

# Homer

## The Odyssey

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For Colleen

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### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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

In this English text, the possessive of names ending in -s is usually indicated in the customary way by adding 's (e.g., Zeus, Zeus's; Atreus, Atreus's, and so on). This convention has the effect of adding a syllable to the word (the sound -iz). It also sometimes produces a rather odd-sounding result. Thus, for metrical and euphonic reasons, the possessive of a name is in places indicated by a simple apostrophe, without the s (an alternative fairly common in written English): e.g., *Achilles' anger* instead of *Achilles's anger*. This latter procedure does not add an extra syllable to the word. In the above example, *Achilles'* has three syllables, unlike *Achilles's*, which has four.

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BOOK ONE  
ATHENA VISITS ITHACA

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

Muse, speak to me now of that resourceful man  
who wandered far and wide after ravaging  
the sacred citadel of Troy.<sup>1</sup> He came to see  
many people's cities, where he learned their customs,  
while on the sea his spirit suffered many torments,  
as he fought to save his life and lead his comrades home.  
But though he wanted to, he could not rescue them—  
they all died from their own stupidity, the fools.  
They feasted on the cattle of Hyperion,  
god of the sun—and so he snatched away their chance      10  
of getting home someday.<sup>2</sup> So now, daughter of Zeus,  
tell us his story, starting anywhere you wish.                      [10]

The other warriors, all those who had escaped  
being utterly destroyed, were now back safely home,  
facing no more dangers from battle or the sea.  
But Odysseus, who longed to get back to his wife  
and reach his home, was being held in a hollow cave  
by that mighty nymph Calypso, noble goddess,  
who desired to have Odysseus as her husband.  
But as the seasons came and went, the year arrived      20  
in which, according to what gods had once ordained,  
he was to get back to his home in Ithaca—  
not that he would be free from troubles even there,  
among his people. The gods pitied Odysseus,  
all except Poseidon, who kept up his anger                      [20]  
against godlike Odysseus and did not relent  
until he reached his native land.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Muses, the divine patrons of the arts, are daughters of Zeus.

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

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

BOOK ONE

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

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

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Zeus:

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

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

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

BOOK ONE

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

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

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

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

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

BOOK ONE

of all the Cyclopes.<sup>1</sup> Thoosa bore him,  
the sea nymph, a daughter of that Phorcys  
who commands the restless deep.<sup>2</sup> Poseidon,  
down in those hollow caves, had sex with her.  
That's the reason Earthshaker Poseidon  
makes Odysseus wander from his country.  
But he has not killed him yet. So come now, 100  
let's all of us consider his return,  
so he can journey back to Ithaca.  
Poseidon's anger will relent. He can't  
fight the immortal gods all by himself,  
not with all of us arrayed against him."

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied: [80]

"Son of Cronos and father to us all,  
ruling high above, if immortal gods  
now find it pleasing for wise Odysseus  
to return back home, then let's send Hermes, 110  
killer of Argus, as our messenger,  
over to the island of Ogygia,  
so he can quickly tell that fair-haired nymph  
our firm decision—that brave Odysseus  
will now leave and complete his voyage home.<sup>3</sup>  
I'll go to Ithaca and urge his son  
to action and put courage in his heart,  
so he will call those long-haired Achaeans [90]  
to assembly, and there address the suitors,  
who keep on butchering his flocks of sheep 120  
and shambling bent-horned cattle. I'll send him  
on a trip to Sparta and sandy Pylos,

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

<sup>2</sup>Phorcys is a primordial god of the sea.

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

BOOK ONE

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>Mentes is an old friend of Odysseus.

BOOK ONE

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

After saying this,

Telemachus led Athena into his home.

She followed. Once they came inside the high-roofed house,  
he walked to a tall pillar carrying the spear  
and set it in a finely-polished rack, which held  
many other spears belonging to Odysseus.

He brought Athena in and sat her in a chair,

a beautifully constructed work. Beneath it  
he rolled out a linen mat and then set in place  
a footstool for her feet. Beside her he drew up  
a lovely decorated chair for him to sit in.

170

[130]

They were somewhat distant from the other people,  
in case the noise the suitors made disturbed the guest  
and made him hate the meal because he had to share  
the company of overbearing men. Then, too,  
Telemachus wished to discuss his absent father.

A female servant carried in a fine gold jug

and poured water out into a silver basin,  
so they could wash their hands. Beside them she set down  
a polished table. Then the worthy housekeeper  
carried in the bread and put it down before them.

180

[140]

She laid out a rich selection of fine things to eat,  
drawing freely on supplies she had in store.

A carver sliced up many different cuts of meat  
and served them. Then he brought out goblets made of gold,  
as a herald went back and forth serving the wine.

Then, one after another, the proud suitors came.

They sat down on reclining seats and high-backed chairs.

190

Heralds poured water out for them to wash their hands,  
and women servants piled wicker baskets full of bread,  
while young lads filled their bowls up to the brim with drink.  
The suitors reached out with their hands to help themselves  
to the fine food prepared and placed in front of them.

When each and every man had satisfied his need  
for food and drink, their hearts demanded something more—  
dancing and song—the finest joys of dinner feasts.

[150]

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

200



BOOK ONE

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>A lyre is a stringed instrument resembling a small harp.

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

BOOK ONE

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>The Taphians are sea-faring people of the island of Taphos.

<sup>2</sup>Laertes is the father of Odysseus.

BOOK ONE

some way to get back home, for he's a man  
of infinite resources. But come now,  
tell me this, and speak straight and to the point.  
Are you in truth Odysseus' son? You're tall,  
your head and handsome eyes look just like his,  
astonishingly so. We used to spend  
a lot of time together, before he left 280  
and sailed away to Troy, where other men, [210]  
the best of all the Argives, voyaged, too,  
in their hollow ships. But since those days,  
Odysseus and I have not seen each other."

Noble Telemachus then answered her and said:

"Stranger, I will speak quite frankly to you.  
My mother says I am Odysseus' son.  
I can't myself confirm that, for no man  
has ever yet been sure about his parents.  
I wish I'd been the son of some man blest 290  
to reach old age among his own possessions,  
for now—and I say this because you asked—  
I'm the son of a man who is, they say,  
of all mortal men, the most unfortunate." [220]

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes answered him:

"Well then, at least the gods have given you  
a family which, in days to come, will have  
a glorious name, since Penelope  
has given birth to such a noble son.  
But come, speak openly and tell me this— 300  
What is this feast? Who are these crowds of men?  
Why do you need this? Is it a wedding?  
Or a drinking party? It seems clear enough  
this is no meal where each man brings his share,  
and I can see that people here are acting  
in an insulting, overbearing way,  
while dining in your home. Looking at them  
and their disgraceful conduct, any man  
who mingled with them, if he had good sense,  
would lose his temper."

Noble Telemachus 310 [230]  
then said to Athena in reply:

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

This made Pallas Athena angry—she said to him:

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

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

BOOK ONE

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

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



BOOK ONE

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes then said:

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

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

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

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

---

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

BOOK ONE

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

Sensible Telemachus answered her and said:

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

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

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

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



BOOK ONE

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

Telemachus finished.

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

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

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

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

Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus, replied:

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

Prudent Telemachus  
then answered him and said:

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

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

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

BOOK ONE

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

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

BOOK TWO  
TELEMACHUS PREPARES FOR HIS VOYAGE

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

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
Odysseus's dear son jumped out of bed and dressed.  
He laced up lovely sandals on his shining feet  
and carried a sharp sword hanging from his shoulders.  
Then he left his room, his face resembling a god's.  
At once he asked the loud-voiced heralds to summon  
all the long-haired Achaeans to an assembly.  
They issued the call, and the Achaeans answered,  
gathering quickly. When the assembly had convened,  
Telemachus moved directly to the meeting, 10 [10]  
gripping a bronze-tipped spear. He was not by himself—  
two swift-footed hunting dogs accompanied him.  
Athena cast down over him a god-like poise—  
all the people were astonished at his presence,  
as he entered and sat down in his father's chair,  
while the senior men gave way. Among those present,  
heroic Aegyptius was the first to speak,  
an old man stooped with age, but infinitely wise.  
His son, warrior Antiphus, had sailed to Troy,  
that horse-rich city, along with lord Odysseus, 20  
in their hollow ships. But in his cave the cyclops,  
after killing him, had made him his final meal.<sup>1</sup> [20]  
Aegyptius had three other sons. One of them,  
Eurynomus, was with the suitors. The other two  
were always working in their father's fields. But still,

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

BOOK TWO

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

“You men of Ithaca,  
pay attention to what I have to say.  
We have not held a general meeting 30  
or assembly since the day Odysseus  
sailed from here in his hollow ships. What man  
has made us gather now? What’s his reason?  
Is he a younger or a senior man?  
Has he heard some news about the army [30]  
and will give us details of its journey home,  
now that he has heard the news himself?  
Or is it some other public business  
he will bring up and talk to us about?  
He has my blessing! I pray that Zeus 40  
fulfills whatever he has in his heart  
and makes his wishes work out for the best.”

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

“Old man, [40]  
the one who called the people to this meeting 50  
is not far off, as you will quickly learn.  
I did. For I’m a man who suffers more  
than other men. But I have no reports  
of our returning army, no details  
I’ve just heard myself to pass on to you,  
nor is there any other public business  
I will mention or discuss. The issue now  
is my own need, for on my household here  
troubles have fallen in a double sense.  
First, my noble father’s perished, the man 60  
who was once your king and my kind father.  
And then there’s an even greater problem,

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<sup>1</sup>In a traditional assembly a sceptre was passed to the man who was to speak next.

BOOK TWO

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

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

BOOK TWO

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

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



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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>The Furies are the goddess of blood revenge, particularly within the family.

BOOK TWO

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

Then Eurymachus, Polybus’s son, spoke out:

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

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

Shrewd Telemachus then said in reply:

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

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

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

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

Leocritus, son of Euenor, spoke in reply:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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what you desire to do. It's true few men  
are like their fathers. Most of them are worse.  
Only very few of them are better.  
But in future you'll not be unworthy  
or a fool, for you do not completely lack  
Odysseus's wisdom, so there is hope [280]  
you will fulfil your mission. Set aside  
what idiotic suitors have advised. 380  
They lack all judgment, all sense of justice,  
for they do not think of death, the dark fate  
encircling them, when in a single day  
they will all perish. You must not delay  
that trip you wish to make. I am a friend  
of your ancestral home, so much so that I  
will furnish a fast ship for you and come  
in person with you. Now you must go home.  
Mingle with the suitors. Collect provisions,  
and put everything in some containers— 390  
wine in jars and barley, which strengthens men, [290]  
in thick leather sacks. I'll go through the town  
and quickly round up a group of comrades,  
all volunteers. In sea-girt Ithaca,  
I'll choose from the many ships, new and old,  
the finest one for you, and when that ship  
has been made ready and is fit to sail,  
we'll launch it out into the wine-dark sea."

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

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

BOOK TWO

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

Prudent Telemachus  
then answered him and said:

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

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

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

And after that another proud young man would say:

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“Who knows whether he might destroy himself,  
once he sets off in his hollow ship, roaming 450  
far away from friends, just like Odysseus?  
If so, he’ll provide still more work for us.  
We’ll have to split up everything he owns  
and hand this palace over to his mother  
and the man she marries.”

That’s how the suitors talked.  
But Telemachus just walked away, going down  
to the high-roofed chamber which stored his father’s wealth,  
a wide and spacious place, bronze and gold in stacks,  
and clothing packed in chests and stores of fragrant oil.  
Huge jars of old sweet wine stood there—each one contained 460 [340]  
drink fit for gods, none of it yet mixed with water—  
arranged in rows along the wall, in case Odysseus,  
after so many hardships, ever reached his home.  
The close-fitting double doors were securely closed,  
and day and night a female steward guarded it,  
protecting everything, the shrewd Eurycleia,  
daughter of Ops, Peisenor’s son. Telemachus  
called her into the storage room, then said:

“Old Nurse,  
pour out some sweet wine into jars for me,  
the very best you’ve got after the stock 470 [350]  
you’re planning to store here for Odysseus,  
that ill-fated man, born from Zeus, in case,  
after evading death and fate, he shows up  
from somewhere.<sup>1</sup> Fill twelve jars and fit them all  
with covers. Pour me out some barley grain  
in well-stitched leather sacks. Make sure there are  
twenty measures of ground-up barley meal.  
But keep this knowledge to yourself. Just get  
all these things assembled. In the evening,  
once my mother goes up into her room 480  
to get some sleep, I’ll come to collect them.  
I’m off to sandy Pylos and to Sparta,  
to see if I can get some information

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



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

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

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

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her and said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK THREE  
TELEMACHUS VISITS NESTOR IN PYLOS

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

When the sun had left the splendid sea and risen up  
into an all-bronze heaven, giving light to gods  
and mortal creatures and grain to farmers' fields,  
the ship and crew reached Pylos, a well-built city  
ruled by Nestor. There by the sea the city folk  
were preparing black bulls as holy offerings  
to lord Poseidon, dark-haired Shaker of the Earth.<sup>1</sup>

There were nine groups of them, each one five hundred strong,  
and nine offerings of bulls ready for sacrifice.

As they were sampling some of the inner organs 10  
and cooking thigh parts for the gods, the ship and crew  
were heading straight for shore. The crew hauled in and furled [10]  
the sails on their trim ship, moored it, and disembarked.

With Athena showing the way, Telemachus  
stepped from the ship. The bright-eyed goddess spoke to him:

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

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

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

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

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

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

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

She spoke.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Responding to Telemachus,  
Geranian horseman Nestor said:

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

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

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we had to endure while on board the ships,  
as we roamed across the misty waters,  
in search of loot, with Achilles in the lead,  
all the fights around great Priam's city,  
where so many of our finest men were killed,<sup>1</sup>  
where warlike Ajax and Achilles lie,  
and Patroclus, too, a man whose counsel 140 [110]  
was like the gods'. My own dear son fell there,  
Antilochus, as strong as he was noble,  
outstanding for his speed and fighting skill.  
And we endured countless other hardships  
apart from these. Who could possibly describe  
every detail of the men who perished?  
If you were to spend five or six years here  
questioning me about the brave Achaeans  
and the troubles they went through, you'd grow tired  
and sail back home well before I'd finished. 150  
Nine years we spent scheming to bring them down  
with every sort of trick, but Cronos' son  
made all our plans so hard to carry out.  
Over there no one ever tried to claim [120]  
he could match Odysseus's shrewd advice.  
In devising every kind of devious scheme  
he was easily the best, your father,  
if indeed you are his son. Looking at you,  
I am astonished, for you truly speak  
the way he did. No one would ever think 160  
a younger man could talk so much like him.  
All that time back then, never once did I  
and lord Odysseus, in council or assembly,  
disagree. We spoke with a single heart  
and gave the Argives wise and useful views  
about how those events would best turn out.  
But when Priam's lofty city was destroyed [130]  
and our ships set off, the Achaean fleet  
was scattered by some god. And even so,  
Zeus planned in his heart to give Achaeans 170  
a sorrowful return. They had not been wise  
or righteous, so many met a nasty fate,  
thanks to the mortal anger of Athena,  
bright-eyed goddess with a mighty father.  
She incited both sons of Atreus

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<sup>1</sup>Priam was king of Troy during the Trojan War. He was killed during the capture of the city.



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

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<sup>1</sup>Tenedos is an island near Troy.

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

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

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

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who'd made it through the war. Not one of them  
was lost at sea. As for Agamemnon,  
although you live a long way off, you've heard  
of his return—how he came home and then  
how Aegisthus planned his vicious slaughter  
and later paid a terrible reckoning.

That's why it's good for any murdered man  
to leave a worthy son. For Orestes  
got his revenge against his father's killer,  
sly Aegisthus, who'd slain Agamemnon,  
that splendid man. And you, my friend, I see  
that you're a powerful, fine-looking man,  
but you must act with courage, so those born  
in future years will say good things of you."

260

[200]

Shrewd Telemachus then said in reply:

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

270

Geranian horseman Nestor  
then said to Telemachus:

[210]

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

280

290

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

Shrewd Telemachus then answered Nestor, saying:

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

Then Athena,  
bright-eyed goddess, answered him:

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

Prudent Telemachus  
then said in answer to Athena:

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

Geranian horseman Nestor  
then answered Telemachus and said:

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

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

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

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

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I have chariots and horses for you.<sup>1</sup>  
My sons will help, as well, and be your guides  
to fair-haired Menelaus, where he lives  
in noble Sparta. Make sure you ask him  
to speak to you and to be quite candid. 450  
He will not lie, for he is far too wise.”

As Nestor finished talking, the sun was setting,  
and dark night coming on. At that point, Athena, [330]  
the bright-eyed goddess, said to them:

“Old man,  
what you’ve just said is true and relevant.  
But now you should slice out the victims’ tongues  
and mix the wine, so we can make libations  
to lord Poseidon and to other gods,  
and then think of rest. It’s that time of day. 460  
Now the light has slid below the darkness,  
and it’s not right for us to linger here  
at feasting for the gods. We must get back.”

Zeus’s daughter spoke, and they heard what she had said.  
Heralds poured out water for them to wash their hands,  
and young boys filled up wine bowls to the brim with drink,  
and served them all, pouring wine out into the cups, [340]  
the first drops for libations. They threw the bulls’ tongues  
on the fire and, standing up, made their offerings.  
That tribute done, they drank wine to their heart’s content. 470  
Then both Athena and godlike Telemachus  
wished to get back to their hollow ship. But Nestor,  
wanting them to stay there, appealed to them and said:

“Zeus and other eternal gods forbid  
that you should leave my home for your fast ship,  
as if you were departing from a man  
who has no clothes or riches, some pauper,  
whose home lacks a store of cloaks or blankets  
to give him and his guests a gentle sleep. [350]  
My house has coverlets and lovely rugs. 480  
Surely the dear son of brave Odysseus  
will not lie down to sleep on a ship’s deck,

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



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

Athena, bright-eyed goddess, then answered Nestor:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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from the heifer's head he cut off a single hair  
and threw it on the fire. Once they made their prayers  
and scattered grains of barley, then Thrasymedes,  
Nestor's courageous son, approached the animal  
and struck it. The axe sliced through sinews on its neck,  
and the spirit of the beast ebbed out. The women—  
Nestor's daughters, his sons' wives, and his cherished wife, [450]  
Eurydice, eldest daughter of Clymenus—  
raised the sacred cry, as the men then lifted up 610  
the animal's head above the much-travelled earth.  
Peisistratus, leader of men, slit the beast's throat,  
and its black blood flowed out. The spirit left its bones.  
They carved the body quickly, cutting thigh bones out,  
all in proper order, and then covered them up  
in double folds of fat and set raw meat on top.  
Next, the old man burned those offerings on split wood  
and over them poured out gleaming wine. Beside Nestor  
stood young men with five-pronged forks in hand. Once the thighs [460]  
had been completely burned and they had sampled innards, 620  
they sliced up the remaining meat, placed it on spits,  
and held the pointed skewers out, above the fire.  
Then beautiful Polycaste, youngest daughter  
of old Nestor, son of Neleus, bathed Telemachus.  
When the bath was finished, she rubbed him with rich oil  
and offered him a tunic and fine cloak to wear.  
As he came from his bath, he looked just like a god.  
He went and sat by Nestor, the people's shepherd.  
After they had roasted the upper cuts of meat [470]  
and pulled the pieces off the spits, they sat and ate. 630  
The servers were distinguished men, who poured the wine  
in goblets made of gold. Once they had all eaten  
their fill of food and drink, Geranian horseman Nestor  
was the first to speak. He said:

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

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

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

BOOK FOUR  
TELEMACHUS VISITS MENELAUS AND HELEN IN SPARTA

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

When Telemachus and Peisistratus reached  
the Lacedaemon plain and its surrounding hills,  
they went straight to splendid Menelaus's palace.<sup>1</sup>  
They found him inside his house, at a marriage feast  
he was providing for his many relatives,  
a celebration for his noble son and daughter.  
He was sending her away to Neoptolemus,  
son of man-destroying Achilles—back in Troy  
he had first promised he would offer her to him.  
He'd pledged his word, and now the gods were making sure      10  
the marriage would take place. He was seeing her off  
with chariots and horses at her departure  
for the illustrious city of the Myrmidons,  
whom her husband ruled. For his son, Menelaus  
was bringing Alector's daughter home to Sparta.      [10]  
That son, mighty Megapenthes, born to a slave,  
was his favourite, for the gods had granted Helen  
no more children after she had given birth  
to the lovely girl Hermione, as beautiful  
as golden Aphrodite. So they were feasting      20  
in the impressive palace with its high-pitched roof—  
neighbours and relatives of glorious Menelaus,  
all enjoying themselves. Among them was a singer,  
accompanying his godlike song by playing the lyre.  
As he began to sing, two tumblers ran and jumped,  
moving here and there, through the middle of the crowd.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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as if illuminated by the sun or moon.

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

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

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

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

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



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I'm amazed just looking at it."<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

Menelaus spoke.

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

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

“Do we know,  
my divinely cherished Menelaus,  
who these two men who’ve come into our home  
claim to be? Shall I speak up and pretend,  
or shall I tell the truth? My heart tells me [140]  
I must be frank. I can’t say I’ve ever seen 190  
someone who looks so much like someone else,  
whether man or woman. When I see it,  
I’m amazed—this man looks just like the son  
of brave Odysseus—I mean Telemachus,  
who, when he left home, was a new-born child,  
when, because I’d acted so disgracefully,  
you Achaeans all sailed away to Troy,  
your hearts intent on brutal warfare.”<sup>1</sup>

Fair-haired Menelaus then answered her and said:

“This likeness you’ve just noticed, my dear wife, 200  
I’ve seen, as well. His feet are similar,  
as are his hands, the glances from his eyes, [150]  
his head, and his hair on top. And just now,  
as I was remembering Odysseus,  
discussing all the troubles he’d endured  
because of me, he let a bitter tear  
fall from his eyes and raised the purple cloak  
across his face.”

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

“Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
leader of your people, cherished by Zeus, 210  
this man here is indeed, as you have said,

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

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

Fair-haired Menelaus  
then answered Peisistratus, saying:

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

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

BOOK FOUR

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

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

Fair-haired Menelaus  
then answered Peisistratus, saying:

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

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

BOOK FOUR

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>Helen is the daughter of Zeus and the mortal Leda.

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

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

In reply to Helen, fair-haired Menelaus said:

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

BOOK FOUR

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

Then shrewd Telemachus replied: 390 [290]

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

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

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



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with rugs on top, and over these some woollen cloaks.  
The women left the hall with torches in their hands [300]  
and arranged the beds. A herald led the guests away.  
And so they slept there in the palace vestibule,  
prince Telemachus and Nestor's noble son.  
The son of Atreus slept in an inner room,  
inside the high-roofed home, with long-robed Helen,  
goddess among women, lying there beside him.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, got out of bed 410  
and put on his clothes, slinging around his shoulders  
a sharp sword. Then he laced up beautiful sandals  
over his sleek feet, and, looking just like a god, [310]  
he left his room. He sat beside Telemachus  
and then addressed him, saying:

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

Shrewd Telemachus  
then said in reply:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus, 420  
cherished by Zeus, leader of your people,  
I've come to see if you could give me news  
about my father. My home's being eaten up,  
my rich estates destroyed. My house is full  
of enemies who keep on butchering  
flocks of sheep and shambling bent-horned cattle. [320]  
They are suitors for my mother—their pride  
makes them supremely arrogant. That's why  
I've now come to your knee, to see if you  
perhaps can tell me of his mournful death, 430  
in case your own eyes witnessed it somewhere,  
or else you've found out from some other man  
the tale of where he's gone. For his mother  
delivered him into a life of sorrow,  
more so than other men. And do not speak  
from pity, or console me with your words,  
but tell me truly how you chanced to see him.

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

440 [330]

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

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

450 [340]  
460

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

[350]  
470

BOOK FOUR

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

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

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

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

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

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

When she told me this, I replied and said:

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

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

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

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

560

[420]

570

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

[430]

580

[440]

590

BOOK FOUR

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

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

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

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

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

        'Before you left,  
you should have offered a fine sacrifice  
to Zeus and other gods, so you could sail  
across the wine-dark sea and then arrive  
in your own land as fast as possible.  
Your fate decrees you will not see your friends  
or reach your homeland or your well-built house,  
till you have gone back once more to Egypt,                     640  
to the waters of that Zeus-fed river,  
and offered sacrifices to the gods,  
the immortal ones who hold wide heaven.  
The gods will then give you that journey home                     [480]  
which you so yearn for.'

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

        'Old man,   650  
I will carry out what you have told me.  
But come now, tell me—and speak truthfully—  
did Argives and their ships get safely back,  
all those men Nestor and myself left there  
when we set out from Troy? Did any die  
a bitter death on board, or in the arms  
of those who loved them, after they'd tied up                     [490]  
the loose threads of the war?'

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

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

BOOK FOUR

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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my words had wings:

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

I spoke. He immediately replied:

750

‘You mean Laertes’ son, from Ithaca.  
I saw him on an island. He was weeping  
in the palace of the nymph Calypso,  
who keeps him there by force. He has no way  
of getting back to his own land—he lacks  
companions. He has no ships equipped with oars,  
to carry him across the sea’s broad back.

[560]

As for you, Zeus-fostered Menelaus,  
it’s not ordained that you will meet your fate  
and die in horse-rich Argos. No. The gods  
will send you off to the Elysian fields,  
and to the outer limits of the earth—  
the place where fair-haired Rhadamanthus lives  
and for human beings life is easy—  
there’s no snow or bad storms or even rain,  
and Oceanus sends a steady breeze,  
as West Wind blows to keep men cool and fresh.<sup>1</sup>  
They’ll do this because Helen is your wife—  
for they’ll treat you as the man who married  
Zeus’s daughter.’

760

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

770 [570]

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

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

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

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

Shrewd Telemachus  
then answered Menelaus:

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

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

820

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

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

830

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

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

840

[630]

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

850

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

He finished. In their hearts the suitors were amazed.  
They had no inkling that Telemachus had gone  
to Pylos, land of Neleus, and still believed 86o  
he was visiting the flocks on his estates  
or the swineherd. So in answer to Noemon, [64o]  
Antinous, Eupheithes’ son, replied:

“Tell me the truth—  
when did he leave? What young men went with him?  
Did he take citizens of Ithaca,  
or were his shipmates his slaves and servants?  
That’s something he could do. And tell me this—  
I want the truth, so I know what happened—  
did he take that black ship against your will,  
by force, or did you volunteer to give it, 87o  
because he begged you?”

Noemon, son of Phronius,  
then answered Antinous:

“I agreed to give it.  
Would anyone have acted otherwise,  
when a man like him, with a grieving heart, [65o]  
makes a request? It would be difficult  
to deny him what he asked. The young men—  
the ones who went with him—are excellent,  
except for us, the best this land affords.  
As they embarked, I observed their leader,  
Mentor, or some god who looks just like him. 88o  
I’m surprised at that—at dawn yesterday  
I saw noble Mentor, though by that time  
he’d already gone on board for Pylos.”

Once he finished speaking, Noemon went away,  
back to his father’s house. But those two suitors,  
Antinous and Eurymachus, had angry hearts.  
They quickly got the suitors to give up their games  
and had them sit down all together in a group.  
Antinous, son of Eupheithes, then spoke to them. [66o]  
He was extremely angry, black heart filled with rage, 89o

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his flashing eyes a fiery blaze:

“Here’s trouble.

In his overbearing way Telemachus,  
with this voyage of his, has now achieved  
significant success. And we believed  
he would never see it through. Against our will,  
this mere youngster has simply gone away,  
launching a ship and choosing our best men,  
the finest in the land. He’ll soon begin  
creating problems for us. I hope Zeus  
will sap his strength before he comes of age 900  
and reaches full maturity. Come now,  
give me a swift ship and twenty comrades,  
so I can watch for him and set an ambush, [670]  
as he navigates his passage through the strait  
dividing Ithaca from rugged Samos,  
and bring this trip searching for his father  
to a dismal end.”

When Antinous had finished,  
the suitors all agreed, and they instructed him  
to carry out what he proposed. Then they got up  
and went back inside the palace of Odysseus. 910

Now, Penelope was not ignorant for long  
of the schemes those suitors were hatching in their hearts.  
For the herald Medon told her. He’d been listening  
outside the hall, as they were making plans inside,  
weaving their plot. Medon proceeded through the house  
to tell Penelope the news. As he came out  
just across the threshold, Penelope called him: [680]

“Herald, why have these distinguished suitors  
sent you out here? Are you supposed to tell  
the female household slaves of lord Odysseus 920  
to stop their work and then make them a feast?  
After this whole courtship, I hope those men  
never gather somewhere else. And today,  
may they make the banquet in this palace  
their latest and their last, all those of you  
who by collecting here consume so much,  
the wealth of wise Telemachus. It seems,  
when you were children all those years ago,

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

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

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

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

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

Wise Medon then answered Penelope and said:

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

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or had met his fate.”

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

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

---

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



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

The good nurse Eurycleia answered Penelope:

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

Eurycleia spoke.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>Arcesius was the father of Laertes, hence Odysseus’s grandfather.

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from those suitors and their murderous pride.”

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

But the suitors 1040  
were still carousing down in those shadowy halls.  
One overbearing youth would say something like this:

“Ah ha, the lady with so many suitors [770]  
is making preparations for the marriage,  
knowing nothing of the plans we’re hatching  
for the killing of her son.”

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

“Noble lords,  
you must not speak out so intemperately— 1050  
no more such talk. Someone may report it,  
especially to those inside the house.  
Come now, let’s get up quietly and work  
to carry out that scheme which all our hearts  
responded to with such delightful joy.”

After saying this, Antinous picked out his men,  
twenty of the best. They went down to the shore  
and dragged a swift black ship out into deep water. [780]  
They set the mast in place, carried sails on board,  
and fitted oars into their leather rowing loops, 1060  
all in proper order, then spread out the white sail.  
Their proud attendants brought their weapons on the ship.  
They moored the ship quite near the shore, then disembarked  
and ate a meal there, waiting until evening fell.

Wise Penelope lay there in her upstairs room,  
taking no food at all—she would not eat or drink—  
worrying if her fine son could avoid being killed,  
or if those arrogant suitors would slaughter him. [790]  
Just as a lion grows tense, overcome with fear,  
when encircled by a crowd of crafty hunters, 1070  
that’s how her mind was working then, as sweet sleep

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Many enemies are now planning schemes,  
in their eagerness to hurt or kill him,  
before he gets back to his native land.” 1110

The dim phantom form then answered Penelope:

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

Wise Penelope [830]

then spoke out in reply:

“If you’re indeed a god  
and have listened to Athena when she speaks, 1120  
then tell me news of that ill-fated man.  
I’m begging you. Is Odysseus still alive  
and looking at the light, or is he dead,  
already down in the realm of Hades?”

The faint image then answered Penelope and said:

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

After saying these words, the phantom slipped away,  
vanishing through the door bolt in a breath of wind. 1130  
The daughter of Icarius woke from her sleep,  
her heart encouraged that such a vivid dream [840]  
had raced towards her in the middle of the night.

The suitors climbed aboard their ship and sailed away  
on their voyage across the sea, minds fully bent  
on slaughtering Telemachus. Well out to sea,  
half way between Ithaca and rugged Samos,  
lies rocky Asteris. The island is not large,  
but ships can moor there in a place with openings  
in both directions. The Achaeans waited there 1140  
and organized their ambush for Telemachus.



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

Zeus spoke and then instructed Hermes, his dear son:

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>Hermes is often depicted carrying his small staff, the caduceus.

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

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

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

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

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You have not been a visitor before.  
Tell me what's on your mind. My heart desires  
to perform what you request, if I can,  
and if it's something fated to be done. 110 [90]  
But bear with me now, so I can show you  
the hospitality I give my guests."

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

  "You're a goddess,  
and you're asking me, a god, why I've come.  
Since you've questioned me, I'll tell you the truth. 120  
Zeus told me to come here against my will.  
For who would volunteer to race across [100]  
that huge expanse of sea—so gigantic  
it cannot be described? There's no town there  
where mortal men can offer sacrifice  
or choice gifts to the gods. But there's no way  
that any other god can override  
or shun the will of aegis-bearing Zeus.  
He says that you have here with you a man  
more unfortunate than all the others 130  
who fought nine years around king Priam's city,  
which in the tenth year they destroyed and left  
to get back home.<sup>2</sup> But on that voyage back  
they sinned against Athena, and she sent  
tall waves and dangerous winds against them.  
All his other noble comrades perished, [110]  
but winds and waves still carried him ahead  
and brought him here. Now Zeus is telling you  
to send him off as soon as possible.  
For it is not ordained that he will die 140  
far from his friends. Instead his fate decrees  
he'll see his family and make it home  
to his own high-roofed house and native land."

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

<sup>2</sup>Priam's city is Troy.



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

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

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

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

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

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

“Poor man, [160]  
spend no more time grieving on this island, 200  
wasting your life away. My heart agrees—  
the time has come for me to send you off.  
So come now, cut long timbers with an axe,  
and make a raft, a large one. Build a deck  
high up on it, so it can carry you  
across the misty sea. I'll provision it  
with all the food and water and red wine  
you're going to need to satisfy your wants.  
I'll give you clothes and send a favouring wind  
blowing from your stern, so you may reach 210  
your own native land unharmed, if the gods  
are willing, the ones who hold wide heaven,  
whose will and force are mightier than mine.” [170]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Resourceful Odysseus  
then answered her and said:

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>An auger is a tool used for making holes in wood.

<sup>2</sup>Halyards are ropes used to raise and lower sails.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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Then Athena, Zeus's daughter, thought of something.  
She blocked off the pathways of every wind but one 470  
and ordered all of them to stop and check their force,  
then roused the swift North Wind and broke the waves in front,  
so that divinely born Odysseus might yet meet  
the people of Phaeacia, men who love the oar,  
avoiding death and Fates.

So for two days and nights  
he floated on the ocean waves—his heart was filled  
with countless thoughts of death. But when the fair-haired Dawn [390]  
gave rise at last to the third day, the wind died down,  
the sea grew calm and still. Odysseus was raised up  
by a large swell, and as he quickly looked ahead, 480  
he could see the land close by. Just as young children  
rejoice to see life in a father who lies sick,  
in savage pain through a lengthy wasting illness,  
with a malicious god afflicting him, and then,  
to their delight, the gods release him from disease,  
that is how Odysseus rejoiced when he could see  
the land and forests. He swam on ahead, eager  
to set foot on the shore. But when he came in closer,  
as far as man's voice can carry when he shouts, [400]  
he heard the crashing of the sea against the rocks— 490  
huge waves with a dreadful roar smashing on dry land  
and foaming clouds of spray concealing everything—  
there were no harbours fit for ships to ride or coves,  
but jutting headlands, cliffs, and boulders—at that point  
Odysseus felt both his knees and spirit give way,  
and in despair he spoke to his great heart:

“What's this?  
great Zeus has given me a glimpse of land,  
just when I'd lost hope, and I've made my way  
cutting across this gulf, but I can't find  
a place where I can leave this cold grey sea. 500 [410]  
There's an outer rim of jagged boulders  
where waves come crashing on them with a roar.  
The rock face rises sheer, the water there  
is deep—there's no way to gain a foothold  
and escape my death. If I try to land,  
a huge wave may pick me up and smash me  
on those protruding rocks, and my attempt  
would be quite useless. But if I keep swimming

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>Amphitrite, a sea goddess, is the divine wife of Poseidon.

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

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

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

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

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a spacious bed for him—for all around that spot  
there were fallen leaves, enough to cover two or three  
on a winter night, however bad the weather. 590

When resourceful lord Odysseus noticed that,  
he was delighted and lay down in the middle  
and piled heaps of fallen leaves around his body.  
Just as someone on a farm without a neighbour  
hides a torch beneath black embers, and in this way  
saves a spark of fire and does not need to kindle it [490]

from somewhere else, that is how he spread out the leaves  
on top of him. Athena poured sleep on his eyes,  
covering his eyelids, so he could find relief,  
a quick respite from his exhausting troubles. 600

BOOK SIX  
ODYSSEUS AND NAUSICAA

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

While much-enduring lord Odysseus rested there,  
overcome with weariness and sleep, Athena  
went to the land of the Phaeacians, to their city.<sup>1</sup>  
Many years ago these people used to live  
in wide Hypereia, close to the Cyclopes,  
proud arrogant creatures and much more powerful,  
who kept on robbing them. So god-like Nausithous  
had taken them away and led them off to settle  
in Scheria, far from any men who have to work  
to earn their daily bread. He'd had them build a wall 10  
around the city, construct new homes, raise temples  
to the gods, and portion out the land for farming. [10]  
But some time past his fate had struck him—he had gone  
down to the house of Hades. Now Alcinous ruled,  
a mortal being infused with wisdom by the gods.  
Athena, bright-eyed goddess, went to this man's home,  
to arrange a journey back for brave Odysseus.  
She moved into a wonderfully furnished room  
where a young girl slept, like an immortal goddess  
in form and loveliness. She was Nausicaa, 20  
daughter of great-hearted Alcinous. Close by her,  
beside each door post, her two servant women slept,  
girls whose beauty had been given by the Graces.<sup>2</sup>  
The shimmering doors were closed. Like a gust of wind, [20]  
Athena slipped over to the young girl's bedside,  
stood there beside her head, and then spoke to her.  
Her appearance changed to look like Dymas' daughter—  
a man celebrated for the many ships he owned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[60]

80

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

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

[70]

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

90

100

[80]



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

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

But when Nausicaa [110]  
was going to harness up the mules and start to fold  
the splendid clothes to make the journey homeward,  
Athena, bright-eyed goddess, thought of something else, 140  
so that Odysseus might wake up and then could see  
the lovely girl, who would escort him to the city  
of Phaeacian men. So when the princess threw the ball  
to one of those attendants with her, she missed the girl,

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

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

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

---

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

BOOK SIX

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

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

BOOK SIX

after so much grief—and I do not know  
any people here, none of those who hold  
the city and its land. Show me the town.  
Give me some rag to throw around myself,  
perhaps some wrapping you brought for the clothes 230  
when you came here. As for you, may gods grant [180]  
everything your heart desires—may they give  
a husband, home, and mutual harmony,  
a noble gift—for there is nothing better  
or a stronger bond than when man and wife  
live in a home sharing each other’s thoughts.  
That brings such pain upon their enemies  
and such delight to those who wish them well.  
They know that too, more so than anyone.”

White-armed Nausicaa then answered him and said: 240

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

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

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

## BOOK SIX

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

270 [210]

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

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

280 [220]

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

290 [230]  
300

BOOK SIX

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

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

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

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

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

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

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the palace of heroic Alcinous.

Once past the courtyard and inside the house,  
move through the great hall quickly till you reach 390  
my mother, Arete, seated by the fire,  
against a pillar, spinning purple yarn—  
a marvellous sight. Servants sit behind her.

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

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

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

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

The wagon moved briskly forward at a rapid pace.  
Using her judgment with the whip, she drove ahead [320]  
so Odysseus and her servants could keep up on foot.  
Just at sunset, they reached the celebrated grove,  
sacred to Athena. Lord Odysseus sat down there  
and quickly made a prayer to great Zeus's daughter: 410

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

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



BOOK SEVEN  
ODYSSEUS AT THE COURT OF ALCINOUS IN PHAEACIA

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

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

10 [10]

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

20 [20]

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

Gleaming-eyed Athena

then said in reply:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup>Erechtheus is a legendary early king of Athens.

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

---

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

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

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

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In part of it, a sunny patch of level ground,  
grapes are drying in the sun. In another place  
men are gathering up and treading other grapes.  
In front the unripened vines are shedding blossoms,  
while others are changing to a purple colour.  
Beside the final row of vines there are trim beds  
with all varieties of plant growing all year round.  
There are two springs inside—one lets its water flow  
throughout the garden, and on the opposite side 150 [130]  
the other runs below the threshold of the yard,  
where people of the town come to get their water,  
beside the high-roofed palace. These glorious things  
were gifts from the gods to the home of Alcinous.  
Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, stood there  
and gazed around. When his heart had marvelled at it,  
he moved quickly past the threshold into the house.

There he found Phaeacian counsellors and leaders  
making libations to honour keen-eyed Hermes,  
killer of Argus. They poured him a final tribute 160  
whenever they intended to retire to bed.  
Long-suffering Odysseus, still enclosed in mist,  
the thick covering poured around him by Athena, [140]  
went through the hall until he came to Arete  
and king Alcinous. With both his arms Odysseus  
embraced the knees of Arete—at that moment  
the miraculous mist dissolved away from him.  
All the Phaeacians in the palace were struck dumb,  
as they gazed upon the man, overcome with wonder  
at the sight. Odysseus then made this entreaty: 170

“Arete, daughter of godlike Rhexenor,  
I’ve come to you and to your husband here,  
to your knees, in supplication to you—  
a man who has undergone much hardship—  
and to those feasting here. May gods grant them  
happiness in life. May they each pass on  
riches in their homes to all their children, [150]  
and noble honours given by the people.  
Please rouse yourself to help me travel home,  
to get back quickly to my native soil. 180  
For a long time I have been in great distress  
and far away from friends.”

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Odysseus finished.

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

“Alcinous, it is not at all appropriate  
or to our credit that this stranger sits [160]  
on the ground at our hearth, in the ashes.  
The people here are holding themselves back,  
waiting for your word. Come, tell the stranger  
to get up. Then invite the man to sit  
on a silver-studded chair. Tell the heralds  
to mix wine, so we may make an offering  
to thunder-loving Zeus, who accompanies  
all pious suppliants. And tell the steward  
to provide this stranger with a dinner  
from what she has in store.”

When he heard these words, 200  
courageous, kingly Alcinous stretched out his hand,  
reaching for Odysseus, that wise and crafty man,  
raised him from the hearth, and invited him to sit  
in a shining chair, after he had asked his son,  
handsome Laodamas, the son he loved the most, [170]  
who sat beside him, to stand up and offer it.  
An attendant carried in a fine gold pitcher,  
then poured some water into a silver basin,  
so that he could wash his hands. A polished table  
was set up beside him, and then the housekeeper, 210  
a well-respected female servant, brought in food,  
set it in front of him, with many tempting treats  
offered freely from her store. And so Odysseus,  
that noble, long-suffering man, could eat and drink.  
Then royal Alcinous called out to his herald:

“Pontonous, prepare wine in the mixing bowl,  
then serve it to all people in the hall,  
so we may pour libations out to Zeus, [180]  
who loves lightning, for he accompanies  
all pious suppliants.”

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

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

Resourceful Odysseus then answered Alcinous:

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: [240]

"O queen, it would be hard to tell the story  
of my miseries from start to finish—  
heavenly gods have given me so many.  
But in answer to what you have asked me  
I can tell you this. There is an island  
called Ogygia far off in the sea. 300

On it lives a cunning, fearful goddess,  
fair-haired Calypso, Atlas's daughter.  
None of the gods associates with her,  
nor any mortal men. One of the gods  
led me in my misfortune to her hearth.  
I was alone, for Zeus had struck my ship  
with his bright lightning bolt and shattered it,  
right in the middle of the wine-dark sea. [250]

All my other fine companions perished, 310  
but I clung to the keel of my curved ship  
and drifted for nine days. The tenth black night,  
gods brought me to Ogygia, the island  
where that fair-haired, fearful goddess lives—  
I mean Calypso. She received me kindly,  
loved and fed me. She promised she'd make me  
an immortal—ageless for eternity.

But she never won the heart inside my chest.  
I stayed there seven years, the entire time,  
always soaking the immortal clothing 320  
Calypso gave me with my constant tears. [260]

But, as the circling years kept moving past me,  
the eighth year came. Then she commanded me,  
with her encouragement, to sail back home—  
either because she'd got some news from Zeus,  
or else her mind had changed. She sent me off  
on a well-lashed raft, and she provided  
many things—food and sweet wine. She dressed me  
in immortal clothing, and sent a wind,  
a warm and gentle breeze. Seventeen days 330

I sailed across the sea. On the eighteenth  
the shadowy mountains of your country  
came in sight, and my fond heart was happy. [270]  
But I had no luck—I still had to bear



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Resourceful Odysseus

then said in answer to the king:

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

Alcinous said in answer to Odysseus:

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

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

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They went there and, without any effort,  
finished the journey home in the same day.  
So you, too, will discover for yourself  
I have the finest ships and young men, too,  
whose oar blades make the briny waters foam.” 410

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

“Father Zeus, [330]  
may Alcinous complete all he has said.  
Then on this grain-fostering earth his fame  
will never be extinguished, and I will reach  
my native land once more.”

As they conversed like this,  
white-armed Arete commanded her attendants  
to set a bed outside, under the portico,  
laying on top of it lovely purple blankets  
with coverlets spread out on them, and finally, 420  
over these, some woollen cloaks to keep him warm.  
The servants left the chamber, torches in their hands.  
Once they had hurried to arrange the well-made bed, [340]  
they came to call Odysseus, saying:

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

When they said this, he welcomed thoughts of going to sleep.  
So long-suffering lord Odysseus lay down there,  
on the bed, beneath the echoing portico.  
But Alcinous rested in an inner chamber  
in the high-roofed home—his lady wife lay there, too, 430  
stretched out beside him, sharing their marriage bed.

BOOK EIGHT  
ODYSSEUS IS ENTERTAINED IN PHAEACIA

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

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

10

[10]

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

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

20

[20]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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when Demodocus started up again, urged to sing  
by Phaeacian noblemen enjoying his song, 110 [90]  
Odysseus would cover up his head once more and groan.  
He concealed the tears he shed from all those present,  
except Alcinous, the only one who noticed,  
since he sat beside him and heard his heavy sighs.  
So Alcinous quickly spoke to the Phaeacians,  
men who love the sea:

“Listen to me,  
you counsellors and leaders of Phaeacians.  
Now we have refreshed our spirit. We’ve shared  
this tempting food. Music has accompanied  
our splendid banquet. So now let us go 120 [100]  
and test ourselves in various events.  
Then this stranger, after he gets back home,  
can inform his friends how much we surpass  
all other men at wrestling and boxing,  
at jumping and at running.”

Once he said this,  
Alcinous led them out, and they all followed him.  
The herald hung the clear-toned lyre up on the peg,  
took Demodocus by the hand, and led him out,  
taking him along the pathway that other men,  
Phaeacia’s best, had walked along to watch the games. 130  
So they made their way to the large assembly ground.  
A huge crowd numbering thousands walked behind them.  
Many excellent young men came forward to compete— [110]  
Acroneus, Ocyalus, and Elatreus,  
then Nauteus, Pymneus, and Anchialus,  
Eretmeus, as well, along with Ponteus,  
Proreus, Thoön, and Anabesineus,  
with Amphialus, a son of Polyneus,  
the son of Tecton, along with Euryalus,  
a match for man-destroying Ares, god of war, 140  
a son of Naubolus. His handsome looks and shape  
made him, after Laodamas, who had no equal,  
the finest of Phaeacians. Three sons of Alcinous  
stepped out, as well—Halius and Laodomas,  
and godlike Clytoneus. In the first contest [120]  
these men competed in the foot race on a course  
laid out for them with markers. They all sprinted off,  
moving quickly. A cloud of dust rose from the ground.



BOOK EIGHT

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

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

Then Euryalus [140]  
answered him and said:

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

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

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

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

BOOK EIGHT

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

Then shrewd Odysseus answered him:

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

Euryalus then replied by taunting Odysseus  
right to his face:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK EIGHT

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

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

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

Godlike Alcinous finished. The herald got up  
to fetch the hollow lyre from the royal palace.  
Nine officials chosen from among the people, 330  
men who organized each detail of their meetings,  
stood up, smoothed off a dancing space, and then marked out

BOOK EIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK EIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

The famous lame god then replied:

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

Earthshaker Poseidon  
then answered him and said:

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

Then the celebrated crippled god replied: 450

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

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

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

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

Then lord Odysseus spoke:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then Odysseus, that resourceful man, replied and said:

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

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

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“My lady, have a precious trunk brought here,  
the best there is. You yourself should place in it  
a tunic and a freshly laundered cloak.  
Then heat a cauldron for him on the fire,  
warm up some water, so that he can bathe,  
and, after he’s seen safely stowed away  
all the splendid gifts Phaeacian nobles  
have brought in here, he can enjoy the feast,  
while listening to the minstrel’s singing. 540  
And I will give him this fine cup of mine— [430]  
it’s made of gold—for all his days to come  
he will think of me, as he pours libations  
in his halls to great Zeus and other gods.”

Alcinous finished. Arete told her servants  
to set a cauldron full of water on the fire  
as quickly as they could. They placed it on the fire,  
poured water into it, and stacked wood underneath.  
So hot flames soon licked the belly of the cauldron,  
heating up the water. Meanwhile to please her guest, 550  
from her inner rooms Arete had carried out  
a beautiful chest, which she filled with precious gifts,  
the clothing and the gold offered by Phaeacians. [440]  
She herself added a cloak and lovely tunic.  
Then she addressed Odysseus—her words had wings:

“You must deal with the lid on this yourself,  
and tie it down securely with a knot,  
so that no one robs you on your journey,  
perhaps when you are lost in a sweet sleep  
sometime later, as your black ship sails on.” 560

Long-suffering lord Odysseus heard what she advised.  
He quickly shut the lid and bound it with a knot,  
a tricky one which he had learned from noble Circe.  
Then the female servant invited him to step  
into the bathing tub. His heart was filled with joy 570  
to see hot water—he’d not had such welcome care [450]  
since he had left the home of fair-haired Calypso.  
Till then he had always been treated like a god.  
The servant women washed him, rubbed him down with oil,  
and dressed him in new clothes, a fine cloak and tunic.  
He left his bath and went to drink wine with the men.

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

[460]

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

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

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

580

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

[470]

590

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

600 [480]

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

BOOK EIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



BOOK EIGHT

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

730

[580]

BOOK NINE  
ISMARUS, THE LOTUS EATERS, AND THE CYCLOPS

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

Resourceful Odysseus then replied to Alcinous:

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

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

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

When Calypso, that lovely goddess, tried 40  
to keep me with her in her hollow cave,  
longing for me to become her husband, [30]  
or when, in the same way, the cunning witch  
Aeaean Circe held me in her home  
filled with a keen desire I'd marry her,  
they never won the heart here in my chest.  
That's how true it is there's nothing sweeter  
than a man's own country and his parents,  
even if he's living in a wealthy house,  
but in a foreign land, away from those 50  
who gave him life. But come, I will describe  
the miserable journey back which Zeus  
arranged for me when I returned from war.

From Troy my ships were carried by the wind  
to Ismarus, land of the Cicones.<sup>1</sup>  
I destroyed the city there, killed the men, [40]  
seized their wives, and captured lots of treasure,  
which we divided up. I took great pains  
to see that each man got an equal share.  
Then I gave orders we should leave on foot— 60  
and with all speed. But the men were foolish.  
They did not listen. They drank too much wine  
and on the shoreline slaughtered many sheep,  
as well as shambling cows with twisted horns.  
The Cicones set off and gathered up  
their neighbours, tribes living further inland.  
There are more of them, and they are braver men,  
skilled at fighting enemies from chariots  
and also, should the need arise, on foot. [50]  
They reached us in the morning, thick as leaves 70  
or flowers growing in season. Then Zeus  
brought us disaster—he made that our fate,

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

BOOK NINE

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

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

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

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

BOOK NINE

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>The land of the Lotus Eaters is commonly placed in North Africa.

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

BOOK NINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK NINE

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

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



BOOK NINE

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

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

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

BOOK NINE

even good ones, could not have shifted it  
along the ground—that's how immense it was,  
the rock he set in place to seal his cave.

He sat down with his bleating goats and ewes  
and milked them all, each one in turn, setting  
the young beside their mothers. He curdled  
half the white milk and set aside the whey  
in wicker baskets, then put the other half  
in bowls for him to drink up with his meal.

330

When he had finished working at these tasks,  
he lit a fire. Then he noticed us and said:

[250]

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

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

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

340

[260]

350

[270]

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

BOOK NINE

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

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

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

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

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We, too, would have been utterly destroyed,  
there in the cave—we didn't have the strength  
with our own hands to roll from the high door  
the massive rock he'd set there. So we groaned,  
and stayed there, waiting for a bright new Dawn. 400

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
he made a fire and milked his flock, one by one,  
with a new-born placed beside each mother.  
When this work was over, he once again [310]  
snatched two of my men and gorged himself.

After his meal, he easily rolled back  
the huge rock door, drove his rich flock outside, 410  
and set the stone in place, as one might put  
a cap back on a quiver. Then Cyclops,  
whistling loudly, drove his fat flocks away  
towards the mountain. He left me in the cave,  
plotting a nasty scheme deep in my heart,  
some way of gaining my revenge on him,  
if Athena would grant that glory to me.

My heart came up with what appeared to me  
the best thing I could do. An immense club  
belonging to the cyclops was lying there 420  
beside a stall, made of green olive wood [320]  
he'd cut to carry with him once it dried.

To human eyes it seemed just like the mast  
on a black merchant ship with twenty oars,  
a broad-beamed vessel which can move across  
the mighty ocean—that's how long and wide  
that huge club looked. Moving over to it,  
I chopped off a piece, about six feet in length,  
gave it to my companions, telling them  
to smooth the wood. They straightened it, while I, 430  
standing at one end, chipped and tapered it  
to a sharp point. Then I picked up the stake  
and set it in the smoldering fire to harden.

That done, I placed it carefully to one side,  
concealing it beneath some of the dung  
which lay throughout the cave in massive piles. [330]

And then I told my comrades to draw lots  
to see which men would risk their lives with me—  
when sweet sleep came to settle on the cyclops,  
we'd lift that stake and twist it in his eye. 440  
The crew drew lots and picked the very men

BOOK NINE

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

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

450 [340]

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

460

[350]

I spoke.

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

470

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

BOOK NINE

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

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

That's what I said.

His ruthless heart replied:

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

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

BOOK NINE

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

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

From the cave mighty Polyphemus roared:

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

They answered him—their words had wings:

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

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







BOOK NINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Alas!

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

He finished speaking. I answered him and said:

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

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

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

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

That's what he prayed. The dark-haired god heard him.  
Then Cyclops once again picked up a rock,  
a much larger stone, swung it round, and threw,  
using all his unimaginable force.

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

We reached the island where our well-decked ships  
were gathered. Our comrades sat beside them,  
in great sorrow, always watching for us.

We rowed in, drove our ship up on the sand,  
then climbed out through the surf. From the ship's hold  
we unloaded Cyclops' flock and shared it.

I took great care to see that all men there  
received an equal part. But when the flock  
was given out, my well-armed companions  
awarded me the ram, my special gift,  
one just for me. I sacrificed that ram,  
there on the shore, to Zeus, son of Cronos,  
lord of the dark cloud, ruler of all,  
offering him burnt pieces of the thigh.

But he cared nothing for my sacrifice.  
Instead he started planning to destroy  
all my well-decked ships and loyal comrades.

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

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

BOOK NINE

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

740



BOOK TEN

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

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

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

---

<sup>1</sup>These fires would serve to guide the ship toward land.

BOOK TEN

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

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

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

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

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

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



BOOK TEN

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

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

---

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

BOOK TEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

That's what I said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He spoke.

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

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

That's what he said.

But I gave him this answer: [270]

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

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

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on my way to Circe's home, a goddess 360  
skilled in many magic potions, I met  
Hermes of the Golden Wand. I was going  
towards the house. He looked like a young man  
when the first growth of hair is on his lip,  
the age when youthful charm is at its height.  
He gripped my hand, spoke to me, and said: [280]

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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Hermes of the Golden Wand, always said  
Odysseus in his swift black ship would come  
on his way back from Troy. So put that sword  
back in its sheath, and let the two of us  
go up into my bed. When we've made love,  
then we can trust each other.' 440

Once she said this,  
I answered her and said:

'O Circe,  
how can you ask me to be kind to you?  
In your own home you've changed my crew to pigs  
and keep me here. You're plotting mischief now,  
inviting me to go up to your room, [340]  
into your bed, so when I have no clothes,  
you can do me harm, destroy my manhood.  
But I will not agree to go to bed, 450  
unless, goddess, you will agree to swear  
a solemn oath that you'll make no more plans  
to injure me with some new devious trick.'

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

Meanwhile four women serving in her home  
were busy in the hall, children of springs, [350]  
groves, and sacred rivers flowing out to sea. 460  
One of them threw lovely purple coverlets  
across the chairs and spread linen underneath.  
And one pulled silver tables to each chair  
and on them placed baskets made of silver.  
The third one mixed deliciously sweet wine  
inside a silver bowl, then served it out  
in cups of gold. The fourth brought water in,  
lit a large fire under a huge cauldron,  
and warmed the water up until it boiled  
inside the bronze. She sat me in a tub, 470 [360]  
and, diluting water from that cauldron  
so it was right for me, gave me a bath,  
pouring water on my head and shoulders,  
until the weariness that sapped my heart

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

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

When she said this,  
I answered her and said:

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

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

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which they'd received from Circe earlier  
fell from their limbs, and they were men again,  
more youthful and much taller than before,  
more handsome to the eye. Now they knew me.  
Each shipmate grabbed my hand, and all of them  
were overcome with passionate weeping,  
so the house around them echoed strangely.  
Circe herself was moved to pity then—  
standing near me, the lovely goddess said: 520 [400]

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

Her words persuaded my proud heart. I left,  
going back to our swift ship beside the sea.  
I found my trusty comrades at the ship 530  
lamenting sadly, shedding many tears.  
Just as on a farm calves frisk around the herd [410]  
when cows, having had their fill of grazing,  
return back to the yard—they skip ahead,  
and pens no longer hold them, as they run,  
mooing in a crowd around their mothers,  
that's how my companions, once they saw me,  
thronged around, in tears—in their hearts it felt  
as if they they'd just sailed back to their own land,  
the rugged town of Ithaca itself, 540  
where they were born and bred. In their distress  
they spoke winged words to me:

‘You're back,  
you favourite of Zeus. We're glad of that,  
as if we had returned to Ithaca, [420]  
our native land. But come, describe for us  
how our other comrades came to grief.’

They spoke. I replied and reassured them:

‘First, let's drag our ship up onto the shore,  
stow all our goods and tackle in the caves.  
Then you can rouse yourselves and come with me, 550

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>According to some stories, Eurylochus was married to Odysseus's sister.

BOOK TEN

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

The lovely goddess came to me and said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I spoke. The goddess answered me at once.

‘Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes  
 and Zeus’s child, if it’s against your will,  
 you should not now remain here in my house.  
 But first you must complete another trip— [490]  
 to the home of Hades and Persephone, 630  
 to consult the shade of blind Teiresias,  
 the Theban prophet.<sup>1</sup> His mind is unimpaired.  
 Even though he’s dead, dread Persephone  
 has granted him the power to understand—  
 the others flit about, mere shadows.’

As Circe finished, my spirit was breaking.  
 I sat weeping on her bed, for my heart  
 no longer wished to live or glimpse the light.  
 But when I’d had enough of shedding tears  
 and rolling in distress, I answered her: 640 [500]

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

The lovely goddess gave me a quick answer:

‘Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes  
 and Zeus’s child, do not concern yourself  
 with a pilot for your ship. Raise the mast,  
 spread out your white sail, and just take your seat.  
 And then the breath of North Wind Boreas  
 will take you on your way. But once your ship  
 has crossed flowing Ocean, drag it ashore 650  
 at Persephone’s groves, on the level beach  
 where tall poplars grow, willows shed their fruit, [510]  
 right beside deep swirling Oceanus.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

BOOK TEN

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

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

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



BOOK TEN

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

‘No more sleeping now, no sweet slumbering.  
Let’s go. Queen Circe’s told me what to do.’ 700

That what I said. And their proud hearts agreed. [550]  
But I could not lead my men off safely,  
not even from that place. Of all of them  
the youngest was Elpenor, in battle  
not all that brave or clever. He’d lain down  
in Circe’s sacred home some distance off,  
away from his companions. Heavy with wine,  
he’d climbed onto the roof, seeking cooler air.  
When he heard the noise and the commotion  
made by his shipmates as they moved around, 710  
he jumped up on the spot, but then forgot  
to use the long ladder to come down again.  
He fell from the roof headfirst, snapped his neck,  
and broke his spine. His spirit went to Hades. [560]  
As my men came out, I spoke to them and said:

‘No doubt you now believe you’re going home,  
back to your dear native land. But Circe  
has stated we must take a different route,  
to Hades’ home and dread Persephone,  
to meet the shade of Teiresias from Thebes.’ 720

That’s what I said, and it broke their spirit.  
Sitting down right where they were, they shed tears  
and tore their hair. But their cries were useless.  
We moved down to our swift ship by the shore,  
shedding many tears of grief, while Circe [570]  
went out and tied a ram and a black ewe  
by our black ship. She’d slipped past us with ease,  
for who can see a god move back and forth,  
if she has no desire to be observed?”



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

Then out of Erebus came swarming up  
 shades of the dead—brides, young unmarried men,  
 old ones worn out with toil, young tender girls,  
 with hearts still new to grief, and many men  
 wounded by bronze spears, who'd died in battle, [40]  
 still in their blood-stained armour. Crowds of them  
 came thronging in from all sides of the pit,  
 with amazing cries. Pale fear seized my heart. 50  
 Then I called my comrades, ordering them  
 to flay and burn the sheep still lying there,  
 slain by cruel bronze, and pray to the gods,  
 to mighty Hades and Persephone.  
 And then I drew the sharp sword on my thigh  
 and sat there, stopping the powerless heads  
 of all the dead from getting near the blood,  
 until I'd asked Teiresias my questions. [50]  
 The first shade to appear out of the pit  
 was my companion Elpenor, whose corpse 60  
 had not been buried in the broad-tracked earth.  
 We'd left his body back in Circe's house,  
 without lament or burial—at the time  
 another need was driving us away.  
 When I saw him, I wept. My heart felt pity.  
 So I called out to him—my words had wings:

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

I spoke. He groaned and gave me his reply: 70

‘Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son, [60]  
and child of Zeus, some fatal deity  
has brought me down—that and too much wine.  
In Circe’s house, after I’d been sleeping,  
I didn’t think of using the long ladder  
to get back again. So I fell headfirst,  
down off the roof. The impact broke my neck,  
shattering the spine. My shade departed,  
and went down to Hades. I beg you now,  
in the name of shipmates we’ve left behind, 80  
the ones who are not with us, of your wife,  
and your father, who reared you as a child,  
and Telemachus, whom you left at home,  
your only son. I know that your fine ship  
will sail away from this home of Hades  
and once more reach the island of Aeaea, [70]  
where, my lord, I ask you to remember me.  
When you go from there, don’t abandon me,  
unburied, unlamented. Don’t turn away,  
or I may bring gods’ anger down on you. 90  
Burn me with all the armour I possess.  
Raise a mound for me by the gray sea shore,  
in memory of an unlucky man,  
for those in times to come. Do this for me.  
And on the tomb there fix the oar I used  
while I lived and rowed with my companions.’

He finished. I answered him and promised:

‘You poor man, I’ll do this, complete it all.’ [80]

So we two sat in gloomy conversation,  
I, on one side, with my sharp sword held high, 100  
above the blood, and, on the other side,  
the shade of my companion speaking out.

BOOK ELEVEN

Then appeared the ghost of my dead mother,  
Anticleia, Autolycus's child.  
I'd left her still alive when I set off  
for sacred Troy. Once I caught sight of her,  
I wept, and I felt pity in my heart.  
Nonetheless, in spite of my great sorrow,  
I could not let her get too near the blood,  
until I'd questioned blind Teiresias. 110

The shade of Teiresias from Thebes appeared, [90]  
holding a gold staff. He knew who I was  
and started speaking:

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

When Teiresias said this, I drew back  
and thrust my studded sword inside its sheath. 120  
Once the blameless prophet had drunk dark blood,  
he said these words:

‘Glorious Odysseus, [100]  
you ask about your honey-sweet return.  
But a god will make your journey bitter.  
I don't think you can evade Poseidon,  
whose heart is angry at you, full of rage  
because you blinded his dear son.<sup>1</sup> But still,  
though you will suffer, you may still get home,  
if you will curb your comrades and your heart.  
As soon as you've escaped the dark blue sea 130  
and reached the island of Thrinacia  
in your sturdy ship, you'll find grazing there  
the cattle and rich flocks of Helios,  
who hears and watches over everything.  
If you leave them unharmed and keep your mind [110]  
on your return, you may reach Ithaca,  
though you'll have trouble. But if you touch them,  
then I foresee destruction for your crew,

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

for you, and for your ship. And even if  
 you yourself escape, you'll get home again  
 late and grieving, in someone else's ship,  
 after losing all of your companions. 140  
 There'll be trouble at home—insolent men  
 eating up your livelihood and wooing  
 your godlike wife by giving courtship gifts.  
 But when you come, you'll surely take revenge  
 for all their violence. Once you have killed  
 the suitors in your house with your sharp sword,  
 by cunning or in public, then take up [120]  
 a well-made oar and go, until you reach 150  
 a people who know nothing of the sea,  
 who don't put salt on any food they eat,  
 and have no knowledge of ships painted red  
 or well-made oars that serve those ships as wings.  
 I'll tell you a sure sign you won't forget—  
 when someone else runs into you and says  
 you've got a shovel used for winnowing  
 on your broad shoulders, then fix that fine oar  
 in the ground, and offer rich sacrifice [130]  
 to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull, 160  
 and a boar that breeds with sows. And then leave.<sup>1</sup>  
 Go home, and there make sacred offerings  
 to immortal gods, who hold wide heaven,  
 all of them in order. Your death will come  
 out of the sea, such a gentle passing,  
 when you are bowed down with a ripe old age,  
 with your people prospering around you.<sup>2</sup>  
 In all these things I'm telling you the truth.'

He finished speaking. Then I replied and said:

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

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

BOOK ELEVEN

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

170 [140]

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

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

180

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

[150]

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

190 [160]

Once she’d finished, I answered her:

‘Mother,  
I had to come down here to Hades’ house,  
meet the shade of Teiresias of Thebes,  
and hear his prophecy. I have not yet  
come near Achaea’s shores or disembarked  
in our own land. I’ve been wandering round

200

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

I spoke.  
 My honoured mother quickly answered me:

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

Remember all these things, so later on  
you can describe the details to your wife.’

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>The Greek text calls her Epicaste, which seems to be an alternative name for Jocasta, rather than a different person from another legend. The name Jocasta has been used here, since that name is better known from Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*.

as queen, she bore Neleus splendid children—  
 Nestor, Chromius, Periclymenus,  
 and lovely Pero, a mortal wonder, 360  
 so much so that all the neighbouring men  
 sought her hand in marriage. But Neleus  
 would not give her up, except to someone  
 who drove great Iphicles's cattle herd [290]  
 from Phylace—broad-faced beasts with spiral horns,  
 and hard to manage. A trusty prophet  
 was the only one who promised he would try,  
 but a sad fate determined by the gods  
 ensnared him—those savage cattle herders  
 threw him in prison, a cruel bondage. 370  
 But as the days and months went by, bringing  
 a change in seasons, the new year rolled in,  
 and mighty Iphicles had him released—  
 after he'd told them all his prophecies,  
 and Zeus's will then came to be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>  
 I saw Leda, wife of Tyndareus.  
 She bore Tyndareus two noble sons,  
 horse-taming Castor and Polydeuces, [300]  
 the illustrious boxer. Life-giving earth 380  
 has buried them, although they live on still.  
 Even in the world below Zeus honours them.  
 On every other day they are alive  
 and then, on alternating days, are dead.<sup>2</sup>  
 And they have won respect reserved for gods.

After Leda, I saw Iphimedeia,  
 wife of Aloeus. Poseidon, she said,  
 had made love to her, and she'd had two sons,  
 godlike Otus and famous Ephialtes.  
 Though neither one of them lived very long, 390

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<sup>1</sup>Commentators have suggested that this “trusty prophet” may have been Melampus. One of the stories of Melampus has him captured for stealing cattle and spending a year in prison. But he had the ability to communicate with animals and heard the worms in the roof beams of his prison talking about how the timbers were about to collapse. Melampus passed this information onto his captor (in this story Iphicles), who was so impressed he released him.

<sup>2</sup>Leda is the mother of Helen of Troy and of Clytaemnestra, two twin sisters, but with different fathers. Helen is a daughter of Zeus, Clytaemnestra the daughter of the mortal Tyndareus. Castor was, like Clytaemnestra, a child of the mortal Tyndareus, king of Sparta, and Polydeuces (or Pollux), like Helen, a child of Zeus. When Castor, who was mortal, was killed, Polydeuces asked Zeus if he could share his immortality with Castor. Zeus then allowed them to live alternating days on Mount Olympus and Hades. The twins were also immortalized as the constellation Gemini.

grain-giving Earth had raised them up to be  
 the tallest and handsomest men by far, [310]  
 after glorious Orion. They stood,  
 at nine years of age, twenty-two feet wide  
 and fifty-four feet high.<sup>1</sup> But they threatened  
 to bring the battle din of furious war  
 against the immortals on Olympus.  
 They wished to pile Mount Ossa on Olympus,  
 and stack Pelion with its trembling woods  
 on top of Ossa.<sup>2</sup> Then they could storm heaven. 400  
 And if they'd reached their full-grown height as men,  
 they could well have done it. But Zeus's son,  
 the one whom Leto bore, killed both of them,  
 before the hair below their temples grew  
 and hid their chins beneath a full-fledged beard.<sup>3</sup> [320]  
 I saw Phaedra, Procris, and Ariadne,  
 daughter of Minos, whose mind loved slaughter.  
 Theseus brought her once away from Crete  
 to the hill in sacred Athens. But he got  
 no joy of her. Before he did, Artemis 410  
 on sea-girt Dia murdered Ariadne,  
 because of something Dionysus said.<sup>4</sup>

And then I saw Maera and Clymene,  
 and despicable Eriphyle, who sold  
 her dear husband's life for a gift of gold.  
 I cannot mention all the woman I saw,  
 every wife and daughter of those heroes—  
 immortal night would end before I finished. [330]  
 It's time to sleep, in my swift ship or here.  
 How I am escorted from this palace 420  
 is now up to you and the immortals."

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<sup>1</sup>The Greek says nine cubits wide and nine fathoms tall. A cubit was the length of a man's arm from the elbow to the tip of his middle finger (the exact length varies somewhat), and a fathom was the length of a man's outstretched arms (about six feet, but the exact length varies).

<sup>2</sup>Ossa and Pelion are mountains in Thessaly. This attempt to scale the heights of heaven is part of the famous stories of the war between the Giants and the Olympian deities.

<sup>3</sup>The son referred to is Apollo, child of Zeus and Leto.

<sup>4</sup>In the best-known version of this famous story, Theseus sails off from Crete with Ariadne, who has helped him escape from her father's labyrinth, but then deserts her on an island (Dia or Naxos). She later marries Dionysus. It is not clear here just what Dionysus may have told Artemis to make her want to kill Ariadne.

BOOK ELEVEN

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence,  
saying not a word, spellbound in the shadowy hall.  
The first to speak was white-armed Arete, who said:

“Phaeacians, how does this man seem to you  
for beauty, stature, and within himself,  
a fair, well-balanced mind? He is my guest,  
though each of you shares in this honour, too.  
So don’t be quick to send him on his way,  
and don’t hold back your gifts to one in need. 430 [340]  
Thanks to the good will of the gods, you have  
many fine possessions stored in your homes.”

Then old warrior Echeneus addressed them all—  
one of the Phaeacian elders there among them:

“Friends, what our wise queen has just said to us,  
as we’d expect, is not wide of the mark.  
You must attend to her. But the last word  
and the decision rest with Alcinous.”

Once Echeneus finished, Alcinous spoke out:

“The queen indeed will have the final word, 440  
as surely as I live and am the king  
of the Phaeacians, men who love the oar.  
But though our guest is longing to return, [350]  
let him agree to stay until tomorrow.  
By then I’ll have collected all our gifts.  
His leaving here is everyone’s concern,  
especially mine, since I control this land.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men most renowned,  
if you asked me to stay for one whole year, 450  
to arrange my escort and give splendid gifts,  
then I would still agree. It’s far better  
to get back to one’s own dear native place  
with more wealth in hand. I’ll win more respect, [360]  
more love from anyone who looks at me,  
whenever I return to Ithaca.”

Alcinous then replied to him and said:

“Odysseus,  
 when we look at you, we do not perceive  
 that you’re in any way a lying fraud,  
 like many men the black earth nourishes 460  
 and scatters everywhere, who make up lies  
 from things no man has seen. You speak so well,  
 and you have such a noble heart inside.  
 You’ve told your story with a minstrel’s skill, [370]  
 the painful agonies of the Argives  
 and your own, as well. Come then, tell me this—  
 and speak the truth—did you see your comrades,  
 those godlike men who went with you to Troy  
 and met their fate there? This night before us  
 will be lengthy, astonishingly so. 470  
 It’s not yet time to sleep here in the halls,  
 so tell me of these marvellous events.  
 I could stay here until bright Dawn arrives,  
 if you’d agree to tell me in this room  
 the tale of your misfortunes.”

Adventurous Odysseus  
 then answered him and said:

“Lord Alcinous,  
 most renowned among all men, there’s a time  
 for many stories and a time for sleep.  
 If you are eager to hear even more, [380]  
 I will not hesitate to speak to you 480  
 of other things more pitiful than these.  
 I mean the troubles of those friends of mine  
 who perished later—they managed to escape  
 the Trojans’ fearsome battle cries, but died  
 when they returned, thanks to the deviousness  
 of a malicious woman.

Once Persephone  
 dispersed those female shadows here and there,  
 then the grieving shade of Agamemnon,  
 son of Atreus, appeared. Around him  
 other shades had gathered, all those who died 490  
 and met their fate alongside Agamemnon  
 in Aegisthus’ house. He knew me at once, [390]  
 and after drinking blood, he wept aloud,

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shedding many tears, and stretched out his hands,  
keen to reach me. But he no longer had  
any inner power or strength, not like  
the force his supple limbs possessed before.  
I watched him and wept. Pity filled my heart.  
Then I called out to him—my words had wings:

‘Lord Agamemnon, son of Atreus, 500  
king of men, what fatal net of grievous death  
destroyed you? Did Poseidon stir the winds [400]  
into a furious storm and strike your ships?  
Or were you killed by enemies on land,  
while you were cutting out their cattle herd  
or rich flocks of sheep? Or were you fighting  
to seize their town and carry off their wives?’

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

‘Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
and Zeus’s child, Poseidon did not kill me 510  
in my ships by rousing turbulent winds  
into a vicious storm. Nor was I slain  
by enemies on land. No. Aegisthus  
brought on my fatal end. He murdered me,  
and he was helped by my accursed wife, [410]  
after he’d welcomed me into his home  
and prepared a feast for me, like an ox  
one butchers at the trough. And so I died  
the most pitiful of deaths. Around me  
they kept killing all of my companions, 520  
like white-tusked pigs at some nuptial banquet,  
communal feast, or fine drinking party  
in a powerful and rich man’s palace.  
You have encountered dying men before,  
many of them, slain in single combat  
or the thick of war. But if you’d seen that,  
your heart would feel great pity. There we were,  
lying in the hall with the mixing bowls  
and tables crammed full of food, the whole floor [420]  
awash with blood. The saddest thing I heard 530  
was Cassandra, Priam’s daughter, screaming.  
That traitor Clytaemnestra slaughtered her  
right there beside me. Though I was dying,  
I raised my arms to strike her with my sword,



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but that dog-faced bitch turned her back on me.  
Even though I was on my way to Hades,  
she made no attempt to use her fingers  
to close my eyelids or to shut my mouth.<sup>1</sup>  
The truth is, there's nothing more disgusting,  
more disgraceful, than a woman whose heart 540  
is set on deeds like this—the way she planned  
the shameless act, to arrange the murder [430]  
of the man she married. I truly thought  
I'd be warmly welcomed when I reached home  
by my children and my slaves. That woman,  
more than anyone, has covered herself  
and women born in years to come with shame,  
even the ones whose deeds are virtuous.'

Agamemnon finished. I answered him at once:

'That's appalling! Surely wide-thundering Zeus 550  
for many years has shown a lethal hate  
towards the family of Atreus,  
thanks to the conniving of some woman.  
Many died because of Helen, and then  
Clytaemnestra prepared a trap for you,  
while you were fighting far away.'

I spoke,  
and he immediately replied, saying: [440]

'That's why you should never treat them kindly,  
not even your own wife. Never tell her  
the things you have determined in your mind. 560  
Tell her some, but keep the rest well hidden.  
But in your case, Odysseus, death won't come  
at your wife's hand, for wise Penelope,  
Icarius' child, is a noble wife,  
with an understanding heart. When we left  
to go to war, she'd not been married long.  
She had a young lad at her breast, a child,  
who now, I think, sits down among the men,  
happy his dear father will notice him [450]  
when he returns back home. He'll welcome him 570

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<sup>1</sup>These actions were made out of respect for the dead on their way to the underworld. The refusal to carry them out shows the greatest disrespect for the dead.

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in an appropriate way. But my wife  
did not let my eyes feast on my own son.  
Before I could do that, she slaughtered me,  
her husband. But I'll tell you something else—  
keep this firmly in your mind. Bring your ship  
back to your dear native land in secret,  
without public display. For there's no trust  
in women anymore. But come, tell me—  
and speak the truth—whether you chanced to hear  
where my son's living now. He may well be 580  
in Orchomenus or sandy Pylos,  
or perhaps in Sparta with Menelaus. [460]  
For brave Orestes has not yet perished  
up there on the earth.'

Once Agamemnon paused,  
I answered him immediately and said:

'Son of Atreus, why ask me that question?  
I don't know whether he's alive or dead.  
And there's no point in prattling like the wind.'

As we two stood there in sad conversation,  
full of sorrow and shedding many tears. 590  
Achilles' shade came up, son of Peleus,  
with those of glorious Antilochus  
and Patroclus, too, as well as Ajax,  
who in his looks and body was the best  
of all Danaans, after Achilles, [470]  
whom no one else could match. Then the shadow  
of the swift-footed son of Aeacus  
knew who I was, and with a cry of grief,  
Achilles spoke to me—his words had wings:

'Adventurous Odysseus, Laertes' son 600  
and Zeus's child, what a bold man you are!  
What exploit will your heart ever dream up  
to top this one? How can you dare to come  
down here into Hades, the dwelling place  
for the mindless dead, shades of worn-out men?'

Achilles spoke. I answered him at once:

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‘Achilles, son of Peleus, mightiest  
by far of the Achaeans, I came here  
because I had to see Teiresias  
and hear his prophecy of my return  
to rugged Ithaca. I’ve not yet reached  
Achaean land. I’ve still not disembarked  
on my own soil. I’m in constant trouble.  
But as for you, Achilles, there’s no man  
in former days who was more blest than you,  
and none will come in future. Before now,  
while you were still alive, we Achaeans  
honoured you as we did the gods. And now,  
since you’ve come down here, you rule with power  
among those who have died. So Achilles,  
you have no cause to grieve because you’re dead.’

I paused, and he immediately replied:

‘Don’t try to comfort me about my death,  
glorious Odysseus. I’d rather live  
working as a wage-labourer for hire  
by some other man, one who had no land  
and not much in the way of livelihood,  
than lord it over all the wasted dead.  
But come, talk to me of my noble son—  
whether he went off to war or not.  
Did he become a leader? Talk to me  
about great Peleus, if there’s something  
you have heard. Is he still held in honour  
among the many Myrmidons? Do men  
disparage him in Hellas and in Phthia  
because old age now grips his hands and feet?  
I am not there, living in the sunlight,  
to help him with the power I once had  
in spacious Troy, when I fought their best men  
and kept the Argives safe. But if I came  
back to my father’s house with strength like that,  
though only for the briefest length of time,  
those who act with disrespect against him,  
denying him honour, would soon come to fear  
my force, these all-conquering hands of mine.’

Achilles spoke. I answered him at once:

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'To tell the truth, I've heard nothing at all  
of worthy Peleus. As for your son,  
dear Neoptolemus, I can tell you  
the entire truth, just as you requested. 650  
I myself escorted him in my fine ship  
from Scyros, to join well-armed Achaeans.  
And whenever we discussed our strategies [510]  
around the Trojans' city, I tell you,  
he was always first to state his own ideas,  
and when he talked, he never missed the mark.  
The only ones superior to him  
were godlike Nestor and myself. And then,  
on the Trojan plain, when we Argives fought,  
he never stayed back in the crowds of men 660  
with ranks of soldiers. No. He ran ahead,  
far out in front. No soldier's strength matched his.  
In fearful battles he killed many men.  
I can't give you the names of all of them,  
those he slew while fighting for the Argives.  
But his sword cut down the son of Telephus,  
brave Eurypylus. What a man he was!  
Many of his comrades, the Ceteians, [520]  
also met their deaths in war around him,  
because a certain woman wanted gifts.<sup>1</sup> 670  
He was the finest looking man I saw  
after noble Memnon. And then, when we,  
the noblest of the Argives, were sitting  
in the wooden horse made by Epeius,  
with me in full command, ordering men  
to open up or close our well-built trap,  
many other Danaan counsellors  
and leaders, too, were brushing tears aside,  
and each man's legs were trembling—even then  
my eyes never saw his fair skin grow pale 680  
or watched him wipe his cheeks to clear off tears. [530]  
He begged me many times to let him loose,  
to leave the horse, and he kept reaching for  
his sword hilt and his spear of heavy bronze.  
That's how keen he was to kill the Trojans.  
Once we'd ravaged Priam's lofty city,  
he took his share of loot and a fine prize,

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<sup>1</sup>Eurypylus was sent to fight for the Trojans by his mother Astyoche, who did so because her brother Priam promised to give her a golden vine.

when he went to his ship. He was unhurt—  
 no blows from sharp bronze spears or other wounds  
 from fighting hand-to-hand, the sort one gets 690  
 so frequently in battle. For Ares,  
 when he's angry, does not discriminate.'

I spoke. Then the shade of swift Achilles  
 walked away with massive strides through meadows  
 filled with asphodel, happy that I'd said  
 his son was such a celebrated man. [540]

The other shadows of the dead and gone  
 stood there in sorrow, all asking questions  
 about the ones they loved. The only one  
 who stood apart was the shade of Ajax, 700  
 son of Telamon, still full of anger  
 for my victory, when I'd bested him  
 beside our ships, in that competition  
 for Achilles' arms. His honoured mother  
 had offered them as prizes. The judges  
 were Athena and captive sons of Troy.<sup>1</sup>  
 How I wish I'd never won that contest!  
 Those weapons were the cause earth swallowed up  
 the life of Ajax, such a splendid man,  
 who, in his looks and actions, was the best 710 [550]  
 of all Danaans after the noble son  
 of Peleus. I called to him and spoke  
 to offer him some reassurance:

'Ajax,  
 worthy son of Telamon, can't you forget,  
 even when you're dead, your anger at me  
 over those destructive weapons? The gods  
 turned them to a curse against the Argives,  
 when they lost you, such a tower of strength.  
 Now you've been killed, Achaeans mourn your death  
 unceasingly, just as they do Achilles, 720  
 son of Peleus. No one is to blame  
 but Zeus, who in his terrifying rage [560]

<sup>1</sup>When Achilles died there was a contest for his famous weapons. The two main claimants were Odysseus and Ajax. When Odysseus was awarded the weapons by the judges, Ajax went berserk and later killed himself. Different versions of the story provide different accounts of how the decision was made. In one such story, the judges asked some Trojan prisoners which of the two Achaean warrior leaders they feared more.

against the army of Danaan spearmen  
brought on your death. Come over here, my lord,  
so you can hear me as I talk to you.  
Let your proud heart and anger now relent.<sup>1</sup>

I finished. He did not reply, but left,  
moving off towards Erebus, to join  
the other shadows of the dead and gone.  
For all his rage, he would have talked to me, 730  
or I to him, but in my chest and heart  
I wished to see more shades of those who'd died.

Next I saw Minos, glorious son of Zeus,  
sitting there, holding a golden sceptre  
and passing judgments on the dead, who stood  
and sat around the king, seeking justice, [570]  
throughout the spacious gates of Hades' home.<sup>1</sup>  
After him I noticed huge Orion  
driving on through a field of asphodel  
wild creatures he himself had hunted down 740  
in isolated mountains. In his hand,  
he clutched his still unbreakable bronze club.<sup>2</sup>

And I saw Tityus, son of glorious Earth,  
lying on the ground. His body covered  
nine acres and more. Two vultures sat there,  
one on either side, ripping his liver,  
their beaks jabbing deep inside his guts,  
for his hands could not protect his body.  
He'd attacked Leto, Zeus's lovely wife, [580]  
as she was passing through Panopeus, 750  
with its fine dancing grounds, towards Pytho.<sup>3</sup>

Then I saw Tantalus in agony,  
standing in a pool of water so deep

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<sup>1</sup>This scene and the following details are a remarkable view of the underworld as a place of judgment, with eternal punishment inflicted on particularly grievous wrongdoers, a view of a moralized afterlife unknown anywhere else in Homer. Not surprisingly, this sudden description of such a different sense of Hades has given rise to charges that it is a later interpolation.

<sup>2</sup>Orion was a legendary hunter, in some accounts a son of Zeus, who, after Orion's death, turned him into the constellation of the same name.

<sup>3</sup>Tityus was a giant son of Zeus (or of Uranus). Hera persuaded Tityus to attack Leto, whose children, Apollo and Artemis, came to her help and killed him. The measurement describing his size on the ground is unclear.

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it almost reached his chin. He looked as if  
he had a thirst but could not take a drink.  
Whenever that old man bent down, desperate  
to drink, the water there was swallowed up  
and vanished. You could see black earth appear  
around his feet. A god dried up the place.  
Some high and leafy trees above his head 760  
were in full bloom—pears and pomegranates,  
apple trees—all with gleaming fruit—sweet figs [590]  
and luscious olives. Each time the old man  
stretched out his arms and tried to reach for them,  
a wind would raise them to the shadowy clouds.<sup>1</sup>

And then, in his painful torment, I saw  
Sisyphus striving with both hands to raise  
a massive rock. He'd brace his arms and feet,  
then strain to push it up a nearby hill.  
But as he was about to get that stone 770  
across the crest, its overpowering weight  
would make it change its course. The cruel rock  
would roll back down again along the plain.  
Then he'd strain once more to get it up the slope.  
His limbs dripped sweat, and dust rose from his head.<sup>2</sup> [600]

And then I noticed mighty Hercules,  
or at least his image, for he himself  
was with immortal gods, enjoying their feasts.  
Hebe with the lovely ankles is his wife,  
daughter of great Zeus and Hera, goddess 780  
of the golden sandals.<sup>3</sup> Around him there  
shades of the dead were making noises, like birds  
fluttering here an there, quite terrified.

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<sup>1</sup>Tantalus was a son of Zeus and a distant ancestor of Agamemnon and Menelaus. His punishment comes from some action he committed against the gods (stealing the gods' food or murdering his son Pelops and serving him to the gods for dinner).

<sup>2</sup>Sisyphus was the son of Aeolus and founder of Corinth, famous for his trickery. He gave away the secrets of the gods and once tricked the god of death, so that the dead could not reach the underworld.

<sup>3</sup>Hercules had the rare distinction of being admitted to heaven, even though he was a mortal son of Zeus. Hence, Odysseus meets an "image" of Hercules. His later mention of serving an inferior man is a reference to the Labours of Hercules, work he had to carry out for king Eurystheus over a twelve-year period as punishment for having murdered his own wife and children in a fit of temporary insanity brought on by Zeus's wife, Hera. One of those labours involved bringing back Cerberus, a dog belonging to Hades.

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And like dark night, he was glaring round him,  
his unsheathed bow in hand, with an arrow  
against the string, as if prepared to shoot.  
The strap across his chest was frightening,  
a golden belt inlaid with images— [610]  
amazing things—bears, wild boars, and lions  
with glittering eyes, battles, fights, murders, 790  
and men being killed. I hope the craftsman  
whose skill conceived the pictures on that belt  
never made or ever makes another.  
His eyes saw me and knew just who I was.  
With a mournful tone he called out to me—  
his words had wings:

‘Odysseus, you resourceful man,  
son of Laertes and a child of Zeus,  
are you now bearing an unhappy fate  
below the sunlight, as I, too, did once?  
I was a son of Zeus, child of Cronos, 800  
and yet I had to bear so many troubles, [620]  
forced to perform those labours for a man  
vastly inferior to me, someone  
who kept assigning me the harshest tasks.  
One time he sent me here to bring away  
Hades’ hound. There was no other challenge  
he could dream up more difficult for me  
than that one. But I carried the dog off  
and brought him back from Hades with my guides,  
Hermes and glittering-eyed Athena.’ 810

With these words he returned to Hades’ home.  
But I stayed at that place a while, in case  
one of those heroic men who perished  
in days gone by might come. I might have seen  
still more men from earlier times, the ones [630]  
I wished to see—Theseus and Perithous,  
great children of the gods. Before I could,  
a thousand tribes of those who’d died appeared,  
with an astounding noise. Pale fear gripped me—



holy Persephone might send at me  
a horrific monster, the Gorgon's head.<sup>1</sup>

820

I quickly made my way back to the ship,  
and told my crew to get themselves on board  
and loosen off the cables at the stern.  
They went aboard at once and took their seats  
along each rowing bench. A rising swell  
carried our ship away down Ocean's stream.  
We rowed at first, but then a fair wind blew.

[640]

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<sup>1</sup>The Gorgons were three sisters (the most famous being Medusa, the only mortal of the three). Perseus killed Medusa, but her head retained its power to turn people and even some immortals to stone.

BOOK TWELVE  
THE SIRENS, SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS, THE CATTLE OF THE SUN

*[Odysseus continues his story in Phaeacia: the ship sails from Oceanus back to Circe's island where they bury Elpenor; Circe advises Odysseus about future adventures; Odysseus and his crew leave Circe and sail past the Sirens; then they encounter Scylla and Charybdis and lose six men; the ship then sails on to Thrinacia, where the herds and flocks of Helios graze; Odysseus's men swear not to touch the animals; winds keep them on the island; desperate with hunger the crewmen round up some of the animals and kill them; they leave the island, and Zeus sends on a storm as punishment; the boat is destroyed and all of Odysseus's shipmates drown; Odysseus drifts back on a temporary raft to Charybdis, but manages to escape; he reaches Calypso's island; the tale of his past adventures concludes.]*

“Our ship sailed on, away from Ocean's stream,  
across the great wide sea, and reached Aeaea,  
the island home and dancing grounds of Dawn.<sup>1</sup>  
We sailed in, hauled our ship up on the beach,  
then walked along the shore beside the sea.  
There, waiting for bright Dawn, we fell asleep.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
I sent my comrades off to Circe's house  
to fetch the body of the dead Elpenor. [10]  
Then, after quickly cutting down brushwood, 10  
we buried him where the land extended  
furthest out to sea. Overcome with grief,  
we shed many tears. After we had burned  
the dead man's corpse and armour, we piled up  
a mound, raised a pillar, then planted there,  
above the mound, his finely fashioned oar.

While we were occupied with all these tasks,  
Circe was well aware of our return  
from Hades' home. Dressed in her finery,  
she quickly came to us. With her she brought 20  
servants carrying bread, plenty of meat,  
and bright red wine. Then the lovely goddess  
stood in our midst and spoke: [20]

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<sup>1</sup>This return to Aeaea, Circe's island, has puzzled commentators, because the description of it here seems to place in a very different location from the earlier one (in the east rather than in the north west).

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‘You reckless men,  
you’ve been down to Hades while still alive,  
to meet death twice, when other men die once.  
But come, enjoy this food and drink this wine.  
Take all day. Then, as soon as Dawn arrives,  
you’ll sail. I’ll show you your course and tell you  
each sign to look for, so you’ll not suffer,  
or, thanks to ill-thought acts on sea and land, 30  
endure great pain.’

Circe finished speaking.  
And our proud hearts agreed with what she’d said.  
So all that day until the sun went down  
we sat there eating rich supplies of meat [30]  
and drinking down sweet wine. The sun then set,  
and darkness came. So we lay down and slept  
beside our ship’s stern cables. But Circe  
took me by the hand and led me away,  
some distance from the crew. She made me sit,  
while she stretched out beside me on the ground. 40  
I told her every detail of our trip,  
describing all of it from start to finish.  
Then lovely Circe spoke to me and said:

‘All these things have thus come to an end.  
But you must listen now to what I say—  
a god himself will be reminding you.  
First of all, you’ll run into the Sirens.  
They seduce all men who come across them. [40]  
And no man who unwittingly sails past  
and hears the Sirens’ call ever returns. 50  
His wife and infant children in his home  
will never stand beside him full of joy.  
No. Instead, the Sirens’ clear-toned singing  
will captivate his heart. They’ll be sitting  
in a meadow, surrounded by a pile,  
a massive heap, of rotting human bones  
encased in shrivelled skin. Row on past them.  
Roll some sweet wax in your hand and stuff it  
in your companions’ ears, so none of them  
can listen. But if you’re keen to hear them, 60  
make your crew tie you down in your swift ship. [50]  
Stand there with hands and feet lashed to the mast.  
They must attach the rope ends there as well.

BOOK TWELVE

Then you can hear both Sirens as they sing.  
 You'll enjoy their song. If you start to beg  
 your men, or order them, to let you go,  
 make sure they lash you there with still more rope.  
 When your men have rowed on past the Sirens,  
 I cannot tell you which alternative  
 to follow on your route—for you yourself 70  
 will have to trust your heart. But I'll explain  
 the options. One has overhanging rocks,  
 on which dark-eyed Amphitrite's great waves [60]  
 smash with a roar. These cliffs the sacred gods  
 have called the Planctae. No birds pass through there,  
 not even timid doves who bring ambrosia  
 to father Zeus. The sheer rock precipice  
 snatches even these away. And then Zeus  
 sends out another to maintain their count.  
 No human ship has ever reached this place 80  
 and made it past. Instead, waves from the sea  
 and deadly blasts of fire carry away  
 a whirling mass of timbers from the boat  
 and human corpses. Only one ocean ship,  
 most famous of them all, has made it through,  
 the Argo, on her way home from Aeetes, [70]  
 and waves would soon have smashed that vessel, too,  
 against the massive rocks, had Hera not  
 propelled her through. For Jason was her friend.<sup>1</sup>  
 On the other route there are two rock cliffs. 90  
 One has a sharp peak jutting all the way  
 up to wide heaven. Around that mountain  
 a dark cloud sits, which never melts away.  
 No blue sky ever shows around the peak,  
 not even in summer or at harvest time.  
 No human being could climb up that rock  
 and stand on top, not even if he had  
 twenty hands and feet. The cliff's too smooth,  
 like polished stone. Half way up the cliff face [80]  
 there's a shadowy cave. It faces west, 100  
 to Erebus. You'll steer your ship at it,  
 illustrious Odysseus. There's no man  
 powerful enough to shoot an arrow

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<sup>1</sup>The Argo, a ship named after its builder Argus, carried Jason and his companions (the Argonauts) to Colchis on their trip to capture the Golden Fleece and back again. Aeetes was king of Colchis, father of Medea.

BOOK TWELVE

from a hollow ship and reach that cavern.  
In there lives Scylla. She has a dreadful yelp.  
It's true her voice sounds like a new-born pup,  
but she's a vicious beast. No mortal man  
would feel good seeing her, nor would a god  
who crossed her path. She has a dozen feet,  
all deformed, six enormously long necks, 110 [90]  
with a horrific head on each of them,  
and three rows of teeth packed close together,  
full of murky death. Her lower body  
she keeps in her hollow cave, out of sight,  
but sticks her heads outside the fearful hole,  
and fishes there, scouring around the rock  
for dolphins, swordfish, or some bigger prey,  
whatever she can seize of all those beasts  
moaning Amphitrite keeps nourishing  
in numbers past all counting. No sailors 120  
yet can boast they and their ship sailed past her  
without disaster. Each of Scylla's heads  
carries off a man, snatching him away [100]  
right off the dark-prowed ship. Then, Odysseus,  
you'll see the other cliff. It's not so high.  
The two are close together. You could shoot  
an arrow from one cliff and hit the other.  
There's a huge fig tree there with leaves in bloom.  
Just below that tree divine Charybdis  
sucks black seawater down. She spews it out 130  
three times a day, and then three times a day  
she gulps it down—a terrifying sight.  
May you never meet her when she swallows!  
Nothing can save you from destruction then,  
not even Poseidon, Shaker of the Earth.  
Make sure your ship stays close to Scylla's rock.  
Row past there with all speed. It's much better  
to mourn for six companions in your ship [110]  
than to have them all wiped out together.'

Circe paused. I answered her directly: 140

'Goddess, please tell me this, and speak the truth—  
is there some way I can get safely through,  
past murderous Charybdis, and protect  
me and my crew when Scylla moves to strike.'

BOOK TWELVE

I spoke. The lovely goddess then replied:

'You reckless man, you think you're dealing here  
with acts of war or work? Why won't you yield  
to the immortal gods? She's not human,  
but a destroyer who will never die—  
fearful, difficult, and fierce—not someone 150  
you can fight. There's no defence against her.  
The bravest thing to do is run away. [120]  
If you linger by the cliff to arm yourself,  
I fear she'll jump out once more, attack you  
with all her heads and snatch away six men,  
just as before. Row on quickly past her,  
as hard as you can go. Send out a call  
to Crataeis, her mother, who bore her  
to menace human beings. She'll restrain her—  
Scylla's heads won't lash out at you again. 160  
Next you'll reach the island of Thrinacia,  
where Helios's many cattle graze,  
his rich flocks, too—seven herds of cattle  
and just as many lovely flocks of sheep,  
with fifty in each group. They bear no young [130]  
and never die. Their herders are divine,  
fair-haired Lampetie and Phaethusa.  
Beautiful Neaera gave birth to them  
from sun god Helios Hyperion.  
Once she had raised them, their royal mother 170  
sent them off to live on Thrinacia,  
an island far away, where they could tend  
their father's sheep and bent-horned cattle herds.  
Now, if you leave these animals unharmed  
and focus on your journey home, I think  
you may get back to Ithaca, although  
you'll meet misfortune. But if you harm them,  
then I foresee destruction for your ship  
and crew. Even if you yourself escape, [140]  
you'll get back home in great distress and late, 180  
after all your shipmates have been killed.'

Circe finished speaking. When Dawn came up  
on her golden throne, the lovely goddess  
left to go up island. So I returned  
back to the ship, where I urged my comrades  
to get on board and loosen off the ropes.

BOOK TWELVE

They quickly climbed into the ship, sat down  
in proper order at each rowing bench,  
and struck the gray sea surface with their oars,  
as fair winds blew behind our dark-prowed ship, 190  
filling the sail, excellent companions  
sent by fair-haired Circe, fearful goddess [150]  
who possessed the power of song. We checked  
the rigging on our ship and then sat down.  
The wind and helmsman kept us on our course.  
Then, with an aching heart, I addressed my crew:

‘Friends, it’s not right that only one or two  
should know the prophecies revealed to me  
by the lovely goddess Circe. And so,  
I’ll tell you all—once we understand them, 200  
we’ll either die or ward off Death and Fate  
and then escape. She told me first of all  
we should guard against the wondrous voices  
of the Sirens in their flowery meadow.  
She said I alone should listen to them. [160]  
But you must tie me down with cruel bonds,  
so I stay where I am and cannot move,  
standing upright at the mast. You must fix  
the rope at both its ends onto the mast.  
If I start telling you to set me free, 210  
you have to tie me down with still more rope.’

I reviewed these things in every detail,  
informing my companions. Our strong ship,  
with a fair wind still driving us ahead,  
came quickly to the island of the Sirens.<sup>1</sup>  
Then the wind died down. Everything was calm,  
without a breeze. Some god had stilled the waves.  
My comrades stood up, furled the sail, stowed it [170]  
in the hollow ship, then sat at their oars,  
churning the water white with polished blades 220  
carved out of pine. With my sharp sword I cut  
a large round chunk of wax into small bits,  
then kneaded them with my strong fingertips.  
This pressure and the rays of Helios,  
lord Hyperion, made the wax grow warm.

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<sup>1</sup>Odysseus’s encounter with the Sirens seems to take place on an island between the west coast of Italy and Sicily.

BOOK TWELVE

Once I had plugged my comrades' ears with wax,  
they tied me hand and foot onto the ship,  
so I stood upright hard against the mast.  
They lashed the rope ends to the mast as well,  
then sat and struck the gray sea with their oars. 230 [180]  
But when we were about as far away  
as a man shouts, moving forward quickly,  
our swift ship did not slip past the Sirens,  
once it came in close, without being seen.  
So they began their clear-toned cry:

'Odysseus,  
you famous man, great glory of Achaeans,  
come over here. Let your ship pause awhile,  
so you can hear the songs we two will sing.  
No man has ever rowed in his black ship  
past here without attending to our songs, 240  
sweet-voiced melodies sung from our own lips.  
That brings him joy, and he departs from here  
a wiser man, for we two understand  
all the misfortunes men endured at Troy,  
hardships faced by Trojans and Achaeans, [190]  
thanks to what the gods then willed, for we know  
everything that happens on this fertile earth.'

They paused. The voice that reached me was so fine  
my heart longed to listen. I told my crew  
to set me free, sent them clear signals 250  
with my eyebrows. But they fell to the oars  
and rowed ahead. Then two of them got up,  
Perimedes and Eurylochus, bound me  
with more rope and lashed me even tighter.  
When they'd rowed on well beyond the Sirens,  
my loyal crew quickly removed the wax  
I'd stuffed in each man's ears and loosed my ropes. [200]

But once we'd left the island far behind,  
I saw giant waves and smoke. Then I heard  
a crashing roar. The crew was terrified. 260  
The oars were snatched away, out of their hands,  
and banged each other in the swirling sea.  
Once the men were no longer pulling hard  
on their tapered oars, the boat stopped moving.  
I went through the ship, cheering up the crew,



standing beside each one and speaking words  
of reassurance:

‘Friends, up to this point,  
we have not been strangers to misfortune.  
Surely the bad things now are nothing worse  
than when the cyclops with his savage force  
kept us prisoners in his hollow cave. 270 [210]  
But even there, thanks to my excellence,  
intelligence, and planning, we escaped.  
I think someday we’ll be remembering  
these dangers, too. But come now, all of us  
should follow what I say. Stay by your oars,  
keep striking them against the surging sea.  
Great Zeus may somehow let us all move past  
and thus avoid destruction. You, helmsman,  
I’m talking, above all, to you, so hold 280  
this in your heart—you control the steering  
on this hollow ship. Keep us on a course  
some distance from the smoke and breaking waves.  
Hug the cliff, in case, before you know it, [220]  
our ship veers over to the other side,  
and you throw us all into disaster.’

I spoke. They quickly followed what I’d said.  
I did not mention Scylla—for she was  
a threat for which there was no remedy—  
in case my comrades, overcome with fear, 290  
stopped rowing and huddled up together  
inside the boat. At that point I forgot  
Circe’s hard command, when she’d ordered me  
not to arm myself. After I’d put on  
my splendid armour, I took two long spears  
and moved up to the foredeck of the ship,  
where, it seemed to me, I could see Scylla [230]  
as soon as she appeared up on the rock  
and brought disaster down on my ship’s crew.  
I could not catch a glimpse of her at all. 300  
My eyes grew weary as I searched for her  
all around that misty rock. We sailed on,  
up the narrow strait, groaning as we went.  
On one side lay Scylla; on the other  
divine Charybdis terrified us all,

BOOK TWELVE

by swallowing salt water from the sea.<sup>1</sup>  
When she spewed it out, she seethed and bubbled  
uncontrollably, just like a cauldron  
on a huge fire, while high above our heads  
the spray rained down on top of both the cliffs. 310  
And when she sucked the salt sea water down, [240]  
everything there looked totally confused,  
a dreadful roar arose around the rocks,  
and in the depths the dark and sandy ground  
was plain to see. Pale fear gripped my comrades.  
When we saw Charybdis, we were afraid  
we'd be destroyed. Then Scylla snatched away  
six of my companions, right from the deck,  
the strongest and the bravest men I had.  
I turned to watch the crew and the swift ship— 320  
already I could see their hands and feet,  
as Scylla carried them high overhead.  
They cried out and screamed, calling me by name  
one final time, their hearts in agony. [250]  
Just as an angler on a jutting rock  
casts out some bait with his long pole to snare  
small fish and lets the horn from some field ox  
sink down in the sea, then, when he snags one,  
throws it quivering on shore, that's how those men  
wriggled as they were raised towards the rocks.<sup>2</sup> 330  
Then, in the entrance to her cave, Scylla  
devoured the men—they still on kept screaming,  
stretching out their arms in my direction,  
as they met their painful deaths. Of all things  
my eyes have witnessed in my journeying  
on pathways of the sea, the sight of them  
was the most piteous I've ever seen.

Once we had made it past those rocks and fled, [260]  
escaping Scylla and dread Charybdis,  
we reached the lovely island of the god, 340  
home to those fine herds of broad-faced cattle  
and numerous rich flocks belonging to

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<sup>1</sup>Scylla and Charybdis are commonly located on either side of the narrow Strait of Messina, between Italy and Sicily.

<sup>2</sup>The horn of the field ox mentioned here is, one assumes, designed to act as a lead sinker and carry the hook down into deeper water.

BOOK TWELVE

Helios Hyperion, god of the sun.<sup>1</sup>  
While I was still at sea in my black ship  
and heard the lowing cattle being penned  
and bleating sheep, there fell into my heart  
the speeches of Teiresias of Thebes,  
the sightless prophet—Circe’s words, as well,  
on Aeaëa. They both had strictly charged  
that I should at all costs miss this island, 350  
the property of Helios, who brings  
such joy to men. So with heavy heart, [270]  
I spoke to my companions:

‘Shipmates,  
though you have endured a lot of trouble,  
hear what I have to say, so I can speak  
about the prophecies Teiresias made  
and Circe, too, on Aeaëa. They both  
strictly charged me to avoid this island,  
which Helios owns, who gives men such joy.  
Here, she said, we face our gravest danger. 360  
So let’s row our black ship past this island.’

I paused. The spirit in my crew was shattered.  
Then Eurylochus answered me. His words  
were full of spite:

‘You’re a difficult man,  
Odysseus, with more strength than other men.  
Your limbs are never weary. One would think [280]  
you were composed entirely of iron,  
if you refuse to let your shipmates land,  
when they’re worn out with work and lack of sleep.  
Here on this sea-girt island, we could make 370  
a tasty dinner. You tell us instead  
to wander on like this through the swift night.  
But harsh winds which destroy men’s ships arise  
out of the night. And how could we avoid  
total disaster, if we chance to meet  
unexpected blasts from stormy South Wind  
or from blustering West Wind, gusty storms  
most likely to completely wreck our ship,

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<sup>1</sup>The location of Thrinacia, the island where Helios’s cattle live, is uncertain. It may be in Sicily or perhaps Malta.

BOOK TWELVE

no matter what the ruling gods may wish? [290]  
Surely we should let black night persuade us, 380  
and now prepare a meal, while we stay put  
alongside our swift ship. When morning comes,  
we'll go on board, set off on the wide sea.'

Eurylochus spoke. My other comrades  
all agreed. So then I understood too well  
some god was planning trouble. I replied—  
my words had wings:

'It seems, Eurylochus,  
you're forcing me to stand alone. But come,  
let all of you now swear this solemn oath—  
if by chance we find a herd of cattle 390  
or a large flock of sheep, not one of you [300]  
will be so overcome with foolishness  
that you will kill a cow or sheep. Instead,  
you'll be content to eat the food supplies  
which goddess Circe gave.'

Once I'd said this,  
they swore, as I had asked, they'd never kill  
those animals. When they had made the oath  
and finished promising, we moved our ship  
inside a hollow harbour, by a spring  
whose water tasted sweet. Then my crewmen 400  
disembarked and made a welcome dinner.  
When everyone had eaten food and drunk  
to ease his heart, they wept as they recalled  
those dear companions Scylla snatched away  
out of the hollow ship and then devoured. [310]  
As they cried there, sweet sleep came over them.

But when three-quarters of the night had passed  
and the stars had shifted their positions,  
cloud-gatherer Zeus stirred up a hostile wind  
and an amazing storm, which hid in clouds 410  
both land and sea alike. And then dark night  
descended. Once rose-fingered Dawn arrived,  
we dragged up our ship and then secured it  
inside a hollow cave, a place nymphs used  
as a fine dancing and assembly ground.  
Then I called a meeting of the men and said:

BOOK TWELVE

'My friends, in our ship we have meat and drink, [320]  
so let's not touch those cattle, just in case  
that causes trouble for us. For these cows  
and lovely sheep belong to Helios, 420  
a fearful god, who spies out all there is  
and listens in on everything we say.'

These words of mine won over their proud hearts.  
But then South Wind kept blowing one whole month.  
It never stopped. No other wind sprang up,  
except those times when East and South Wind blew.  
Now, while the men still had red wine and bread,  
they did not touch the cattle. They were keen  
to stay alive. But once what we had stored  
inside our ship was gone, they had to roam, 430  
scouring around for game and fish and birds, [330]  
whatever came to hand. They made bent hooks  
to fish, as starvation gnawed their stomachs.  
At that point I went inland, up island,  
to pray to the gods, hoping one of them  
would show me a way home. Once I had moved  
across the island, far from my companions,  
I washed my hands in a protected spot,  
a shelter from the wind, and said my prayers  
to all the gods who live on Mount Olympus. 440  
Then they poured sweet sleep across my eyelids.

Meanwhile Eurylochus began to give  
truly bad advice to my companions:

'Shipmates, although you're suffering distress, [340]  
hear me out. For wretched human beings  
all forms of death are hateful. But to die  
from lack of food, to meet one's fate like that,  
is worst of all. So come, let's drive away  
the best of Helios' cattle, and then  
we'll sacrifice to the immortal gods 450  
who hold wide heaven. And if we get home,  
make it to Ithaca, our native land,  
for Helios Hyperion we'll build  
a splendid temple, and inside we'll put  
many expensive gifts. If he's enraged  
about his straight-horned cattle and desires

BOOK TWELVE

to wreck our ship and other gods agree,  
I'd rather lose my life once and for all [350]  
by choking on a wave than starve to death  
on an abandoned island.'

Eurylochus spoke. 460  
My other comrades agreed with what he'd said.  
They quickly rounded up the finest beasts  
from Helios's herd, which was close by,  
sleek, broad-faced animals with curving horns,  
grazing near the dark-prowed ship. My comrades  
stood around them, all praying to the gods.  
They broke off tender leaves from a high oak,  
for there was no white barley on the ship.<sup>1</sup>  
Once they had prayed, they cut the creatures' throats,  
flayed them, and cut out portions of the thighs. 470  
These they hid in double layers of fat [360]  
and laid raw meat on top. They had no wine  
to pour down on the flaming sacrifice,  
so they used some water for libations  
and roasted all the entrails in the fire.  
Once the thigh parts were completely roasted  
and they'd had a taste of inner organs,  
they sliced the rest and skewered it on spits.  
That was the moment sweet sleep left my eyes.  
I went down by the shore to our swift ship. 480  
As I drew closer to our curving ship,  
the sweet smell of hot fat floated round me.  
I groaned and cried out to the immortals: [370]

'Father Zeus and you other sacred gods,  
who live forever, you forced it on me,  
that cruel sleep, to bring about my doom.  
For my companions who remained behind  
have planned something disastrous.'

A messenger  
quickly came to Helios Hyperion,  
long-robed Lampetie, bringing the news— 490

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<sup>1</sup>The traditional sacrifice requires white barley. But since the sailors are out of food, they have to substitute the leaves for the barley.

we had killed his cattle.<sup>1</sup> Without delay,  
he spoke to the immortals, full of rage:

‘Father Zeus and you other blessed gods,  
who live forever, take your vengeance now  
on those men, companions of Odysseus,  
Laertes’ son, who, in their arrogance,  
have killed my animals, the very ones  
I always look upon with such delight [380]  
whenever I move up to starry heaven  
and then turn back from there towards the earth. 500  
If they don’t pay me proper restitution  
for those beasts, then I’ll go down to Hades  
and shine among the dead.’

Cloud-gatherer Zeus  
answered him and said:

‘Helios, I think  
you should keep on shining for immortals  
and for human beings on fertile earth.  
With a dazzling thunderbolt I myself  
will quickly strike at that swift ship of theirs  
and, in the middle of the wine-dark sea,  
smash it to tiny pieces.’

I learned of this 510  
from fair Calypso, who said she herself [390]  
had heard it from Hermes the Messenger.

I came down to the sea and reached the ship.  
There I bitterly attacked my crewmen,  
each of them in turn, standing by the boat.  
But we could not find a single remedy—  
the cattle were already dead. The gods  
immediately sent my men bad omens—  
hides crept along the ground, while on the spits  
the meat began to bellow, and a sound 520  
like cattle lowing filled the air.

For six days,  
those comrades I had trusted feasted there,

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<sup>1</sup>Lampetie is a divine daughter of Helios and one of the guardians of his cattle herds.

BOOK TWELVE

eating the cattle they had rounded up,  
the finest beasts in Helios's herd.  
But when Zeus, son of Cronos, brought to us  
the seventh day, the stormy winds died down. [400]  
We went aboard at once, put up the mast,  
hoisted the white sail, and left the island,  
out on the wide sea

Once we'd sailed away,  
no other land appeared, just sky and sea. 530  
The son of Cronos sent us a black cloud,  
above our hollow ship, while underneath  
the sea grew dark. Our boat sailed on its course,  
but not for long. All at once, West Wind whipped up  
a frantic storm—the blasts of wind snapped off  
both forestays on the mast, which then fell back, [410]  
and all our rigging crashed down in the hold.  
In the stern part of the ship, the falling mast  
struck the helmsman on his head, caving in  
his skull, every bone at once. Then he fell, 540  
like a diver, off the boat. His proud spirit  
left his bones. Then Zeus roared out his thunder  
and with a bolt of lightning struck our ship.  
The blow from Zeus's lightning made our craft  
shiver from stem to stern and filled it up  
with sulphur smoke. My men fell overboard  
and rode atop the waves, like cormorants,  
around our blackened ship, because the god  
had robbed them of their chance to get back home.

But I kept moving up and down the ship, 550 [420]  
until the breaking seas had loosened off  
both sides of the keel. Waves were holding up  
the shattered ship but then snapped off the mast  
right at the keel. But the ox-hide backstay  
had fallen over it, and so with that  
I lashed them both together, mast and keel.  
I sat on these and then was carried off  
by those destructive winds. But when the storms  
from West Wind ceased, South Wind began to blow,  
and that distressed my spirit—I worried 560  
about floating back to grim Charybdis.  
All night I drifted. When the sun came up,  
I reached Scylla's cliff and dread Charybdis [430]



BOOK TWELVE

still sucking down salt water from the sea.  
I jumped up into the lofty fig tree  
and held on there, as if I were a bat.  
But there was nowhere I could plant my feet,  
nor could I climb the tree—its roots were spread  
far down below me, and its branches stretched  
above me, out of reach, immense and long, 570  
shadowing Charybdis. So I hung there,  
staunch in my hope that when she spewed again,  
she'd throw up keel and mast. And to my joy  
at last they surfaced—at the very hour  
a man gets up for dinner from assembly,  
one who adjudicates the bitter quarrels [440]  
young men have, who then request his judgment,  
that's when those timbers first came into view  
out from Charybdis.<sup>1</sup> My hands and feet let go  
and from up high I fell into the sea 580  
beside those lengthy spars. I sat on them  
and used my hands to paddle my way through.  
As for Scylla, the father of gods and men  
would not let her catch sight of me again,  
or else I'd not have managed to escape  
being utterly destroyed.

From that place  
I drifted for nine days. On the tenth night,  
I was guided to Ogygia by the gods,  
the island where fair-haired Calypso lives,  
fearful goddess with the power of song. 590  
She welcomed and treated me with care. [450]  
But why should I tell you that story now?  
It was only yesterday, in your home,  
I told it to you and your noble wife.  
And it's an irritating thing, I think,  
to re-tell a story once it's clearly told."

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<sup>1</sup>These details suggest that Odysseus was stuck in the tree virtually all day.

BOOK THIRTEEN  
ODYSSEUS LEAVES PHAEACIA AND REACHES ITHACA

*[Odysseus ends his story; the Phaeacians collect gifts and store them on a ship; Odysseus takes his leave and goes on board, where he sleeps during the voyage to Ithaca; the Phaeacians land in Ithaca, unload the goods, place Odysseus sleeping on the shore, and leave; Poseidon complains to Zeus about the Phaeacians' transporting Odysseus safely home; Poseidon decides to turn the Phaeacian ship to stone and put up a mountain range around their city; the Phaeacians are amazed at the transformation of their ship; Alcinous recalls his father's prophecies; the Phaeacians sacrifice to Poseidon; Odysseus wakes up on Ithaca but does not recognize the place; Athena visits him in the form of a young man; she tells him he is in Ithaca; Odysseus fabricates a story about his identity; Athena transforms herself into a woman, reveals her identity, and points out the features of the island; the two of them plan how Odysseus will take his revenge on the suitors; Athena transforms his appearance so that he looks like an impoverished old beggar; she tells him to seek out the man who tends his swine; Athena leaves for Sparta to fetch Telemachus.]*

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence,  
motionless and spellbound in the shadowy hall.  
Then Alcinous again spoke up and said to him:

“Odysseus, since you’re visiting my home,  
with its brass floors and high-pitched roof, I think  
you won’t leave here and go back disappointed,  
although you’ve truly suffered much bad luck.  
And now I’ll speak to all men present here,  
those who in this hall are always drinking  
the council’s gleaming wine and enjoying  
the songs the minstrel sings. I tell you this. 10  
Clothing for our guest is packed already, [10]  
stored in a polished chest inlaid with gold,  
as well as all the other gifts brought here  
by Phaeacia’s counsellors. But come now,  
let’s give him a large tripod and cauldron,  
each one of us. We can repay ourselves—  
we’ll get the people to provide the cost.  
It’s too expensive for one man to give  
without receiving any money back.” 20

Alcinous spoke. And they agreed with what he said.  
Then they all left to go back home and get some rest.

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But as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
they hurried to the ship and loaded on the bronze,  
which strengthens men. Strong and mighty Alcinous [20]  
went in person through the ship and had the gifts  
stowed beneath the benches, where they would not hinder  
any of the crew, as the rowers plied their oars.  
Then they went back to Alcinous's home to feast.

On their behalf, forceful and mighty Alcinous 30  
sacrificed a bull to Zeus, god of the dark cloud  
and son of Cronos, who rules over everything.  
Once they had burned pieces of the thigh, they enjoyed  
a splendid banquet. Among them Demodocus,  
the godlike minstrel revered by all Phaeacians,  
sang a song of celebration. But Odysseus  
kept on turning round toward the blazing sunlight,  
eager to see it set—he so wanted to return. [30]  
Just as a man longs for supper, when all day long  
a pair of wine-dark oxen pull a well-made plough 40  
through fallow land for him, and as the sun goes down,  
the sight delights him—now he can prepare a meal,  
for both his knees are weary when he moves—that's how  
Odysseus rejoiced to see the sunlight disappear.  
He spoke up at once, addressing the Phaeacians,  
men who love the oar, especially Alcinous,  
saying these words:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men  
most renowned, pour out your libations now,  
and send me safely off. Farewell to you!  
Now everything my dear heart once desired 50 [40]  
has come about—an escort and these gifts,  
marks of friendship. May the heavenly gods  
make me content with them. When I get back,  
may I find my excellent wife at home,  
with all my family safe. As for you,  
may you stay here and make a happy life  
for the wives you married and your children.  
May gods grant you success of every kind,  
and may no evil things afflict your people.”

Odysseus spoke. They all approved of what he said, 60  
and ordered that their guest should be escorted off,

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because he spoke so well. Mighty Alcinous  
addressed the herald, saying:

“Pontonous, [50]  
stir the mixing bowl, and serve out the wine  
to all those in the hall, so once we’ve prayed  
to Father Zeus, we may send off our guest,  
back to his native land.”

Alcinous finished speaking.  
Pontonous mixed wine sweet as honey, then served it  
to all of them, moving to everyone in turn,  
and, from where they sat, they each poured out libations 70  
to all the immortal gods who hold wide heaven.  
Lord Odysseus stood up, placed a two-handled cup  
in Arete’s hands, and spoke winged words to her:

“Fare well, queen Arete, through all your years,  
until old age and death arrive, the fate [60]  
of every mortal being. I’m leaving now.  
But in this house may you have much delight  
from your own children and your people,  
and from Alcinous, the king.”

Lord Odysseus spoke,  
then moved across the threshold. Mighty Alcinous 80  
dispatched a herald to conduct him to the sea  
and his fast ship. Arete sent slave girls with him.  
One carried a freshly laundered cloak and tunic.  
She told a second one to follow on behind  
escorting the large trunk. Another female slave  
brought red wine and bread. Once the group had reached the ship [70]  
beside the sea, the noble youths escorting him  
immediately took all the food and drink on board  
and stowed them in the hollow ship. They spread a rug  
and a linen sheet on the deck inside the ship, 90  
at the stern, so Odysseus could have a peaceful sleep.  
He went aboard, as well, and lay down in silence.  
Each man sat in proper order at his oarlock.  
They loosed the cable from the perforated stone.  
Once they leaned back and stirred the water with their oars,  
a calming sleep fell on his eyelids, undisturbed  
and very soothing, a sensation much like death. [80]  
Just as four stallions yoked together charge ahead

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across the plain, all running underneath the lash,  
 and jump high as they gallop quickly on their way, 100  
 that's how the stern part of that ship leapt up on high,  
 while in her wake the dark waves of the roaring sea  
 were churned to a great foam, as she sped on her path,  
 safe and secure. Not even wheeling hawks in flight,  
 the swiftest of all flying things, could match her speed,  
 as she raced ahead, slicing through the ocean waves,  
 bearing on board a man whose mind was like a god's.  
 His heart in earlier days had undergone much pain, [90]  
 as he moved through men's wars and suffered on the waves.  
 Now he slept in peace, forgetting all his troubles. 110

When the most splendid of the morning stars appeared,  
 which always comes to herald light from early Dawn,  
 the fast sea-faring ship was nearing Ithaca.  
 Now, in that land, Phorcys, the Old Man of the Sea,  
 has his harbour.<sup>1</sup> Two jutting headlands at its mouth  
 drop off on the seaward side, but on the other,  
 slope down to the cove and keep the place protected  
 from massive waves whipped up by stormy winds at sea.  
 In there well-timbered ships, once they reach the inlet,  
 can ride without an anchor. At the harbour head,  
 there is an olive tree with lengthy pointed leaves, 110 [100]  
 and close beside it is a pleasant shady cave,  
 sacred to the nymphs whom people call the Naiads.<sup>2</sup>  
 Mixing bowls and jars of stone are stored inside,  
 and bees make honey there. The cave has long stone looms  
 where those nymphs weave cloth with a deep sea-purple dye,  
 an amazing thing to see. In there, too, are springs  
 which never cease to flow. It has two entrances—  
 one, which faces North Wind, is the one people use [110]  
 to go inside; the other, which faces South Wind, 130  
 is sacred—human beings may not go in there,  
 for the pathway is confined to the immortals.

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<sup>1</sup>Phorcys was an ancient god of the sea who produced large number of monster children. The title "Old Man of the Sea," the name given to Proteus in Menelaus's account of his adventures in Egypt (in Book 4), is applied here to Phorcys as well and elsewhere (in Book 24) to the sea god Nereus, father of the fifty Nereids, one of whom was Thetis, mother of Achilles.

<sup>2</sup>The Naiads are the nymph goddesses of fresh water, one of three classes of water nymphs (the others being the Nereids, nymphs of the sea, and the Oceanids, nymphs of the Ocean).

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They rowed in here, a place they knew about before.  
Those rowers' arms had so much strength that half the boat,  
which was moving quickly, was driven up on shore.  
Once the crew had clambered from that well-built ship  
onto dry land, first they carried off Odysseus,  
lifting him out of the hollow ship still wrapped up  
in the linen sheet and splendid blanket, placed him,  
down on the sand, fast asleep, then brought ashore 140  
the gifts Phaeacia's noblemen had given him, [120]  
thanks to the goodwill of powerful Athena,  
when he was setting out for home. They put these gifts  
against the trunk of the olive tree, in a pile,  
some distance from the path, in case someone came by,  
before Odysseus could wake up, stumbled on them,  
and robbed him. Then the Phaeacians set off for home.

But the Shaker of the Earth had not forgotten  
those threats he once made against godlike Odysseus.  
So he asked Zeus what plan he had in mind:

“Father Zeus, 150  
the immortal gods will honour me no more,  
for these men pay me no respect at all,  
these Phaeacians, who, as you well know, [130]  
are my descendants.<sup>1</sup> For I clearly said  
Odysseus should suffer much misfortune  
before he made it home. I'd not rob him  
of his return completely, once you'd made  
that promise and confirmed it with a nod.  
But these men carried him, while still asleep,  
over the sea in their swift ship, set him 160  
in Ithaca, and gave him countless gifts—  
bronze and gold and piles of woven clothing,  
more than Odysseus ever would have got  
at Troy, if he'd come safely back, bringing  
his fair share of battle trophies with him.”

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then gave Poseidon this reply:

“Mighty Earthshaker, what strange things you say! [140]  
The gods aren't treating you with disrespect.

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<sup>1</sup>The Phaeacians, according to legend, stem from Pheax, a son of Poseidon, or from Nausithous, father of Alcinous, also a son of Poseidon.

To dishonour the oldest and the best  
 would be hard to bear. But if any man,  
 seduced by his importance and his power,  
 fails to honour you somehow, it's up to you  
 to take vengeance later. Do what you want,  
 what gives your heart delight.”

170

Earthshaker Poseidon  
 then answered Zeus:

“Lord of the Dark Cloud,  
 I would have quickly done as you've just said,  
 but I was afraid you might be angry,  
 and that I wanted to avoid. But now,  
 I wish to strike a blow at those Phaeacians,  
 at their splendid ship, as it sails back home,  
 after its trip across the misty seas,  
 so they will stop and never more provide  
 an escort carrying mortal beings.  
 Then all around their city I'll throw up  
 a massive mountain range.”

180 [150]

Cloud-gatherer Zeus  
 then answered him and said:

“Brother, listen  
 to what my heart thinks best—when all of them  
 are in the city gazing at that boat  
 speeding on its way, turn it into stone  
 close to the shore, a rock that looks just like  
 a racing ship—all men will be amazed.  
 Then raise a ring of mountains round their town.”

190

When Earthshaker Poseidon heard these words, he left  
 and went to Scheria, home of the Phaeacians. [160]

There he waited. As their sea-faring ship approached,  
 moving quickly on her course, Earthshaker came up  
 and turned it into stone. With the palm of his hand  
 he hit it once and from below froze it in place.  
 Then Poseidon went away. Long-oared Phaeacians,  
 men famous for their ships, spoke to one another—  
 their words had wings. Looking at the man beside him,  
 one of them would say:

200

“Who has transformed our ship  
out at sea as she was racing homeward,  
and in plain sight of all?”

That’s what they said. [170]  
But they did not understand why this had happened.  
Then Alcinous addressed them all and said:

“Alas!  
The prophecies my father used to make  
so long ago have come to pass. He said  
we were going to rouse Poseidon’s rage,  
because we escort all men in safety. 210  
He claimed that one day, as a splendid ship  
of the Phaeacians was returning home,  
after a convoy on the misty seas,  
Poseidon would strike her and then throw up  
a huge mountain range around our city.  
That’s what the old man said. And now all this  
is taking place. But come, let all of you  
attend to what I say. You must now stop [180]  
escorting strangers when a mortal man  
comes to our city. And let’s sacrifice 220  
twelve choice bulls as offerings to Poseidon,  
so he’ll take pity and not ring our city  
with a lofty mountain range.”

Alcinous spoke.  
They were all afraid, so they prepared the bulls,  
and the counsellors and leaders of Phaeacians,  
standing by the altar, prayed to lord Poseidon.

Meanwhile, brave Odysseus, asleep in his own land,  
woke up. He did not recognize just where he was.  
He had been away so long, and Pallas Athena, [190]  
Zeus’s daughter, had cast a mist around him, 230  
to make him hard for people to identify,  
so she could tell him every detail, while his wife,  
his townsfolk, and his friends would not know who he was,  
until the suitors’ crimes had all been paid in full.  
And so all things seemed unfamiliar to their king,  
the long straight paths, the harbour with safe anchorage,  
the sheer-faced stony cliffs, the trees in rich full bloom.  
So he jumped up and looked out at his native land.



He groaned aloud and struck his thighs with both his palms,  
and then cried out in sorrow:

“Where am I now? 240 [200]

Whose strange country have I come to this time?  
Are they violent, unjust, and cruel,  
or do they welcome strangers? Do their minds  
respect the gods? And all this treasure here,  
where do I take that? Where do I go next?  
I wish I’d stayed with the Phaeacians there.  
I could have visited another king  
who would have welcomed me, then sent me off  
on my way home. I’ve no idea now  
where to put this wealth. I won’t leave it here, 250  
in case somebody robs me and removes it  
as his spoils. Alas! All those Phaeacians,  
those counsellors and leaders, weren’t so wise [210]  
or just—they led me to a foreign land.  
They said they’d bring me to bright Ithaca,  
but that’s not what they’ve done. I pray that Zeus,  
god of suppliants, who watches everyone  
and punishes the man who goes astray,  
will pay them back. But come, I’ll count these gifts  
and check them over, just in case these men 260  
in their hollow ship have carried away  
some property of mine.”

After saying this,  
Odysseus examined his gifts—lovely tripods,  
cauldrons, gold, and splendid clothing. It was all there.  
Then, overwhelmed with longing for his native land,  
he wandered on the shore beside the crashing sea, [220]  
with many cries of grief. But then Athena came,  
moving close to him in the form of a young man,  
someone who herded sheep, but with a refined air  
that marks the sons of kings. She wore a well-made cloak, 270  
a double fold across her shoulders, and sandals  
on her shining feet. In her hand she gripped a spear.  
Odysseus, happy to catch sight of her, came up  
and spoke to her—his words had wings:

“My friend,  
since you’re the first one I’ve encountered here,  
my greetings to you, and may you meet me

with no evil in your mind. Save these goods, [230]  
 and rescue me. For I'm entreating you,  
 the way I would a god, and I've come here  
 begging you, like a dear friend at your knee. 280  
 Tell me the truth, so I can understand—  
 What country is this? Who are these people?  
 Is it some sunny island or a cape  
 jutting from the mainland out to sea?"

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

"Stranger, you must be a fool, or else come  
 from somewhere far away, if you must ask  
 about this land. Its name is not unknown—  
 not at all—many men have heard of it,  
 all those who live in regions of the dawn 290 [240]  
 and rising sun, as well as all who dwell  
 towards the gloomy darkness in the west—  
 a rugged place, not fit for herding horses,  
 yet not too poor, although not very wide.  
 There are countless crops and wine-bearing grapes.  
 There is no lack of rain or heavy dew,  
 a fine land for raising goats and cattle.  
 There are all sorts of trees and water springs  
 that last throughout the year. And so, stranger,  
 Ithaca is well known, even in Troy, 300  
 a long way from Achaean land, they say."

Athena spoke, and much-enduring lord Odysseus [250]  
 felt great joy, happy to learn of his ancestral lands  
 from what Pallas Athena said, daughter of Zeus,  
 who bears the aegis. So he spoke winged words to her.  
 He did not tell the truth, but left some things unsaid,  
 always thinking devious thoughts inside his chest:

"I've heard of Ithaca, even in Crete,  
 far across the sea. Now I have come here  
 with these goods of mine. When I ran away, 310  
 I left even more there with my children.  
 I killed a dear son of Idomeneus,  
 the swift Orsilochus—in spacious Crete [260]  
 he was the fastest runner of all those

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who have to work to earn the bread they eat.<sup>1</sup>  
 He wished to steal the spoils I'd won at Troy,  
 for which my heart had gone through so much pain,  
 facing men's wars and perils on the sea,  
 because I would not gratify his father  
 and serve as his attendant there in Troy, 320  
 but led another group of my own men.  
 As he was coming home, back from the fields,  
 I lay in wait for him with my companions,  
 close to the road. There with my bronze-tipped spear  
 I struck him. Black night concealed the heavens,  
 and no one noticed us or was aware [270]  
 I took his life. Once my sharp bronze killed him,  
 I ran off to a ship without delay,  
 offered prizes to some fine Phoenicians,  
 as much as they could wish, entreating them, 330  
 pleading to be taken off to Pylos  
 and left there, or else to lovely Elis,  
 where Epeians rule. Much against their will,  
 the power of the winds drove them off course.  
 They did not wish to cheat me, but were blown  
 away from there and sailed in here at night.  
 We quickly rowed into this anchorage.  
 Although we needed food, we never thought [280]  
 of dinner—we just stretched out where we were.  
 I was so tired, sweet sleep fell over me. 340  
 They took my goods out of the hollow ship  
 and piled them right beside me on the shore.  
 Then they went back on board and sailed away  
 for bustling Sidon, leaving me behind  
 with all these troubles in my heart."

Odysseus finished.

Bright-eyed Athena smiled and stroked him with her hand.  
 Then she changed herself into a lovely woman,  
 tall and very skilled in creating splendid things.  
 She spoke to him—her words had wings: [290]

"Any man,  
 or even a god who ran into you, 350  
 would have to be a cunning charlatan

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<sup>1</sup>In the *Iliad* Idomeneus, leader of the forces from Crete, is a major ally and a senior leader among the Achaean troops fighting against the Trojans.

to surpass your different kinds of trickery.  
 You are bold and make complicated plans.  
 You love deceit. Now, back in your own land,  
 it does not seem that you intend to stop  
 your lies or making up those artful tales,  
 which you love from the bottom of your heart.  
 But come, let's no longer talk about this,  
 for we both understand what shrewdness means.  
 Of all men you're the best in making plans 360  
 and giving speeches, and among all gods  
 I'm well known for subtlety and wisdom.  
 Still, you failed to recognize Athena, [300]  
 daughter of Zeus, who's always at your side,  
 looking out for you in every crisis.  
 Yes, I made all those Phaeacians love you.  
 Now I have come to weave a scheme with you  
 and hide these goods Phaeacian noblemen  
 offered as you were setting out for home,  
 thanks to my plans and what I had in mind. 370  
 I'll tell you what Fate has in store for you.  
 You'll find harsh troubles in your well-built home.  
 Be patient, for you must endure them all.  
 Don't tell anyone, no man or woman,  
 you have returned from wandering around.  
 Instead, keep silent. Bear the many pains.  
 When men act like savages, do nothing." 310]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"Goddess, it's difficult for any man  
 to recognize you when you come to him, 380  
 even if he's truly wise, for you appear  
 in any shape you wish. But I know well  
 that in years past you have been kind to me,  
 when we sons of Achaea fought in Troy.  
 But when we'd ransacked Priam's lofty town  
 and sailed off in our ships and then some god  
 scattered the Achaeans, I never saw you,  
 daughter of Zeus. I did not notice you  
 coming aboard our ship to keep me safe  
 from danger. So I kept on wandering, 390 [320]  
 my heart always divided in my chest,  
 until the gods delivered me from harm.  
 Then, in the rich land of the Phaeacians,

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your words encouraged me, and you yourself  
led me to their city. Now I beg you,  
in your father's name, for I don't believe  
I've come back to sunny Ithaca. No.  
I'm at a loose end in some other land,  
and you're attempting to confuse my mind.  
So tell me truly if I have arrived  
on my dear native soil." 400

Then Athena,  
the bright-eyed goddess, answered him:

“That heart in your chest [330]  
always thinks this way. And that's the reason  
I can't abandon you. You're so polite,  
astute, and cautious. Any other man  
who'd just come back from wandering around  
would have been eager to run home to see  
his wife and children. But you're in no rush  
to learn about or hear of anything,  
before you can observe your wife yourself. 410  
She's still living in her home, as before—  
her nights and days always end in sorrow,  
and she weeps. As for me, I had no doubts,  
for my heart always knew you'd get back home,  
although your comrades would all be destroyed. [340]  
But you should know I had no wish to fight  
against Poseidon, my father's brother,  
who bears anger in his heart against you,  
enraged that you destroyed his dear son's eye.  
But come, I'll demonstrate to you this land 420  
is Ithaca, so you'll be reassured.  
This anchorage here belongs to Phorcys,  
the Old Man of the Sea. At the harbour  
stands the long-leaved olive tree. Beside it  
is the pleasant, shadowy cave, sacred  
to those nymphs the people call the Naiads.  
This, you must know, is the arching cavern  
where you made many sacrificial gifts [350]  
to those same nymphs to grant you what you asked.  
And there is forested Mount Neriton.” 430

As the goddess said these words, she dispersed the mist.  
Once the land was visible to him, Odysseus,

who had endured so much, overjoyed to see it,  
kissed the fertile ground. Then, stretching out his arms  
towards the nymphs, he prayed:

“You Naiad nymphs,  
Zeus’s daughters, I thought I’d never catch  
a glimpse of you again. Now I greet you  
with loving prayers. I’ll give gifts, as well,  
as I have done for you in former days,  
if Zeus’s daughter who awards the spoils  
will in her goodness let me stay alive  
and help my dear son grow into a man.”

440  
[360]

Athena, the bright-eyed goddess, then said to him:

“Be brave, and don’t weigh down your heart with this.  
Now, let’s not wait, but put away these goods  
in some dark recess of this sacred cave,  
where they’ll stay safely stored inside for you.  
And then let’s think about how all these things  
may turn out for the best.”

After saying this,  
goddess Athena went in the shadowy cave  
and looked around for hiding places. Odysseus  
brought in all the treasures—enduring bronze and gold  
and finely woven clothes, gifts from the Phaeacians.  
He stored these carefully, and Pallas Athena,  
child of aegis-bearing Zeus, set a rock in place  
to block the entranceway.

450  
[370]

Then the two of them  
sat down by the trunk of the sacred olive tree  
to think of ways to kill those insolent suitors.  
Athena, bright-eyed goddess, was the first to speak:

“Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes,  
and child of Zeus, think how your hands may catch  
these shameless suitors, who for three years now  
have been lording it inside your palace,  
wooing your godlike wife and offering her  
their marriage gifts. She longs for your return.  
Although her heart is sad, she feeds their hopes,

460  
[380]

by giving each man hints he may prevail.  
But her mind is filled with other matters.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Goddess, if you had not told me all this, 470  
I would have shared the fate of Agamemnon,  
son of Atreus, death in my own home.  
Come, weave a plan so I can pay them back.  
Stand in person by my side, and fill me  
with indomitable courage, as you did  
when we loosed the bright diadem of Troy.  
I pray, goddess with the glittering eyes,  
that you are with me now as eagerly [390]  
as you were then. If so, then I would fight 480  
three hundred men, if you, mighty goddess,  
in your heart are willing to assist me.”

Gleaming-eyed goddess Athena then answered him:

“You can be certain I will stand by you.  
I won’t forget you when the trouble starts.  
I think the brains and blood of many suitors  
who consume your livelihood will spatter  
this wide earth. But come, I will transform you,  
so that no one here will recognize you.  
I’ll wrinkle the fine skin on your supple limbs,  
change the dark colour on that head of hair, 490  
and dress you in rags that would make you cringe [400]  
to see on anyone. As for your eyes,  
so striking up to now, I’ll make them dim.  
To all those suitors you’ll appear disgusting,  
and to the wife and son you left at home.  
Then you must go first to see the swineherd,  
who tends your pigs. He’s well disposed to you  
and loves your son and wise Penelope.  
You’ll find him keeping his swine company  
where they feed by Corax Rock, near the spring 500  
of Arethusa, drinking its dark stream  
and eating lots of acorns, which make pigs [410]  
grow rich in fat. Stay there and sit with him.  
If you have questions, just ask the swineherd.  
I’ll go to Sparta, land of lovely women,  
and there, Odysseus, I will summon back

your dear son, Telemachus, who has gone  
to spacious Lacedaemon, to the home  
of Menelaus, to hear news of you,  
to learn if you are still alive somewhere.”<sup>1</sup> 510

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Why did you not tell him, since in your mind  
you know all things? What was your intention—  
that he’d run into hardships on his trip  
across the restless seas, while other men  
were eating up his livelihood?”

Athena, [420]

goddess with the glittering eyes, then said to him:

“Don’t worry in your heart about your son.  
I sent him off myself, so he might earn  
a well-known reputation going there. 520  
He’s not in trouble, but sits there in peace,  
in the home of the son of Atreus,  
with countless splendid things surrounding him.  
It’s true some young men out in a black ship  
are lying in ambush, keen to kill him  
before he gets back to his native land,  
but I don’t think that’s what will come about.  
Before that happens, earth will cover up  
the many suitors who consume your goods.”

As she said this, Athena touched him with her staff. 530  
She wrinkled the fine smooth skin on his supple limbs [430]  
and took the dark hair from his head. His arms and legs  
she covered with an old man’s ancient flesh and dimmed  
his eyes, which earlier had been so beautiful.  
She dressed him in different clothes—a ragged cloak,  
a dirty tunic, tattered, dishevelled, and stained  
with stinking smoke. Then around his shoulders she threw  
a large hairless hide from a swift deer and gave him  
a long staff and shabby leather pouch, full of holes,  
with a twisted strap.

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<sup>1</sup>Lacedaemon is another name for Sparta.



BOOK THIRTEEN

When the two of them  
had made their plans, they parted, and Athena went  
to Lacedaemon to bring back Odysseus' son.

540

[440]

BOOK FOURTEEN  
ODYSSEUS MEETS EUMAEUS

*[Odysseus leaves the harbour and moves inland to the farm of Eumaeus, the swineherd; Eumaeus welcomes Odysseus and prepares a meal for him; Eumaeus talks about his absent master; Odysseus assures Eumaeus that his master will return, but Eumaeus does not believe him; Odysseus tells Eumaeus a long made-up story about his identity and his adventures in Egypt and elsewhere, telling him he heard news of Odysseus's return; Eumaeus still does not believe him; the other swineherds arrive; Eumaeus prepares a sacrifice and another meal; Odysseus tells another story about an incident in the Trojan War; Eumaeus prepares a bed for Odysseus, then goes outside to guard the boars.]*

Odysseus left the harbour, taking the rough path  
into the woods and across the hills, to the place  
where Athena told him he would meet the swineherd,  
who was, of all the servants lord Odysseus had,  
the one who took greatest care of his possessions.  
He found him sitting in the front part of his home,  
a built-up courtyard with a wide extensive view,  
a large, handsome place, with cleared land all around it.  
The swineherd built it by himself to house the pigs,  
property belonging to his absent master. 10  
He had not told his mistress or old Laertes.  
He made it from huge stones, with a thorn hedge on top [10]  
and surrounded on the outside with close-set stakes  
facing both directions, made by splitting oaks trees  
to leave the dark heart of the wood. Inside the yard,  
to hold in the pigs, he packed twelve sties together.  
In each of these fifty wallowing swine were penned,  
sows for breeding. The boars, in a much smaller group,  
stayed outside. The feasting of the noble suitors  
kept their numbers low, for the swineherd always sent 20  
the finest of all fattened hogs for them to eat.  
There were three hundred and sixty boars there—four dogs, [20]  
fierce as wild animals, always crouched beside them.  
These the swineherd, a splendid man, had raised himself.  
He was trimming off a piece of coloured ox-hide,  
shaping sandals for his feet. Three of his fellows  
had gone off, herding pigs in different places.  
He had had to send a fourth man to the city,  
taking a boar to be butchered for the suitors,  
so they could feast on meat, as much as they desired. 30

BOOK FOURTEEN

All of a sudden, the dogs observed Odysseus.  
They howled and ran at him, barking furiously. [30]  
Odysseus was alert enough to drop his staff  
and sit. Still, he could have been severely injured  
in his own farmyard, but the swineherd ran up fast  
right behind them, dropping the leather in his hands.  
Hurrying through the gate and shouting at his dogs,  
he scattered them in a hail of stones here and there.  
Then he spoke out to his master, saying:

“Old man,  
those dogs would’ve ripped at you in no time, 40  
and then you would’ve heaped the blame on me.  
Well, I’ve got other troubles from the gods,  
things to grieve about. For as I stay here,  
raising fat pigs for other men to eat,  
I’m full of sorrow for my noble master, [40]  
who’s probably going hungry someplace else,  
as he wanders through the lands and cities  
where men speak a foreign tongue, if, in fact,  
he’s still alive, looking at the sunlight.  
But follow me, old man. Come in the hut. 50  
When you have had enough to eat and drink  
and your heart’s satisfied, you can tell me  
where you come from, what hardships you’ve endured.”

With these words, the loyal swineherd entered the hut,  
brought Odysseus in, and invited him to sit,  
after piling some leafy twigs and, over them,  
spreading out the rough shaggy skin of a wild goat, [50]  
the large and hairy hide which covered his own bed.  
Odysseus was glad to get this hospitality,  
so he addressed the swineherd, saying:

“Stranger, 60  
may Zeus and other gods who live forever  
give what you truly want—you’ve welcomed me  
with such an open heart.”

BOOK FOURTEEN

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,  
you answered him and said:<sup>1</sup>

“It would be wrong,  
stranger, for me to disrespect a guest,  
even if one worse off than you arrived,  
for every guest and beggar comes from Zeus,  
and any gift from people like ourselves,  
though small, is welcome. It’s the fate of slaves  
to always fear young masters who control them. 70 [60]  
The gods are holding up the journey home  
of the man who would have loved me kindly  
and given me possessions of my own,  
a home, a plot of land, a wedded wife  
worthy of being wooed by many suitors,  
the sorts of things a generous master gives  
a servant who has toiled so hard for him,  
whose work the gods have helped to thrive and grow,  
the way the tasks I put my mind to here 80  
have prospered. If my master was at home  
and growing old, he would have given me  
so many presents. But he has perished.  
How I wish all of Helen’s relatives  
had been knocked to their knees and lost their lives—  
for she brought death to many fighting men.  
He went to Troy, famous for its horses, [70]  
to carry out revenge for Agamemnon  
by fighting Trojans.”

After saying this,  
Eumaeus quickly cinched the belt around his tunic,  
left the hut for the pens where the young pigs were held, 90  
selected two from there, brought them in, and killed them.  
He singed and cut them up, then skewered them on spits.  
When they were completely roasted, he picked them up  
and, without taking out the spits, brought them, still hot,  
over to Odysseus. On top of them he spread  
white barley meal. Then in a bowl of ivy wood  
he mixed wine sweet as honey. That done, he sat down  
opposite Odysseus, inviting him to dine:

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<sup>1</sup>Here the narrator makes an unexpected shift and addresses one of the characters in person (“you”), suggesting a certain closeness between the narrator and the character. While this is not common in Homer, it does occur several times (e.g., with Menelaus in the *Iliad*).

BOOK FOURTEEN

“Eat now, stranger, what a servant offers, [80]  
 meat from a young pig, for the suitors take 100  
 the fatted hogs. Their hearts have no compassion,  
 and they never think about gods’ anger.  
 The truth is this—the blessed gods don’t love  
 men’s reckless acts. No. They honour justice  
 and men’s righteousness. Even enemies  
 with cruel intentions can invade the lands  
 of someone else, and Zeus awards them spoils.  
 They fill their ships and then sail off for home.  
 And even in the hearts of men like these  
 falls a great fear of vengeance from the gods. 110  
 But these suitors here, I think, know something—  
 they have heard a voice from one of the gods  
 about my master’s painful death. That’s why [90]  
 they do not wish to have a proper courtship  
 or to go back to their homes. Instead,  
 without a care they waste our property  
 in all their insolence, sparing nothing.  
 For every day and night Zeus sends, they kill  
 our animals, and not just one or two,  
 and, with their arrogance, they draw our wine, 120  
 taking what they want—sometimes even more.  
 My master used to be a man of substance,  
 beyond all measure. No warrior hero  
 in Ithaca itself or on the mainland  
 possessed what he did. Twenty men combined  
 did not have so much wealth. I’ll tell you this—  
 on the mainland he’s got twelve cattle herds, [100]  
 as many flocks of sheep and droves of pigs  
 and wide-ranging herds of goats, all of these  
 tended by foreign herdsmen or his own. 130  
 And here, on the edges of this island,  
 graze roaming herds of goats, eleven in all,  
 with loyal servants guarding every one.  
 To supply the suitors, all these herdsmen  
 keep bringing in more creatures from their flocks,  
 the fattest ones which seem to them the best.  
 That always happens, each and every day.  
 As for me, I protect and raise these pigs.  
 I choose with care and then deliver them  
 the finest of the boars.”

BOOK FOURTEEN

Eumaeus finished. 140  
Meanwhile Odysseus eagerly devoured the meat  
and drank the wine in silence. He was ravenous. [110]  
He was also sowing troubles for the suitors.  
Once he had eaten his heart's fill and had enough,  
Eumaeus filled the bowl from which he drank himself  
and gave it to him full of wine. Odysseus took it,  
rejoicing in his heart, and spoke winged words to him:

“My friend, who was the man who used his wealth  
to purchase you? Was he rich and powerful,  
as you've just said? You claim he was destroyed 150  
helping Agamemnon get his revenge.  
Tell me. I may know him, a man like that.  
Zeus and the rest of the immortal gods  
know if I've seen him or heard any news.  
For I've been travelling a lot.” [120]

Then Eumaeus,  
a worthy man, answered him and said:

“Old man,  
no wanderer who came with news of him  
could convince his wife or his dear son.  
Men who roam about, when they need a meal,  
have no desire to speak the truth—they lie. 160  
Whoever moves around and reaches here,  
this land of Ithaca, goes to my mistress  
with some made-up tale. She receives him well,  
with hospitality, and questions him  
about each detail. Then she starts to grieve,  
and tears fall from her eyes, as is fitting  
when a woman's husband dies far away. [130]  
You too, old man, would make up a story  
quickly enough, if someone offered you  
a cloak and tunic—you need clothes to wear. 170  
But by this time swift birds and dogs have ripped  
the flesh from off his bones, and his spirit  
has slipped away. Or else fish in the sea  
have eaten him, and now his bones remain  
somewhere on the shore, buried in deep sand.  
Anyway, he died out there. From now on,  
it is the fate of all his friends to grieve,  
especially me—however far I go,

BOOK FOURTEEN

I'll never come across another man  
who could match him as a gentle master, 180  
not even if I went back home again  
to where my mother and my father live, [140]  
where I was born, where they reared me themselves.  
I don't mourn for them so much, though I yearn  
for these eyes of mine once more to see them  
and be in my own native land again.  
What grips me is a longing for Odysseus,  
who is gone. Even though he is not here,  
stranger, I speak his name with full respect.  
His love for me was great, and in his heart 190  
he cared. So although he may be absent,  
I call him my dear master."

Odysseus,  
that resourceful man, answered him and said:

"My friend,  
since you are so firm in your denials,  
when you declare he'll not come home again,  
and your heart always clings to this belief, [150]  
I won't tell you Odysseus will return—  
no, I'll take an oath on it. When he comes,  
when he gets back home, give me my reward  
for my good news—let me have fine clothing, 200  
a cloak and tunic. Until that moment,  
there's nothing I'll accept, despite my need.  
For just as I despise the gates of Hades,  
I hate the man who, in his poverty,  
tells stories which are lies. So now let Zeus,  
the first of gods, this welcoming table,  
and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,  
which I have reached, let them all bear witness—  
everything will happen the way I say— [160]  
Odysseus will return within a month, 210  
between the waning and the rising moons.  
He'll get back home and take out his revenge  
on anyone here who has not honoured  
his wife and noble son."

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,  
you gave him your reply and said:

“Old man,  
 I won’t be rewarding you for that good news.  
 Odysseus won’t be coming back. Drink up—  
 and relax. Now, let’s talk of something else.  
 I don’t want to remember all those things.  
 The heart here in my chest fills up with grief, 220  
 whenever someone mentions my good master. [170]  
 So let’s forget about your oath. I wish  
 Odysseus would come home—that’s what I want.  
 So does Penelope, Laertes, too,  
 the old man, and noble Telemachus.  
 Right now I’m always grieving for the boy,  
 the child Odysseus had, Telemachus.  
 Immortal gods reared him like a sapling,  
 and, as a man, I thought he’d be a match  
 for his dear father, with a splendid shape 230  
 and handsome. But one of the immortals  
 warped his better judgment—perhaps it was  
 some mortal being. He’s gone on a trip  
 to sacred Pylos to learn any news  
 about his father. Now noble suitors [180]  
 lie in wait for him on his voyage home.  
 And so the race of brave Arceisius  
 will die without a name in Ithaca.<sup>1</sup>  
 But let’s just let him be—they may get him,  
 or they may fail, if the son of Cronos 240  
 holds out his hand to guard him. But come now,  
 old man, describe for me what you’ve been through.  
 Give me the truth, so I clearly understand—  
 Who are you among men? Where are you from?  
 Where is your city? Who are your parents?  
 On what kind of ship did you travel here?  
 How did sailors bring you to Ithaca?  
 Who did they claim they were? For I don’t think [190]  
 you reached this place on foot.”

Resourceful Odysseus  
 then answered Eumaeus and said:

“All right, 250  
 I’ll tell you the truth of what you’ve asked me.  
 I wish we two had food and honey wine

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<sup>1</sup>Arceisius is the name of the father of Laertes and thus of Odysseus’s paternal grandfather.



BOOK FOURTEEN

to last a while, so we could feast in peace  
 inside your hut, while others did the work.  
 I could easily go on for one whole year  
 and never finish talking of those things  
 my heart has suffered, all the miseries  
 I've endured, thanks to what the gods have willed.  
 I claim my people come from spacious Crete.  
 I am a rich man's child, and in his house 260  
 several other sons were born and raised, [200]  
 his legal children from his lawful wife.  
 My mother was a purchased concubine.  
 But still, Castor, son of Hylax, the man  
 I claim as my own father, honoured me,  
 just as he did his true-born sons. Back then,  
 since he had wealth and land and worthy sons,  
 the Cretans in the country looked on him  
 as if he were a god. But lethal Fates  
 sent him down to Hades, and his proud sons 270  
 divided up his goods by drawing lots.  
 They gave me a really tiny portion [210]  
 and assigned a house. But I won a wife  
 from people who had many rich estates,  
 thanks to my courage—for I was no fool,  
 nor was I a coward. Now all that strength  
 has gone. A host of troubles wears me down.  
 But by examining the husk, I think,  
 you can assess the plant. Back then, Ares  
 and Athena gave me strength and courage, 280  
 the power to break ranks of men apart.  
 Whenever I would choose the bravest men  
 to set an ambush and put my enemies  
 in peril, my proud spirit never sensed  
 that I might die. I always jumped out first, [220]  
 and my spear killed whatever enemy  
 ran past me. That's the kind of man I was  
 when it came to war. But I got no joy  
 from working on the land or household chores,  
 like raising lovely children. No. Instead, 290  
 I always took pleasure in ships with oars  
 and weapons—well polished shields and arrows—  
 deadly things, so horrible to others.  
 I think I loved those things because a god  
 somehow set them in my heart. Different men  
 find their delight in different kinds of work.

BOOK FOURTEEN

Before Achaea's sons set foot in Troy,  
 I'd led fast ships and warriors nine times, [230]  
 attacking troops from foreign lands, and won  
 enormous quantities of loot. I'd take 300  
 what I desired and later pile up more,  
 when we drew lots. So my house soon grew rich,  
 and Cretans honoured and respected me.  
 When far-seeing Zeus planned that fatal trip  
 which loosed the knees of many warriors,  
 they asked me and famous Idomeneus  
 to lead their ships to Troy. There was no way  
 one could refuse—the people's voice insisted.  
 So we Achaean sons fought there nine years, [240]  
 and ransacked Priam's city in the tenth. 310  
 We set out, sailing for home, but some god  
 scattered the Achaeans. Counsellor Zeus  
 devised some difficulties just for me,  
 to make me miserable. I stayed at home,  
 enjoying my children, the wife I'd married,  
 and what I owned, for just a single month.  
 Then my heart urged me to outfit some ships  
 and sail to Egypt with my noble comrades.  
 I manned nine ships. The fleet was soon prepared.  
 My loyal shipmates feasted for six days— 320  
 I gave them many beasts to sacrifice, [250]  
 as offerings to the gods and to prepare  
 a banquet for them. On the seventh day,  
 we left wide Crete. North Wind provided us  
 a stiff and welcome breeze, so we sailed on  
 quite easily, like drifting down a stream.  
 None of my ships was damaged, no one got sick  
 or suffered harm, and we stayed in our seats,  
 while wind and helmsman held us on our course.  
 The fifth day we reached Egypt's mighty river, 330  
 where I moored my curving ships. Then I told  
 my loyal crew to stay there with the ships, [260]  
 keeping watch on them, while I sent out scouts  
 to find some places we could use as lookouts.  
 But my men, overcome with arrogance,  
 and trusting their own might, at once began  
 to plunder the Egyptians' finest fields.  
 They took their women and small children, too,  
 and killed the men. Shouts soon reached the city,  
 and, once they heard the noise, Egyptians came, 340

as daylight first appeared. The entire plain  
 filled up with chariots and infantry,  
 all flashing bronze. Zeus, who hurls the lightning,  
 threw a nasty panic in my comrades,  
 so no one dared to stay and face the fight.  
 We were badly threatened from all quarters. [270]

They slaughtered many men with their sharp bronze  
 and took some alive. They wished to force us  
 to do their work for them. Then Zeus himself  
 put an idea inside my heart—but still, 350

I wish I'd died and met my fate right there,  
 in Egypt, since all sorts of troubles still  
 lay waiting for me—I at once removed  
 the finely crafted helmet from my head  
 and the shield I'd slung around my shoulders.  
 My hand let go my spear, and I ran out  
 straight to the king's chariot, clutched his knee,  
 and kissed it. The king felt pity for me  
 and spared my life. He set me in his chariot,  
 and, as I wept, he took me to his home. 360 [280]

Many of his men, armed with their ash spears,  
 came after me—their anger was so great,  
 they were all keen to kill me. But the king  
 kept them in check—he wanted to respect  
 the rage of mighty Zeus, god of strangers,  
 who is especially irked at impious deeds.  
 I remained there seven years, amassing  
 wealth in huge amounts from those Egyptians,  
 for they all gave me gifts. When the eighth year  
 came wheeling in, a Phoenician man arrived, 370

a greedy rogue who understood deceit.  
 He'd already brought men lots of trouble.  
 Well, he won me over with his cunning [290]  
 and I travelled with him, until we reached  
 his house and his possessions in Phoenicia.  
 I remained there with him an entire year.  
 But as the days and months kept passing by  
 and yearly seasons rolled around once more,  
 he put me on a ship to Libya,  
 making up a false story of some scheme 380

that he would be taking cargo with him,  
 whereas, in fact, once we were there, he meant  
 to sell me for an enormous profit.  
 Though I was suspicious, I had to go

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with him and board the ship. North Wind blew  
a fresh and welcome breeze, and we sailed off,  
on a mid-sea course, the windward side of Crete.<sup>1</sup> [300]  
Then Zeus planned the destruction of his men.  
When we sailed past Crete, we saw land no more,  
only sky and sea. The son of Cronos 390  
sent a black cloud above our hollow ship.  
Underneath the sea grew dark. All at once,  
Zeus thundered and then hurled a lightning flash  
down on our ship, which shook from stem to stern  
and filled with sulphur smoke, as Zeus's bolt  
came crashing down. The crew fell overboard  
and floated on the waves, like cormorants,  
past our black ship—the god then took away  
the day of their return. As for myself, [310]  
though anguish filled my heart, lord Zeus himself 400  
let me wrap my hands around the main mast  
from our black-prowed ship, so that once again  
I could escape destruction. I hung on,  
and was carried along by dreadful winds  
for nine full days. Then on the tenth dark night,  
a huge rolling wave threw me up on shore  
in Thesprotian land, and there the king,  
Pheidon, ruler of the Thesprotians,  
welcomed me, without demanding ransom.<sup>2</sup>  
When I'd been beaten down by weariness 410  
and freezing winds, his dear son had met me,  
helped me stand up again, and brought me home,  
to his father's palace. He gave me clothes— [320]  
a cloak and tunic. There I heard reports  
about Odysseus. For king Pheidon said  
he had welcomed him with entertainments,  
as he was returning home to Ithaca.  
He showed me what Odysseus had collected,  
all the bronze and gold and well-worked iron,  
so many riches stored in Pheidon's house, 420  
they'd feed ten generations after him.  
Odysseus, he said, was in Dodona,  
to hear from the huge towering oak tree,

<sup>1</sup>This seems to mean that the ship passed along the northern coast of Crete, but the precise meaning is disputed.

<sup>2</sup>The Thesprotians lived in southern Epirus, a coastal region in north-west Greece, nowadays on the border with Albania.

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sacred to the god, what great Zeus had willed  
 about his own return to that rich land  
 of Ithaca, after his long absence. [330]

Should he go back there openly or not?<sup>1</sup>  
 As he poured libations in his palace,  
 he swore to me a ship had been hauled down  
 and a crew prepared to take Odysseus 430  
 back to his native land. But before that,  
 he sent me off, since, as it so happened,  
 a ship manned with a crew of Thesprotians  
 was sailing to Dulichium carrying corn.  
 He ordered them to take me there, treating me  
 with all due kindness, and deliver me  
 to king Acastus. But those sailors' hearts  
 were more attracted to a nasty scheme  
 concerning me—and I would be reduced  
 to abject poverty. So when the ship 440  
 had sailed some distance from the land, they tried  
 from that day forward to make me their slave. [340]  
 They ripped away my clothes, cloak and tunic,  
 and dressed me differently, a ragged cloak  
 and filthy tunic torn to shreds, these here—  
 the ones you see before your very eyes.  
 They reached the fields of sunny Ithaca  
 that very night. Inside that well-decked ship  
 they tied me up with tightly twisted rope  
 and went ashore, eager to eat a meal 450  
 beside the sea. But the immortal gods  
 with ease untied my bonds, and so I wrapped  
 my rags around my head and slipped away  
 down a smooth plank, chest first into the sea. [350]  
 Then with both arms I paddled and swam off.  
 I left the water far away from them  
 and moved inland, where leafy bushes grew,  
 and lay crouching down. They began to shout  
 and wandered here and there. But then they thought  
 there was no point in searching any more. 460  
 So they went back on board their hollow ship.  
 The gods themselves concealed me easily  
 and led me on my way. They brought me here,

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<sup>1</sup>Dodona was a very ancient shrine in the interior of Epirus, sacred to Zeus and Dione. The centre of the oracle was an oak tree where doves nested, and interpretations were made of the noises coming from the leaves of the tree, the doves, and brass ornaments hung in the branches.

to the farmyard of a man who understands.  
My fate, I think, is to continue living.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said: [360]

“Stranger, you’re unlucky. The tale you tell  
has really touched my heart, all those ordeals  
you’ve suffered, all the places where you roamed.  
But I don’t think it’s all just as you said, 470  
and the things you mentioned of Odysseus  
do not convince me. Given who you are,  
why must you include such pointless falsehoods?  
I know that in my master’s journey home  
he was totally despised by all the gods.  
That’s why they didn’t kill him over there,  
among the Trojans or in his comrades’ arms,  
when he was done with war. For the Argives  
would have made him a tomb—and for his son  
he would have won great fame in days to come. 480 [370]  
Now the spirits of the storm have snatched him,  
and there’s no glory. As for me, I live  
here among the pigs, far away from men.  
I don’t go to the town, unless I’m called  
to travel there by wise Penelope,  
when a message reaches her from somewhere.  
Then people sit around the man who’s come  
and ask him questions about everything,  
those who are still grieving for their ruler,  
who’s been away so long, and other men 490  
who delight in using up his livelihood  
without paying anything. I don’t like  
to investigate it or ask questions,  
not since the day an Aetolian man  
tricked me with his story. He’d killed someone. [380]  
After roaming around in many lands,  
he reached my home, where I made him welcome.  
He claimed he’d seen Odysseus in Crete,  
Idomeneus’s home, repairing ships  
damaged in a storm, vowing he’d return 500  
by summer or before they harvest crops,  
with his fine comrades, bringing treasure home.  
And so you, you long-suffering old man,  
since a spirit led you here, should not try  
to cheer me up or secure my favour

by telling falsehoods. That's not the reason  
I show you respect and give you welcome,  
but because I pity you and fear Zeus,  
the god of strangers."

Resourceful Odysseus [390]  
answered Eumaeus with these words:

"That heart in your chest 510  
is truly hard to sway. The oath I swore,  
even those words did not influence you  
or win you over. But come now, let's make  
this promise—the gods who hold Olympus  
will stand as witnesses for both of us  
in days to come—if your master does get back  
to his own home, you'll give me some clothing,  
a cloak and tunic, and then send me off  
to Dulichium, as my heart desires,  
and if your master does not come the way 520  
I say he will, then set your men on me,  
have them throw me from a towering cliff,  
so some other vagrant will be careful [400]  
to avoid deception."

The splendid swineherd  
then said in reply:

"Yes, stranger, what a way for me  
to gather fame and fortune among men,  
both now and in the future, to kill you,  
steal your precious life, after bringing you  
to my own hut and entertaining you!  
I could later pray to Zeus, son of Cronos, 530  
with a sincere heart. Now it's time to eat.  
I hope my comrades will get here quickly,  
so we can cook our meal here in the hut."

As these two were talking like this to each other,  
the other herdsmen came up, bringing home their swine. [410]  
They shut the sows up in their customary pens,  
so they could sleep. The pigs gave out amazing squeals,  
as they were herded in. Then the trusty swineherd  
called out to his companions:

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“Bring a boar in here,  
the best there is, so I can butcher it 540  
for this stranger from another country.  
We too will get some benefit from it,  
seeing we’ve worked so hard and for so long  
and gone through hardships for these white-tusked pigs,  
while others gorge themselves on our hard work  
without paying anything.”

Once he’d said this,  
with his sharp bronze axe he chopped up wood for kindling,  
while others led in a huge great boar, five years old,  
and stood it by the hearth. The swineherd’s heart was sound— [420]  
he did not neglect the gods and began the meal 550  
by throwing in the fire some bristles from the head  
of the white-tusked boar and uttering a prayer  
that wise Odysseus would get back to his own home.  
He raised his arm, and with a club made out of oak,  
which he’d left lying beside him, he struck the boar.  
Life left the beast. The other herdsmen slit its throat,  
singed its bristles, and, working quickly, carved it up.  
At first, the swineherd offered pieces of the meat  
from all the limbs, wrapped up in layers of rich fat.  
After sprinkling white barley meal all over these, 560  
he threw them in the fire. The others sliced the rest, [430]  
put it on spits, cooked it with care, drew it all off,  
and set out heaps of meat on platters. The swineherd,  
whose heart always concerned itself with what was fair,  
stood up to carve, and as he shared each piece of meat,  
he split the food in seven portions. With a prayer,  
he set one aside for Hermes, son of Maia,  
and for the nymphs. The rest he gave out equally,  
honouring Odysseus with a long cut from the back  
of the white-tusked boar. That pleased his master’s heart. 570  
Then adventurous Odysseus spoke to him and said:

“Eumaeus, may father Zeus treat you as well [440]  
as you are treating me with this boar’s chine,  
the very finest cut of meat, even though  
I’m just a beggar.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,  
you replied by saying:



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“Eat, god-guided stranger,  
and enjoy the kind of food we offer.  
A god gives some things and holds others back,  
as his heart prompts, for he can do all things.”

Eumaeus spoke and offered to eternal gods 580  
the first pieces he had cut. He poured gleaming wine  
as a libation, handed it to Odysseus,  
sacker of cities, then sat to eat his portion.

Mesaulius passed around the bread, a servant  
Eumaeus purchased on his own, when his master [450]  
was away from home. He'd not informed his mistress  
or old man Laertes. He had acquired the slave  
from Taphians, using resources of his own.<sup>1</sup>

So they stretched out their hands to the generous meal  
set out in front of them. Once they enjoyed their fill 590  
of food and drink, and each man's heart was quite content,  
Mesaulius took away their food. They had eaten  
so much bread and meat, they were eager for some rest.

Night came on, bringing stormy winds. There was no moon.  
And Zeus sent blustery West Wind blowing in with rain,  
a relentless downpour all night long. Odysseus  
spoke to them, testing Eumaeus, to find out if,  
given the hospitality he had offered,  
he'd take off his cloak and give it to Odysseus, [460]  
or would urge one of his comrades to give up his. 600

“Eumaeus and you others, his work mates,  
hear me now—I wish to tell a story,  
prompted by this wine, which addles our wits.  
Wine can make a man, even though he's wise,  
sing out loud, or laugh softly to himself,  
or leap up and dance. It can bring out words  
which were better left unspoken. But still,  
since I've begun to talk, I'll hide nothing.  
I wish I were as young, my strength as firm,  
as when we were setting up an ambush 610  
and leading men to it below Troy's walls,  
led by Menelaus, son of Atreus, [470]  
and by Odysseus—and they had ordered

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<sup>1</sup>The Taphians lived on a cluster of islands in the Ionian Sea. In Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, when Athena visits Telemachus in Ithaca (1.138), she takes on the form of Mentos, son of the king of the Taphians.

that I was to be the third man in command.  
 When we reached the steep walls of the city,  
 we lay down in thick bushes round the place,  
 crouching with our weapons in swampy reeds.  
 A nasty night came on. North Wind dropped off,  
 and it was freezing cold. Snow fell on us,  
 like frost from high above, bitterly cold. 620  
 Our shields were caked with ice. Now, the others  
 all wore cloaks and tunics, and could rest there  
 quite easily, shields across their shoulders.  
 But when I'd set out, like a fool I'd left 630  
 my own cloak behind with my companions, [480]  
 Not thinking I might feel cold without it,  
 I'd only brought my tunic and my shield.  
 Well, when it was the third watch of the night  
 and the stars had shifted their positions,  
 I spoke to Odysseus, who was close by. 630  
 When my elbow nudged him, he was all ears,  
 instantly prepared to listen:

‘Odysseus,  
 you resourceful man, son of Laertes  
 and child of Zeus, I won't be here for long,  
 not among the living. Instead, this cold  
 will kill me off—for I don't have a cloak.  
 Some spirit deluded me, made me come  
 with just a tunic. Now there's no way out.’

That is what I said. In his heart he had a plan— 640 [490]  
 that's the kind of man he was for scheming  
 or for fighting war. With a quiet whisper,  
 he spoke to me:

‘Keep silent for the moment,  
 in case one of our Achaeans hears you.’

Then he propped his head up on his elbow,  
 and spoke out, saying:

‘Listen to me, friends.  
 As I slept here, a dream sent from the gods  
 came to me. We've moved a long way forward,  
 too far from our ships. I would like someone  
 to tell Agamemnon, son of Atreus,

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a shepherd of his people, in the hope  
he'd tell more men to come out from the fleet.<sup>1</sup> 650

Once he'd said this, Thoas jumped up quickly,  
Andraemon's son. He threw off his purple cloak [500]  
and ran off to the ships. I grabbed the cloak  
and was quite happy to crouch down again.  
Then early Dawn arose on her golden throne.  
I wish I were as young as I was then,  
and my strength as firm. Then in this farmyard,  
some swineherd would give me a cloak to wear,  
from kindness and respect for a brave man. 660  
But now, with filthy clothing on my skin,  
I receive no honours."<sup>2</sup>

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,  
you answered him and said:

“Old man, that story  
you just told us is all right—you've spoken  
very clearly and told us what you want.  
You won't lack clothes or any other thing [510]  
a long-suffering suppliant should get  
from those he meets, at least for this cold night.  
When morning comes you'll have to dance around  
in those rags of yours. We don't have many cloaks  
or other tunics. We've each got just one. 670  
But when Odysseus's dear son arrives,  
he'll give you some clothes, a cloak and tunic,  
and send you where your heart desires to go.”

After saying this, he jumped up and placed a bed  
for Odysseus near the fire. On the bed he threw  
some skins from sheep and goats. Odysseus lay down there. [520]  
Eumaeus covered him up with a huge thick cloak,  
which he kept as a change of clothing in the hut,  
something to wear whenever a great storm blew in. 680

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<sup>1</sup>Something seems awry with this speech, since we are given no details of what the dream might have been, and the rest has no apparent connection to a dream.

<sup>2</sup>The last lines of this speech (598-602) have long been rejected by many critics, since they obviously destroy the point of the story by making an explicit request at the end, rather than displaying a clever hint.

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So Odysseus went to sleep there, and the young men  
slept around him. But Eumaeus had no desire  
to have his bed indoors and sleep so far away  
from all his boars. So he prepared to go outside.  
Odysseus was pleased the swineherd took such trouble  
with his master's goods while he was absent far away.  
First, Eumaeus slung a sharp sword from his shoulder  
and wrapped a thick woollen cloak around his body,  
to protect him from the wind. He took a huge fleece  
from a well-nourished goat and grabbed a pointed spear  
to warn off dogs and men. And then he left the hut,  
going to lie down and rest where the white-tusked boars  
slept beneath a hollow rock, sheltered from the wind.

[530]

690

BOOK FIFTEEN  
TELEMACHUS RETURNS TO ITHACA

*[Pallas Athena visits Sparta to urge Telemachus to return home, tells him to visit Eumaeus, the swineherd, when he gets back; Telemachus tells Menelaus he'd like to leave; Menelaus and Helen give gifts and a farewell banquet; they receive a favourable omen before leaving; Helen interprets the omen; Telemachus and Peisistratus leave Sparta and reach Pylos; Telemachus asks Peisistratus to leave him at his ship, so that Nestor won't delay his return; Peisistratus agrees; a stranger arrives, Theoclymenus, a descendant of the prophet Melampus, and asks for passage on Telemachus's ship; Telemachus agrees, and they sail for Ithaca; Odysseus and Eumaeus feast in the hut; Odysseus asks Eumaeus about his parents, and Eumaeus tells him; Eumaeus tells the story of how he got to Ithaca and was sold to Laertes; Telemachus lands in Ithaca and tells the crew to take the ship on without him; Theoclymenus interprets a bird omen; Telemachus walks to Eumaeus's farmyard.]*

Pallas Athena went to spacious Lacedaemon,  
to remind the noble son of brave Odysseus  
about going home and to urge him to return.  
She found Telemachus and Nestor's noble son  
lying on the portico, resting in their beds,  
inside the palace of splendid Menelaus.  
A calming sleep had overpowered Nestor's son,  
but for Telemachus no soothing sleep had come—  
because deep in his heart through that immortal night  
anxious thoughts about his father kept him awake.  
Bright-eyed Athena stood beside him and spoke out:

10

“Telemachus, it's not good to wander  
much longer from your home, abandoning  
your property and leaving in your house  
such overbearing men, who may divide  
and use up all your goods. Then this journey  
you have undertaken will be pointless.  
You must, with all speed, urge Menelaus,  
expert at war shouts, to let you go back,  
so you can find your noble mother there,  
still at home. Her father and her brothers  
have already told her she should marry  
brave Eurymachus—he offers her more  
than other suitors. Now he's intending  
to give even more as wedding presents.  
Take care she does not carry from the house  
some property, without your knowing it.

[10]

20

BOOK FIFTEEN

You understand what sort of spirit lies [20]  
inside a woman's chest. She wants to help  
the household of the man who marries her 30  
and no longer thinks about her children  
or her previous husband whom she loved.  
Now he's dead, she doesn't ask about him.  
You should go yourself and entrust your goods  
to the female slave you think most worthy,  
until the gods show you a splendid bride.  
I'll tell you something else—take it to heart.  
The bravest of the suitors lie in wait,  
enough to set an ambush, in the straits  
between Ithaca and rugged Samos. 40  
Before you get back to your native land, [30]  
they mean to murder you. But in my view,  
that won't be happening. Before it does,  
the earth will cover many of those men  
who are consuming all your livelihood.  
You must choose a course for your well-built ship  
far from the islands, and keep on sailing  
day and night. One of the immortal gods  
who's watching over and protecting you  
will make sure that you have favouring winds. 50  
As soon as you set foot in Ithaca,  
send your companions and the ship ahead,  
on to the city—you yourself should go  
to see the man who nourishes your pigs.  
He is very well disposed towards you.  
Spend the night there in his hut. And tell him [40]  
to travel to the city and bring news  
to wise Penelope that you are safe  
and have returned from Pylos.”

Athena spoke.

Then she moved away, going back to high Olympus. 60  
With his foot Telemachus prodded Nestor's son  
and roused him from sweet sleep. Then he spoke to him:

“Wake up, Peisistratus, son of Nestor.  
Bring your well-shod horses here, and yoke them  
to the chariot. We'll soon be on our way.”

Peisistratus, Nestor's son, then replied and said:

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“No matter how keen you may be to leave,  
Telemachus, there’s no way we can ride  
in this pitch-black night. Dawn will soon be here. [50]  
So let’s wait until brave Menelaus, 70  
son of Atreus, that famous spearman,  
brings our gifts and puts them in the chariot,  
then sends us off with a warm farewell speech.  
A guest remembers all his life the man  
who gave him hospitality and kindness.”

He spoke. Early Dawn appeared on her golden throne,  
and lord Menelaus, expert in battle shouts,  
rose up from the bed beside his fair-haired Helen  
and came to see his guests. When he caught sight of him,  
Odysseus’ dear son quickly put a tunic on, 80 [60]  
slung a heavy cloak across his sturdy shoulders,  
and left his room. He came up to Menelaus  
and spoke to him, saying:

“Menelaus,  
son of Atreus and cherished of Zeus,  
leader of your people, send me back now  
to my native land, for my heart is keen  
to get back home.”

Then Menelaus,  
expert at war cries, answered him:

“Telemachus,  
I will not detain you here a long time,  
not if you’re eager to return. I’d blame 90  
another man who, as a host, provides [70]  
too much hospitality or not enough.  
It’s far better to show moderation.  
It’s bad when someone does not want to leave  
to be too quick to send him on his way,  
but just as bad is holding someone back  
when he’s ready to depart. For a host  
should welcome any guest in front of him  
and send away the one who wants to go.  
But stay until I bring some fine gifts here 100  
and set them in your chariot, where your eyes  
can see them, and I can tell the women  
to prepare a meal inside the palace

from the plentiful supply of food there.  
 For a traveller to feast before he leaves  
 to journey on the wide unbounded earth  
 brings double benefits—it gives him help  
 and gives me fame and honour. If you wish  
 to go through Hellas and middle Argos, [80]  
 then I'll accompany you in person.<sup>1</sup> 110  
 I'll have a team of horses harnessed for you,  
 and I'll escort you to men's cities there.  
 Not one of them will send us from their town  
 without insisting we accept a gift,  
 a beautiful bronze tripod or a cauldron,  
 a pair of mules or goblet made of gold."

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

"Lord Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
 child of Zeus, and leader of your people,  
 I wish to get back home without delay— 120  
 when I left there I did not leave behind  
 anyone to protect my property.  
 As I keep searching for my noble father, [90]  
 I hope I don't get killed or in my home  
 have men rob me of my fine possessions."

When Menelaus, skilled in war cries, heard these words,  
 he quickly advised his wife and her attendants  
 to gather some of the abundant food they stored  
 and prepare a farewell feast. Then Etoneus,  
 son of Boethous, came up to Menelaus— 130  
 he lived close by and had just risen from his bed.  
 Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, instructed him  
 to get a fire started and to roast some meat.  
 Once Etoneus heard, he did what he'd been asked.  
 Menelaus went down to his fragrant storage room—  
 not by himself, for Helen and Megapenthes [100]  
 went with him as well. Once they reached the places  
 where he stored his treasure, the son of Atreus  
 selected a two-handled cup and told his son,  
 Megapenthes, to take a silver mixing bowl. 140

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<sup>1</sup>This invitation from Menelaus seems to involve a detour on the journey back so as to include a trip through the northern Peloponnese. However, the terms Hellas and Argos in Homer are often very imprecise and ambiguous.



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Helen went over to the storage chests which held  
the richly woven garments she herself had made.  
Then Helen, goddess among women, picked out one,  
the largest and most beautifully embroidered—  
it lay below the others, shining like a star.  
Helen carried away this robe, and they returned,  
back through the house, until they reached Telemachus. [110]  
Fair-haired Menelaus spoke to him:

“Telemachus,  
may Zeus, Hera’s loud-thundering husband,  
accomplish the return your heart desires. 150  
Of all the treasured gifts stored in my home,  
I’ll give you the one with highest value  
and the loveliest—I’ll present to you  
this finely crafted mixing bowl. It’s made  
entirely of silver and its rims  
are plated gold. Hephaestus crafted it.  
Warrior Phaedimus, the Sidonian king,  
presented it to me on my way home,  
when his house gave me shelter. Now I’d like  
to send it back with you.”

Menelaus spoke. 160  
Then the son of Atreus handed Telemachus [120]  
the two-handled cup, and mighty Megapenthes  
carried in the mixing bowl of shining silver  
and set it down before him, and fair-cheeked Helen,  
standing beside him with the fine robe in her hands,  
spoke to Telemachus and said:

“My dear child,  
I’m giving you this gift as a reminder  
of Helen, something made by her own hands.  
Your bride can wear it on her wedding day,  
something to look forward to. Until then, 170  
let it remain in your dear mother’s room.  
As for you, I wish you a joyful journey  
back to your well-built home and native land.”

With these words, Helen placed the garment in his hands. [130]  
Telemachus was delighted to receive the dress.  
Noble Peisistratus took the gifts and packed them  
in a box stored in the chariot, gazing at them

BOOK FIFTEEN

with wonder in his heart. Fair-haired Menelaus  
escorted them inside the house, where they sat down  
on stools and chairs. A female servant carried in  
a beautiful gold jug and poured some water out  
into a silver basin, so they could rinse their hands,  
then placed a polished table beside each of them.  
The worthy housekeeper then carried in some bread  
and set it down before them, with platters of meat,  
generous provisions from food she had in store.  
Standing close to them, Eteoneus carved the meat  
and handed out the portions, while Megapenthes,  
son of glorious Menelaus, poured the wine.  
Then their hands reached for the food spread out before them.  
After they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,  
Telemachus and the noble son of Nestor  
yoked the horses, climbed in the ornate chariot,  
and drove from the portico through the echoing gate.  
Fair-haired Menelaus followed them outside.  
His right hand held a gold cup full of honey wine,  
so they might pour libations before setting out.  
Standing there beside the horses, Menelaus  
made a pledge to both of them and said:

“Farewell,  
young men. Make sure you greet Nestor for me,  
shepherd of his people. Over in Troy,  
when we sons of Achaea went to war,  
he truly was a gentle father to me.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Zeus-fostered king, we will indeed tell him  
what you ask, when we arrive in Pylos.  
How I wish when I returned to Ithaca  
I’d come across Odysseus in his home,  
so I could tell him how, when I left here,  
I’d met with every hospitality  
and taken many splendid gifts away.”

As he said these words, a bird flew over them,  
to the right—an eagle clutching in its talons  
an enormous white goose, a tame one from some farm.  
A crowd of men and women hurried after it,  
all shouting as they ran. The bird flew close to them,

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then veered, wheeling to the right before the horses.  
When they saw that, they were happy—in every chest  
the spirits filled with joy. Then the son of Nestor,  
Peisistratus, was the first of them to speak: 220

“Menelaus, leader of your people,  
cherished by Zeus, tell us about this sign—  
whether god sent it to the two of us  
or just to you alone.”

Peisistratus spoke.  
War-loving Menelaus thought about the birds—  
How should he understand the omen properly [170]  
and provide an appropriate interpretation?  
But before he said a word, long-robed Helen spoke  
and said these words:

“Listen to me.  
I will prophesy what the immortals 230  
have set into my heart, what I believe  
will happen. Just as this eagle came here  
from mountains where it and its young were born  
and snatched up this goose bred in the household,  
that’s how Odysseus, after all his toil  
and many hardships, will be coming back  
and take revenge. Or he’s already home,  
sowing destruction for all the suitors.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Now may Zeus, Hera’s loud-thundering mate, 240 [180]  
bring that about. If so, I’ll pray to you  
as to a god.”

Telemachus said this,  
then flicked the horses with his whip. They sped off quickly,  
keen to move on through the city towards the plain.  
All day long the harness on their shoulders rattled.  
Then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.  
Their chariot reached Pherae, home of Diocles,  
son of Ortilochus, a child of Alpheus.  
Diocles welcomed them with hospitality  
the way one should with strangers. There they spent the night. 250

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As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
they yoked the horses, climbed in the ornate chariot, [190]  
then drove out from the echoing portico and gate.  
Peisistratus urged on the horses with his whip,  
and they raced willingly ahead. They quickly reached  
the lofty citadel of Pylos. Telemachus  
then addressed the son of Nestor:

“Peisistratus,  
will you promise to do something for me,  
and see it through exactly as I say?  
We claim that we have always been good friends, 260  
because our fathers were good friends, as well,  
and we are the same age. This trip of ours  
will make our hearts united even more.  
So, child of Zeus, don’t take me past my ship  
but leave me there, in case old man Nestor [200]  
detains me in his house against my will,  
wishing to show me hospitality,  
when I must now get home with all due speed.”

Telemachus spoke. Deep in his heart Nestor’s son  
considered how he might make such a promise 270  
and see it through to its conclusion. As he thought,  
he followed what seemed to him the better option—  
he turned the horses to the swift ship by the shore,  
took out the lovely gifts, the clothing and the gold,  
which Menelaus had given to Telemachus,  
stowed them in the stern and urged Telemachus to go—  
his words had wings:

“You must move quickly now.  
Climb in your ship, and instruct your comrades  
to do so, too, before I get back home [210]  
and let old Nestor know what’s happening. 280  
For in my heart and mind I know too well  
he likes things done his way—he won’t agree  
and will come in person to call you back.  
I tell you, he won’t return without you.  
In any case, he’s sure to be upset.”

Once he said this, Peisistratus drove his horses,  
creatures with lovely manes, quickly back to Pylos.

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He soon reached the palace. Meanwhile, Telemachus urged his companions on—he spoke to them and said:

“Comrades, put all the stuff in our black ship. 290  
Let’s get ourselves on board, so we can sail.” [220]

When they heard these words, his shipmates obeyed at once. Soon they were aboard, each man sitting at his oar.

Telemachus sat in the stern part of the ship, praying to Athena and offering sacrifice.

Then a stranger approached, someone from far away, running from Argos because he had killed a man.

He was prophet, descended from Melampus, who many years earlier had lived in Pylos, a sheep-breeding land. He had been a wealthy man, living in a rich house among the Pylians. 300

But then Melampus went into a foreign land, fleeing his country and great-hearted Neleus, the most illustrious of living mortal men, who for one whole year had taken his wealth by force, [230]

while Melampus lay tied up in savage bondage in Phylacus’s palace, in cruel suffering, all for the sake of a daughter of Neleus,

and thanks to the terrible blindness in his heart which the goddess Erinys, who strikes down families, had fixed on him.<sup>1</sup> But then he got away from Fate 310

and drove the bellowing cattle from Phylace to Pylos, thus succeeding in getting his revenge for the disgraceful acts of noble Neleus, and led the daughter home to be his brother’s wife.

But then he went off to Argos, where horses graze, a land of strangers. He was destined to live there, ruling many Argives. He won himself a wife, built a high-roofed house, and fathered two strong sons, [240]

Antiphates and Mantius. Antiphates 320  
fathered brave Oicles, who, in his turn, produced Amphiaraus, a man who could rouse people up, and whom lord Apollo and aegis-bearing Zeus

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<sup>1</sup>This passage gives yet another reference the story of Melampus (see previous references at 11.320 and 11.352), the prophet who could communicate with animals. His brother fell in love with Neleus’s daughter. Neleus said that whoever could steal the cattle of Phylacus could have the daughter. Melampus was caught trying to help his brother and imprisoned by Phylacus, but his prophetic powers persuaded Phylacus to release him and give him the cattle. These he brought back to Neleus and thus won the daughter for his brother.

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loved in all sorts of ways. But he did not live long—  
he died in Thebes, thanks to a woman’s need for gifts.<sup>1</sup>  
He had two sons—Alcmaeon and Amphilocus.  
Mantius fathered Cleitus and Polyphides.  
Cleitus was so beautiful he was snatched away  
by goddess Dawn on her golden throne, so he might live  
with the immortal gods, and then lord Apollo  
made noble-minded Polyphides his prophet,  
the best of men, after Amphiaraus was dead.  
He was angry with his father and moved away  
to Hyperesia, where he lived and prophesied  
to everyone. He had a son—Theoclymenus—  
he was the one who now approached Telemachus,  
as he poured libations by his swift ship and prayed.  
Standing close beside him, Theoclymenus spoke—  
his words had wings:

[250]

330

“Friend, since I’ve met you here  
while making sacrifice, I’m asking you,  
for the sake of your offerings and the god  
and by your comrades’ lives and by your own,  
answer what I ask, and tell me the truth,  
hiding nothing. Among men who are you?  
Where is your city? Who are your parents?”

[260]

340

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“All right, stranger, I will speak candidly.  
I am from Ithaca by birth. My father  
is Odysseus, as surely as he lived,  
but now he’s died by some pitiful fate.  
That’s why I got this crew and this black ship  
and sailed in search of news about my father  
who has been absent for so long.”

350

[270]

Theoclymenus  
then replied and said:

“I, too, have run away  
from my own land. I killed a relative,

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<sup>1</sup>Amphiaraus was married to Eriphyle, who was bribed with a gold necklace to persuade her husband to join a military expedition against Thebes. He died in the fighting. Eriphyle is one of the women Odysseus glimpses among the shades of the dead (see 11.414).

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one of my family. His relations  
live in horse-nurturing Argos—they rule  
Achaeans there and have enormous power.  
I'm fleeing to prevent them killing me.  
So now it's my dark fate, my destiny, 360  
I think, to roam around among mankind.  
Let me board your ship—I'm a fugitive,  
and I'm begging you, so they won't kill me.  
I think they're on my track."

Prudent Telemachus  
then answered him and said:

"If you desire to come, [280]  
I will not stop you boarding my trim ship.  
So come with us. You'll find a welcome here,  
as much as we possess."

As he said these words,  
he took the spear Theoclymenus was holding,  
set it down lengthwise on the deck of the curved ship, 370  
and then clambered aboard the ocean-going boat.  
Theoclymenus sat beside him in the stern.  
The crewmen loosed the cables. Then Telemachus  
called his comrades, urging them to hoist the tackle.  
They hurried to obey, raising the mast of fir  
and setting it in place in its hollow socket.  
They tightened forestays and then hoisted a white sail [290]  
with twisted ox-hide ropes. Gleaming-eyed Athena  
sent favouring winds blowing stiffly through the air,  
so the sailors could complete their voyage quickly 380  
across salt waters of the sea. So they sailed on  
past Crouni and past Calchis, with its lovely streams.  
Then the sun went down, and all the routes grew dark.  
They made for Pheae, driven on by winds from Zeus,  
and for fair Elis, where Epeians rule. From there,  
Telemachus steered them past the jagged islands,  
wondering if he could evade a fatal ambush. [300]

Meanwhile, Odysseus and the faithful swineherd  
and the other herders were eating in the hut,  
After they'd had food and drink to their heart's content, 390  
Odysseus spoke to all of them, testing the swineherd,  
to see if he would sustain his kindly welcome

BOOK FIFTEEN

and invite him to go on staying at the farm  
or if he would send him off towards the city:

“Eumaeus and all you other herdsmen,  
listen to me now. Tomorrow morning  
I’d like to wander off and beg in town,  
so I won’t exhaust you and your comrades.  
Give me good advice, then send me away [310]  
with a fine guide who can conduct me there. 400  
I’ll have to roam the city by myself,  
hoping to get a cup and piece of bread.  
I could go to the home of lord Odysseus  
and give some news to wise Penelope  
and mingle with those arrogant suitors.  
They might give me a meal—they’ve lots of food.  
If so, I could well serve in what they want.  
Let me tell you how. Listen carefully.  
Thanks to Hermes the Messenger, the one  
who pours grace and fame on all men’s work, 410 [320]  
no other man can match the way I serve  
in splitting dry wood, building a good fire,  
roasting and carving meat, and serving wine,  
all those actions performed by lesser men  
when they are servants to nobility.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you were most upset  
and spoke out to Odysseus:

“Why, stranger,  
is your heart so in love with this idea?  
You must possess a strong desire to die,  
if you mean to go among the suitors, 420  
that crowd whose pride and violence extend  
right up to iron heaven. Their servants [330]  
are not like you. No. The ones who serve them  
are young men, well dressed in cloaks and tunics,  
their heads and faces always sleek with oil.  
They keep well-polished tables loaded down  
with bread and meat and wine. You should stay here.  
No one in this place finds you a bother—  
I don’t, nor do the others here with me.  
When the dear son of lord Odysseus comes, 430  
he’ll give you clothing, a cloak and tunic,  
and send you where your heart and spirit urge.”



BOOK FIFTEEN

Then much-enduring lord Odysseus answered him: [340]

“Eumaeus, I hope father Zeus likes you  
as much as I do—you’ve brought to an end  
my wanderings and painful suffering.  
Nothing is more wretched for human beings  
than roaming around, but men must endure  
all kinds of trouble for their stomach’s sake,  
when they have to face the pain and sorrow 440  
their travels bring. Now, since you keep me here,  
telling me to wait for your young master,  
talk about the mother of lord Odysseus  
and his father, too. When he went away,  
he left him just as he was growing old.  
Are they still living in the sunshine here,  
or have they died and now dwell in Hades?” [350]

Then the swineherd, a splendid fellow, answered him:

“Well, stranger, I’ll tell you the honest truth.  
Laertes is alive, but all the time 450  
inside his home he keeps praying to Zeus  
the spirit in his limbs will fade away.  
He grieves excessively for his own son,  
who has gone, and for the wife he married,  
a wise lady, whose death, above all else,  
caused him much distress and made him old  
before his time. She died a wretched death  
grieving for her splendid son. May no man  
who lives here as my friend and treats me well [360]  
die the way she did! While she was alive, 460  
though she was sad, I was always happy  
to ask about her, find out how she was,  
because she personally brought me up,  
together with long-robed Ctimene,  
her fine daughter, the youngest child she bore.  
I was raised with her, though with less honour.  
When we both reached our young maturity,  
that time we long for, she was sent to Same  
to be married and got countless wedding gifts.  
She dressed me in fine clothes, cloak and tunic, 470  
and gave me sandals to tie on my feet,  
then sent me out into the fields. In her heart [370]

BOOK FIFTEEN

she was especially fond of me. But now,  
I miss all that, though personally for me  
the sacred gods prosper the work I do.  
From that I have had food and drink and helped  
those men who have a claim on my attention.  
But now bad times have fallen on the house  
full of overbearing men. I don't hear  
any news that's good, whether word or deed, 480  
about my lady, although servants have  
a powerful urge to talk face to face  
with their mistress and find out everything,  
to eat and drink, and then take something back  
into the fields—such things warm servants' hearts."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said: [380]

"Swineherd Eumaeus, you were just a child  
when you wandered far off from your parents  
and your native land. Come now, tell me this—  
and speak candidly—was the place ransacked, 490  
that populated city with broad streets  
in which your mother and your father lived,  
or were you alone with sheep or cattle?  
Did hostile people take you in their ships  
and bring you here to sell you to the master  
of the palace, who paid a decent price?"

The swineherd, an outstanding fellow, then replied:

"Stranger, since you ask questions about this, [390]  
stay quiet, enjoy yourself, drink your wine,  
as you sit there, and listen to my tale. 500  
These nights go on forever. There's a time  
to sleep, and there's a time to take delight  
in hearing stories. You don't need to rest  
before you're ready, and excessive sleep  
can leave one weary. As for the others,  
if any man's heart and spirit tell him,  
let him go outside and sleep. Then at dawn  
he can eat and walk behind our master's swine.  
We two will drink and feast here in the hut  
and enjoy each other's wretched troubles, 510  
as we recall them. For once they're over, [400]  
a man who's done a lot of wandering

BOOK FIFTEEN

and suffered much gets pleasure from his woes.  
So now I'll give you answers to those questions.  
There's an island you may have heard about  
beyond Ogygia—it's called Syrie,  
where Sun changes his course. The land is good.  
Though not too many people live on it,  
there are many herds and flocks, plenty of wine,  
and lots of wheat. Famine never comes there, 520  
no lethal sickness falls on mortal men.  
Inside the town, when tribes of men get old,  
Apollo comes there with his silver bow [410]  
and Artemis as well. He attacks them  
with his gentle arrows and kills them off.  
There are two cities there, with all the land  
divided up between them. My father  
ruled both as king. His name was Ctesius,  
son of Ormenus, like an immortal god.  
Phoenicians came there, famous sailing men, 530  
greedy rogues, who carried countless trinkets  
in their black ship. Now, in my father's house  
lived a beautiful Phoenician woman,  
skilled in making lovely things. Phoenicians,  
truly crafty men, seduced her. First of all,  
while she was doing laundry, one of them  
had sex with her beside the hollow ship— [420]  
love like that distracts the minds of women,  
even virtuous ones. When he asked her  
who she was and where she came from, she said, 540  
pointing to my father's high-roofed palace:

'I claim to come from Sidon, rich in bronze,  
daughter of Arybas, a man whose wealth  
was like a flood. But then I was captured  
by Taphian pirates, as I was coming  
from the fields. They brought me to this place  
and sold me to the household of that man,  
who paid an excellent price.'

Then the man [430]  
who had made love to her in secret said to her:

'Would you like to sail home again with us, 550  
to see your father's and your mother's house

BOOK FIFTEEN

and them, as well? Yes, they are still alive  
and, so people say, are very wealthy.’

The servant woman answered him and said:

‘I might come, if you sailors are willing  
to promise me on oath to take me home,  
and ensure my safety.’

When she said this,  
they all took the oath, as she requested.  
When they had sworn and finished promising,  
the woman spoke to them again and said:

560

‘Now, keep silent. None of your company  
must talk to me, if we meet in the street  
or maybe at the springs, in case someone  
runs to tell the old king in the palace.  
If he gets suspicious, he’ll tie me up  
in cruel bondage and then plan your death.  
Keep what I say in mind, and finish off  
your trading quickly. When your ship is full  
and your goods stowed on board, send me a sign  
at the palace right away. I’ll bring gold,  
whatever I can lay my hands on there.  
And there’s something else I’d like to offer  
to pay my passage. Inside the palace  
my master has a child. I am his nurse.  
He’s quite an impish boy—when we’re outside  
he runs beside me. I’ll bring him on board.  
He’s worth an enormous sum of money,  
if ever you run into foreigners.’

[440]

570

[450]

She said this, then left for the fine palace.  
The men stayed there with us for one whole year,  
and by trading filled their hollow ship with goods.  
When the deep boat was loaded to return,  
they sent a messenger to tell the woman.  
The man, a shrewd one, reached my father’s house  
with a gold necklace strung with amber beads.  
In the hall servants and my noble mother  
were handling and inspecting it, haggling  
about the price. He nodded at the woman,  
without saying a word. After that sign,

580

[460]

BOOK FIFTEEN

he went back to his hollow ship. So then, 590  
she took my hand and led me from the house.  
In the front hall she found cups and tables  
left there by guests who had been at a feast,  
men who were attendants on my father.  
They had just left for a council meeting  
where public civic issues were discussed.  
She quickly hid three goblets in her clothes  
and then strolled out with them. I followed her, [470]  
without thinking a thing. The sun went down,  
and all the roads grew dark. But we rushed on 600  
and came to the fine harbour where we found  
the swift sailing ship and the Phoenicians.  
They put us both on board, climbed in themselves,  
and moved away across the watery road.  
Zeus sent a welcome wind. We sailed six days,  
all day and night. When Zeus, son of Cronos,  
brought us the seventh day, archer Artemis  
struck the woman, and she fell with a thud  
down in the hold, just like a sea bird's fall.  
They threw her overboard to make a meal 610 [480]  
for seals and fish. But I was left heart-sick.  
The winds and waters carried them along.  
They sailed to Ithaca, where king Laertes  
purchased me with his own money—that's how  
I came to see this land with my own eyes."

Odysseus, born from Zeus, then answered him and said:

"Eumaeus, by telling me what happened,  
you've truly stirred the heart here in my chest,  
all those ordeals your spirit has endured.  
But with the bad things Zeus has given you 620  
he's put some good—you've undergone much pain,  
but you ended up at a kind man's house.  
With a good heart, he gives you food and drink, [490]  
and the life you lead is good. As for me,  
I've reached here only after wandering  
through many cities of men."

So the two men  
kept talking to each other. Then they fell asleep.  
But they did not sleep long, for early Dawn arrived  
soon afterwards, seated on her golden throne.

BOOK FIFTEEN

As Telemachus and his crew were nearing land, 630  
they furled and stowed the sail, quickly lowered the mast,  
and used their oars to move into an anchorage.  
They tossed out mooring stones, lashed cables at the stern,  
and then left the boat, wading through the crashing surf.  
They prepared a meal and mixed the gleaming wine. [500]  
Once they had food and drink to satisfy their hearts,  
shrewd Telemachus was the first of them to speak:

“You men row the black ship to the city,  
while I’m checking on the fields and herdsman.  
I’ll come to the city in the evening, 640  
after I have visited my estates.  
In the morning I’ll lay out a banquet,  
as compensation to you for the trip,  
a splendid meal of meat and sweetened wine.”

Then godlike Theoclymenus spoke up and said:

“Where do I go, dear lad? Of those who rule  
in Ithaca, whose house do I go to— [510]  
the palace you live in with your mother?”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“If things were different, I would invite you 650  
to go straight to our home—there is no lack  
of welcome there for strangers. But for you  
it would be worse, because I’ll not be there,  
and my mother will not see you. It’s rare  
for her to show up among the suitors  
when they are in the house—she stays away  
and does her weaving in an upstairs room.  
But I’ll mention another man to you  
and you can visit him—Eurymachus,  
a noble son of wise Polybius, 660  
whom men of Ithaca see as a god. [520]  
He’s the best man by far and truly keen  
to marry my mother and then possess  
the royal prerogatives of Odysseus.  
But Olympian Zeus, who lives in heaven,  
knows if, before that wedding day arrives,  
he’ll bring about a day of reckoning.”

BOOK FIFTEEN

As he said this, a bird flew past them on the right,  
a hawk, Apollo's messenger. In its talons  
it held a dove, which it was plucking—the feathers 670  
fell to the ground halfway between Telemachus  
and his ship. Theoclymenus called him aside,  
away from his companions, grasped his hand, and spoke: [530]

“Telemachus, this bird flying to our right  
has not come without prompting by some god.  
When I saw it darting forward, I knew  
it was an omen. Here in Ithaca  
no family is more royal than yours.  
No. You will be powerful forever.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said: 680

“Stranger, I hope that prophecy of yours  
may be fulfilled. If so, you'll quickly hear  
of many gifts and kindnesses from me,  
so any man you meet will call you happy.”

Then he spoke to Peiraeus, a faithful comrade:

“Peiraeus, son of Clytius, of those 690  
who came with me on the trip to Pylos  
you're the one who is especially loyal.  
So now conduct this stranger to your home,  
take good care to welcome him with honour,  
until I get there.” [540]

Peiraeus, a famous spearman,  
then answered him and said:

“Telemachus,  
if you remain a long time on your land,  
I will entertain him. He will not lack  
a welcome that's appropriate for guests.”

After saying these words, he went on board the ship  
and told the crew to get in and loose the cables.  
They boarded quickly and sat down at their benches.

BOOK FIFTEEN

Telemachus tied sturdy sandals on his feet,  
then from the deck picked up his powerful spear  
with a sharp bronze point. The crew untied stern cables  
and then pushed out to sea, sailing to the city,  
as Telemachus, dear son of lord Odysseus,  
had ordered them to do, while he strode quickly off,  
his feet carrying him onward, until he reached  
the farmyard and the herds of pigs in countless numbers,  
among whom the loyal swineherd still lay asleep,  
always thinking gentle thoughts about his master.

[550]

700



BOOK SIXTEEN  
ODYSSEUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO TELEMACHUS

*[Telemachus arrives at Eumaeus's farm; Eumaeus is overjoyed to see Telemachus back from his voyage; Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Odysseus (in disguise) talk together; Telemachus sends Eumaeus off to tell Penelope of his safe return; Athena tells Odysseus to reveal himself to his son and transforms his appearance; Telemachus and Odysseus are reunited; Telemachus and Odysseus discuss strategies for dealing with the suitors; Odysseus gives Telemachus instructions about hiding weapons and behaving in front of the suitors; a herald from Telemachus's crew announces to Penelope and others the news of his return from Pylos; the suitors are upset and discuss what to do; Penelope appears before the suitors and upbraids Antinous for his behaviour; Antinous replies; Eumaeus returns to Odysseus and Telemachus in the hut; Athena transforms Odysseus into an old beggar once again; Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Telemachus eat a meal and go to sleep.]*

Meanwhile at dawn Odysseus and the loyal swineherd,  
once they had sent the herdsmen out with droves of pigs,  
lit a fire in the hut and prepared their breakfast.  
As Telemachus approached the hut, the yelping dogs  
stopped barking and fawned around him. Lord Odysseus  
noticed what the dogs were doing and heard footsteps.  
He quickly shouted to the swineherd—his words had wings:

“Eumaeus, some friend of yours is coming,  
or someone you know. The dogs aren't barking  
and are acting friendly. I hear footsteps.”

10

He hardly finished speaking when his own dear son  
stood in the doorway. The swineherd, amazed, jumped up—  
the bowls he was using to mix the gleaming wine  
fell from his hands. He went up to greet his master,  
kissed his head, both his handsome eyes, and his two hands,  
then through his tears he spoke. Just as a loving father  
welcomes his dear son after a nine-year absence,  
returning from a foreign land, an only son,  
his favourite, for whom he's undergone much grief,  
that's how the loyal swineherd hugged Telemachus  
and kissed him often, as if he'd escaped his death.  
And through his tears he spoke to him—his words had wings:

20 [20]

“You've come back, Telemachus, you sweet light.  
I thought I'd never see you any more,  
once you went off to Pylos in that ship.”

BOOK SIXTEEN

Come in here now, dear boy, so that my heart  
can feel the joy of seeing you in my home,  
now that you've returned from distant places.  
You don't often visit farms and herdsmen—  
your life is in the town. Your heart, I think, 30  
must enjoy the sight of those vile suitors."

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said: [30]

"If you say so, old friend. I've come here now  
on your account, to see you face to face  
and to hear you talk about my mother.  
Is she still living in the palace halls,  
or has some other man now married her?  
Is no one sleeping in Odysseus's bed?  
Is it covered in disgusting cobwebs?"

The swineherd, that outstanding man, then answered him: 40

"Yes indeed, she still lives in your palace,  
with a faithful heart, but always grieving,  
wasting days and nights away with weeping."

He said this, took the bronze spear from Telemachus, [40]  
and let him in, crossing the threshold made of stone.  
As he approached, Odysseus, his father, got up  
to offer him his seat, but from across the room  
Telemachus stopped him and said:

"Stay put, stranger.  
We'll find a seat somewhere inside this hut.  
Here's a man who will arrange that for us." 50

He spoke. Odysseus went back and sat down again.  
Eumaeus made a pile of green brushwood on the floor  
and spread a fleece on top. Odysseus's dear son  
sat down there. Then the swineherd set out before them  
platters of roast meat, left over from the dinner [50]  
they had made the day before, and quickly heaped up  
baskets full of bread. In a wooden bowl he mixed  
wine as sweet as honey and then sat down himself,  
opposite godlike Odysseus. Their hands reached out  
to the welcome meal prepared and spread before them. 60

BOOK SIXTEEN

When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,  
Telemachus spoke out to the trusty swineherd:

“Old friend, where does this stranger come from?  
How did sailors bring him to Ithaca?  
Who do they claim to be? For I don’t think  
there’s any way he could get here on foot.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said: [60]

“My child, I’ll tell you nothing but the truth.  
He claims that he was born in spacious Crete  
and says he has been roaming all around, 70  
wandering through many human cities.  
That how some god has spun a fate for him.  
He’s just fled a ship of Thesprotians  
and come here to my farm. You can have him.  
Do as you wish. He’s a suppliant, he says.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Eumaeus, I’m truly distressed at heart  
by those words you said. How can I welcome [70]  
this guest into my home? I am too young—  
I don’t believe my hands are strong enough 80  
to fight a man who acts with violence  
against me first. And, as for my mother,  
in her chest the heart is quite divided,  
whether to stay with me and tend the house,  
out of respect for what the people say  
and for her husband’s bed, or to go now  
with the finest man of those Achaeans  
who have been courting her within the halls,  
the one who offers the most marriage gifts.  
But anyway, now this stranger’s come here, 90  
to your home, I’ll dress him in fine clothing,  
cloak and tunic, and give a two-edged sword [80]  
and sandals for his feet. I’ll send him off  
wherever his heart and spirit prompt him.  
If you wish, you can keep him at this farm  
and care for him. I’ll send some clothing here  
and the food he’ll eat, so he won’t ruin  
you and your friends. But I will not let him  
go to my home and mingle with the suitors—

BOOK SIXTEEN

they are far too full of insolent pride  
They might mock him, and I would die of shame.  
It's difficult for one man on his own  
even if he's very strong, to do much  
against so many—they are far stronger.”

Then lord Odysseus, who had endured so much,  
said to Telemachus: [90]

“Friend, surely it's all right  
for me to answer, and my heart is torn  
as I hear you talk—these suitors think up  
such presumptuous actions in your home  
and flout your will, though you're a decent man. 110  
Tell me, do you agree with this oppression?  
Do the people of the country hate you  
and follow what some god is telling them?  
Do you think the blame rests with your kinsmen,  
whom a man relies on in a quarrel,  
even when it's a serious dispute?  
With my heart the way it is, how I wish  
I were either as young as you, the son [100]  
of brave Odysseus, or the man himself  
returning from his travels—there's still room 120  
for us to hope for that—then, if I came  
to Odysseus' home, son of Laertes,  
and did not bring destruction on them all,  
I'd let a stranger's sword slice off my head.  
If I, acting alone, was overwhelmed  
by their great number, I would rather die,  
killed in my own home, than keep on watching  
such disgraceful acts—guests treated badly,  
women servants shamelessly being dragged  
through the fine palace, wine drawn and wasted, 130 [110]  
and all the time food eaten needlessly,  
acts which go on and on, without an end.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Well, stranger, I'll speak candidly to you.  
The people are not all angry with me,  
nor do they bear a grudge. And I don't blame  
my kinsmen, the ones a man relies on  
in a fight, even a serious dispute.

BOOK SIXTEEN

The son of Cronos made our family  
follow a single line. It goes like this— 140  
Arceisius fathered a single son,  
Laertes, and he, too, was the father  
of only a single son, Odysseus,  
and he, in turn, fathered me, just one son,  
then left me by myself in his own hall. [120]  
He got no joy of me. That’s the reason  
so many hostile men are in our home.  
All those lords with power in the islands—  
Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—  
and those who rule in rocky Ithaca, 150  
all of them trying to court my mother  
and destroy my home.<sup>1</sup> She does not turn down  
the hateful marriage, but cannot decide  
how to bring these matters to an end.  
With their feasting they consume my household,  
and they’ll soon be the ruin of me, too.  
But all this lies in the lap of the gods.  
Old friend, you must go quickly and report [130]  
to wise Penelope that I’ve come back,  
I’m safely home from Pylos. I’ll stay here, 160  
until you’ve told the news to her alone  
and have returned. No other Achaean  
must learn about it, for many of them  
are hatching dangerous plans against me.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

“I know what you’re saying—I understand.  
You’re speaking to a man who thinks things through.  
But come, tell me this, and be frank with me.  
On this trip should I go to see Laertes  
with the news? The poor man is miserable. 170  
For a while, though suffering great distress  
about Odysseus, he’d supervise the fields [140]  
and in his home eat and drink with servants,

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<sup>1</sup>As a number of commentators have observed, the exact political status of the suitors is ambiguous and in places confusing. Sometimes, as here, they are called the chief leaders or rulers of the islands or those with ruling power in Ithaca. They all appear to live in Ithaca and visit the palace during the day. However, the islands listed here are sometimes described as under Odysseus’s control. What does seem clear is that the suitors have political importance as noblemen, as the most important leaders (or their sons), whatever the precise arrangements between them and the royal family of Odysseus in Ithaca.

BOOK SIXTEEN

as the heart inside his chest would urge him.  
But now, since the time you left for Pylos,  
people say he no longer eats and drinks  
the way he used to or inspects the fields,  
but sits there, groaning and wailing, in tears,  
with his flesh shrivelling around his bones.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

180

“That’s more distressing, but nevertheless,  
though it makes us sad, we’ll leave him alone.  
If mortal men could somehow get all things  
simply by wishing, we would first of all  
select the day my father gets back home.  
After you have informed her of the news,  
get back here right away. Don’t go roaming  
around the fields looking for Laertes.  
Instead, tell my mother to send her maid,  
the housekeeper, quickly and in secret.  
She can report the news to the old man.”

[150]

190

His words spurred on the swineherd. He took his sandals,  
tied them on his feet, and set off for the city.

It did not escape the notice of Athena  
that swineherd Eumaeus was going from the farm.  
She approached the hut, appearing like a woman,  
beautiful, tall, and skilled in making lovely things.  
She stood there, just outside the entrance to the farm  
and was visible to no one but Odysseus.  
Telemachus could not observe her shape or face  
or notice she was there. For when the gods appear,  
they do not let all men perceive the form they take.  
But Odysseus saw her. So did the dogs, as well.  
But there was no barking. Instead, they slunk away,  
whimpering in fear, to the far side of the hut.  
She gave a signal with her eyebrows—Odysseus  
noticed and went out of the hut, past the large wall  
that ran around the yard, and stood in front of her.  
Then Athena spoke to him:

200 [160]

“Son of Laertes,  
adventurous Odysseus, sprung from Zeus,  
Now is the time to speak to your own son—

210

BOOK SIXTEEN

make yourself known and don't conceal the facts,  
so you can plan the suitors' lethal fate,  
then go together to your famous city. [170]  
I won't be absent from you very long—  
I'm eager for the fight."

As she said this, Athena  
touched Odysseus with her golden wand. To start with,  
she placed a new unblemished cloak around his body,  
then made him taller and restored his youthful looks.  
His skin grew dark once more, his countenance filled out, 220  
and the beard covering his chin turned black again.  
Once she'd done this, Athena left, and Odysseus  
went back into the hut. His dear son was amazed.  
He turned his eyes away, afraid it was a god,  
and spoke to him—his words had wings: [180]

"Stranger,  
now you look different than you did before—  
you're wearing different clothes, your skin has changed.  
You're one of the gods who hold wide heaven.  
If so, be gracious, so we can give you  
pleasing offerings, well-crafted gifts of gold. 230  
But spare us."

Long-suffering lord Odysseus  
then answered him and said:

"I'm not one of the gods.  
Why do you compare me to immortals?  
But I am your father, on whose account  
you are grieving and suffer such distress,  
having to bear men's acts of insolence."

He spoke, then kissed his son. He kept his self-control, [190]  
until a tear slid down his cheek, falling in the dirt.  
But Telemachus, who could not yet believe  
it was his father, spoke to him again, saying: 240

"You cannot be Odysseus, my father.  
No. Some spirit has cast a spell on me,  
to make me lament and grieve even more.  
There's no way a mortal man could plan this  
with his own wits, unless some god himself

were present, who could, if he so desired,  
 make him look young or old quite easily.  
 Not long ago you wore filthy clothing  
 and were an older man. But now you're like  
 the immortal gods who hold wide heaven." 250 [200]

Then resourceful Odysseus answered him and said:

"Telemachus, it's not appropriate  
 to be overly surprised your father  
 is back home or to be too astonished.  
 You can rest assured—no other Odysseus  
 will ever be arriving. I am here.  
 I've borne a lot in many wanderings,  
 and now, in the twentieth year, I'm back  
 on my native soil. This present business,  
 you should know, is forager Athena's work. 260  
 She's made me look like this—it's what she wants,  
 and she has that power—in one moment,  
 like a beggar, and in another one,  
 a younger man dressed in much finer clothes. [210]  
 It's easy for the gods who hold wide heaven  
 to glorify or else debase a man."

Once he'd said this, he sat down, and Telemachus  
 embraced his noble father, cried out, and shed tears.  
 A desire to lament arose in both of them—  
 they both wailed aloud, as insistently as birds, 270  
 like two sea eagles or hawks with curving talons  
 whose young chicks have been carried off by country folk  
 before being fully fledged. That's how those two men  
 let tears of sorrow fall from underneath their eyes.  
 And now light from the sun would have gone down on them, [220]  
 as they wept, if Telemachus had not spoken.  
 He suddenly addressed his father:

"In what kind of ship,  
 dear father, did sailors carry you here,  
 to Ithaca? Who did they say they were?  
 For I don't think you made it back on foot." 280

Noble long-suffering Odysseus answered him:



“All right, my child, I will tell you the truth.  
 Phaeacians, those famous sailors, brought me.  
 They escort other men, as well, all those  
 who visit them as guests. I stayed asleep  
 as they transported me across the sea  
 in their swift ship and left me on the shore.  
 They gave me splendid gifts of bronze and gold [230]  
 and woven clothing. Now, thanks to the gods,  
 these things are stored away in caves. I’ve come 290  
 at Athena’s bidding, so we may plan  
 destruction for our foes. But now it’s time  
 to tell me the number of the suitors,  
 so I may know how many men there are  
 and what they’re like. Then, once my noble heart  
 has thought it over, I’ll make up my mind,  
 whether we two are powerful enough  
 to take them on alone, without assistance,  
 or whether we should seek out other men.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said: 300 [240]

“Father,  
 I’ve always heard about your great renown,  
 a mighty warrior—your hands are strong,  
 your plans intelligent. But what you say  
 is far too big a task. I’m astonished.  
 Two men cannot fight against so many—  
 and they are powerful. In an exact count,  
 there are not just ten of them or twice ten,  
 but many more. Here, you can soon add up  
 their numbers—from Dulichium there are  
 fifty-two hand-picked young men, six servants 310  
 in their retinue, from Same twenty-four,  
 from Zacynthus twenty young Achaeans, [250]  
 and from Ithaca itself twelve young men,  
 all nobility. Medon, the herald,  
 is with them, as is the godlike minstrel,  
 and two attendants skilled in carving meat.  
 If we move against all these men inside,  
 I fear revenge may bring a bitter fate,  
 now you’ve come home. So you should consider  
 if you can think of anyone who’ll help, 320  
 someone prepared to stand by both of us  
 and fight with all his heart.”

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Then lord Odysseus,  
who had endured so much, replied to him and said:

“All right, I’ll tell you. Pay attention now,  
and listen. Do you believe Athena, [260]  
along with Father Zeus, will be enough  
for two of us, or should I think about  
who else might help us?”

Prudent Telemachus  
answered with these words:

“Those two allies you mention  
are excellent. They sit high in the clouds, 330  
ruling others, men and immortal gods.”

Long-suffering lord Odysseus then said to him:

“The two of them won’t stand apart for long  
from the great fight—we can be sure of that—  
when Ares’ warlike spirit in my halls  
is put to the test between these suitors  
and ourselves. But for now, when Dawn arrives, [270]  
go to the house, join those haughty suitors.  
The swineherd will bring me to the city  
later on. I’ll be looking like a beggar, 340  
old and wretched. If they’re abusive to me,  
let that dear heart in your chest endure it,  
while I’m being badly treated, even if  
they drag me by my feet all through the house  
and out the door or start hurling things at me.  
Keep looking on, and hold yourself in check.  
You can tell them to stop their foolishness,  
but seek to win them over with nice words,  
even though you’ll surely not convince them,  
because the day they meet their fate has come. 350 [280]  
I’ll tell you something else—keep it in mind.  
When wise Athena puts it in my mind,  
I’ll nod my head to you. Once you see that,  
take all the weapons of war lying there,  
inside the hall. Stow them in a safe place,  
all of them, in the lofty storage room.  
When the suitors notice they’ve gone missing

BOOK SIXTEEN

and ask about it, you must deceive them  
with reassuring words:

‘I’ve placed them  
well beyond the smoke, since they’re no longer  
like the weapons Odysseus left behind  
when he went off to Troy. They’re all tarnished—  
the fire has breathed on them too many times.  
Beyond that, the son of Cronos has put  
a greater worry in my heart that you,  
after too much wine, may start up a fight  
amongst yourselves and then hurt each other,  
dishonouring your courtship and the feast.  
Iron attracts a man all on its own.’

360  
[290]

But leave behind a pair of swords, two spears,  
and two ox-hide shields, for the two of us  
to grab up when we make a rush at them—  
Pallas Athena and Counsellor Zeus  
will keep the suitors’ minds preoccupied.  
I’ll tell you something else—keep it in mind.  
If you are my son—truly of our blood—  
let no one hear Odysseus is back home.  
Don’t let Laertes know or the swineherd,  
or the slaves, or Penelope herself.  
You and I alone will investigate  
how the women feel, and we will check out  
some of the serving men, to discover  
if any of them fears and honours us  
in his heart—and the ones with no respect,  
who malign you for being who you are.”

370  
[300]  
380

Then his splendid son answered him and said:

“Father,  
I think you’ll later come to recognize  
my spirit, for no timidity of mind  
possesses me. But still, I do not think  
your plan will benefit the two of us.  
I’d ask you to consider this—you’ll spend  
a long time simply testing every man,  
as you visit the farms, while those others,  
in their proud way, relax inside your halls  
and use your property without restraint.

[310]  
390

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I'd suggest you learn about the women,  
those disgracing you and the guiltless ones.  
As for men on the estates, I'd prefer  
we did not test them. There'll be time enough  
to do that later, if you recognize  
signs sent from Zeus, who bears the aegis." 400 [320]

So the two men talked about these things together.

Meanwhile, the well-built ship which brought Telemachus  
from Pylos with his comrades had reached Ithaca.  
Once the crew had rowed the boat inside the harbour,  
they hauled the black ship up on shore. Eager servants  
carried away their weapons and without delay  
took the lavish gifts to the home of Clytius.  
They also sent a herald to the royal home,  
to report to wise Penelope, telling her 410 [330]  
Telemachus had gone to visit the estates  
and had told the ship to sail off for the city,  
in case the noble lady might get sick at heart  
and start to weep. This herald and the swineherd met  
because they'd both been sent off with the same report  
to tell the queen. When they reached the royal palace,  
the herald spoke out in front of female servants:

"My queen, your much-loved son has just returned."

But the swineherd walked up, straight to Penelope,  
and informed her of all the details her dear son 420 [340]  
had instructed him to say. Once he had mentioned  
in his account what he had been ordered to report,  
he went away, leaving the courtyard and the hall,  
to get back to his pigs. The suitors were unhappy,  
their hearts dismayed, and they departed from the hall,  
moving past the courtyard wall. There, before the gates,  
they sat down. The first one of them to speak a word  
was Eurymachus, son of Polybus:

"My friends,  
to tell the truth, in his great arrogance  
Telemachus has carried out his trip, 430  
and has had great success. We never thought  
he would complete it. So let's do something.  
Let's launch a ship, the very best we have,

BOOK SIXTEEN

collect some sailors, a crew of rowers,  
so they can quickly carry a report  
to those other men to come home at once.”<sup>1</sup> [350]

No sooner had he said this, than Amphinomus,  
turning in his place, saw a ship in the deep harbour.  
Men were bringing down the sail, others holding oars.  
With a hearty laugh, he then addressed his comrades: 440

“Don’t bother with a message any more.  
They have arrived back home. Either some god  
gave them news, or they saw his ship themselves,  
as it sailed past, but could not attack it.”

He spoke. They all got up and went to the sea shore,  
then quickly dragged the ship up onto drier ground,  
while eager attendants carried off the weapons. [360]  
Then in a large group they went to their meeting place.  
No others were permitted to sit there with them,  
no old or younger men. Antinous addressed them, 450  
son of Eupheithes:

“Well, this is bad news—  
the gods made sure Telemachus was safe.  
Our lookouts sat each day on windy heights,  
always in successive shifts. At sunset,  
we never spent the night on shore, but sailed  
over the sea in our swift ship, waiting  
for sacred Dawn, as we set our ambush  
for Telemachus, so we could capture  
and then do away with him. But some god [370]  
has brought him home again. So let’s devise 460  
a sad end for Telemachus right here—  
ensure he does not get away from us.  
For as long as he’s alive, I don’t think  
what we’re doing will bring us much success.  
He himself is clever, shrewd in counsel,  
and people don’t regard us well at all.  
So come now, before he calls Achaeans  
to assembly. I don’t think he will concede.  
He’ll get angry and stand up to proclaim

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<sup>1</sup>The “other men” are the ones waiting in the islands to ambush Telemachus on his voyage home. They may be still unaware that he has slipped past them.

BOOK SIXTEEN

to everyone how we planned to kill him 470  
and how our ambush failed. Then the people  
will turn against us, once they learn about [380]  
what we have done. Take care. They may harm us  
and force us out, away from our own homes,  
then send us off into a foreign land.  
Let's move first—capture him out in the fields,  
far from the city, or else on the road.  
We suitors will retain his property  
and his wealth, with each of us receiving  
an appropriate share. As for his home, 480  
that's something we should let his mother keep—  
together with the man who marries her.  
If what I've been saying displeases you,  
and you prefer he still remain alive,  
retaining all the riches of his fathers,  
let's not keep on gathering in this place,  
consuming his supply of pleasant things.  
Instead, let each man carry on his courtship [390]  
from his home, seeking to prevail with gifts.  
She can marry the one who offers most, 490  
the husband her own fate has set for her.”

He finished. They all sat quiet, saying nothing.  
Then Amphinomus spoke out and addressed them,  
a son of noble Nisus, Areteias' son,  
the leader of the suitors from Dulichium,  
land rich in grass and wheat. Penelope found him  
especially pleasant because of the way he talked,  
for he understood things well. With good intentions,  
he spoke to them and said:

“My friends, [400]  
I would not want to slay Telemachus. 500  
It's reprehensible to kill someone  
of royal blood. But first let's ask the gods  
for their advice. If Zeus's oracles  
approve the act, I myself will kill him  
and tell all other men to do so, too.  
But if the gods decline, I say we stop.”

Amphinomus finished. They agreed with what he'd said.  
So they immediately got up and went away  
to Odysseus's house. Once they reached the palace,

BOOK SIXTEEN

they sat on polished chairs in the great hall. By then, 510  
wise queen Penelope had thought of something else—  
to put in an appearance before the suitors, [410]  
despite their arrogance, because she heard about  
their plot to kill Telemachus in his own home.  
The herald Medon, who heard their plans, had told her.  
So Penelope set out, moving to the hall,  
escorted by her attendant servant women.  
As soon as the noble lady reached the suitors,  
she stood beside the doorpost of the well-built room  
and, holding a bright veil across her lovely face, 520  
she spoke to Antinous, reprimanding him:

“Antinous, though you’re an arrogant man  
and come up with crafty schemes, people say  
you are the best among those men your age  
at offering advice and making speeches.  
But you don’t seem to be a man like that. [420]  
You madman, why devise a fatal plan  
to kill Telemachus and disregard  
the things involved with being a suppliant,  
who has Zeus as witness? It’s impiety 530  
to plot evil things against each other.  
Do you not know how your father came here  
a fugitive, afraid of his own people?  
They had grown extremely angry at him,  
because he’d joined with Taphian pirates  
to cause trouble for the Thesprotians,  
who were allied with us, and those men wished  
to kill him, rip out his heart, and devour  
his huge and pleasant livelihood. But then,  
Odysseus held them back, kept them in check, 540 [430]  
for all their fury. And now you eat up  
that man’s home without paying anything—  
you court his wife, attempt to kill his son,  
and cause me much distress. So stop all this,  
I tell you, and order other suitors  
to do the same.”

Then Eurymachus,  
son of Polybus, answered her and said:

“Wise Penelope,  
child of Icarius, cheer up. Don’t let

BOOK SIXTEEN

these things concern your heart. No man living,  
no man born and no one yet to be, 550  
will lay hands on your son Telemachus,  
not while I'm alive, gazing on the earth.  
I tell you—and this will truly happen— [440]  
that man's black blood will quickly saturate  
my spear, for Odysseus, sacker of cities,  
also set me on his knees many times  
and put roast meat into my hands and held  
red wine up for me. Thus, Telemachus  
is far the dearest of all men to me.  
I say to him—don't be afraid of death, 560  
not from the suitors, but there's no way out,  
when our death comes from the immortal gods.”

He said these words to ease her mood, while he himself  
was planning how her son would die. Penelope  
climbed the stairs to her bright upper room and wept there [450]  
for Odysseus, her dear husband, until sweet sleep  
from gleaming-eyed Athena spread across her eyes.

At evening the fine swineherd came to Odysseus  
and to his son, both busy preparing dinner.  
They killed and singed a boar, a yearling. Athena 570  
went up to Odysseus and touched him with her wand,  
transforming him into an old man once again.  
She put shabby clothing on his body, in case  
the swineherd, by looking up, would recognize him  
and then go off to tell faithful Penelope,  
unable to keep secret what was in his heart.  
Telemachus addressed the swineherd first and said: [460]

“Eumaeus, you've come back from the city.  
Is there some news? Are those haughty suitors  
already in the house, after their trip, 580  
or are they still out there watching for me,  
as I travel on my journey homeward?”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

“I did not bother to find out such things  
or ask any questions on my travels  
through the town. Once I'd given my report,  
my heart told me to get myself back here



BOOK SIXTEEN

as quickly as I could. A swift messenger,  
who was sent by your companions, met me,  
a herald. Your mother got the first report 590  
from him. But I discovered something else, [470]  
which I saw with my own eyes. As I walked  
above the city, by the hill of Hermes,  
I saw a fast ship coming into harbour,  
with lots of men aboard and loaded down  
with weapons—shields and two-edged spears. I thought  
it could be the suitors, but I'm not sure."

Eumaeus finished. Telemachus, with a smile  
full of fresh confidence and strength, allowed his eyes  
to glance over at his father, avoiding contact 600  
with the swineherd. Then, once they had finished working  
and dinner was prepared, they ate a meal. Their hearts  
did not lack a thing—they shared the food as equals.  
When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink, [480]  
they thought of rest, and so they took the gift of sleep.

BOOK SEVENTEEN  
ODYSSEUS GOES TO THE PALACE AS A BEGGAR

*[Telemachus leaves Eumaeus and Odysseus at the farm, telling the swineherd that the beggar (Odysseus) must go to the city; Telemachus is welcomed in the palace by Eurycleia and his mother; Telemachus joins the suitors; Peiraeus leads in Theoclymenus; Theoclymenus and Telemachus dine with Penelope; Telemachus tells Penelope about his journey; Theoclymenus makes a prophecy of Odysseus's return; Eumaeus and Odysseus leave the farm for the city; they meet Melanthius, the goat herder, on the way, who insults them; Eumaeus and Odysseus arrive at the palace, meet Odysseus's old dog, Argus, who recognizes him and dies; Eumaeus enters the palace and joins Telemachus at dinner; Odysseus sits by the entrance way; Telemachus offers food to the disguised Odysseus, who then starts begging from the suitors; Melanthius and Antinous insult Eumaeus and Odysseus; Odysseus tells Antinous his story, they trade insults, and Antinous throws a foot stool at Odysseus and hits him; Penelope summons Eumaeus to her, asks him to call the disguised beggar to her; Odysseus tell Eumaeus that he'll meet Penelope in the evening; Eumaeus tells Penelope, talks to Telemachus, and returns to the farm, leaving the feast still in progress.]*

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
Telemachus, dear son of god-like Odysseus,  
tied sandals on his feet, took a powerful spear,  
well suited to his grip, and, as he headed off  
towards the city, called out to the swineherd:

“Old friend, I’m now leaving for the city,  
so I can see my mother. I don’t think  
her dreadful grieving and her sorry tears  
will stop until she sees me for herself.  
So I’m telling you to do as follows—  
take this vagrant stranger to the city.  
Once there, he can beg food from any man  
who’ll offer him bread and cups of water.  
I can’t take on the weight of everyone,  
not when I have these sorrows in my heart.  
As for the stranger, if he’s upset at this,  
things will be worse for him. Those are the facts,  
and I prefer to speak the truth.”

10

[10]

Odysseus,  
that adventurous man, then answered him and said:

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“Friend, I myself am not all that eager  
to be held back here. For a beggar man  
it’s better to ask people for a meal  
inside cities instead of in the fields.  
Whoever’s willing should give me something.  
For an old man, it’s not appropriate [20]  
to linger any longer at the farm,  
obeying everything a master says.  
So you should be on your way. This swineherd,  
who you give orders to, will take me there,  
as soon as I’ve warmed up beside the fire 30  
and the sun gets hot. These clothes I’m wearing  
are miserably bad, and I’m afraid  
the morning frost may be too much for me—  
you say the city is a long way off.”

Odysseus finished. Telemachus walked away,  
out through the farmyard, moving at a rapid pace.  
He was sowing seeds of trouble for the suitors.  
When he entered the beautifully furnished house,  
he carried in his spear and set it in its place,  
against a looming pillar. Then he moved inside, 40 [30]  
across the stone threshold. His nurse, Eurycleia,  
saw him before the others, while spreading fleeces  
on the finely crafted chairs. She burst out crying,  
rushed straight up to him, and other female servants  
of brave Odysseus were quick to gather round them.  
They kissed his head and shoulders in loving welcome.  
Then from her chamber wise Penelope emerged,  
looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.  
She embraced the son she loved, while shedding tears,  
and kissed his head and both his beautiful eyes. 50  
As her eyes wept, she spoke to him—her words had wings: [40]

“You’ve returned, Telemachus, you sweet light.  
I thought I’d never see you anymore,  
when you secretly sailed off to Pylos  
in that ship, against my wishes, seeking  
some report of your dear father. So come,  
describe for me what you have heard of him.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

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“Mother, do not encourage me to grieve,  
or get the heart inside my chest stirred up. 60  
I’ve just escaped being utterly destroyed.  
You should have a bath and put fresh clothing  
on your body. Then, with your attendants  
go to your upper chambers and promise  
the gods you’ll make a perfect sacrifice, [50]  
if Zeus will somehow bring to fulfillment  
actions which will give us retribution.  
I’ll go to the place where we assemble,  
so I can call upon a foreign man  
who came with me on my trip from Pylos. 70  
I sent him to town with my fine comrades,  
telling Peiraeus to make him welcome,  
to treat him kindly, and to honour him,  
until I got there.”

Telemachus finished.

Penelope was quiet—no winged words flew from her.  
She bathed herself, took fresh clothing for her body,  
and promised she would offer a perfect sacrifice  
to all the gods, if Zeus would somehow bring about  
a way of gaining her revenge against the suitors. [60]  
Telemachus walked through the hall, gripping his spear. 80  
Two swift dogs went with him. Athena poured on him  
such marvellous beauty that, as he moved along,  
all people gazed at him. The arrogant suitors  
thronged around him, making gentle conversation,  
but deep within their hearts they nurtured evil plans.  
Avoiding the main group of them, he chose a seat  
where Mentor, Antiphus, and Halitherses sat,  
companions of his father many years ago. [70]  
They asked him all kinds of questions. Then Peiraeus,  
the well-known spearman, approached, leading the stranger 90  
through the city to the place where they assembled.<sup>1</sup>  
Telemachus did not keep his back turned for long  
upon the stranger, but went up to him. Peiraeus  
was the first to speak:

“Telemachus,  
get some women to hurry to my home,

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<sup>1</sup>The “stranger” being led to the city is the prophet Theoclymenus, who earlier (in Book 16) asked Telemachus to take him in his ship to Ithaca.

so I may have those gifts brought here to you—  
the ones from Menelaus.”

Shrewd Telemachus

then answered him and said:

“Peiraeus,  
we don’t know how these matters will turn out.  
If these overbearing suitors kill me 100  
in my own halls in secret and divide [80]  
the goods my father owns amongst themselves,  
I’d much prefer you keep those gifts yourself  
and enjoy them than any of those men.  
But if I sow a lethal fate for them,  
then bring those presents to me in my home,  
for I will be rejoicing in my heart.”

With these words, he led the long-suffering stranger  
towards the house. When they reached the stately palace,  
they removed their cloaks, put them on the stools and chairs, 110  
and went into the polished tubs to take a bath.  
After the attending women had washed both men,  
rubbed their bodies down with oil, and wrapped around them  
woollen cloaks and tunics, they came out from the bath, [90]  
and both of them sat down. A servant brought water  
in a lovely golden pitcher and poured it out  
into a silver bowl, so they could wash their hands.  
Beside both men she set in place a polished table.  
The worthy housekeeper brought bread and set it down,  
then added plates of meat, giving freely from her stores. 120  
Telemachus’s mother sat across from him,  
by the doorpost of the hall, leaning from her seat  
to spin fine threads of yarn. They reached out with their hands  
to take the fine food prepared and set before them.  
When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,  
the first to speak to them was wise Penelope: [100]

“Telemachus, once I’ve gone up to my room,  
I’ll lie in bed, which has become for me  
a place of sorrow, always damp with tears,  
ever since Odysseus sailed off to Troy 130  
with Atreus’s sons. Yet you don’t dare  
to tell me clearly of your father’s trip,

before those haughty suitors come back here  
and shame my home, no word of what you learned.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“All right then, mother, I’ll tell you the truth.  
First, we sailed to Pylos and reached Nestor,  
shepherd of his people. He welcomed us [110]  
into his home with hospitality  
and kindness, like a father for a son 140  
who has just returned from far-off places  
after many years—that’s how lord Nestor  
looked after me, helped by his splendid sons,  
with loving care. But of brave Odysseus,  
alive or dead, he had not heard a thing  
from any man on earth. He sent me off  
with horses and a well-built chariot  
to that famous spearman Menelaus,  
son of Atreus. I saw Argive Helen,  
for whom countless Trojans and Achaeans 150  
struggled hard, as the will of gods decreed.  
Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, at once [120]  
questioned me: Why had I come to Sparta?  
What was I was looking for? I told the truth,  
all the details. He answered me and said:

“That is disgraceful! They want to lie down  
in the bed of a courageous warrior,  
when they themselves are cowards—just as if  
a doe has put two new-born suckling fawns  
in a lion’s thicket, so they can sleep, 160  
and roams mountain slopes and grassy valleys  
seeking pasture, and then the lion comes  
back to that lair and brings a dismal fate [130]  
for both those fawns—that is how Odysseus  
will bring those men to their disastrous end.  
By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,  
how I wish he could be as he was once  
in well-built Lesbos, in a wrestling match,  
when he stood and fought Philomeleides,  
threw him decisively, and all Achaeans 170  
felt great joy—if he were that sort of man,  
Odysseus might well mingle with the suitors  
and destroy them all, a bitter courtship.

As for the things you're asking me about,  
 begging me to speak, I'll not evade them  
 or lead you astray. No. I won't neglect  
 or hide a single word that I was told  
 by that all-knowing Old Man of the Sea. [140]  
 He claimed to me that he had seen Odysseus  
 on an island, suffering great distress 180  
 in nymph Calypso's home—she keeps him there  
 by force. He can't get to his native land  
 because he has no ship available,  
 no oars, and no companions, men who might  
 transport him on the broad back of the sea.'

That's what great spearman Menelaus said,  
 the son of Atreus. When I was finished,  
 I came home, and the immortals gave me  
 favouring winds which quickly carried me  
 back to my home once more."

Telemachus's words 190 [150]  
 stirred the heart within her chest. Then among the group  
 Theoclymenus, a godlike man, spoke out and said:

"Noble wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,  
 Menelaus has no certain knowledge.  
 You should attend to what I have to say,  
 for I will make a truthful prophecy  
 and not conceal a thing. Now, let lord Zeus,  
 first among the gods, act as my witness,  
 and this fine table welcoming your guests,  
 and the hearth of excellent Odysseus, 200  
 which I have reached—Odysseus is, in fact,  
 in Ithaca already, sitting still  
 or moving, learning of these wicked acts,  
 and sowing trouble for every suitor. [160]  
 That's how I interpret that bird omen  
 which I saw, sitting on the well-decked ship—  
 that's what I told Telemachus back then."

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

"Ah stranger, how I wish what you've just said  
 might come about. For then you'd quickly learn 210

how kind we are, how many gifts I'd give—  
anyone you met would call you blessed."

That is how they talked to one another of these things.  
Meanwhile, in front of the palace of Odysseus,  
the suitors were relaxing, throwing a discus  
and tossing javelins on a patch of level ground,  
as was their custom, displaying their arrogance.  
When it was time for dinner and the sheep arrived,  
coming from the fields in all directions, with those  
whose task it was to drive them there, Medon spoke up.  
He was the herald they liked more than all the rest,  
and he was always with them when they had a feast:

[170]

220

"Young men, now you have entertained your hearts  
with tests of skill, so come inside the house,  
and we'll prepare a meal. There's nothing wrong  
with eating when it's time to have some food."

Medon spoke. Persuaded by his words, the suitors  
stood up and moved away. When they reached the palace,  
they removed their cloaks and draped them on stools and chairs.  
Men sacrificed huge sheep and goats with lots of fat.  
They killed some plump hogs and a heifer from the herd,  
as they prepared the meal.

230 [180]

Meanwhile Odysseus

and the loyal swineherd were hastening to leave  
their country fields and start walking to the city.  
Eumaeus, a worthy man, was the first to speak:

"Stranger, you are eager to reach the town,  
as my master asked, and to go today.  
Myself, I'd rather leave you at the farm  
to guard it, but I respect and fear him,  
for he may reprimand me afterwards,  
and a master's punishment can be severe.  
So come now, let's be off. Most of the day  
has passed already, and as evening comes  
you'll quickly sense how cold the air can get."

240

[190]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:



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“I see that. I know. You’re talking to a man  
who understands. So let’s be setting out.  
You take the lead. Show me the way to town.  
But if you’ve got a pole somewhere that’s cut  
for you to lean on, then give it to me. 250  
For you did say the road is slippery.”

Odysseus finished, then threw around his shoulders  
his tattered bag, full of holes, with a twisted strap.  
Eumaeus offered Odysseus a staff he liked.  
Then the two of them set off, while dogs and herdsmen [200]  
remained behind to guard the farmyard. The swineherd  
led his master to the city, like a beggar  
leaning on a stick, an old and wretched vagrant,  
with his body covered by shabby, threadbare rags.  
But as they made their way along the rugged path, 260  
getting near the city, they reached a well-made spring,  
built by Ithacus, Neritus and Polyctor,  
where townsfolk drew their water from a steady flow.<sup>1</sup>  
Around it was a poplar grove, fed by its stream.  
They grew on all sides of the spring. Cold water flowed  
down from a rock above. High up on the summit, [210]  
an altar had been dedicated to the nymphs,  
where all the people passing by made offerings.  
Here Melanthius, son of Dolius, met them—  
he was driving a herd of goats, the finest ones 270  
in all the flocks, to serve as dinner for the suitors.  
Two herdsmen followed him. When he caught sight of them,  
Melanthius started yelling shameful insults—  
Odysseus in his heart was enraged at such abuse:

“Now here we have a truly filthy man  
leading on another filthy scoundrel.  
As always, a god matches like with like.  
You wretched swineherd, where are you off to  
with this disgusting pig, this beggar man,  
a tedious bore who’ll interrupt our feasts? 280 [220]  
He’ll rub his shoulders on many doorposts,  
begging scraps—no need for sword or cauldron.<sup>2</sup>  
If you’d let me have him guard my farmyard,

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<sup>1</sup>Ithacus, Neritus, and Polyctor were the ancient founders of Cephallenia and Ithaca.

<sup>2</sup>Melanthius is mocking the beggar’s status. All he wants is scraps of food, so the traditional trophies sought by and awarded to successful warriors (swords and cauldrons) are irrelevant to him.

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clean out the pens, and carry tender shoots  
to my young goats, then he could drink down whey  
and put some muscle on those thighs of his.  
But since he's picked up his thieving habits,  
he has no urge to cope with real work.  
No. He'd rather creep around the country  
and beg food to fill his bottomless gut. 290  
I'll tell you something—and this will happen—  
if he goes in the home of brave Odysseus, [230]  
many a footstool hurled by real men  
will hit his ribs and all parts of his head,  
while he gets tossed around all through the house."

Melanthius spoke, and as he moved on past them,  
the stupid herder kicked Odysseus on the hip.  
But that did not dislodge Odysseus from the path.  
He stood there without budging. He was wondering  
whether he should charge in and kill him with his staff, 300  
or grab him by the waist, lift him up, and smash his head  
down on the ground. But he controlled himself, checking  
the fury in his heart. Eumaeus looked at the man,  
scolded him, then, lifting up his hands in prayer,  
he cried aloud:

"You spring nymphs, daughters of Zeus, [240]  
if for your sake Odysseus ever burned  
pieces of thigh from lambs or from young goats,  
richly wrapped in fat, grant me this prayer—  
let my master come, guided by some god.  
He would soon shatter the rude presumption 310  
that you now, in your insolence, display,  
always wandering down into the town,  
while wicked herdsmen devastate our flocks."

Melanthius the goatherd answered him and said:

"Dear me, the things this crafty mongrel says!  
I'll take him someday on a trim black ship  
far from Ithaca—he can make me rich. [250]  
O how I wish Apollo's silver bow  
would strike Telemachus in his own house  
this very day, or that he'd be silenced 320  
by all the suitors, for the day Odysseus

BOOK SEVENTEEN

will be returning home has disappeared  
in some land far away.”

Melanthius said this  
and left them there, as they trudged slowly onward.  
He strode ahead and quickly reached the royal house.  
He went in at once and sat among the suitors,  
opposite Eurymachus, who was fond of him  
more so than were the others. A household servant  
set down a portion of the meat in front of him.  
The worthy housekeeper then carried in the bread  
and placed it there for him to eat. 330

Meanwhile Odysseus [260]  
and the loyal swineherd paused as they came closer.  
Around them rang the music of the hollow lyre,  
for Phemius was striking up a song to sing  
before the suitors. Odysseus clutched the swineherd  
by the hand and said to him:

“Eumaeus,  
this place surely is the splendid palace  
belonging to Odysseus. It’s easy  
to recognize, even when one sees it  
among many others, for here there is 340  
building after building, and this courtyard—  
it’s finished off with walls and coping stones,  
and there’s a double gateway well fenced in.  
No man could criticize a house like this.  
I notice many men are eating here—  
there’s smoke from roasting meat above the house, [270]  
and a lyre is playing. A god made that  
to serve as our companion at a feast.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

“You recognized it easily enough, 350  
for in other things you’re quite perceptive.  
But come, let’s consider how this business  
will be carried out. Either you go first  
and move inside the finely furnished house  
to join the suitors, while I stay outside,  
or, if you wish, stay here. I’ll go ahead.  
But don’t hang around for long, just in case

BOOK SEVENTEEN

someone sees you here outside and hits you  
or starts throwing something. That's my advice.  
You should think about it."

Long-suffering Odysseus 360 [280]  
then said to Eumaeus:

"I know. I see that.  
You're talking to a man who understands.  
But you go on ahead. I'll stay out here.  
Having things thrown at me or being hit  
is nothing new. My heart can bear all that,  
for I've put up with numerous hardships  
in war and on the waves. So let all this  
be added in with those. There is no way  
someone can hide a ravenous stomach—  
that torment which brings mortal men such grief. 370  
Because of it, they launch their well-built ships  
and transport evil to their enemies  
across the restless seas."

And so these two men [290]  
talked to each other about these things. Then a dog,  
prone in the dirt, raised its head and pricked up its ears.  
It was Argus, brave Odysseus's hunting dog,  
whom he himself had brought up many years ago.  
But before he could enjoy being with the hound,  
he'd left for sacred Troy. In earlier days, young men  
would take the dog to hunt wild goats, deer, and rabbits, 380  
but now, with his master gone, he lay neglected  
in the piles of dung left there by mules and cattle,  
heaped up before the doors, until the household slaves  
took it to manure some large field. Argus lay there, [300]  
covered in fleas. But then, when he saw Odysseus,  
who was coming closer, Argus wagged his tail  
and dropped his ears. But he no longer had the strength  
to approach his master. Odysseus looked away  
and brushed aside a tear—he did so casually  
to hide it from Eumaeus. Then he questioned him: 390

"Eumaeus, it's strange this dog is lying here,  
in the dung. He has a handsome body.  
I'm not sure if his speed once matched his looks

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or if he's like those table dogs men have,  
the pets their masters raise and keep for show." [310]

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

"Yes, this dog belongs to a man who died  
somewhere far away. If he had the form  
and acted as he did when Odysseus  
left him and went to Troy, you'd quickly see 400  
his speed and strength, and then you'd be amazed.  
No wild animal he chased escaped him  
in deep thick woods, for he could track a scent.  
He's in a bad way now. His master's dead  
in some foreign land, and careless women  
don't look after him. For when their masters [320]  
no longer exercise their power, slaves  
have no desire to do their proper work.  
For Zeus steals half the value of a man  
the day he's taken and becomes a slave." 410

This said, Eumaeus went inside the stately palace,  
straight into the hall to join the noble suitors.  
But once he'd seen Odysseus after nineteen years,  
Argus died, seized by the fatal clutch of Death.

As the swineherd Eumaeus came inside the house,  
godlike Telemachus was the first to see him,  
well before the others. He quickly summoned him  
by nodding. Eumaeus looked around, then picked up [330]  
a stool placed where a servant usually sat  
and carved massive cuts of meat to feed the suitors, 420  
when they were feasting in the house. He took this stool,  
placed it by Telemachus's table, facing him,  
and then sat down. Meanwhile, a herald offered him  
a portion of the meat, set it in front of him,  
and helped him to some bread served in a basket.  
Odysseus came in the house behind Eumaeus,  
looking like an old and miserable beggar,  
leaning on his staff, with his body dressed in rags.  
He sat on the ash wood threshold in the doorway,  
propping his back against a post of cypress wood, 430  
which a craftsman had cut and planed with utmost skill [340]  
and set in true alignment. Then Telemachus  
called the swineherd to him and from the basket took

an entire loaf and as much meat as he could hold  
in both his hands. As he did this he spoke to him:

“Take this food, and give it to the stranger.  
Tell him he can move among the suitors  
and solicit each of them in person.  
When a man is hungry, they say that shame  
is not a good companion.”

Telemachus spoke. 440

Once he had heard these words, Eumaeus went and stood  
beside Odysseus, then spoke to him—his words had wings:

“Stranger, Telemachus gives you this food [350]  
and invites you to move around and beg  
among the suitors, each in turn. He says,  
when one’s in need, it’s bad to feel ashamed.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“May lord Zeus, I pray, grant Telemachus  
be blest among all men. May he obtain  
whatever he desires in his heart.”

Once he’d said this, 450

he took the food in his two hands and set it down  
right there at his feet, on his tattered bag, and ate,  
while the minstrel sang to those feasting in the hall.  
When he had eaten and the godlike singer finished,  
the suitors were causing an uproar in the room.  
Athena approached Odysseus, Laertes’ son, [360]  
and urged him to beg for bread from all the suitors,  
so he might find out those who did respect the law  
and those who flouted their traditions. Even so,  
she would not let any of them evade his fate. 460

Odysseus then moved off to beg for scraps of bread,  
holding his hand out to each of them on every side,  
starting on the right, as if he had been a beggar  
for years and years. They pitied him and gave him bread,  
then asked about him, questioning one another  
who he was and where he came from. Then the goatherd,  
Melanthius, spoke out to them:

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“Listen to me, [370]  
those of you courting the glorious queen,  
about this stranger. I’ve seen him before.  
The swineherd was the one who brought him here. 470  
I don’t know his identity for sure  
or the family he claims to come from.”

Once he said this, Antinous turned on Eumaeus,  
to reprimand him:

“You really are a man  
who cares for pigs—why bring this fellow here  
into the city? As far as vagrants go,  
do we not have enough apart from him,  
greedy beggars who disrupt our banquets?  
Do you believe too few of them come here  
and waste away your master’s livelihood, 480  
so you invite this man to come as well?”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said: [380]

“Antinous, you may be a noble man,  
but what you’ve said is not a worthy speech.  
Who looks for strangers from another land  
and then in person asks them to come in,  
unless they’re workers in a public space—  
prophets, healers of disease, house builders,  
or gifted minstrels, who sing for our delight?  
Such men are summoned to where people live 490  
everywhere on boundless earth. But no one  
invites a beggar to consume his goods.  
You are abusive to my master’s slaves,  
more so than any of the other suitors,  
especially to me. But I don’t care,  
not while faithful Penelope lives here, [390]  
with brave Telemachus inside these halls.”

Then prudent Telemachus answered him and said:

“Be quiet. For my sake don’t reply to him  
with a long speech. It’s Antinous’s habit 500  
always to offer nasty provocation,  
to start a quarrel with abusive words.  
He urges other men to do the same.”

That said, he spoke to Antinous—his words had wings:

“Antinous, you really do care for me,  
 like fathers for their sons, when you tell me,  
 in your forceful way, to drive this stranger  
 from the house. May god forbid such action.  
 Take some food and give it to him yourself—  
 I don’t mind. I’m asking you to do it.  
 You need not worry about my mother  
 or any of the servants in this house  
 belonging to godlike Odysseus. But still,  
 there is no thought like this inside your heart—  
 you’d much prefer to stuff yourself with food  
 than give it to another man.”

510 [400]

Antinous

then answered him and said:

“Telemachus,  
 you’re a braggart and won’t control your rage.  
 What are you saying? If every suitor  
 offered him as much as I will, this house  
 would make him stay away at least three months.”

520

As he said this, he picked up a stool standing there,  
 where he used to rest his shining feet while feasting,  
 and lifted it up high, as if about to throw it.  
 But every other suitor offered Odysseus food,  
 and so his bag was quickly filled with meat and bread,  
 enough to make him stop and shuffle to his place  
 back in the doorway where he could squat down and eat  
 the food the suitors gave. But he stopped by Antinous,  
 and spoke to him, saying:

[410]

“My friend, give something.  
 You don’t seem to me the worst Achaean,  
 but one of the best—you have a regal look.  
 So you should give a bigger piece of bread  
 than other men. I’d publicize your fame  
 across the boundless earth. For once I, too,  
 lived among those in my home, a rich man  
 with a happy life. There were many times  
 I’d offer presents to some vagabond,

530

[420]



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no matter who he was or what he needed  
when he came. I had countless servants 540  
and many other things that people have  
when they live well and are considered rich.  
But Zeus, son of Cronos, destroyed all that.  
That's what he wanted, I suppose. He sent me  
with some roaming pirates off to Egypt,  
a lengthy trip. He wanted me to die.  
I moored my curving ships in Egypt's river  
and told my loyal comrades to stay there  
and protect the ships. Then I sent out scouts [430]  
to go up to the lookouts. But the crew, 550  
giving way to impulse and counting on  
their numbers, quickly set off to ravage  
the attractive farms of the Egyptians,  
capturing the women and their children,  
while slaughtering the men. The cry went up,  
and soon it reached the city. Hearing noise,  
the people came as soon as dawn appeared—  
the entire plain was filled with men on foot  
and in chariots, armed with gleaming bronze.  
Then Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt, threw down 560  
dreadful panic on my crew. None of them  
dared stand and face up to the enemy.  
Disaster loomed for us from every side.  
With their sharp bronze they killed a lot of us, [440]  
but others they led off while still alive  
so they could be compelled to work for them.  
They gave me to a stranger they had met,  
bound for Cyprus, Dmetor, son of Iasus,  
a man with power and king of Cyprus.  
From there I reached this place in great distress." 570

Then Antinous answered him and said:

“What god  
sent this nuisance to interrupt our feast?  
Leave my table alone! Go over there,  
in the middle, or you'll soon find yourself  
somewhere worse than Cyprus or in Egypt.  
You're an insolent and shameless beggar—  
you come up to each of us, one by one,  
and they give you things, with no holding back, [450]  
for there's no check or scruple when one gives

from someone else's goods, and each of us  
has so much food set here in front of him." 580

Resourceful Odysseus then moved back and replied:

"Well now, it seems as if that mind of yours  
doesn't match your looks—you'd refuse to give  
even a grain of salt from your own house  
to a followers of yours, and now you sit  
in someone else's house and do not dare  
to take some bread and offer it to me.  
And yet there's plenty right in front of you."

Odysseus finished. Antinous deep in his heart 590  
was even angrier than before. He glared at him,  
and, with a scowl, gave his response—his words had wings:

"I do not think you'll leave this hall unharmed, [460]  
now that you've begun to babble insults."

As he said these words, he grabbed the stool and threw it.  
It hit Odysseus at the base of his right shoulder,  
where it joins the back. But he stood firm, like a rock—  
what Antinous had thrown did not make him stagger.  
He shook his head in silence, making cruel plans.  
He shuffled to the door, set down his well stuffed bag, 600  
crouched in the entranceway, and addressed the suitors:

"Listen to me, you suitors of the queen—  
for in my chest my heart prompts me to speak.  
A man's heart feels no pain and does not grieve [470]  
when he's hit fighting for the things he owns,  
for cattle or white sheep. But Antinous  
just struck me thanks to my wretched belly,  
that curse which brings such pain to mortal men.  
So if beggars have their gods and Furies,  
may Antinous come to a fatal end, 610  
before his wedding day."

Antinous, Euepeithes' son,  
gave him this reply:

"Sit still and eat, stranger,  
or go someplace else, in case younger men

BOOK SEVENTEEN

haul you through the house by your hands and feet  
for what you say, scraping your whole body.” [480]

He finished. But all those proud men were furious,  
and one of the more insolent young men spoke out:

“Antinous, it was wrong of you to hit  
a wretched beggar. And you may be doomed,  
if somehow he’s a god come down from heaven. 620  
For gods can truly make themselves appear  
like foreign strangers, assuming many shapes  
and haunting cities, to investigate  
men’s pride and their obedience to laws.”

That’s what the suitors said. However, Antinous  
paid no attention to their words. Telemachus,  
having seen the blow, felt pain growing in his heart.  
But no tear passed his eyelids and dripped onto the floor. [490]  
He remained silent, shaking his head and planning  
dark schemes in his heart.

But when wise Penelope 630  
heard that the stranger had been hit inside the hall,  
she spoke out to her attendant women, saying:

“O how I wish Antinous might be struck  
by the famous archer god, Apollo!”

The housekeeper, old Eurynome, said to her:

“If what we all pray for could be fulfilled,  
not one of them would see Dawn’s lovely throne.”

Wise Penelope then answered her:

“Good nurse,  
they are all enemies with evil plans,  
but Antinous, more than any of them, 640 [500]  
is like black fate. Some unhappy stranger  
wanders through the house, begging from the men.  
His own need drives him to it. The others,  
all of them, gave him gifts and filled his bag,  
but Antinous threw a footstool at him  
and hit a bone in his right shoulder blade.”

So Penelope talked with her serving women,  
sitting in her upper room, while Odysseus ate.  
Then she called out to the loyal swineherd, saying:

“Good Eumaeus, go and ask the stranger  
to come here, so I can greet him warmly  
and ask if he perhaps has heard about  
my brave Odysseus, or caught sight of him  
with his own eyes. For he looks like a man  
who’s spent a long time wandering around.”

650

[510]

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered her and said:

“How I wish Achaeans would keep quiet,  
my queen, for he tells the kind of stories  
which delight one’s heart. I had him with me  
for three nights, and for three days I kept him  
in my hut. He came to me first of all—  
he was fleeing in secret from a ship.  
He never finished what he had to say  
of his misfortunes. Just as any man  
hears a minstrel who sings enticing songs  
to mortal men, ones the gods have taught him,  
and there’s no end to his desire for more,  
no matter what he sings, that’s how this man  
enchanted me, as he sat in my home.  
He claims that he’s a guest-friend of Laertes  
from Crete, where the race of Minos lives,  
He’s come from there, after many hardships,  
as he keeps wandering from place to place.  
He insists he’s heard about Odysseus—  
who is close by, living in the rich land  
of Thesprotians—with many treasures  
which he intends to bring back home.”

660

[520]

670

Wise Penelope  
then answered him:

“Go and call him here—  
he can tell me for himself. Let the men  
keep sitting in the hall or at the door  
enjoying themselves—their hearts are cheerful.  
Their own possessions lie untouched at home,

[530]

680

BOOK SEVENTEEN

sweet wine and bread, which their house servants eat.  
But they fill up our home day after day,  
butchering our cattle, fat sheep, and goats,  
carousing and drinking our gleaming wine  
without restraint. Much of it is wasted.  
There's no one like Odysseus here who'll guard  
our house from ruin. If Odysseus came  
back here to Ithaca, he and his son  
would quickly seek revenge on all these men  
for their unseemly ways.”

690 [540]

As Penelope said this,  
Telemachus gave a mighty sneeze—it echoed  
through the house. Penelope laughed and quickly spoke  
some winged words to Eumaeus:

“Call the stranger.  
Bring him here before me. Did you not see  
my son sneezing at everything I said?  
The complete destruction of the suitors  
will not go unfulfilled—for all of them—  
not one will flee his fatal destiny.<sup>1</sup>  
I'll tell you something else. Lay it to heart.  
If I can see he's telling me the truth,  
I'll offer him fine clothes, a cloak and tunic.”

700 [550]

Penelope finished. Once Eumaeus heard her,  
he went off and, standing close beside Odysseus,  
spoke to him—his words had wings:

“Honoured stranger,  
wise Penelope is summoning you,  
Telemachus's mother. For her heart,  
in spite of bearing much anxiety,  
is urging her to ask about her husband.  
If she perceives that everything you say  
is true, she'll give you a cloak and tunic,  
things you desperately need. As for food,  
you can beg for it throughout the country  
and fill your stomach. Whoever's willing  
will give it to you.”

710

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<sup>1</sup>Sneezes were sometimes viewed as omens, hence Penelope's prophetic tone.

Long-suffering lord Odysseus [560]  
then answered him:

“Eumaeus, I’ll tell the truth,  
all the details, to wise Penelope,  
daughter of Icarius, and quickly, too.  
I know Odysseus well—for both of us 720  
have had the same misfortunes. But I fear  
this abusive crowd of suitors, whose pride  
and violence reach up to iron heaven.  
Just now, as I was moving through the house,  
doing nothing wrong, one of them struck me  
and caused me pain—and no one sitting there,  
not even Telemachus, could do a thing  
to stop him. So you should tell Penelope,  
for all her eagerness, to wait right now,  
there in the hall, until the sun goes down. 730 [570]  
Let her ask me then about her husband  
and the day of his return. Let me sit  
close by the fire, for the clothes I’m wearing  
are pitiful, as you yourself well know,  
since I came to you first of all for help.”

Odysseus finished. Once he’d listened to these words  
the swineherd went away. As he crossed the threshold,  
Penelope said:

“He’s not with you, Eumaeus.  
Why is the beggar acting in this way?  
Is he somehow too afraid to come here, 740  
or does he feel ashamed by something else?  
He’s a poor beggar if he feels disgraced.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered her and said:

“What he said made sense—what any man [580]  
would think if he was planning to avoid  
the insolence of those presumptuous men.  
He says you should wait for him till sunset.  
And, my queen, it would be appropriate  
for you to talk in person to this man,  
so you yourself will hear what he may say.” 750

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“The stranger is not stupid. For he thinks  
about the dangers that may well threaten.  
I don’t believe that any mortal men  
are as high-handed as these suitors are,  
the way they plan their wicked foolishness.”

Penelope spoke. Once he’d told her everything,  
the loyal swineherd mixed with the crowd of suitors. [590]  
Moving up close to Telemachus, so others  
could not hear, he spoke to him—his swift words had wings: 760

“Friend, I’m going to leave and guard the swine  
and other things, your livelihood and mine.  
You take charge of what’s going on in here.  
First and foremost, protect yourself. Your heart  
must stay alert, so you don’t suffer harm.  
Many Achaeans are hatching evil plans—  
may Zeus kill them all before they harm us.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

“It will happen, old friend. Now, you should eat  
before you leave. Come here in the morning, 770  
and bring fine animals for sacrifice. [600]  
Everything in here will be my concern,  
mine and the immortals.”

Telemachus spoke.  
The swineherd sat down on the polished chair again.  
Once he had filled his heart with food and drink, he left,  
returning to his pigs, through the hall and courtyard,  
where the throngs of suitors were enjoying themselves  
with dance and song, for evening had already come.

BOOK EIGHTEEN  
ODYSSEUS AND IRUS THE BEGGAR

*[Irus the beggar arrives at the palace and starts abusing Odysseus; the suitors encourage them to fight; in the scrap Odysseus knocks Irus out; Odysseus warns Amphinomus of trouble ahead; Athena makes Penelope want to appear before the suitors; Athena puts Penelope to sleep and makes her more beautiful; Penelope wakes up and goes downstairs to mix with the suitors; Telemachus and Penelope talk about the stranger; Penelope encourages the suitors to bring presents for her, and they do so; Odysseus talks to the female servants, criticizing them for assisting the suitors; Odysseus holds up the lamps for the suitors at their feast; Eurymachus makes fun of Odysseus, and Odysseus give him a heated reply; Eurymachus throws a stool at Odysseus but misses and hits the wine steward; Telemachus and Amphinomus restore order; the suitors continue feasting and then leave.]*

Then a vagrant from the community arrived,  
who used to beg through all the town of Ithaca,  
a beggar famous for his gluttonous stomach,  
with an incessant appetite for food and drink.  
He looked huge, but had little energy or strength.  
This man was called Arnaeus—his honoured mother  
had given him that name when he was born, but now  
all young men called him Irus, since he ran around  
carrying messages for anyone who asked.<sup>1</sup>  
Entering the hall, he tried to drive Odysseus  
away from his own home by shouting out abuse—  
his words had wings:

10

“Get out of the door, old man,  
or you’ll be hauled off by your feet. You see  
how they’re all winking at me, telling me  
to pull you out? As far as I’m concerned,  
I’d be ashamed to do it. So get up,  
or else we’ll fight this quarrel with our fists.”

[10]

Resourceful Odysseus frowned, looked at him, and said:

“My good man, I am not bothering you,  
nor am I shouting insults. I don’t mind  
if someone gives you something, even if  
he offers a generous portion. This door

20

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<sup>1</sup>The name *Irus* is probably a masculine version of *Iris*, the name of the goddess who carries messages for the gods.



has room for both of us, and there's no need  
to care about what someone else may get.  
You seem to be a vagrant, just like me—  
gods are supposed to make us happy men.  
But don't provoke me too much with your fists, [20]  
in case you make me angry. Though I'm old,  
I might spatter your lips and chest with blood.  
If so, I could enjoy more peace tomorrow, 30  
for I don't think you'd come a second time  
to Odysseus' home, son of Laertes."

That made the beggar Irus angry, so he said:

"Well, how nicely this filthy beggar talks,  
like an old woman from the baking ovens.  
But I'll make trouble for him. I'll punch him  
with both fists on the jaw, smash all his teeth  
into the ground, and treat him like a sow  
who's been devouring the crop. Come now,  
tighten your belt, so all these people here 40 [30]  
can recognize that we're about to fight.  
How can you go against a younger man?"

As their tempers heated up, they both grew angry  
on the polished threshold beside the lofty doors.  
Strong and powerful Antinous observed them there,  
and, laughing cheerfully, shouted to the suitors:

"My friends, here's something we've not seen before.  
A god has sent this house some entertainment!  
There's a quarrel—Irus and the stranger.  
They're going to fight each other with their fists. 50  
Let's get them started now!"

Antinous's words [40]  
made the suitors jump up laughing. They gathered there,  
around the shabby beggars. Then Eupheithes' son,  
Antinous, said to them:

"Listen to me,  
you brave suitors. I've something to suggest.  
We've got goats' bellies lying by the fire,  
stuffed full of fat and blood, our dinner meal.  
Whichever of these two men wins this fight

and proves the better man, let him stand up  
 and take the one he wishes for himself. 60  
 And he will always eat his meals with us.  
 Nor will we allow another beggar  
 to come into our group and ask for food.”

Antinous finished. They were pleased with what he said. [50]  
 Then, resourceful Odysseus with his crafty mind  
 spoke to them:

“My friends, there’s no way an old man  
 weighed down with grief can fight a younger man.  
 But that trouble-making stomach of mine  
 urges me to try, so he may beat me  
 with his blows. But come now, let all of you 70  
 swear a binding oath that not one of you  
 supporting Irus will use his heavy fists  
 to strike at me unfairly, and by force  
 overpower me on Irus’s behalf.”

Odysseus spoke. They all vowed to act as he had asked.  
 After they had promised and finished with the oath,  
 Telemachus spoke up with strength and confidence, [60]  
 so all could hear:

“Stranger, if your proud spirit  
 and your heart drive you on to beat this man,  
 don’t fear a single one of these Achaeans. 80  
 Whoever strikes at you will have to fight  
 with many more as well. I am your host,  
 and the two princes here agree with me,  
 Antinous and Eurymachus, both men  
 who understand things well.”

Telemachus spoke,  
 and everyone endorsed his words. Then Odysseus,  
 while hitching up the rags around his private parts,  
 exposed his fine large thighs, and they could also see  
 his well muscled shoulders, chest and powerful arms.  
 Athena stood beside that shepherd of his people 90 [70]  
 and enlarged his limbs. Each suitor, quite astonished,  
 glanced quickly at the man beside him and muttered  
 words like these:

BOOK EIGHTEEN

“Irus will soon be in trouble,  
something he brought on himself—he won’t be  
Irus any more, judging from the thighs  
that old man shows under those rags of his.”

That’s how they talked. Irus’s heart was badly shaken.  
The servants girded up his clothes and led him out.  
He was afraid—flesh quivering on every limb—  
but they pushed him forward. Antinous sneered at him, 100  
addressing him right to his face:

“You bragging fool,  
if you’re afraid and tremble at this man, [80]  
you should not live or ever have been born.  
He’s an old man worn down by misfortunes  
that have made him feeble. I’ll tell you this,  
and what I say will happen—if this beggar  
beats you and proves himself the better man,  
I’ll throw you in a black ship and take you  
over to the mainland to king Echetus,  
who tortures everyone.<sup>1</sup> With pitiless bronze 110  
he’ll cut off your nose and ears, slice away  
your cock and balls and throw them to the hounds,  
raw meat for his dogs to rip to pieces.”

Antinous spoke. An even greater trembling seized  
the vagrant’s legs, as they led him to the middle.  
Both men raised their fists. At that point lord Odysseus, [90]  
who had endured so much, was of two minds—should he  
hit Irus so his life would leave him where he fell,  
or should he strike him with a less destructive blow  
and stretch him on the ground? As he thought about it, 120  
this seemed the better choice—to hit him with less force,  
so Achaeans would not look at him too closely.  
They both raised their fists, and Irus struck Odysseus  
on his right shoulder, but Odysseus then struck him  
on his neck, just below his ear, and crushed the bones.  
Immediately blood came flowing from his mouth.  
He fell down moaning in the dirt, grinding his teeth.  
His feet kept kicking at the ground. The brave suitors  
all threw up their hands and almost died of laughter. [100]  
Odysseus grabbed Irus by the foot and dragged him 130

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<sup>1</sup>Echetus was king of Epirus and notorious for his extreme cruelty.

out the entranceway until he reached the courtyard  
and the portico gate. There he left him, leaning  
against the courtyard wall with his stick in his hands.  
Odysseus then spoke to Irus—his words had wings:

“Sit there and scare away the pigs and dogs.  
And do not, in your miserable state,  
try to bully foreigners and strangers.  
You may end up in even worse distress.”

As he spoke, he threw his tattered bag full of holes  
across his shoulders, hanging by a twisted strap. 140  
Then he went back into the doorway and sat down.  
The suitors went inside, laughing uproariously, [110]  
and threw him words of greeting as they passed him.  
One of the arrogant young men said something like:

“May Zeus and the other eternal gods  
give you, stranger, the thing you most desire,  
what fills your heart—since now you will prevent  
that greedy vagrant begging in this place.  
We’ll soon take him over to the mainland,  
to Echetus, who mutilates all men.” 150

That is how they talked. Odysseus was happy  
at such friendly words. Antinous set down by him  
the immense goat stomach stuffed full of blood and fat,  
and Amphinomus picked two loaves from the basket, [120]  
placed them before Odysseus, and then toasted him  
with a golden cup, saying:

“Greetings, honoured stranger,  
though right now you’re facing many miseries,  
may happiness be yours in future days.”

Then resourceful Odysseus answered him and said:

“Amphinomus, you seem to be a man 160  
with true intelligence. Your father, too,  
had the same quality. I’ve heard about  
his noble name—Nisus of Dulichium,  
a brave and wealthy man. And people say  
you come from him, and you do seem discreet.  
I’ll tell you something you should keep in mind.

BOOK EIGHTEEN

Listen to me. Of all the things that breathe  
and move along the ground, Earth does not raise [130]  
any creature more powerless than man.  
He thinks he'll never suffer any harm 170  
in days to come, as long as gods provide  
prosperity and his knees stay supple.  
But when blessed gods bring on misfortunes,  
he bears those, too, though much against his will.  
The father of gods and men brings us days  
which shape the hearts of earth's inhabitants.  
Among men I was set to be successful,  
but, yielding to my strength and influence,  
I did many reckless things, relying  
on my father and my family. No man 180 [140]  
should ever practise any lawlessness.  
He should hold his gifts from gods in silence,  
whatever they may give. I see suitors here  
planning desperate acts, wasting the wealth  
and dishonouring the wife of a man who,  
I think, will not remain away for long,  
not from his family and native soil.  
He is close by. May some god lead you home,  
and may you not have to confront the man  
whenever he comes back to his own house. 190  
For I do not believe, once he returns  
under his own roof, he and the suitors  
will separate until much blood is shed." [150]

Odysseus spoke. After pouring a libation,  
he drank some honey wine, then handed back the cup  
to Amphinomus. That leader of the people  
went through the house, head bowed, with foreboding  
in his heart—he had a sense that many troubles  
still lay in store. Still, he did not escape his fate.  
Athena had ordained that he would be destroyed 200  
by a spear in the strong hand of Telemachus.  
He moved away, sitting where he had sat before.

Then goddess Athena with the glittering eyes  
put an idea in the mind of wise Penelope,  
Icarius's daughter—to approach the suitors,  
so she might truly stir the feeling in their hearts [160]  
and acquire more honour from her son and husband

than she had before.<sup>1</sup> With an unnatural laugh  
she spoke out and said:

“Eurynome, though my heart  
has never once desired to show myself  
before these suitors, it does now, shameless  
though they may be. And I’ve got words to say  
to my own son—he would be better off  
not mingling with those arrogant suitors.  
They may say nice things, but they’re making plans  
for nasty schemes in future.”

210

Old Erynome,  
her housekeeper, then answered her and said:

“My child,  
all these things you say make sense. You must go  
and say that to your son. Do not hide it.  
But first of all, you should wash your body  
and rub ointment on your face. Don’t leave here,  
not like this, showing both cheeks stained with tears.  
It’s not right to show your grief forever  
and never stop. Your son is old enough  
to grow a beard—and you prayed very hard  
to gods that you would see him reach that age.”

[170]

220

Then wise Penelope answered her and said:

“Eurynome, although you care for me,  
don’t tell me I should rinse my body off  
or rub oil on my skin. Gods on Olympus  
have ravaged all my beauty, since the day  
Odysseus went off in his hollow ships.  
Tell Hippodameia and Autonoe  
to come in here—they can stand beside me  
in the hall. For I won’t go there alone  
among the men. I’d be ashamed.”

230 [180]

Once she said this,  
the old woman went through the chamber to instruct  
the women and urge them to appear. Then once again,

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<sup>1</sup>This entire incident (lines 203 to 380) has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, especially concerning Penelope’s motivation and the style of the writing.

BOOK EIGHTEEN

Athena, bright-eyed goddess, thought of something else.  
She poured sweet sleep over Icarius's child, 240  
who leaned back and closed her eyes, lying on the couch,  
all her limbs relaxed. Meanwhile, the lovely goddess [190]  
gave her immortal gifts, so those Achaean men  
would be enchanted with her. First, she cleansed her face  
with a divine ointment made from ambrosia,  
like lotion lovely Cythera rubs on her skin  
when she attends the joyful dancing of the Graces.<sup>1</sup>  
She made her seem taller, too, and changed her figure,  
so she looked more like a queen, and whitened her skin—  
it shone more pale than fresh-cut ivory. That done, 250  
the lovely goddess left, and white-armed servants came,  
all chattering as they moved there from their chambers.  
Then sweet Sleep released Penelope. With her hands  
she rubbed her cheeks and said: [200]

“In spite of my great grief,  
a deep sweet sleep has held me in its arms.  
I wish pure Artemis would quickly bring  
a gentle death to me right now, so I  
no longer waste my life away, mourning  
in my heart and craving my dear husband,  
a man with every form of excellence, 260  
the finest of Achaeans.”

Once she said this,  
she made her way from her shining upper chambers.  
She was not alone—two attendants went with her.  
When the noble lady reached the suitors, she stood  
beside a pillar holding up the well-made roof,  
with a bright veil across her face. Loyal servants [210]  
stood there with her, one on either side. The suitors  
in their hearts felt immediately overwhelmed,  
consumed by sexual desire. Their legs grew weak.  
Each of them prayed that he could go to bed with her. 270  
She began to speak, first addressing her dear son:

“Telemachus, your wit and understanding  
are not as steady as they used to be.  
While still a child, the way you used to think  
was more astute. But now you're fully grown,

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<sup>1</sup>Cythera is another name for Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual attraction and beauty.

on the verge of being a man. Anyone  
 from somewhere far away who looked at you  
 and only saw your beauty and your size  
 might well observe that you're a rich man's son.  
 Yet your mind and thoughts are no longer wise. 280 [220]  
 What sort of actions are going on here,  
 in this house, when you allow a stranger  
 to be mistreated in this way? And now,  
 what if this stranger, sitting in our home,  
 should suffer harm from such severe abuse?  
 You'd be disgraced among all men and shamed."

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

"Mother, I don't take issue with you now  
 for being angry. I know about these things. 290  
 My heart understands them, all the details,  
 good and bad. I was still a child before.  
 But I can't think through everything correctly, [230]  
 with these men sitting round me on all sides—  
 they strike at me, devising evil plans,  
 and I have no one here to guard me. Still,  
 this battle between Irus and the stranger  
 did not turn out the way the suitors wished.  
 The stranger's strength made him the better man.  
 By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,  
 I wish these suitors now inside our home 300  
 could be defeated, just as Irus was,  
 their heads drooping down inside the courtyard  
 and inside the hall, each man's arms and legs  
 gone limp—that's how Irus is now sitting  
 beside the courtyard gate, nodding his head, [240]  
 like some drunken fool. He can't stand upright  
 or wander home, wherever his home is,  
 because his precious limbs have all gone slack."

As they were talking to each other in this way,  
 Eurymachus spoke to Penelope and said: 310

"Child of Icarius, wise Penelope,  
 if all Argives in Iasian Argos  
 saw you now, more suitors would be feasting  
 in your home from tomorrow on, since you



excel all women for your form, your poise,  
and for the wisdom you have in your heart.”<sup>1</sup>

Wise Penelope then answered him:

[250]

“Eurymachus,  
what’s excellent about my form and beauty  
the gods destroyed when Argives left for Troy  
and Odysseus, my husband, sailed with them.  
If he would come and organize my life,  
then I’d be more beautiful and famous.  
But now I’m grieving. A god has sent me  
so much trouble! You know, when he went off  
and left his native land, he held the wrist  
on my right hand and said to me:

320

‘Dear wife,  
I don’t believe that all well-armed Achaeans  
will make it safely back from Troy unharmed.  
For Trojans, people say, are warriors,  
who know how to fight with spears and arrows  
and guide swift-footed horses, all those skills  
which soon decide the outcome of a battle  
in impartial war. So I do not know  
if gods will get me back or I’ll be killed  
over there in Troy. You must take control  
of everything back here. While I’m away,  
take care of my parents in the palace  
the way you do right now, but even more.  
But when you see our son has grown a beard,  
then marry whom you wish, and leave the house.’

[260]

330

340 [270]

That’s what he said. Now it’s all happening.  
The night will come when some hateful marriage  
will be my lot, for now I am accursed—  
Zeus has deprived me of my happiness,  
and painful grief has come into my heart,  
into my spirit. The way you men behave  
was not proper for suitors in the past.  
Those who wish to court a noble lady,  
daughter of a wealthy man, and compete

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<sup>1</sup>The phrase *Iasian Argos* seems to mean *the entire Peloponnese* (i.e., all of mainland Greece south of the Isthmus of Corinth). In Homer, the term *Argos* is often rather imprecise.

BOOK EIGHTEEN

against each other, bring in their cattle, 350  
their own rich flocks, to feast the lady's friends,  
and offer splendid gifts. They don't consume  
another's livelihood and pay him nothing." [280]

Penelope finished. Long-suffering Odysseus  
was pleased that she was getting them to give her gifts,  
with charming, soothing words, her mind on other things.

Then Antinous, son of Eupeithes, spoke to her:

"Child of Icarus, wise Penelope,  
if one of the Achaeans wants to bring  
a gift for you in here, you should accept it. 360  
It's not good if you refuse a present.  
But we will not return to our estates  
or any other place, until you marry  
whoever is the best of the Achaeans."

Antinous spoke. The suitors all agreed with him, [290]  
and each man sent a herald out to fetch some gifts.  
One of them brought back, at Antinous's bidding,  
a large and lovely robe with rich embroidery.  
On it hung golden brooches, twelve in all, each one  
fitted with graceful curving clasps. Another man 370  
brought in a chain of gold made for Eurymachus,  
a finely crafted pendant strung with amber beads  
glowing like the sun. Two attendants carried back  
some earrings for Eurydamas, with three droplets  
in a stylish shining cluster. For Peisander,  
Polyctor's son, an attendant brought a necklace, [300]  
a splendid piece of jewellery. All Achaeans  
offered her some sort of gorgeous, costly gift.

Noble Penelope then left and went upstairs.  
Her servants carried up the lovely gifts for her. 380  
Then the suitors turned to joyful songs and dances,  
enjoying themselves and waiting for the sunset,  
and as they entertained themselves, black evening came.  
They set up three braziers in the hall for light  
and stacked hard seasoned wood around them, dry kindling  
freshly split by axe, placing torches in between. [310]  
Odysseus's servants held up the blazing flames.

BOOK EIGHTEEN

Then Odysseus, born from Zeus, man of many schemes,  
addressed those slaves in person:

“Servants of Odysseus,  
your master, who has been away so long, 390  
go to the rooms the honoured queen lives in,  
and twist the yarn beside her. Sit down there.  
Make her happy, by staying in the room  
or combing wool by hand. As for these lamps,  
I’ll keep providing light for all these men.  
Even if they wait here for fair-throned Dawn,  
they cannot wear me down, for I’m a man  
who can endure much suffering.”

Odysseus spoke. [320]  
The slaves looked at each other and burst out laughing.  
Then fair-cheeked Melanthe, daughter of Dolius, 400  
spoke out shamelessly. Penelope had raised her,  
treating her as her own daughter, providing toys,  
whatever she desired. And yet, in spite of this,  
her heart was never sorry for Penelope,  
for she loved Eurymachus and had sex with him.  
In an abusive speech, she rebuked Odysseus:

“You idiotic stranger, you’re a man  
whose mind has had all sense knocked out of it.  
You’ve no desire to sleep just anywhere,  
not in a blacksmith’s home or public house. 410  
Instead you’re here and babbling all the time.  
Around these throngs of men, you’re far too brash. [330]  
There’s no fear in your heart. In fact, the wine  
has stolen your wits, or else your spirit  
has always been that way and forces you  
to prattle on. Are you playing the fool  
because you beat up that beggar Irus?  
Take care another man, better than him,  
does not quickly come to stand against you.  
His heavy fists will punch you in the head, 420  
stain you with streams of blood, and shove you out,  
send you packing from this house.”

With an angry frown,  
crafty Odysseus then answered her and said:

“You bitch! I’ll go and tell Telemachus  
the way you talk, so he can cut you up,  
limb from limb, right here.”

Once Odysseus spoke, [340]  
his words made the women afraid, and they scattered,  
moving off and fleeing through the hall. Each of them  
could feel her limbs grow slack with fear—they all believed  
he was telling them the truth. Then Odysseus stood 430  
by the flaming braziers, keeping them alight.  
He looked at all the men. But in his chest his heart  
was making other plans, which he would act upon.

There was no way Athena would allow the suitors,  
those arrogant men, to stop behaving badly,  
so even more distress would sink into the heart  
of Laertes’ son, Odysseus. So Eurymachus,  
son of Polybus, began shouting to the suitors,  
insulting Odysseus, to make his comrades laugh. [350]

“Listen to me now, those of you courting 440  
the splendid queen, so I may speak to you  
of what the heart here in my chest is urging.  
The gods were not unwilling this man came  
into Odysseus’ home. In fact, I think  
the torchlight emanates from his own head  
because he’s got no hair up there at all.”<sup>1</sup>

Once he had said this, he then called to Odysseus,  
destroyer of cities:

“Stranger, do you like work?  
What if I hired you for some distant farm—  
I guarantee I’d pay—gathering stones 450  
to build up walls or planting lofty trees?  
I’d bring some food there for you all year round, [360]  
clothe you, and get some sandals for your feet.  
But since you’ve only learned to misbehave,  
you won’t want to acquaint yourself with work.

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<sup>1</sup>The point seems to be that Odysseus, who is standing by the burning braziers, must be radiating light (hence must be divine or getting divine help) because he has no hair on his head which might burn to produce a flame.

No. You'd prefer to beg throughout the land,  
collecting food for your voracious gut."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"Eurymachus, I wish the two of us  
could have a contest working in the spring, 460  
when long days come, both mowing down the grass.  
I'd have a curved scythe in my hands, and you  
with one just like it. Then we'd test ourselves,  
in lush grass, with no food to eat till dusk. [370]  
If we had oxen there, the best there are,  
massive tawny beasts, both well fed on grass,  
with strength that never tires, and in a field  
measuring four acres and holding soil  
which turns beneath the plough, then you would see  
if I could cut a straight unbroken furrow. 470  
If today the son of Cronos stirred up  
a battle somewhere and I had a shield,  
a pair of spears, and helmet made of bronze,  
well fitted to my temples, then you'd see  
how I'd join in with fighters at the front.  
And you'd not chatter on, insulting me [380]  
about my stomach. But you're much too proud,  
and your mind's unfeeling. You really think  
you have great influence and power,  
because you mingle with a few weak men. 480  
But if Odysseus ever got back here,  
to his native land, those doors over there,  
although they're really wide, would quickly seem  
too narrow for you, as you fled outside."

Odysseus finished. Eurymachus in his heart  
grew even angrier, and, with scowl, he spoke—  
his words had wings:

"You miserable man,  
I'll bring you trouble soon enough. You talk  
brashly in this way when you're in a crowd, [390]  
no fear in your heart! Wine has seized your wits, 490  
or else your mind has always been like this,  
and prattles vainly on. Have you gone mad  
just because you beat that beggar Irus?"

BOOK EIGHTEEN

As he said this, he picked up a stool. Odysseus  
took a seat beside the knee of Amphinomus  
from Dulichium, avoiding Eurymachus.

So Eurymachus struck a person serving wine  
on his right hand. The wine jug fell and hit the ground  
with a resounding clang. The server gave a groan,  
then fell over, backwards in the dirt. The suitors  
broke into an uproar in the shadowy halls,  
and one man, glancing at the person next to him,  
said something like these words:

“How I wish  
that wandering stranger there had perished  
somewhere else before he reached this place.  
He’d not be causing such a fuss among us.  
We are brawling over beggars. This meal,  
this splendid feast, will bring us no delight,  
now this dispute has got the upper hand.”

Telemachus then spoke with royal authority:

“You fools, you’ve gone insane and in your hearts  
no longer hide how much you eat and drink.  
You must be being incited by some god.  
So, now you’ve feasted well, return back home.  
When the spirit bids, you can get some rest.  
Still, I’m not chasing anyone away.”

Telemachus spoke. The suitors all bit their lips,  
astonished that he had spoken out so boldly.  
Then Amphinomus, the splendid son of Nisus,  
son of lord Aretias, spoke to them and said:

“Friends, when what a man says is something just,  
no one should get enraged and answer him  
with hostile words. Don’t abuse this stranger  
or any slaves in the home of lord Odysseus.  
But come, let the wine server pour some drops  
into our cups so we can make libations,  
and then go home and rest. This stranger here,  
we’ll leave him in Odysseus’s palace,  
and Telemachus can cater to him—  
after all, it is his home he came to.”

## BOOK EIGHTEEN

Amphinomus finished. They were all delighted  
with what he said. A herald from Dulichium,  
lord Mulus, attending on Amphinomus,  
mixed wine in a bowl for them and served the suitors,  
every one in turn. Then they poured libations  
to the sacred gods and drank wine sweet as honey.  
Once they had poured libations and had drunk more wine  
to their heart's content, they all went on their way,  
each man going to his own house to get some sleep.

BOOK NINETEEN  
EURYCLEIA RECOGNIZES ODYSSEUS

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

So lord Odysseus remained in the hall behind,  
thinking of ways he might overcome the suitors,  
with Athena's help. He spoke out immediately  
to his son—his words had wings:

“Telemachus,  
all these war weapons we must stash inside,  
and when the suitors notice they're not there  
and ask you questions, then reassure them,  
using gentle language:

‘I've put them away  
in a place far from the smoke. Those weapons  
are no longer like the ones Odysseus left 10  
when he set off for Troy so long ago.  
They've been tarnished. Fires have breathed on them  
and left their stain. Then, too, a god has set [10]  
great fear inside my heart—you men may drink  
far too much wine and fight amongst yourselves  
and wound each other. That would shame the feast  
and harm your courtship. For iron by itself  
can draw a man to use it.’”

Odysseus finished.  
The words his father said convinced Telemachus.  
He called his nurse, Eurycleia, and said to her: 20



“Nurse, come here and help me. Keep the women  
in their rooms, so I can put in storage  
these splendid weapons, which were my father’s.  
Since the time he left, when I was a child,  
no one’s looked after them, and they’ve been tarnished  
by smoky fires. Now I wish to keep them  
where they cannot be stained by breathing flames.” [20]

His dear nurse, old Eurycleia, then said to him:

“Yes, my child, may you always think about  
caring for this house, guarding all its wealth. 30  
But come, who will go off and fetch a light  
and carry it for you, if you won’t let  
the servant women, who could bear torches,  
walk out in front of you?”

Shrewd Telemachus

then answered her and said:

“This stranger will.  
I won’t let anyone who’s touched my food  
rest idle, not even if he’s come here  
from somewhere far away.”

Telemachus spoke.

She did not answer him—her words could find no wings.  
So in that stately hall she bolted shut the doors. 40 [30]  
Then both Odysseus and his splendid son jumped up  
and carried off the helmets, embossed body shields,  
and pointed spears. Pallas Athena was their guide,  
holding a golden lamp, which cast a lovely light.  
Then, all of a sudden, Telemachus spoke up:

“Father, what my two eyes are witnessing  
is an enormous wonder. In this room  
the beautiful rafters, the well-built walls,  
the fir beams, and high supporting pillars  
are glowing in my eyes, as if lit up 50  
by fire. Some god who holds wide heaven  
must be inside the hall.” [40]

Resourceful Odysseus

then answered him and said:

“Keep quiet.

Check those ideas and ask no questions.  
 This is how the gods who hold Olympus work.  
 You should go and get some rest. I’ll stay here,  
 so I can stir the servants even more—  
 and your mother. As she laments, she’ll ask  
 for each and every detail.”

Odysseus finished.

Telemachus moved away, striding through the hall, 60  
 below the flaming torches, out into the room  
 where he used to rest when sweet Sleep came to him.  
 Then he lay down in bed, waiting for early Dawn. [50]  
 Lord Odysseus stayed there, lingering in the hall,  
 thinking how to kill the suitors with Athena’s help.

Then wise Penelope emerged out of her room,  
 looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.  
 Beside the fire where she used to sit, servants placed  
 a chair for her, inlaid with ivory and silver.  
 Imalcius, a craftsman, had made it years ago. 70  
 He’d fixed a footstool underneath, part of the chair,  
 on which attendants used to throw a large sheep fleece.  
 Here wise Penelope sat, while white-armed servants [60]  
 came from the women’s hall and started to remove  
 lavish amounts of food, the tables, and the cups  
 high-spirited suitors had used to hold their wine.  
 They threw the embers in the braziers on the floor,  
 then filled them up once more with plenty of fresh wood  
 for warmth and light. But then Melantho once again  
 went at Odysseus, chiding him a second time: 80

“Stranger, are you about to pester us  
 in here at this hour and throughout the night,  
 roaming around the house, spying on slaves?  
 Get outside, you wretch, and be satisfied  
 with what you’ve had to eat, or soon enough  
 you’ll have to leave, beaten out with torches.”

Resourceful Odysseus scowled and then said to her: [70]

“You’re a passionate woman—why is it  
 you go at me like this, with such anger

in your heart? Is it because I'm filthy, 90  
 have shabby clothing covering my limbs,  
 and beg throughout the district? I have to—  
 sheer need forces that on me. That is what  
 beggars and vagabonds are like. But once  
 I was wealthy and lived in my own home,  
 in a rich house, too, among my people.  
 I often gave gifts to wanderers like me,  
 no matter who they were or what their needs  
 when they arrived. I had countless servants  
 and many other things that people own 100  
 when they live well and are considered rich.  
 But then Zeus, son of Cronos, ruined me. [80]  
 That's what he wanted, I suppose. And so,  
 woman, take good care that you, too, someday  
 do not lose that beauty which now makes you  
 stand out among the woman servants here.  
 Your mistress may lose her temper with you  
 and make things difficult, or Odysseus  
 may come home, for there's still a shred of hope.  
 Even if he's dead and won't come home again, 110  
 thanks to Apollo he's got Telemachus,  
 a son just like himself. And no woman  
 in this palace who acts with recklessness  
 escapes his notice. He's a child no more."

Odysseus spoke. Wise Penelope heard his words  
 and rebuked Melantho, saying:

"You can be sure,  
 you bold and brazen bitch, that I have seen  
 your shameless acts. You'll wipe away the stain  
 with your own head. You clearly know full well,  
 because you heard me say it—I'm planning 120  
 to ask this stranger in my halls some questions  
 about my husband, since I feel such grief."

Penelope paused, then spoke to Eurynome,  
 her housekeeper, and said:

"Eurynome,  
 fetch a chair over here with a thick fleece,  
 so the stranger can sit down, talk to me,  
 and hear me out. I want to question him."

Once Penelope had spoken, Eurynome [100]  
 quickly brought a polished chair and placed it by her.  
 She threw a sheep fleece over it. Lord Odysseus, 130  
 who had endured so much hardship, sat down with her.  
 Then wise Penelope began to speak to him:

“Stranger, first of all I’ll ask this question—  
 Who are you among men? Where are you from?  
 From what city? And where are your parents?”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Lady, no man living on boundless earth  
 could find fault with you. And your fame extends  
 right up to spacious heaven, as it does  
 for an excellent king who fears the gods 140  
 and governs many courageous people, [110]  
 upholding justice. His black earth is rich  
 in barley and in wheat, and his orchards  
 are laden down with fruit. His flocks bear young  
 and never fail, while seas yield up their fish—  
 all this from his fine leadership. With him  
 his people thrive. So here inside your home  
 question me about anything you wish  
 except my family or native land,  
 in case you fill my heart with still more grief, 150  
 as I remember them. For I’m a man  
 who’s suffered a great deal, and there’s no need  
 for me to sit here weeping my laments  
 in someone else’s house—for it’s not good [120]  
 to wallow in one’s grief and never stop,  
 in case the slaves or you yourself resent it  
 and say I swim in tears because my mind  
 is now besotted, drenched in too much wine.”

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“Stranger, the immortal gods took away 160  
 the excellence in my poise and body  
 when Argives got on board their ships for Troy,  
 and Odysseus went with them, my husband.  
 If he would come and organize my life,  
 my reputation would be even greater,

more beautiful, as well. But now I grieve.  
 Some god has laid on me a heavy load.  
 All the finest men who rule the islands— [130]  
 Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—  
 and those who live in sunny Ithaca, 170  
 these men are courting me against my will.  
 And they are ruining the house. That's why  
 I have no time for suppliants and strangers,  
 or for heralds who do the people's work.<sup>1</sup>  
 Instead I waste away my heart, longing  
 for Odysseus. They're all keen on marriage,  
 but I tricked them with my weaving. Some god  
 was the first to breathe into my heart the plan  
 that I should place a huge loom in the halls  
 and weave a robe of delicate design. 180 [140]  
 So I spoke to them at once:

'You young men,  
 my suitors, since Odysseus is dead,  
 you're keen for me to marry. You must wait  
 until I have finished with this garment,  
 so I don't weave this twisted yarn in vain.  
 It's a burial shroud for lord Laertes,  
 for when the lethal fate of his sad death  
 will seize him, so no Achaean woman  
 in the district will get angry with me  
 that a man who has acquired such great wealth 190  
 should have to lie in death without a shroud.'

That's what I said, and their proud hearts agreed.  
 So every day I'd weave at the big loom.  
 But at night, once the torches were set up, [150]  
 I'd unravel it. And so for three years  
 I tricked Achaeans into believing me.  
 But as the seasons came and months rolled on,  
 and many days passed by, the fourth year came.  
 That's when they caught me unravelling yarn—  
 thanks to my slaves, those ungrateful hussies. 200  
 The suitors all shouted speeches at me,  
 and, against my will, forced me to complete  
 that piece of weaving. Now I can't escape

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<sup>1</sup>Public heralds worked on public business, as opposed to heralds retained by rich aristocrats to carry their private messages.

the marriage or invent some other scheme.  
 My parents are urging me to marry,  
 and my son is worried about those men  
 eating his livelihood. He notices, [160]  
 because he's now a man, quite capable  
 of caring for a household to which Zeus  
 has granted fame. But tell me of your house, 210  
 the race you come from. For you did not spring  
 up from an oak tree in some ancient tale  
 or from a stone."

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

"Noble lady,  
 wife of Odysseus, Laertes's son,  
 will you never cease from asking questions  
 about my family? All right, I'll tell you.  
 But you'll be giving me more miseries  
 than those which grip my heart—as is the rule  
 when a man's been absent from his homeland 220  
 as long as I have, wandering around, [170]  
 through many towns of mortal men, suffering  
 great distress. Still, I'll answer what you ask,  
 the questions you have posed. There's a place  
 in the middle of the wine-dark sea called Crete,  
 a fertile land surrounded by the sea.  
 Many men live there, more than one can count,  
 in ninety cities. The dialects they speak  
 are all mixed up. There are Achaeans there,  
 as well as stout-hearted native Cretans, 230  
 Cydonians, three groups of Dorians,  
 and noble Pelasgians. Their cities  
 include great Cnossos, where king Minos reigned,  
 after he'd talked with Zeus for nine full years,  
 the father of my father, Deucalion, [180]  
 who, in turn, sired Idomeneus and me.  
 Idomeneus went away to Troy  
 in his beaked ships with Atreus's sons.  
 My name's well known—Aethon—the younger son.  
 Idomeneus, my elder brother, 240  
 was the finer man. I saw Odysseus there  
 and gave him welcoming gifts. The wind's force  
 brought him to Crete, as he was sailing on,

headed for Troy—it drove him off his course  
 past Malea. He'd moored at Amnisus,  
 where the cavern of Eilithyia lies,  
 in a dangerous harbour, fleeing the storm,  
 but only just.<sup>1</sup> He went immediately [190]  
 to the town, seeking Idomeneus,  
 saying he was his loved and honoured friend. 250  
 But by this time nine or ten days had passed  
 since Idomeneus and his beaked ships  
 had left for Troy. So I invited him  
 into my house and entertained him well,  
 with a warm welcome, using the rich store  
 of goods inside my home. For the others,  
 comrades who followed him, I gathered up  
 and gave out barley from the public stores,  
 gleaming wine, and cattle for sacrifice,  
 enough to satisfy their hearts. Those men, 260  
 Achaean lords, remained there for twelve days.  
 The howling North Wind kept them in that place— [200]  
 he would not even let them stand up straight.  
 Some angry deity had stirred him up.  
 But on the thirteenth day, the wind eased off,  
 and they put out to sea.”

As Odysseus spoke,  
 he made his many falsehoods seem just like the truth.  
 Penelope listened, tears flowing from her eyes.  
 Her flesh melted—just as up on high mountain peaks  
 snow drifts melt away beneath West Wind's warm thaw, 270  
 once East Wind starts to blow them down, and, as they melt,  
 the flowing rivers fill—that's how her lovely cheeks  
 melted then, as she kept weeping for her husband,  
 the man sitting there beside her.<sup>2</sup> Lord Odysseus  
 in his heart felt great pity for his grieving wife, [210]  
 but he held his eyes steady between his eyelids,  
 like horn or iron, and he kept up his deceit  
 and concealed his tears. But then, when Penelope  
 had had enough of her laments and shedding tears,  
 she spoke to him once more and said:

<sup>1</sup>Eilithyia is the goddess of childbirth, especially associated with the pains of labour.

<sup>2</sup>Following the suggestion of another editor (Myres), I have exchanged the name of the winds, since in Homer the West Wind is commonly associated with warmth and the East Wind with cold weather and snow.

“Now, stranger, 280  
 I think I’d really like to test you out,  
 to see if you did, in fact, entertain  
 my husband and his fine companions there,  
 in your halls, as you just claimed. So describe  
 the style of clothing he was wearing then  
 and the kind of man he was. And tell me  
 about his comrades, the ones there with him.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: [220]

“Lady, it’s difficult to tell you this 290  
 for any man who’s been away so long—  
 it’s almost twenty years since he set out  
 and sailed from Crete. But I’ll describe for you  
 how my heart pictures him. Lord Odysseus  
 wore a woollen purple cloak, a double one.  
 The brooch on it was made of gold—it had  
 a pair of clasps and a fine engraving  
 on the front, a dog held in its forepaws  
 a dappled fawn and gripped it as it writhed.  
 Everyone who saw it was astonished  
 at those gold animals—the dog held down 300 [230]  
 the fawn, as he throttled it, and the fawn  
 was struggling with its feet, trying to flee.  
 I noticed the tunic on his body  
 glistening like a dried-out onion skin—  
 it was so soft and shone out like the sun.  
 In fact, many women kept watching him  
 in wonder. And I’ll tell you something else.  
 Keep in mind I don’t know if Odysseus  
 dressed in these clothes when he was at home,  
 or whether some comrade gave them to him 310  
 on his swift ship after he went aboard,  
 or perhaps a stranger did—Odysseus  
 was liked by many men. Few Achaeans [240]  
 could equal him. I gave him gifts myself,  
 a bronze sword, an exquisite purple cloak,  
 with a double fold, and a fringed tunic,  
 and I sent him off on his well-benched ship  
 with every honour. In his company  
 he had a herald, older than himself,  
 but not by much. I’ll describe him for you. 320



BOOK NINETEEN

He looked like this—he had rounded shoulders,  
a dark skin, and curly hair. And his name  
was Eurybates. Odysseus valued him  
above all the rest of his companions—  
for he had a mind that could match his own.”

As Odysseus spoke, in Penelope he roused  
desire to weep still more, because she recognized  
in what Odysseus said signs that he spoke the truth. [250]  
But then, when she had had enough of tearful grief,  
she answered him and said these words:

“Stranger, 330  
though I pitied you before, in my home  
you’ll now find genuine welcome and respect.  
I was the one who put him in those clothes  
you talk about. I brought them from the room,  
smoothed them out, and pinned on the shining brooch  
to be an ornament for him. But now,  
I’ll not be welcoming him here again,  
when he returns to his dear native land.  
Odysseus set off with an evil fate  
to catch a glimpse of wicked Ilion, 340  
a place that we should never speak about.” [260]

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Wife of Odysseus, Laertes’s son,  
don’t mar your lovely skin or waste your heart  
by weeping for your husband any more.  
I don’t blame you in the least, for anyone  
would lament the husband she had married  
and then lost, one she’d had loving sex with  
and to whom she’d borne a child, even if  
he were not Odysseus, who, people say 350  
is just like the gods. But end your crying,  
and listen to my words. I’ll speak the truth,  
hiding nothing—I have already heard [270]  
about Odysseus’ return. He’s close by,  
in the wealthy land of Thesprotians,  
still alive and bringing much fine treasure  
with him. He’s urging men to give him gifts  
throughout that land. He lost his loyal crew  
on the wine-dark sea and his hollow ship,

as they were sailing from Thrinacia. 360  
 Zeus and Helios were angry with him—  
 his crew had slaughtered Helios's herds.  
 So they all perished in the surging sea.  
 But Odysseus, by clinging to the keel,  
 made it to shore, tossed by the waves on lands  
 of the Phaeacians, who by their descent  
 are close relations of the gods. These men  
 honoured him with all their hearts, as if [280]  
 he were a god. They gave him many gifts  
 and were eager to bring him home unharmed. 370  
 Odysseus would have been here long ago,  
 but to his heart it seemed a better plan  
 to visit many lands collecting wealth.  
 For above all mortal men, Odysseus  
 knows ways to win many advantages.  
 No other man can rival him in this.  
 That's what Pheidon, king of Thesprotians,  
 told me, and he swore to me in person,  
 as he poured out libations in his home,  
 the ship was launched and comrades were prepared 380  
 to take him back to his dear native soil. [290]  
 But before they left he sent me away.  
 It happened that a Thesprotian ship  
 was sailing for wheat-rich Dulichium.  
 He showed me all the expensive presents  
 lord Odysseus had assembled—enough  
 to feed ten generations of his family—  
 that's how much was lying in storage there,  
 in that king's house. He told me Odysseus  
 had travelled to Dodona to find out 390  
 from the towering oak what plans Zeus had  
 for the voyage back to his dear native land,  
 after being away so long.<sup>1</sup> Should he come  
 openly or not? He's nearby and safe [300]  
 and will be here soon. He won't stay away  
 from his friends in Ithaca much longer.  
 I'll make an oath on that for you. May Zeus  
 be my first witness, highest and best of gods,  
 and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,  
 which I have reached, all these things will happen 400

<sup>1</sup>Dodona, in Epirus, was an ancient centre for the worship of Zeus and a popular place to consult an oracle. The rustling sounds in the large oak tree there were believed to be the words of Zeus himself.

just as I describe. In this very month  
Odysseus will come, as the old moon wanes  
and the new moon starts to rise.”

Wise Penelope

then answered him and said:

“O stranger,  
I wish what you have said might come about.  
You’d soon come to recognize my friendship, [310]  
so many gifts from me that any man  
who met you would call you truly blessed.  
But my heart has a sense of what will be—  
Odysseus won’t be coming home again, 410  
and you’ll not find an escort out of here,  
because there are no leaders in this house,  
not the quality of man Odysseus was,  
if there was ever such a man, to welcome  
honoured strangers and send them on their way.  
But, you servant women, wash this stranger,  
and prepare a place to sleep—a bed, cloaks,  
bright coverlets—so in warmth and comfort  
he may await the golden throne of Dawn.  
Tomorrow morning early give him a bath 420 [320]  
and rub him down with oil, so he’ll be ready  
to take his seat inside the hall and eat  
beside Telemachus. Things will not go well  
for any one of them who injures him  
and pains his heart—that man will accomplish  
nothing further here, even though his rage  
is truly fierce. How will you learn from me,  
stranger, that I in any way excel  
among all women for my prudent plans  
and my intelligence, if you dine here, 430  
in my halls, dressed in filthy ragged clothes?  
Men don’t live long. And if a man is harsh  
and thinks unfeelingly, then everyone  
lays painful curses on his future life, [330]  
and when he’s dead they all make fun of him.  
But if a man is innocent and thinks  
with no sense of injury, then strangers  
spread his fame far and wide among all men,  
and many say ‘He truly is a man.’”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: 440

“Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
 I’ve hated cloaks and shining coverlets  
 since I first left the mountain snows of Crete,  
 when I departed on my long-oared ship.  
 So I’ll lie down, as I have done before [340]  
 through sleepless nights. For I have often lain  
 on filthy bedding, awaiting bright-throned Dawn.  
 And having my feet washed brings no delight  
 into my heart. No woman in your house  
 will touch my feet, none of those who serve you 450  
 in your home, unless there is an old one,  
 who knows true devotion and has suffered  
 in her heart as many pains as I have.  
 I’d not resent it if she touched my feet.”

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“Dear stranger, no visitor from far-off lands [350]  
 who’s come into my house has ever been  
 as wise as you or more welcome—your words  
 are all so sensible and kind. I have  
 a woman with an understanding heart. 460  
 She gave my helpless husband her fine care  
 the day his mother first gave birth to him.  
 Although she’s weak and old, she’ll wash your feet.  
 So come now, stand up, wise Eurycleia,  
 and bathe a man the same age as your master.  
 Odysseus may have feet and hands like his,  
 for mortal men soon age when times are bad.” [360]

Penelope spoke. The old woman clasped her hands  
 across her face and shed warm tears. Then she spoke out  
 uttering words of sorrow:

“Alas for you, my child. 470  
 There’s nothing I can do. Zeus must hate you  
 above all people, though you have a heart  
 that fears the gods. No mortal up to now  
 has given Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt,  
 so many rich burned pieces of the thigh,  
 or offered such well-chosen sacrifice  
 as you have made to him, praying to reach

a sleek old age and raise your splendid son.  
 But now from you alone he's taken away  
 the day that you'll return. And it may be 480 [370]  
 that women in some strange and distant land  
 make fun of him, as well, when he arrives  
 at some famous home, the way these hussies  
 mock you here, all of them. To stop their slurs,  
 their insults, you won't let them wash your feet.  
 But wise Penelope, Icarius' child,  
 has asked me to do it, and I'm willing.  
 For Penelope's sake I'll bathe your feet,  
 and for yours, since the heart in me is stirred  
 with sorrow. But come now, listen to me. 490  
 Hear what I say. Many worn-out strangers  
 have come here, but none of them, I tell you,  
 was so like him to look at—your stature, [380]  
 voice, and feet are all just like Odysseus."

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her and said:

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

After these words from Odysseus,  
 the old woman took a bright bowl to wash his feet. 500  
 She poured in plenty of cold water and added  
 warmer water to it. Odysseus then sat down  
 some distance from the hearth and quickly turned around  
 towards the darkness. For suddenly in his heart  
 he was afraid that, when she touched him, she might see [390]  
 a scar he had, and then the truth would be revealed.  
 When Eurycleia began to wash her master,  
 she recognized the scar immediately, a wound  
 he'd suffered years ago from white tusks on a boar,  
 when he went to Parnassus, making a visit 510  
 to Autolycus, his mother's splendid father,  
 and his sons. Autolycus surpassed all others  
 in thievery and swearing. A god himself, Hermes,  
 had given him those skills. For him he used to burn  
 pleasing offerings, thighs of younger goats and lambs.  
 So Hermes travelled with him, bringing willing gifts.  
 When he travelled to the rich land of Ithaca,

Autolycus had met his daughter's new born son, [400]  
 and once he had eaten dinner, Eurycleia  
 set the young child upon his knees and spoke to him: 520

“Autolycus, you're the person who must name  
 your daughter's child. We have been praying now  
 for a long time to have a child like this.”

So Autolycus then answered her by saying:

“My son-in-law and daughter, give the boy  
 whatever name I say. Since I've come here  
 as one who's been enraged at many people,  
 men and women, on this all-nourishing earth,  
 let him be called Odysseus, a man of rage.<sup>1</sup>  
 And I say this: when he is fully grown 530 [410]  
 and travels to his mother's family home,  
 by Mount Parnassus, where I keep my wealth,  
 I'll give him some of it and send him off.  
 He'll be delighted.”

Odysseus had travelled there  
 to fetch those splendid presents from Autolycus.  
 When he got there, Autolycus and his splendid sons  
 clasped his hand and welcomed him with real affection.  
 His mother's mother, Amphithea, embraced him,  
 kissed him on the head and both his beautiful eyes.  
 Autolycus instructed his distinguished sons 540  
 to prepare a meal, and they did what he had asked.  
 They hastened to bring in a male ox, five years old, [420]  
 flayed it, and prepared the beast, slicing up the limbs.  
 They cut these with great skill, skewered the meat on spits,  
 roasted them with care, and passed around the portions.  
 All day long they feasted until the sun went down.  
 Each one had a share, and their hearts were quite content.  
 After the sun descended and the world grew dark,  
 they went to bed to rest and took the gift of Sleep.  
 But as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared, 550  
 they set off to hunt, with Autolycus's sons  
 and dogs, as well. And young Odysseus left with them. [430]  
 They climbed up Mount Parnassus, through the forest there,

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<sup>1</sup>This explanation for Odysseus's name derives it from the Greek verb *odussomai*, meaning *to be angry at*.

and quickly reached its windy gullies. By this time,  
 Helios's rays had started to strike the fields,  
 rising from deep streams of gently flowing Ocean.  
 The beaters reached a clearing. The dogs went in first,  
 ahead of them, following the tracks. Behind them  
 came Autolycus's sons, with lord Odysseus  
 in their group, close to the dogs. He was holding up 560  
 his long-shadowed spear. Now, right there a huge wild boar  
 was lying in a tangled bush—it was so dense  
 the power of watery winds could not get through, [440]  
 none of Helios's rays could pierce it, and rain  
 would never penetrate. There were fallen leaves  
 in piles around the place. The sound of rustling feet  
 made by the men and dogs, as they pursued the hunt,  
 disturbed the boar—it came charging from the thicket  
 to confront the hunters—with bristles on its back,  
 eyes flashing fire, the beast stood at bay before them. 570  
 Odysseus ran up first, eager to strike the boar,  
 his long spear held up in his two powerful fists.  
 The beast jumped out at him, attacking from the flank,  
 and struck above his knee, a long gash in his flesh  
 sliced by the creature's tusk. It did not reach the bone. [450]  
 Then Odysseus struck back at the boar, hitting it  
 on its right shoulder. That long spear's glittering point  
 went straight through—with a grunt the beast fell in the dust,  
 and its life force flew away. Autolycus' sons  
 attended to the carcass. They neatly bound up 580  
 brave Odysseus's wound, using a healing spell  
 to staunch the flow of dark blood seeping from his skin.  
 The hunters hurried back to their dear father's home.  
 Once Autolycus and Autolycus's sons  
 had fully cured him and presented lavish gifts, [460]  
 they soon sent him back in a joyful frame of mind  
 to Ithaca, his native land. When he got back,  
 his father and honoured mother were delighted,  
 asked him every detail of how he got the wound,  
 and he told them the truth—how, while he was hunting 590  
 on Mount Parnassus with Autolycus's sons,  
 a boar's white tusk had gored him. That was the scar  
 that old Eurycleia was grasping in her hands.  
 She traced it out, recognized it, and dropped his foot.  
 His leg fell in the basin, and the bronze rang out.  
 It tipped over on its side and spilled the water. [470]  
 All at once, joy and sorrow gripped her heart. Her eyes

welled up with tears, and her full voice was speechless.  
She reached up to his chin and said:

“It’s true, dear child.  
You are Odysseus, and I did not know you,  
until my hands had touched my master’s leg.”

600

She spoke, and her eyes glanced over at Penelope,  
anxious to tell her that her husband had come home.  
But Penelope could not see her face or notice,  
for Athena had diverted her attention.  
Odysseus’s arms reached out for Eurycleia—  
with his right hand he grabbed her firmly by the throat,  
and with the other pulled her even closer to him.  
Then he said:

“My good mother, why this wish  
to have me slaughtered? You yourself nursed me  
at this breast of yours. In the twentieth year,  
after suffering through numerous ordeals,  
I’ve come back to my native soil. And now,  
you’ve recognized me—a god has put that  
in your heart. Stay silent, so in these halls  
no one finds out. For I’ll tell you something—  
and it will happen. If gods overcome  
these haughty suitors, set them at my feet,  
I will not spare you, though you are my nurse,  
when I kill other women in my home.”

[480]  
610  
[490]

Prudent Eurycleia then answered him:

“My child,  
what words escaped the barrier of your teeth!  
You know how strong and firm my spirit is.  
I’ll be as tough as a hard stone or iron.  
I’ll tell you something else. Keep it in mind.  
If a god does overwhelm these suitors  
and sets them under you, then I’ll tell you  
about the women in your home, the ones  
demeaning you and those who bear no shame.”

620

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

630



“Good mother, why speak to me about them? [500]  
 There’s no need. I myself will look at them  
 and get to know each one. But keep this news  
 to yourself. Leave the matter with the gods.”

Once Odysseus spoke, the old woman left the room  
 to fetch water for his feet, since what she had before  
 had all been spilled. When she had finished bathing him,  
 she rubbed him with rich oil. Then Odysseus once more  
 pulled his chair closer to the fire to warm himself.  
 He hid the scar beneath his rags. Wise Penelope 640  
 began to speak. She said:

“Stranger, there’s one small thing  
 I’ll ask you myself. Soon it will be time  
 to take a pleasant rest. And sleep is sweet [510]  
 to every man, even if he’s troubled.  
 But gods have given me unmeasured grief.  
 Every day I get my joy from mourning,  
 from laments, as I carry out my work  
 and supervise the servants in the house.  
 But when night comes and Sleep grips everyone,  
 I lie in bed, and piercing worries crowd 650  
 my throbbing heart and give me great distress,  
 while I mourn. Just as Pandareus’s child,  
 the nightingale of the green woods, sings out  
 her lovely song when early spring arrives,  
 perched in thick foliage of the forest, [520]  
 pouring forth her richly modulating voice  
 in wailing for her dear child Itylus,  
 Zethus’s son, whom with a sword one day  
 she’d killed unwittingly—that’s how my heart  
 moves back and forth in its uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> 660  
 Should I stay with my son keeping an eye  
 on all possessions and my female slaves  
 and my large and lofty home, honouring  
 my husband’s bed and what the people say,  
 or marry the best of those Achaeans  
 who court me in my halls—the one who gives  
 countless bridal gifts. For my son, while young [530]

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<sup>1</sup>Itylus, son of king Zethus, was killed by his mother Aedon accidentally. The mother was then transformed into a nightingale, whose song is a constant lament for her dead child. In some versions of the story, Itylus is a daughter.

and with a feeble mind, would not agree  
 I should get married and leave my husband's home.  
 But now he's grown—his youth has reached an end— 670  
 he's begging me to go back home again,  
 away from here, for he is truly worried  
 about our property, which these Achaeans  
 are using up. But come now, hear my dream  
 and interpret it for me. In this house  
 twenty geese approach me from the water  
 to eat my wheat. And when I look at them  
 I am delighted. Then from the mountains  
 a huge hook-beaked eagle came and killed them—  
 snapping all their necks. They lay there in piles, 680  
 inside my hall, while he was carried up  
 [540]  
 into a shining sky. Now in that dream  
 I wept and wailed. Meanwhile, all around me  
 fair-haired women of Achaea gathered,  
 as, in my sorrow, I was there lamenting  
 that the eagle had slaughtered all my geese.  
 But he came back and, sitting on a beam  
 projecting from the roof, checked my sorrow,  
 and in a human voice spoke out to me:

'Daughter of illustrious Icarius, 690  
 you must be resolute. That was no dream,  
 but a glimpse of what will truly happen.  
 The suitors are those geese, and I am here—  
 before I was an eagle, now I've come  
 as your own husband, who will execute  
 a cruel fate on each and every suitor.' 700  
 [550]

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

Resourceful Odysseus 700  
 then answered her and said:

"Lady, it's impossible  
 to twist another meaning from this dream—  
 the real Odysseus has revealed to you  
 how he will end all this. The suitors' deaths

are all plain to see, and not one of them  
will escape destruction and a lethal fate.”

Wise Penelope then replied to him and said:

“Stranger, stories told in dreams are difficult— [560]  
their meanings are not clear, and for people  
they are not realized in every detail. 710  
There are two gates for insubstantial dreams,  
one made of horn and one of ivory.  
Those which pass through the fresh-cut ivory  
deceive—the words they bring are unfulfilled.  
Those which come through the gate of polished horn,  
once some mortal sees them, bring on the truth.  
But I don’t think, in my case, the strange dream  
came through that gate. It truly would have been  
a welcome thing to me and to my son.  
I’ll tell you something else. Keep it in mind. 720 [570]  
That morning is already drawing near  
when I leave the palace of Odysseus,  
a day of evil omen. I will arrange  
a competition featuring those axes  
he used to set up in his hall, aligned  
like ribs on ships, twelve axes in a row.  
He’d stand and shoot an arrow through them all.<sup>1</sup>  
I’ll suggest this contest for the suitors.  
The one whose hand most deftly strings his bow  
and then shoots an arrow through twelve axes 730  
is the one I’ll go with. I’ll leave my house,  
a lovely home where I’ve lived as a wife, [580]  
full of what one needs—even in my dreams  
it will stay in my memory forever.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
do not delay this contest in your halls

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<sup>1</sup>The details of this famous trial of shooting an arrow through a row of axes have been much discussed. Some interpreters have suggested that it makes sense if we imagine that there is a hole in the head of each axe and that they can be lined up so that an arrow might pass through them all (obviously a very difficult shot). Some ancient axes apparently had this feature. Others have suggested that the holes are rings at the bottom end of the shaft or that the holes are those which normally hold the axe shaft (so that the line of axes is actually a line of axe heads with the shaft removed).

BOOK NINETEEN

a moment longer. I can assure you,  
Odysseus will be here with all his schemes,  
before these men pick up the polished bow, 740  
string it, and shoot an arrow through the iron.”

Wise Penelope then answered him:

“Stranger,  
if you wished to sit with me in these halls  
to bring me pleasure, Sleep would never sit [590]  
on these eyelids of mine. But there’s no way  
men can go on forever without sleep.  
Immortal gods have set a proper time  
for every man on this grain-bearing earth.  
So now I’ll climb up to my upstairs room  
and lie down on the bed, which is for me 750  
a place for grieving, always damp with tears,  
since Odysseus went to wicked Ilium,  
a name no one should ever talk about.  
I’ll lie down there. But you can stretch out here,  
in the house, putting cushions on the floor.  
Or let the servants make a bed for you.”

Once she said this, she went to her bright upper room, [600]  
not by herself, for two attendants went with her.  
When she and both her servants reached the upstairs room,  
she cried out for Odysseus, her dear husband, 760  
until Athena cast sweet sleep across her eyes.

BOOK TWENTY  
ODYSSEUS PREPARES FOR HIS REVENGE

*[Odysseus has trouble sleeping; Athena visits him and gives him reassurance; Penelope prays to Artemis, longing for her life to end; Odysseus asks Zeus for two omens; Zeus peals his thunder, and a woman grinding grain prays aloud to Zeus; Telemachus asks Eurycleia about the treatment of his guest; Eurycleia organizes the clean up of the house; Eumaeus arrives with some animals and talks to Odysseus; Melanthius insults Odysseus again; Philoetius arrives and talks to Eumaeus, then wishes Odysseus well; the suitors plan to kill Telemachus but are dissuaded by an omen; Telemachus tells Odysseus he'll protect him at the feast and speaks forcefully to the suitors; Ctesippus throws a piece of meat at Odysseus, but misses; Telemachus threatens him; Agelaus proposes that Penelope make up her mind; Pallas Athena makes the suitors laugh uncontrollably and sends images of disaster; Theoclymenus interprets them and warns the suitors; they all laugh at Telemachus; Penelope sits and listens to the conversations.]*

So lord Odysseus went to the portico to sleep.  
Underneath he spread an untanned hide and on top  
fleeces from many sheep slaughtered for sacrifice  
by the Achaeans. Eurynome spread cloaks on him,  
once he lay down to rest. But still he could not sleep.  
His heart was hatching destruction for the suitors.  
Then servant women went from the hall, all the slaves  
who earlier had enjoyed sex with the suitors.  
They were laughing, having fun with one another.  
Odysseus in his chest was stirred—his mind and heart  
engaged in fierce debate whether he should charge out  
and put each one to death or allow the suitors  
to make love with them one final time. Inside him  
his heart was growling. Just as a bitch stands snarling  
above her tender pups when she sees anyone  
she does not recognize and is prepared to fight,  
that how, in his anger, the heart within him growled  
at their shameless acts. But he struck his chest and said,  
rebuking his own heart:

10 [10]

“Hang on, my heart.  
You went through troubles worse than this that day  
the Cyclops, in his frantic rage, devoured  
your courageous comrades. You held out then,  
until your cunning led you from that cave,  
where you thought you would die.”

20

[20]

BOOK TWENTY

He said these words,  
to calm the heart within his chest, and his spirit  
submitted, bravely resolving to endure it all.  
He still tossed and turned, back and forth. Just as a man  
eager to roast a stomach stuffed with fat and blood  
turns it quickly round and round on a blazing fire,  
that how lord Odysseus tossed and turned, wondering 30  
how he might get the haughty suitors in his grip,  
one man against so many. Then Athena came, [30]  
moving down from heaven, looking like a woman.  
She stood above his head and spoke to him, saying:

“Why now, you most ill-fated of all men,  
are you awake? This is your home—your wife  
lives in this palace, so does your child,  
whom anyone would pray for as a son.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Yes, goddess, everything you say is true. 40  
But the heart inside my chest is anxious.  
How can I handle the shameful suitors,  
just a single man against so many. [40]  
And in the house they’re always in a group.  
There’s something else my heart is thinking of—  
it’s more important—if I do kill them,  
with Zeus’s help and yours, how do I find  
a way of making my escape? That point  
I’d like you to consider.”

Then the goddess,  
bright-eyed Athena, gave him her reply:

“You stubborn man, 50  
men put their trust in weaker friends than me—  
in a mortal man who lacks my wisdom.  
I’m a god, and I’m there to protect you  
to the end of your ordeal. I tell you—  
to make things clear—if there were fifty groups  
of other men standing here around us, [50]  
intent on slaughter, even so, I say,  
you’d still drive off their cattle and fine sheep.  
Let Sleep take hold of you. To stay awake,

BOOK TWENTY

remain alert all night, will tire you out. 60  
These are harsh times, but you'll soon make it through."

Once Athena spoke, she poured sleep on his eyelids.  
Then the lovely goddess went back to Olympus.

While Sleep, who brings relief to troubled human hearts,  
relaxed his mind, his faithful wife woke up and wept,  
sitting up on her soft bed. But after her heart  
had had its fill of crying, the lovely lady  
began by uttering a prayer: [60]

"Artemis,  
royal goddess, child of Zeus, how I wish  
you'd shoot an arrow in my chest right now 70  
and take my life or that storm winds would come,  
lift me up, carry me away from here,  
across the murky roads, and cast me out  
in Ocean's backward-flowing stream, just as  
those storms snatched Pandareus's daughters,  
whose parents the gods killed, thus leaving them  
orphans in their home. Fair Aphrodite  
cared for them, offering cheese, sweet honey,  
and fine wine, while Hera bestowed on them [70]  
beauty and wisdom beyond all women. 80  
Artemis made them tall, and Athena  
gave them their skills in famous handicrafts.  
But when fair Aphrodite went away  
to high Olympus, petitioning Zeus,  
who hurls the thunderbolt, so that the girls  
could find fulfillment in a happy marriage,  
for Zeus has perfect knowledge of all things,  
what each man's destiny will be or not,  
spirits of the storm snatched away the girls  
and placed them in the care of hateful Furies.<sup>1</sup> 90  
How I wish those gods who hold Olympus  
would do away with me like that, or else  
that fair-haired Artemis would strike at me, [80]  
so with my husband's image in my mind

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<sup>1</sup>This legend of the daughters of Pandareus is very different from the story of Pandareus's daughter Aedon, told in Book 19, who killed her son Itylus by accident and was turned into a nightingale. The Furies are the goddess of blood revenge who live underground and are generally hated by the other gods. It's not clear why the girls should be killed and given to them.

BOOK TWENTY

I could descend beneath this odious earth  
and never bring delight of any kind  
to the heart of some inferior man.  
But when someone laments all day, his heart  
thick with distress, and Sleep holds him at night,  
he can endure that—Sleep makes him forget 100  
all things good and bad, once it settles down  
across his eyelids. But some god sends me  
bad dreams as well. This very night again  
a man who looked like him lay down with me,  
just as he was when he sailed with the fleet.  
My heart rejoiced—I thought it was no dream, [90]  
but finally the truth.”

Penelope finished.

Then Dawn appeared on her golden throne. As she wept,  
lord Odysseus heard her and lost himself in thought.  
To his heart she seemed to know him and was standing 110  
beside his head. Gathering up the cloak and blankets  
he had been lying on, he placed them on a chair  
inside the hall. He took an ox-hide from the house,  
set it on the ground, and, raising his hands up high,  
made this prayer to Zeus:

“O Father Zeus,  
if you wished to bring me over land and sea  
to my own land, after loading on me  
so much distress, let someone in the house  
wake up and say something in there for me, [100]  
provide an omen, and outside the house 120  
let there appear another sign from Zeus.”

That is what he prayed. And Counsellor Zeus heard him.  
At once he thundered down from glittering Olympus,  
from high beyond the clouds. Lord Odysseus rejoiced.  
And then some slave woman at the nearby grinding stones  
sent out a word of omen from inside the place  
where the shepherd of his people placed his millstones.<sup>1</sup>  
At these grinding stones twelve women used to work,  
making barley meal and flour, which feed men’s marrow.  
The other women had already milled their wheat 130

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<sup>1</sup>The mills are flat stones set on the ground and used to grind wheat and barley. The servant women kneel on the ground to use them. Here they are, it seems, in a building adjacent to the main house.



BOOK TWENTY

and were asleep, but this one, weaker than the rest, [110]  
had not yet finished. She paused, set the stone aside,  
and uttered a prayer, an omen for her master:

“Father Zeus, who governs both gods and men,  
you’ve thundered loud high in the starry sky,  
and yet there’s not a single cloud up there.  
You must be offering a sign to someone.  
I’m a poor wretch, but what I have to say—  
O make that happen. May these suitors here  
for the last and final time this very day 140  
have a fine dinner in my master’s home.  
Those men have hurt my knees with this hard task  
of making flour—may this meal be their last.”

She spoke. That word of omen and Zeus’s thunder [120]  
made Odysseus happy—he thought he’d be revenged  
on those malicious men.

Inside Odysseus’s home,  
other women slaves were up, making tireless fire  
inside the hearth, as young godlike Telemachus  
rose from bed, put on his clothes, and on his shoulders  
slung a keen-edged sword. On his shining feet he tied 150  
his lovely sandals. He picked up a sturdy spear,  
with a sharp bronze point, went out to the threshold,  
stood there, and said to Eurycleia:

“My dear nurse,  
have you shown our guest respect inside our home  
with bed and food, or is he lying there [130]  
unattended to? That’s how my mother is—  
she’s wise, but she seems to deal with people  
at random—some inferior mortal man  
she’ll honour, while someone more distinguished  
she’ll send away with no respect at all.” 160

Wise Eurycleia then answered him:

“My child,  
don’t blame her now about such things. That man  
sat drinking wine as long as he could wish.  
He said he had no appetite for food.  
She asked him. He thought of going to bed

BOOK TWENTY

to get some sleep, so she told the women  
to spread out bedding, but like some poor wretch [140]  
familiar with hard times, he had no wish  
to lie down under blankets on a bed.  
So he stretched out on the portico to sleep 170  
on sheep fleeces and an untanned ox-hide,  
and then we threw a cloak on top of him.”

Once she'd finished, Telemachus went through the hall,  
spear in hand, with two swift dogs accompanying him.  
He went to join the group of finely dressed Achaeans.  
Then that good nurse Eurycleia, daughter of Ops,  
Peisenor's son, called out, summoning female slaves:

“Come on, some of you get busy in here—  
sweep the hall and sprinkle it. Spread out [150]  
purple covers on these well-fashioned chairs. 180  
And you others, wipe down all those tables  
with wet sponges, clean up the mixing bowls,  
those finely crafted double-handled cups.  
And you women, get water from the spring.  
Carry it back here. And do it quickly—  
the suitors won't be absent from this hall  
for very long. They'll be back really soon.  
Today's a banquet day for everyone.”

As Eurycleia spoke, they listened carefully,  
then acted on her words. Twenty of the women 190  
went to the dark-water spring. The others stayed there,  
busy working diligently throughout the house.  
Then the men who served the Achaean lords arrived. [160]  
While they were working with great skill chopping firewood,  
the women who had gone off to the spring returned.  
Behind them came the swineherd, leading in three hogs,  
the best of all he had. He turned them loose to feed  
inside the splendid yard, while he talked to Odysseus,  
with words of reassurance:

“Stranger, these Achaeans—  
do they have any more regard for you? 200  
Or in these halls are they insulting you,  
they way they did before?”

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Shrewd Odysseus  
then answered him and said:

“Well, Eumaeus,  
I hope the gods pay back the injuries  
arrogant men so recklessly have planned [170]  
in another’s home, with no sense of shame.”

As these two were talking to each other in this way,  
Melanthius, the goatherd, came up close to them,  
leading the very finest she-goats in his flocks,  
part of the suitors’ feast. Two herdsmen came with him. 210  
He tied the goats up by the echoing portico,  
then started once more hurling insults at Odysseus:

“Stranger, are you still bothering us here,  
inside the house, begging from the people?  
Why don’t you get out? I think it’s obvious [180]  
we two will not say good bye, not until  
we’ve had a taste of one another’s fists.  
The way you beg is not appropriate.  
Achaeans do hold feasts in other homes.”

Melanthius spoke, but shrewd Odysseus said nothing. 220  
He shook his head in silence. Deep within his heart  
he was planning trouble. Then a third one joined them,  
Philoetius, an outstanding man, bringing  
a sterile heifer and plump goats for the suitors.  
Some ferrymen, who transport passengers across,  
whoever comes to them, had brought them over  
from the mainland. He tied these animals with care  
below the portico, went up to Eumaeus, [190]  
and questioned him in person:

“Swineherd,  
who’s the man who has just come to this house? 230  
What people does he claim to come from?  
Where are his family and his native land?  
He’s had bad luck, but in his appearance  
he seems just like a noble king. But still,  
the gods bring miseries to wandering men,  
whenever they spin their threads of trouble,  
no matter if they come from royal blood.”

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Once he said these words, he walked up to Odysseus,  
held his right hand out in greeting, and spoke to him—  
his words had wings:

240

“Greetings, honoured stranger.  
Though you are facing many troubles now,  
may you find happiness in future days. [200]  
O Father Zeus, none of the other gods  
is more destructive than you are. For men,  
once you yourself have given birth to them,  
you have no pity. You plunge them into  
painful hardships and abject poverty.  
When I recall Odysseus and think of him,  
I start to sweat. My eyes fill up with tears.  
For he, I think, is dressed in rags like these, 250  
roaming among men somewhere, if indeed  
he’s still alive, looking at the sunlight.  
If he’s already dead and down in Hades,  
then I grieve for excellent Odysseus,  
who, when I was a boy, put me in charge  
of cattle herds in Cephallenia.<sup>1</sup> [210]  
Their numbers now are more than one can count—  
this breed of broad-faced cattle has increased  
more than it could in any other way  
for a different man. Now strangers tell me 260  
to drive the cattle in for their own meals.  
They do not care about the son in there  
or tremble at the vengeance of the gods.  
They are too keen to share amongst themselves  
my master’s goods—he’s been away so long.  
And as for me, the heart here in my chest  
keeps turning over many things—it’s bad,  
truly bad, while his son is still alive,  
for me to leave here with the cattle herds  
and move away to some other region, 270  
to groups of strangers. But it’s even worse [220]  
to stay here, putting up with what’s not right,  
herding his cattle for these other men.  
In fact, I would have run off long ago  
to one of the other high-minded kings—

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<sup>1</sup>The word Cephallenian describes Odysseus’s subjects generally, but Cephallenia is the name of a large island immediately to the west of Ithaca. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus soldiers are called Cephallenians.

for things are now unbearable—but still,  
 my poor master is always on my mind.  
 Perhaps he'll come home from some foreign place  
 and send the suitors packing from his home."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said: 280

"Herdsman, you don't appear to be a man  
 who's bad or one who lacks intelligence,  
 for I can sense your sympathetic heart.  
 And so I'll swear a mighty oath to you.  
 I'll speak the truth—let Zeus be my witness, [230]  
 first among the gods, and this guest table,  
 and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,  
 to which I've come: while you are in these halls,  
 Odysseus will come home. With your own eyes,  
 you'll see the suitors killed, if that's your wish, 290  
 those men who act as if they own the place."

The cattle herder answered him:

"Ah stranger,  
 how I wish Cronos' son might bring about  
 what you've just told me. Then you would find out  
 how strong I am and what my hands can do."

Eumaeus also prayed like that to all the gods  
 for Odysseus to return to his own home.

As they were talking in this way to one another, [240]  
 the suitors were making plans against Telemachus,  
 scheming to bring him to a fatal destiny. 300  
 But then a bird went soaring past them, on their left,  
 an eagle flying high, gripping a trembling dove.  
 So lord Amphinomus addressed them all and said:

"My friends, this plan to kill Telemachus  
 will not proceed the way we want it to.  
 We should instead prepare to have our feast."

Amphinomus spoke. The suitors agreed with him.  
 So they went inside godlike Odysseus's home,  
 threw their cloaks on stools and chairs, and sacrificed [250]  
 big sheep and fattened goats. They killed the plump swine, too, 310

BOOK TWENTY

and the heifer from the herd. They roasted entrails,  
passed them around, and blended wine in mixing bowls.  
The swineherd handed out the cups. Philoetius,  
an outstanding man, brought bread in a fine basket,  
and Melanthius served the wine. Then the suitors  
reached out to take the fine food set in front of them.  
Thinking it might be advantageous, Telemachus  
sat Odysseus down inside the well-constructed hall,  
beside the entrance made of stone. He set down there  
a modest stool and table, and placed before him  
a share of inner organs. Then he poured some wine  
in a golden cup and said:

320

[260]

“Sit here for now,  
among these men. Drink your wine. I myself  
will protect you from all suitors’ insults  
and their fists—this is not a public house  
but a home belonging to Odysseus.  
He acquired this place for me. You suitors,  
make sure your hearts do not encourage you  
to gibes and blows, so that no arguments  
or fights will happen in this hall.”

As he said this,  
the suitors bit their lips. They were all astonished  
Telemachus had talked to them so forcefully.  
Then Antinous, son of Eupheithes, spoke to them:

330

[270]

“Achaean, what Telemachus has said  
is challenging, but let’s accept his words,  
although his speech is a bold threat to us.  
For Zeus, son of Cronos, has not given  
his permission, or here within these halls  
by this time we’d have put a stop to him,  
for all his clear-voiced talk.”

Antinous spoke.  
But Telemachus paid no attention to his words.

340

As heralds led sacred offerings to the gods  
down through the city, long-haired Achaeans gathered  
in the shadowy groves of archer god Apollo.  
They cooked the outer flesh and pulled away the spits,

BOOK TWENTY

then passed around the meat and had a splendid feast.<sup>1</sup> [280]  
The servers placed beside Odysseus a portion  
matching what they themselves received—Telemachus,  
lord Odysseus' son, had given them those orders.

But there was no way Pallas Athena would permit 350  
those proud suitors to hold back their bitter insults,  
so that Odysseus, Laertes' son, would suffer  
still more heartfelt pain. Now, among the suitors  
there was man who had a lawless heart. His name  
was Ctesippus, and he made his home in Same.  
Relying on his prodigious wealth, he courted  
the wife of Odysseus, who had been away so long. [290]  
He now shouted to the overbearing suitors:

“You noble suitors, listen to me now—  
I've got something to say. This stranger here 360  
has for some time had an equal portion,  
as is right, since it's by no means proper,  
nor is it just, for Telemachus's guests  
to go without—no matter who it is  
who shows up at the house. So now I, too,  
will provide a present to welcome him.  
Then he, for his part, can pass it along  
to a bath attendant or some other slave  
here in the home of the great Odysseus.”

As he said this, his strong hand picked up an ox hoof 370  
from the basket where it lay, and then he threw it. [300]  
But by quickly pulling his head back, Odysseus  
dodged the throw. In his heart he smiled with bitter scorn.  
The gristle hit the solid wall. Telemachus  
then went at Ctesippus and said:

“Ctesippus,  
in your heart you know well what's good for you—  
that must be why you did not hit the stranger.  
All on his own he made you miss your target.  
Otherwise, I'd have taken my sharp spear  
and rammed you in the chest. Then your father 380

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<sup>1</sup>This reference to a feast in the grove of Apollo is rather abrupt and confusing, since up to this point the feast has been taking place inside Odysseus's home and further details suggest the same location.

would be here planning for your funeral  
 and not a wedding feast. So none of you  
 make any show of trouble in my house.  
 For now I am observing every detail—  
 both good and bad—I know what’s going on.  
 Before now, I was still a foolish child. [310]  
 But we must still look on and bear these things—  
 the slaughtered sheep, the wine and bread consumed.  
 It’s hard for one man to restrain a crowd.  
 Come now, no longer show me such ill will 390  
 or give me so much trouble. If you’re keen  
 to kill me with your swords, that’s what I’d choose—  
 it would be far better to meet my death  
 than constantly to watch these shameful deeds,  
 strangers being abused and female slaves  
 dragged through this lovely home. It’s a disgrace.”

Telemachus finished. They all sat in silence, [320]  
 saying nothing. Then Agelaus, Damastor’s son,  
 at last spoke up:

“My friends, no man could answer  
 what’s been so justly said and in his rage 400  
 respond with words provoking enmity.  
 So don’t insult the stranger any more  
 or any of the servants in this home  
 belonging to godlike Odysseus. Still,  
 to Telemachus and to his mother  
 I have some reassuring things to say,  
 which both their hearts should find agreeable.  
 As long as you had in your hearts some hope  
 that wise Odysseus would return back home,  
 no blame attached itself to you by waiting, 410 [330]  
 holding off the suitors here in your home.  
 This was the better choice, if Odysseus  
 had returned and come back to his palace.  
 But surely it’s already clear by now  
 he won’t be coming back, not any more.  
 So come, sit down by your mother. Tell her  
 to choose whoever is the finest man  
 and offers the best bridal gifts. And then  
 you can enjoy all your paternal goods—  
 they are yours to keep, all the food and wine, 420  
 while she looks after someone else’s home.”



Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

“I swear to you, Agelaus, by Zeus  
 and by the sufferings of my father,  
 who’s perished or is wandering around [340]  
 somewhere far from Ithaca, there’s no way  
 I’m trying to delay my mother’s marriage.  
 I tell her to marry any man she wants,  
 and I’ll give her innumerable gifts.  
 But I’m ashamed to drive her from the home 430  
 against her wishes, to give an order  
 which forces her to leave. I hope the god  
 will never bring about an act like that.”

Once Telemachus had spoken, Pallas Athena  
 roused them all to laughter, with no sense of control.  
 She unhinged their minds, so the laughing from their mouths  
 came from an alien source, and the meat they ate  
 became blood-spattered. Their eyes filled up with tears.<sup>1</sup>  
 All their hearts were filled with thoughts of lamentation.  
 Then godlike Theoclymenus addressed them all: 440 [350]

“O you miserable men, what troubles  
 are you feeling now? Your heads, your faces,  
 your lower limbs are shrouded in the night.  
 You’re on fire with grief, faces wet with tears,  
 fine pedestals and walls have gobs of blood,  
 the porch is full of ghosts, so is the yard—  
 ghosts rushing in the dark to Erebus.  
 Up in the sky the sun has disappeared—  
 an evil mist is shrouding everything.”

Theoclymenus said these words. But they all laughed, 450  
 enjoying themselves at his expense. The first to speak  
 was Eurymachus, a son of Polybus:

“He’s mad, [360]  
 this stranger who’s just recently arrived  
 from some far-off land. So come on, young men,

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<sup>1</sup>The Greek says (literally) “they laughed with the jaws of other men,” an expression which seems to mean they had no idea of why they were laughing. The blood on the meat is, one assumes, a hallucination, part of the madness Athena has forced upon them.

hurry and carry him outside the house,  
so he can make his way to the assembly,  
since he believes it's like the night in here."

Godlike Theoclymenus then said in reply:

"Eurymachus, I'm not requesting you  
to furnish me with guides. I've got my eyes 460  
and my two feet. And here inside my chest  
I've got a mind that's not made for a fool.  
I'll go outside with these, for I can see  
you're headed for disaster—no suitors  
who, in the home of the great Odysseus,  
mistreat others and plan their reckless schemes  
will be able to avoid it or escape." [370]

After he said this, he left the stately palace  
and went to Peiraeus, who gladly welcomed him.  
The suitors all looked around at one another 470  
and tried to hurt Telemachus with mockery,  
laughing at his guests. Some insolent young man  
would make a comment using words like these:

"Telemachus,  
no one is more unlucky with his guests  
than you are. You have a man like this one,  
a dirty tramp in need of food and wine,  
with no work skills or strength, just a burden  
on the land. Then some other man stood here [380]  
spouting prophecies. You'd be better off  
to follow my advice. Let's throw these guests 480  
onboard a well-decked ship and send them off  
to Sicily. You'd get good prices there."

That is what the suitors said. But Telemachus  
paid no attention to their words. He kept quiet,  
looking at his father, keeping his eyes on him,  
ready for the moment his hands struck the suitors.

But wise Penelope, Icarus's child,  
was sitting in a lovely chair across from them  
and heard what each man in the hall was saying.  
While they kept on laughing, the men prepared the food, 490

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butchering many beasts to satisfy their hearts  
with a fine feast. But there would never be a meal  
more sorrowful than the one the mighty warrior  
and the goddess would set before them very soon,  
a feast the suitors earned for their disgraceful acts.

[390]

BOOK TWENTY ONE  
THE CONTEST WITH ODYSSEUS'S BOW

*[Penelope decides to set up the archery contest with the axes; she goes to a storeroom to fetch the bow, arrows, and axes; the story of how Odysseus got the bow from Iphitus; Penelope addresses the suitors, saying she will marry whoever succeeds in the competition; Eumaeus and Philoetius weep; Antinous upbraids them; Telemachus addresses the suitors, sets up the bows in line, and tries unsuccessfully to string the bow; Leiodes attempts to string the bow and fails; Antinous criticizes Leiodes, then suggests they rub fat on the bow by the fire to make it more supple; Odysseus reveals his identity outside to Eumaeus and Philoetius and gives them instructions; Eurymachus tries to string the bow and fails; Antinous proposes they postpone the contest for today; Odysseus suggests he be given a chance to succeed with the bow; Antinous objects; Penelope intervenes; Telemachus tells his mother to go upstairs; Eumaeus hands the bow to Odysseus and orders Eurycleia to lock the doors; Philoetius closes the courtyard gates; Odysseus inspects the bow, then fires an arrow through the holes in the axe heads; Telemachus arms himself and moves to stand with his father.]*

Bright-eyed Athena then placed inside the heart  
of wise Penelope, Icarius's daughter,  
the thought that she should set up in Odysseus' halls  
the bow and gray iron axes for the suitors,  
as a competition and prelude to their deaths.  
She climbed the lofty staircase to her upper rooms,  
picked up in her firm grip a curved key made of bronze—  
it had an ivory handle fashioned with great skill.  
With her attendants she went off to a storeroom  
in a distant corner of the house, where they kept 10  
her lord's possessions—bronze and gold and iron, [10]  
all finely crafted work. His well-sprung bow was there,  
and quivers, too, with many death-dealing arrows,  
presents he had received from Iphitus, his friend,  
son of Eurytus, a man like the immortals,  
when they met in Lacedaemon, in Messene,  
at the home of wise Ortilochus. Odysseus  
had gone there to collect a debt the people owed—  
Messenian men had run off with three hundred sheep,  
seizing the shepherds, too, and then left Ithaca 20  
in their ships with many oars. In response to this,  
Odysseus, who was just a young lad, had been sent [20]  
a long way by his father and other senior men,  
part of an embassy. Iphitus was searching  
for twelve mares he'd lost, along with some sturdy mules

still on the teat. In later years these animals  
 brought him a fatal destiny, the day he met  
 the mortal Hercules, Zeus's great-hearted son,  
 who knew all there was to know about great exploits.  
 Hercules slaughtered him, although he was a guest 30  
 in his own home—a cruel man who did not care  
 about gods' anger or the welcoming table  
 he'd set before him. After their meal, Hercules  
 killed Iphitus and kept the mares with him at home [30]  
 for his own use.<sup>1</sup> While Iphitus was enquiring  
 about these horses, he got to meet Odysseus  
 and offered him the bow. Earlier this weapon  
 belonged to mighty Eurytus, who, when he died,  
 left it to his son living in his high-roofed home.  
 Odysseus had given him a keen-edged sword 40  
 and a powerful spear, as well. This was the start  
 of their close friendship. Iphitus gave Odysseus  
 that bow of his, but the two men never bonded  
 as mutual guest friends—before that could take place  
 Hercules had murdered Iphitus, Eurytus' son,  
 a god-like man. Odysseus did not take the bow  
 whenever he set off in his black ships to fight.  
 It lay there in his home as a memorial [40]  
 to a dear friend and for his use in Ithaca.  
 When fair Penelope came to the storage room, 50  
 she crossed the wooden threshold—a long time ago  
 a skilful craftsman planed it, set it straight and true,  
 then fitted doorposts and set shining doors in place.  
 Penelope swiftly took the looped thong from its hook,  
 put in the key, and with a push shoved back the bolt.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Iphitus went to see Hercules, who was his friend, about some stolen cattle. But Hercules went insane (a fit brought on by Hera) and killed Iphitus by throwing him off the walls of Tiryns. Hercules had to be purified and suffer some punishment for this murder. It's not entirely clear how the horses mentioned in Homer's text brought about Hercules's violence, unless the idea is that Hercules killed him to obtain the horses. Hercules is called "mortal" because Iphitus met him when he was still a man, that is, before he became deified after his death. The reference to the "welcoming table" is a reminder of the special bond between a host and his guest once they had shared a meal together.

<sup>2</sup>Merry, Riddell, and Monro, in their *Commentary on the Odyssey* (1886) explain that the inside bolt was moved by a thong passing through a slit in the door. Once the door was bolted shut by pulling the thong (when a person was leaving), the thong was attached to a hook on the outside wall. To get into the room from the outside required a key which fit a hole of the appropriate shape. Once the thong was taken off its hook, the key was inserted in the hole, and it pushed the bolt back. The purpose of the thong, it seems, was to prevent someone from opening the door from the inside (where it would be impossible to remove the thong from its hook and thus to move the bolt).

BOOK TWENTY-ONE

Just as a bull grunts when it grazes in a field,  
that how the door creaked as she pushed it with the key, [50]  
and it quickly swung ajar. Then she clambered up  
onto the planking where they kept the storage trunks  
in which they stowed their fragrant clothing. There she stretched 60  
to take the bow in its bright case down from its peg.  
Then she sat down, placed the bow case across her knees  
and wept aloud, as she took out her husband's bow.  
When she had had enough of her laments and tears,  
she went down to the hall, to join the noble suitors,  
holding in her hands the well-sprung bow and quiver,  
with many pain-inflicting arrows. And with her [60]  
came some attendant slaves carrying in a chest  
lots of iron and bronze, her husband's battle gear.  
Once the lovely lady reached the suitors, she stood 70  
beside the doorpost of the well-constructed hall,  
with a bright veil covering her face. On either side  
stood loyal attendant women. Then Penelope  
addressed the suitors with these words:

“Listen to me,  
bold suitors, who've been ravaging this home  
with your incessant need for food and drink,  
now that my husband's been away so long. [70]  
The only story you could offer up  
as an excuse is that you all desire  
to marry me and take me as your wife. 80  
So come now, suitors, since I seem to be  
the prize you seek, I'll place this great bow here—  
a weapon that belonged to brave Odysseus.  
Whichever one of you can grip this bow  
and string it with the greatest ease, then shoot  
an arrow through twelve axes, all of them,  
I'll go with him, leaving my married home,  
this truly lovely house and all these goods  
one needs for living—things I'll remember,  
even in my dreams.”

90 [80]

When she'd said this,  
she told Eumaeus, the good and faithful swineherd,  
to set the bow and iron axes for the suitors.  
With tears in his eyes, Eumaeus took the weapons  
and laid them out. Philoetius, the goatherd,  
was weeping, too, in another spot, once he saw

his master's bow. Then Antinous addressed them both with this reproach:

“You foolish bumpkins,  
 who only think of what's going on today!  
 What a wretched pair! Why start weeping now?  
 Why stir the heart inside the lady's chest? 100  
 Her spirit lies in pain, now that she's lost  
 the man she loves. So sit and eat in silence,  
 or go outside and weep. Leave the bow here. [90]  
 The contest will decide among the suitors.  
 I don't think it will be an easy feat  
 to string that polished bow. Of all men here,  
 no one is like Odysseus used to be.  
 I saw him for myself, and I remember,  
 though at the time I was a little child.”

Antinous spoke. In his chest his heart was hoping 110  
 he would string the bow and with it shoot an arrow  
 through the iron.<sup>1</sup> But, in fact, he would be the first  
 to taste an arrow from brave Odysseus's hands—  
 the very man he was disgracing shamefully,  
 as he sat in the hall, inciting all his friends. [100]  
 But then among them all Telemachus spoke out  
 with royal authority:

“Well now, Zeus,  
 son of Cronos, must have made me foolish—  
 my dear mother, although quite sensible,  
 says she'll be leaving with another man, 120  
 abandoning this home, and I just laugh.  
 My witless heart finds that enjoyable.  
 So come, suitors, since your prize seems to be  
 a woman who throughout Achaean land  
 has no equal, not in sacred Pylos,  
 Argos, Mycenae, or on the mainland,  
 or in Ithaca itself. But you know this,  
 so I do not need to praise my mother. [110]

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<sup>1</sup>As mentioned in the notes for Book Twenty, the challenge required the contestant to string the bow (i.e., bend it back so that the string could be attached at both tips) and then shoot an arrow through a series of holes in twelve ax heads set up in a straight line. This appears to take place inside the great hall, which, as Merry, Riddell, and Monro note, had a floor consisting of hard earth. However, the precise location of the contest (inside or outside) has long been a matter of dispute.

Come on now. Do not delay this contest  
 with excuses or use up too much time  
 diverting your attention from this bow. 130  
 Then we'll see. I might try the bow myself.  
 If I can string it and shoot an arrow  
 through the iron, I won't get so upset  
 when my royal mother has to leave here  
 with another man. I'd be left behind,  
 as someone capable of picking up  
 my father's prizes in a competition."

As he said this, Telemachus quickly threw off  
 the purple cloak covering his back, then jumped up, 140  
 and removed the sharp sword hanging from his shoulders.  
 He set up the axes by digging out a trench, [120]  
 one lengthy ditch for all of them, in a straight line.  
 Then his feet trampled the earth down flat around them.  
 Amazement gripped the suitors as they looked at him  
 and watched how he aligned those axes properly,  
 though before then he had never even seen them.  
 Then, going and standing in the threshold, he tried  
 to test the bow. Three times he made it tremble,  
 as he strove to bend it, and three times he relaxed, 150  
 hoping in his heart he'd string that bow and shoot  
 an arrow through the iron. On his fourth attempt,  
 as his power bent the bow, he might have strung it,  
 but Odysseus shook his head, signalling him to stop,  
 for all his eagerness. Telemachus spoke out, [130]  
 addressing them once more with royal authority:

"Well, I suppose I'll remain a coward,  
 a weak man, too, in future days, or else  
 I'm still too young and cannot yet rely  
 on my own strength to guard me from a man 160  
 who gets angry with me first. But come now,  
 you men who are more powerful than me,  
 test this bow. Let's end this competition."

Once he said this, Telemachus placed the bow  
 down on the ground away from him, leaning it  
 against the polished panels of the door, and set  
 a swift arrow there beside the bow's fine tip,  
 then sat down in the chair where he had been before.  
 Then Antinous, Eupheithes' son, addressed them: [140]



“All you suitors, get up in order now,  
 from left to right, beginning from the place  
 where the steward pours the wine.” 170

Antinous spoke,  
 and what he had proposed they found agreeable.  
 The first to stand was Leiodes, son of Oenops,  
 their soothsayer. He always sat furthest away,  
 beside the lovely mixing bowl, the only man  
 who opposed their recklessness—it made him angry  
 at the entire crowd of suitors. That was the man  
 who first picked up the bow and the swift arrow.  
 After moving to the threshold and standing there, 180  
 he tried the bow, but he could not string it. His hands, [150]  
 which were quite delicate and feeble, grew weary,  
 before he could succeed in hooking up the string.  
 He then spoke out among the suitors:

“My friends,  
 I’m not the man to use this bow. So now,  
 let someone else take hold of it. This bow  
 will take away from many fine young men  
 their lives and spirits, since it’s far better  
 to die than live and fail in the attempt  
 to have what we are gathered here to get, 190  
 remaining here in hope day after day.  
 Now every man has feelings in his heart—  
 he desires and hopes to wed Penelope,  
 Odysseus’ wife. But when he’s tried this bow  
 and observed what happens, then let him woo  
 another of Achaea’s well-dressed women, [160]  
 seeking to win her with his bridal gifts,  
 and then Penelope can wed the man  
 who offers her the most, whose fate it is  
 to be her husband.”

When Leiodes had finished, 200  
 he set the bow beside him, leaning it  
 against the polished panels of the door  
 and placing with it a swift arrow by the tip.  
 Then he sat down again where he had been sitting.  
 But Antinous took issue with what he had said,  
 talking directly to him:

“Leiodes,  
 that speech that passed the barrier of your teeth,  
 what wretched, sorry words! As I listened,  
 it made me angry—as if this bow would, [170]  
 in fact, take away the lives and spirits 210  
 of the very finest men, just because  
 you could not string it. Your royal mother  
 did not produce in you the sort of man  
 who has sufficient strength to draw a bow  
 and shoot an arrow. But some other men  
 among these noble suitors will succeed.”

This said, Antinous called out to Melanthius,  
 the goatherd:

“Come now, Melanthius,  
 light a fire in the hall. Set a large chair  
 in front of it and spread a fleece across. 220  
 Then fetch a hefty piece of fat—there’s some  
 inside the house—so that these young men here  
 can warm the bow and rub grease into it,  
 then test the bow and end this competition.” [180]

Once Antinous said this, Melanthius soon lit  
 a tireless fire. Then he carried a large chair up,  
 draped a fleece on it, set it down beside the fire,  
 and from inside the house fetched a large piece of fat.  
 So then the young men warmed the bow and tested it.  
 But they could not string it—whatever strength they had 230  
 was far too little. Antinous and Eurymachus,  
 the suitors’ leaders, still remained—the two of them  
 with their abilities, were the best men by far.

The cattle herder and the keeper of the swine  
 belonging to godlike Odysseus had gone out,  
 both together, so lord Odysseus moved away, [190]  
 left the palace, walked through the yard, and followed them.  
 When they had passed beyond the courtyard and the gates,  
 Odysseus called to them with reassuring words:

“You there, cattleman and swineherd, shall I 240  
 tell you something or keep it to myself?  
 My spirit tells me I should speak to you.

If Odysseus were to come back suddenly,  
 brought from somewhere by a god, would you two  
 be the sort of men who would defend him?  
 Would you support the suitors or Odysseus?  
 Answer as your heart and spirit prompt you.”

Then the cattle herder answered him:

“O Father Zeus, [200]  
 would that you might fulfill this very wish—  
 may that man come, and led on by some god. 250  
 Then you would know the kind of strength I have  
 and how my hands can demonstrate my power.”

And then Eumaeus, too, made the same sort of prayer  
 to all the gods that wise Odysseus would come back  
 to his own home. Once Odysseus had clearly seen  
 how resolute they were, he spoke to them again,  
 saying these words:

“Well, here I am in person—  
 after suffering much distress, I’ve come home,  
 back in the twentieth year to my own land.  
 Of those who work for me, I recognize 260  
 that you’re the only two who want me back.  
 Among the rest, I’ve heard no one praying [210]  
 that my return would bring me home again.  
 I’ll tell you both how this is going to end—  
 and I’ll speak the truth—if, on my behalf  
 some god will overcome those noble suitors,  
 I’ll bring you each a wife, and I’ll provide  
 possessions and a house built near my own.  
 Then you’ll be my companions—and kinsmen  
 of Telemachus. Come, I’ll show you something, 270  
 a sign, so you will clearly know it’s me  
 and trust me in your hearts—here’s the old scar  
 I got from a boar’s white tusk, on a visit  
 to Parnassus with Autolycus’s sons.” [220]

As he said this, Odysseus pulled aside his rags,  
 exposing the great scar. Once those two had seen it  
 and noted every detail, they both threw their arms  
 around the wise Odysseus—bursting into tears,  
 they welcomed him, kissing his head and shoulders.

Odysseus did the same—he kissed their heads and hands. 280  
 Those men would have kept on weeping until sunset,  
 if Odysseus had not called a halt, saying to them:

“Stop these laments. Let’s have no more crying.  
 Someone might come out from the hall, see us,  
 and tell people in the house. Let’s go in,  
 one by one, not all at once. I’ll go first. [230]  
 You come later. And let’s make this our sign.  
 All those other men, the noble suitors,  
 will not allow the quiver and the bow  
 to be given to me. But, Eumaeus, 290  
 as you carry that bow around the hall,  
 put it in my hands, and tell the women  
 to lock their room—bolt the close-fitting doors.  
 If any of them hears the noise of men  
 groaning or being hit inside our walls,  
 she’s to stay quiet, working where she is,  
 and not run off outside. Now, as for you, [240]  
 Philoetius, I want you to lock  
 the courtyard gates. Bolt and lash them shut.  
 Do it quickly.”

After he said this, 300  
 Odysseus went back into the hall and sat down  
 on the stool where he had been sitting. The two men,  
 godlike Odysseus’ servants, went in after him.

Eurymachus already had the bow in hand,  
 warming it here and there in light from the hot fire.  
 But even doing that, he could not string the bow.  
 Then his courageous heart gave out a mighty groan,  
 and he spoke to them directly—he was angry.

“It’s too bad. I’m frustrated for myself  
 and for you all. I’m not that unhappy 310 [250]  
 about the marriage, though I am upset.  
 There are many more Achaean women—  
 some here in sea-girt Ithaca itself,  
 others in various town. But if we are  
 so weak compared to godlike Odysseus  
 that we can’t string his bow, it’s a disgrace  
 which men will learn about in years to come.”

Antinous, Eupheithes' son, answered him and said:

"Eurymachus, that's not going to happen.  
 as you yourself well know. At this moment, 320  
 in the country there's a feast day, sacred  
 to the god. So who would bend the bow? No,  
 set it aside without saying a thing.  
 As for the axes, what if we let them [260]  
 just remain there. I don't think anyone  
 will come into the home of Odysseus,  
 Laertes' son, and carry them away.  
 Come now, let the steward begin to pour  
 wine in the cups, so we can make libations.  
 Put the curved bow down, and in the morning, 330  
 tell goatherd Melanthius to bring in  
 the finest goats by far from all the herds,  
 so we can set out pieces of the thigh  
 for the famous archer god, Apollo.  
 Then we'll test the bow and end the contest."

Antinous finished. They were pleased with what he said.  
 Heralds poured water on their hands, and young men [270]  
 filled the mixing bowls up to the brim with drink  
 and served them all, pouring a few drops in the cups  
 to start the ritual. Once they'd poured libations 340  
 and drunk wine to their heart's content, Odysseus,  
 a crafty man who had a scheme in mind, spoke out:

"Suitors of the splendid queen, listen to me,  
 so I can say what the heart here in my chest  
 is prompting me to state. It's a request,  
 a plea, especially to Eurymachus  
 and godlike Antinous, since what he said  
 was most appropriate—for the moment  
 you should postpone this business with the bow  
 and turn the matter over to the gods. 350  
 In the morning a god will give the strength [280]  
 to whoever he desires. But come now,  
 give me the polished bow, so in this hall  
 I can test these hands of mine and find out  
 if my supple limbs still possess the strength  
 they used to have, or if my wandering  
 and my lack of food have quite destroyed it."

BOOK TWENTY-ONE

Odysseus finished. They were extremely angry,  
fearing that a beggar might string the polished bow.  
So lord Antinous, addressing him directly, 360  
took Odysseus to task:

“You wretched stranger,  
your mind lacks any sense—you’ve none at all.  
Aren’t you content to share a feast with us,  
such noble men, without being disturbed [290]  
or lacking any food, and to listen  
to the words we speak to one another?  
No other beggar or stranger listens in  
on what we say. The wine, so honey sweet,  
has injured you, as it harms other men,  
who gulp it down and swallow far too much. 370  
Wine befuddled even great Eurytion,  
the centaur, in brave Perithous’s house,  
when he’d gone to the Lapiths. Afterwards,  
when his heart was blinded by drinking wine,  
in a mad fit he committed evil acts  
in Perithous’s home. Grief seized the heroes.  
They all leapt up and hauled him out of doors,  
through the gate, then cut off his ears and nose  
with pitiless bronze. His wits were reckless, [300]  
and he went on his way, bearing madness 380  
in his foolish heart. And that’s the reason  
the fight between centaurs and men began.  
But he first discovered evil in himself,  
when loaded down with wine.<sup>1</sup> And so I say  
if you string the bow, you’ll face great trouble.  
You’ll not get gentle treatment anywhere,  
not in this land. We’ll ship you off at once  
in a black ship over to king Echetus,  
who likes to kill and torture everyone.  
You won’t escape from him. So drink your wine 390  
in peace, and don’t compete with younger men.” [310]

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

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<sup>1</sup>Eurytion, a Centaur, was a guest at Perithous’s wedding. A battle broke out between the centaurs and Perithous’s people, the Lapiths. This version blames the fight on Eurytion’s drinking. Eurytion was later killed by Hercules. It’s not clear here whether the Centaurs are pictured as normal human beings or, as they were later, creatures with the head and torso of a human being and the body and legs of a horse.

“Antinous, it’s neither good nor proper  
to deny guests of Telemachus a chance,  
no matter who it is comes to this house.  
And if, trusting in his strength and power,  
the stranger strings Odysseus’s great bow,  
do you believe this man will take me home  
and make me his wife? I’m sure he himself  
bears no such hope inside that chest of his. 400  
So none of you should be at dinner here  
with sorrow in your heart because of him.  
That would be undignified.”

Then Eurymachus, [320]  
son of Polybus, answered her:

“Wise Penelope,  
daughter of Icarius, we do not think  
this man will take you home. That would be wrong.  
But we would be ashamed by public gossip  
from both men and women if later on  
some base Achaean spoke of us like this:

‘Those men wooing the wife of that fine man 410  
are far worse than him—they can’t even string  
his polished bow, and yet another man,  
a beggar who came here on his travels,  
did so with ease and then shot through the iron.’

That’s what men will say, and those words would be  
a slur on us.”

Then wise Penelope replied: [330]

“Eurymachus, there is no way at all  
there will be in this district good reports  
of those dishonouring and eating up  
a noble’s home. Why turn the matter now 420  
into a slur? This stranger’s very large  
and strongly built. Furthermore, he maintains  
that by birth he comes from a good father.  
So come now, offer him the polished bow,  
and let us see. I will say this to you—  
and it will happen—if he strings the bow  
and Apollo grants him glory, I’ll dress him

in some lovely clothes, a cloak and tunic,  
 and give him a sharp spear, as a defence [340]  
 from dogs and men, as well as a fine sword, 430  
 and sandals for his feet. Then I'll send him  
 wherever his heart and spirit prompt him."

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her:

"Mother,  
 among Achaeans, no man has a right  
 stronger than my own to offer this bow  
 to anyone I wish or to withhold it—  
 none of those who rule in rocky Ithaca  
 or in the islands neighbouring Elis,  
 where horses graze. Among these men, no one  
 will deny my will by force, if I wish 440  
 to give the bow, even to this stranger  
 as an outright gift to take away with him.  
 But, mother, you should go to your own rooms [350]  
 and keep busy with your proper duties,  
 the loom and spindle, and tell your women  
 to go about their tasks. The bow will be  
 a matter for the men, especially me,  
 since power in this house is justly mine."

Penelope, astonished, went back to her chamber,  
 taking to heart the prudent words her son had said. 450  
 With her servant women she walked up to her room  
 and there wept for Odysseus, her dear husband,  
 till bright-eyed Athena cast sweet sleep on her eyes.

The worthy swineherd had picked up the curving bow  
 and was carrying it. But the suitors in the hall [360]  
 started shouting. One of those arrogant young men  
 then said something like:

"What are you doing,  
 you wretched swineherd, carrying that bow,  
 you idiot? You'll soon be with the swine  
 all alone, no one there, being eaten 460  
 by those swift dogs you yourself have raised,  
 if lord Apollo and the other gods  
 act with graciousness to us."



BOOK TWENTY-ONE

That's what they said.  
So, though the bow was in his hands, he put it down.  
He was afraid—so many men inside the hall  
were yelling at him. But then from across the room  
Telemachus shouted out a threat:

“Old man,  
keep on moving up here with that bow or else  
you may regret it. I'm younger than you, [370]  
but I might force you out into the fields 470  
and throw rocks at you. I'm the stronger man.  
I wish my hands had that strength and power  
over all the suitors here. I would force  
some of them soon enough to leave this house  
and go back home. They would not be happy.  
The schemes they keep concocting are unjust.”

Telemachus finished speaking. But the suitors  
all had a hearty laugh at his expense. This eased  
their bitter anger at Telemachus. Meanwhile,  
the swineherd had kept on moving through the hall, 480  
carrying the bow. He came to shrewd Odysseus  
and placed it in his hands. Then he summoned the nurse, [380]  
Eurycleia, and said to her:

“Wise Eurycleia,  
Telemachus is telling you to lock up  
the closely fitted doorway to this hall.  
If anyone hears groans inside this room  
or any noise from men within these walls,  
she's not to run outside, but stay in there,  
busy with her work and saying nothing.”<sup>1</sup>

After he had said this, her words could find no wings. 490  
She bolted all the doors to that well-furnished hall.  
And Philoetius, without a word, slipped out  
and locked the courtyard gates inside the sturdy walls.  
A cable from a curving ship was lying there, [390]  
by the portico, made of papyrus fibres.  
With that he lashed the gates tight shut and went inside,  
moved to the chair where he had been before, sat down,

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<sup>1</sup>The doorway in question is the entrance to the women's quarters. They are to be locked in so that they don't interrupt the revenge killings or run off to raise a general alarm.

and watched Odysseus, who already had the bow.  
 He was turning it this way and that, testing it  
 in different ways to see if, while its lord was gone, 500  
 worms had nibbled on the horns. One of the suitors,  
 with a glance beside him, would say something like:

“This man knows bows—he must be an expert.  
 Either he has bows like this stored at home  
 or else he wants to make one. That is why  
 he’s turning it around in all directions.  
 That beggar’s really skilled in devious tricks.” [400]

And then another of those arrogant young men  
 would make some further comment:

“Well, I hope  
 the chance that this brings him some benefit 510  
 matches his ability to string this bow.”

That is how the suitors talked. But shrewd Odysseus,  
 once he had raised the weapon and looked it over  
 from every angle, then—just as someone really skilled  
 at playing the lyre and singing has no trouble  
 when he loops a taut string around a brand-new peg,  
 tying the twisted sheep’s gut down at either end—  
 that’s how easily lord Odysseus strung that bow.  
 Holding it in his right hand, he tested the string. [410]  
 It sang out, resonating like a swallow’s song, 520  
 beneath his touch. Grief overwhelmed the suitors.  
 The skin on all of them changed colour. And then Zeus  
 gave out an ominous sign, a peal of thunder.  
 Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, rejoiced—  
 crooked-minded Cronos’ son had sent an omen.  
 Then he picked up a swift arrow lying by itself  
 on the table there beside him—the other ones,  
 which those Achaeans soon would be familiar with—  
 were stored inside the hollow quiver. He set it  
 against the bow, on the bridge, pulled the notched arrow 530  
 and the bowstring back—still sitting in his seat— [420]  
 and with a sure aim let it fly. It did not miss,  
 not even a single hole in all the axe heads.  
 The arrow, weighted with bronze, sped straight on through  
 and out the other end. And at that point, Odysseus  
 called out to his son:

BOOK TWENTY-ONE

“Telemachus, the stranger  
sitting in your halls has not disgraced you.  
I did not miss my aim or work too long  
to string that bow. My strength is still intact,  
in spite of all the suitors’ scornful gibes. 540  
Now it’s time to get a dinner ready  
for these Achaeans, while there’s still some light,  
then entertain ourselves in different ways,  
with singing and the lyre. For these are things [430]  
which should accompany a dinner feast.”

As he spoke, he gave a signal with his eyebrows.  
Telemachus, godlike Odysseus’s dear son,  
cinched his sword belt tight, closed his fist around a spear,  
moved in close beside his father, next to his seat,  
and stood there by him, fully armed with gleaming bronze. 550

BOOK TWENTY-TWO  
THE KILLING OF THE SUITORS

*[Odysseus stands in the doorway and shoots arrows at the suitors; he first kills Antinous; Eurymachus offers compensation for what the suitors have done; Odysseus kills him; Telemachus kills Amphinomus, then goes to fetch weapons from the storeroom; Melanthius reveals where the weapons are stored and gets some for the suitors; Eumaeus and Philoetius catch Melanthius and string him up to the rafters; Athena appears in the guise of Mentor to encourage Odysseus; Agelaus tries to rally the suitors; Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus and Philoetius keep killing suitors until Athena makes the suitors panic; Leiodes seeks mercy from Odysseus but is killed; Odysseus spares Phemius and Medon; Odysseus questions Eurycleia about the women servants who have dishonoured him; he gets them to haul the bodies outside and clean up the hall; Telemachus hangs all the unfaithful female slaves; Melanthius is cut up and castrated; Odysseus purifies the house and yard; Odysseus is reunited with the faithful women servants.]*

Resourceful Odysseus stripped off his rags, grabbed up the bow and quiver full of arrows, and sprang up, moving to the doorway. He dumped his swift arrows beside his feet and then shouted at the suitors:

“This contest to determine who is best  
is over. But there’s another target—  
one no man has ever struck—I’ll find out  
if I can hit it. May Apollo grant  
I get the glory.”

As Odysseus spoke,  
he aimed a bitter arrow straight at Antinous, 10  
who was just about to raise up to his lips  
a fine double-handled goblet he was holding [10]  
in his hands, so he could drink some wine. In his heart  
there was no thought of slaughter. Among those feasting,  
who would ever think, in such a crowd of people,  
that one man, even if his strength was truly great,  
would risk confronting evil death, his own black fate?  
Odysseus took aim and hit him with an arrow  
right in the neck—its point passed through his tender throat.  
He slumped over on his side, and, as he was hit, 20  
the goblet fell to the ground, and thick spurts of blood  
came flowing quickly from his nose. Then, suddenly  
he pushed the table from him with his foot, spilling [20]  
food onto the floor—the bread and roasted meat

were ruined. When the suitors saw Antinous fall,  
they raised an uproar in the house, leaping from their seats,  
scurrying in panic through the hall, looking round,  
searching in every corner of the well-built walls,  
but there were no weapons anywhere, no strong spear  
or shield for them to seize. They all began to shout,  
yelling words of anger at Odysseus: 30

“Stranger,  
you’ll pay for shooting arrows at this man.  
For you there’ll be no contests any more.  
It’s certain you’ll be killed once and for all.  
You’ve killed a man, by far the finest youth  
in all of Ithaca. And now vultures  
are going to feast on you.” [30]

Each of them  
shouted out words like these. They did not realize  
he had killed the man on purpose. In their folly,  
they did not understand that they were now enmeshed  
in destruction’s net. Shrewd Odysseus scowled at them  
and gave his answer: 40

“You dogs, because you thought  
I’d not come back from Troy to my own home,  
you’ve been ravaging my house, raping women,  
and, in devious ways, wooing my wife,  
while I was still alive, with no fear of gods  
who hold wide heaven, or of any man  
who might take his revenge in days to come.  
And now a fatal snare has caught you all.” [40]

As Odysseus said this, pale fear seized the suitors. 50  
Each man looked around to see how he might flee  
complete destruction. Only Eurymachus spoke—  
he answered him and said:

“If, in fact, it’s true  
that you’re Odysseus of Ithaca,  
back home again, you’re right in what you say  
about the actions of Achaeans here,  
their frequent reckless conduct in your home,  
their many foolish actions in the fields.  
But the man who is responsible for this

now lies dead—I mean Antinous, the one 60  
 who started all this business, not because [50]  
 he was all that eager to get married—  
 that’s not what he desired. No. For he had  
 another plan in mind, which Cronos’ son  
 did not bring to fulfillment. He wanted  
 to become the king of fertile Ithaca,  
 by ambushing your son and killing him.  
 Now he himself is dead, as he deserved.  
 At this point, then, you should spare your people.  
 Later on we’ll collect throughout the land 70  
 payment for what we’ve had to eat and drink  
 inside your halls, and every man will bring  
 compensation on his own, in an amount  
 worth twenty oxen, paying you in gold  
 and bronze until your heart is mollified.  
 Until that time, no one is blaming you  
 for being so angry.”

Shrewd Odysseus glared at him [60]  
 and then replied:

“Eurymachus, if you gave me  
 all the goods you got from your own fathers,  
 everything which you now own, and added 80  
 other assets you could obtain elsewhere,  
 not even then would I hold back my hands  
 from slaughter, not until the suitors pay  
 for all their arrogance. Now you’ve a choice—  
 to fight here face to face or, if someone  
 wishes to evade his death and lethal fate,  
 to run away. But I don’t think there’s one  
 who will escape being utterly destroyed.”

As Odysseus said this, their knees and hearts went slack  
 right where they stood. Then Eurymachus spoke once more, 90  
 calling out to them:

“Friends, this man won’t check [70]  
 those all-conquering hands of his. Instead,  
 now he’s got the polished bow and quiver,  
 from that threshold he’ll just keep on shooting,  
 until he’s killed us all. So let’s think now  
 about how we should fight. Pull out your swords,

BOOK TWENTY-TWO

and set tables up to block those arrows—  
they bring on death so fast—and then let's charge,  
go at him all together in a group,  
so we can dislodge him from the threshold, 100  
clear the door, get down into the city,  
and sound the alarm as swiftly as we can.  
Then this man should soon take his final shot.”

Once he said this, Eurymachus pulled out his sword,  
a sharp two-edged blade of bronze, and then charged out, [80]  
rushing at Odysseus with a blood-curdling shout.  
As he did so, lord Odysseus shot an arrow.  
It hit him in the chest, striking near his nipple—  
and the swift shaft sped on, straight into his liver.  
Eurymachus's sword slipped down onto the ground. 110  
He bent double, writhing on the table, and collapsed,  
knocking food and two-handled cups onto the floor.  
His forehead kept hammering the earth, his heart  
in agony, as both his feet kicked at the chair  
and made it shake. A mist fell over both his eyes.

Then Amphinomus went at glorious Odysseus,  
charging straight for him, his sharp sword drawn and ready, [90]  
to see if he would somehow yield the door to him.  
But Telemachus moved in too quickly for him—  
he threw a bronze-tipped spear and hit him from behind, 120  
between the shoulder blades. He drove it through his chest.  
With a crash, Amphinomus fell, and his forehead  
struck hard against the ground. Telemachus jumped back,  
leaving his spear in Amphinomus, afraid that,  
if he tried recovering the long-shadowed spear,  
some Achaean might attack and stab him with a sword  
or lunge at him as he was dealing with the corpse.  
So he backed off quickly and made his way across  
to his dear father. Standing close to him, he spoke— [100]  
his words had wings:

“Father, now I'll bring you 130  
a shield, two spears, a helmet made of bronze,  
one that fits your temples. When I get back,  
I'll arm myself and hand out other weapons  
to the swineherd and keeper of the goats.  
It's better if we fully arm ourselves.”

Quick-witted Odysseus answered him and said:

“Get them here fast, while I still have arrows  
to protect myself, in case they push me  
from the doors, since I’m here by myself.”

Odysseus spoke. Telemachus obeyed the orders 140  
of his dear father. He hurried to the storeroom  
where they kept their splendid weapons. From there he took  
four shields, eight spears, and four helmets made of bronze [110]  
with thick horsehair plumes. He went out carrying these  
and made his way back quickly to his dear father.  
First, he armed himself with bronze around his body,  
and the two servants did the same, dressing themselves  
in dazzling armour. Then they went to take their place  
in the doorway beside skilled and shrewd Odysseus,  
who, as long as he had arrows to protect him, 150  
continued shooting at the suitors in his home,  
killing them one by one. As his arrows hit them,  
they fell down in heaps. But once he’d used his arrows,  
the king could shoot no more. So he then propped the bow [120]  
against the doorpost of the well-constructed wall,  
and let it lean beside the shining entrance way.  
Standing there alone, he set across his shoulders  
his four-layered shield, and on his powerful head  
he put a beautifully crafted helmet  
with horsehair plumes nodding ominously on top. 160  
Then in his fists he grabbed two heavy bronze-tipped spears.

In that well built wall there was a narrow doorway  
and, close to the upper level of the threshold  
into the great hall, the entrance to a passage,  
blocked off by a close-fitting door.<sup>1</sup> So Odysseus  
told the worthy swineherd to stand beside this door  
and watch, for there was just one way of reaching it. [130]  
Then Agelaus cried, calling all the suitors:

“Friends, can someone climb up to that side door  
and tell the men to raise a quick alarm? 170  
Then this man won’t be shooting anymore.”

But Melanthius, the goatherd, answered him and said:

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<sup>1</sup>To understand the architectural details of the palace, please consult the diagram on p. 439 below.



“It can’t be done, god-raised Agelaus.  
 The main gate to the yard is really near,  
 and the entrance very hard to get through.<sup>1</sup>  
 One man could block the way for everyone,  
 if he were brave. But come, let me bring you  
 armour from the storeroom. You could use it.  
 It’s in the house, I think—there’s nowhere else  
 Odysseus and his noble son could stash  
 their weapons.”

[140]  
180

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

190 [150]

“Telemachus,  
 it seems one of the women in the house  
 has stirred up a nasty fight against us,  
 or perhaps Melanthius is the one.”

Prudent Telemachus then said in his reply:

“Father, I bear the blame for this myself.  
 It’s no one else’s fault. I left it open—  
 the close-fitting door of that storage room.  
 One of them has keener eyes than I do.  
 Come, good Eumaeus, shut the storeroom door.  
 Try to find out if it was a woman  
 who did this, or if it was Melanthius,  
 Dolius’s son—I suspect it’s him.”

200

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<sup>1</sup>Agelaus wants someone to get through the side door by the entrance to the main hall, go out through passage into the yard, and raise the alarm. Melanthius objects, saying that the passage leading from the side door, which is guarded by Eumaeus, is very narrow and the courtyard gate is still close enough for Odysseus to reach with an arrow from the main doorway.

While they were saying these things to one another, [160]  
 Melanthius the goatherd went back once again,  
 to carry back more armour from the storage room.  
 But the diligent swineherd saw him and spoke out,  
 saying a quick word to Odysseus, who was close by:

“Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
 raised from Zeus, I can see that man again, 210  
 the wretch we think is going to the storeroom.  
 Give me clear instructions—Should I kill him,  
 if I prove the stronger man, or should I  
 bring him to you here? He can pay you back  
 for the many insolent acts he’s done,  
 those devious schemes he’s thought up in your home.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said: [170]

“These proud suitors Telemachus and I  
 will keep penned up in here, inside the hall,  
 no matter how ferociously they fight. 220  
 You two twist Melanthius’ feet and arms  
 behind him, then throw him in the storeroom,  
 with boards lashed against his back. Tie the man  
 to a twisted rope and then hoist him up  
 the lofty pillar till he’s near the beams.  
 Let him stay alive a while and suffer  
 in agonizing pain.”

As Odysseus spoke,  
 they listened eagerly and did what he advised.  
 They moved off to the storeroom, without being seen  
 by the man inside. He was, as it turned out, searching 230 [180]  
 in a corner of the room for more bronze weapons.  
 As Melanthius, the goatherd, made his way out  
 across the threshold, holding a lovely helmet  
 in one hand and in the other an old broad shield  
 covered in mould—one belonging to Laertes,  
 which he used to carry as a youthful warrior,  
 but which now was lying in storage, with its seams  
 unravelling on the straps—the two men jumped out,  
 grabbed him, hauled him by the hair back inside the room,  
 and threw him on the ground—the man was terrified. 240  
 They tied up his feet and hands with heart-wrenching bonds  
 and lashed them tight behind his back, as Odysseus, [190]

Laertes' royal son, who had endured so much,  
 had ordered. They tied him up with a twisted rope,  
 yanked him up the lofty pillar, and raised him high,  
 up near the roof beams. And then, swineherd Eumaeus,  
 you taunted him and said:

“Now, Melanthius,  
 you can truly remain on watch all night,  
 stretched out on a warm bed, as you deserve.  
 You won't miss early Dawn on her gold throne,                     250  
 as she rises from the streams of Ocean—  
 the very hour you've been bringing goats here,  
 so the suitors can prepare their banquets  
 in these halls.”

They left Melanthius there,                     [200]  
 roped up and dangling in bonds which would destroy him.  
 The two picked up their weapons, closed the shining door,  
 and made their way to wise and crafty Odysseus.  
 Filled with fighting spirit, they stood there, four of them  
 on the threshold, facing many brave men in the hall.

Then Athena, Zeus's daughter, came up to them,                     260  
 looking just like Mentor and with his voice, as well.  
 Odysseus saw her and rejoiced. He cried:

“Mentor,  
 help fight off disaster. Remember me,  
 your dear comrade. I've done good things for you.  
 You're my companion, someone my own age.”

Odysseus said this, thinking Mentor was, in fact,                     [210]  
 Athena, who incites armed warriors to fight.  
 From across the hall the suitors yelled:

“Mentor,  
 don't let what Odysseus says convince you  
 to fight the suitors and to stand by him.                     270  
 For this is how it will end up, I think,  
 when our will prevails. Once we've killed these men,  
 father and son, then you'll be slaughtered, too.  
 You may be eager to win glory now,  
 here in the hall, but you will have to pay  
 with your own head. Once our swords slice away

that strength of yours, we'll put your property, [220]  
 all the fine things you have inside your home  
 and in the fields, with what Odysseus owns  
 and refuse to let your sons and daughters 280  
 live in your house or your beloved wife  
 remain in Ithaca, not in the city."

After they made this threat, Athena in her heart  
 grew very angry, and she rebuked Odysseus  
 with heated words:

"Odysseus, you no longer have  
 that firm spirit and force you once possessed  
 when for nine years you fought against the Trojans  
 over white-armed Helen, who was nobly born.  
 You never stopped. You slaughtered many men  
 in fearful combat. Through your stratagems 290  
 Priam's city of broad streets was taken. [230]  
 So how come now, when you are in your home  
 with your own possessions, you are moaning  
 about acting bravely with these suitors?  
 Come on now, my friend, stand here beside me,  
 see what I do, so you can understand  
 the quality of Mentor, Alcimus' son—  
 he may be surrounded by his enemies,  
 but he repays those who have honoured him."

Athena spoke. But she did not give him the strength 300  
 to win that fight decisively. She was still testing  
 the power and resolution of Odysseus  
 and his splendid son. So she flew up to the roof  
 inside the smoky hall, and sat there, taking on [240]  
 the appearance of a swallow.

Meanwhile, the suitors  
 were being urged to action by Agelaus,  
 Damastor's son, by Eurynomus, Amphimedon,  
 Demoptolemus, Peisander, Polyctor's son,  
 and shrewd Polybus. Among the suitors still alive  
 these were the finest men by far. Odysseus' bow 310  
 and his swift arrows had brought down all the others.  
 Agelaus spoke out, addressing all the suitors:

“Friends, this man’s hands have been invincible,  
 but now they’ll stop. Mentor has moved away,  
 once he uttered some empty boast. And now,  
 they’re left alone before the outer gates. [250]  
 So don’t throw those long spears of yours at them,  
 not all at once. Come, you six men throw first,  
 to see if Zeus will let us strike Odysseus  
 and win glory. Those others over there 320  
 will be no trouble after he’s collapsed.”

Agelaus spoke these words, and in their eagerness  
 to follow what he said, the suitors hurled their spears.  
 But Athena made sure their spear throws missed the mark.  
 One suitor hit a doorpost in the well-built hall.  
 Another struck the closely fitted door. One ash spear,  
 weighted down with its bronze tip, fell against the wall.  
 When they’d escaped the suitor’s spears, lord Odysseus, [260]  
 who had suffered so much pain, was the first to speak:

“Friends, now I’ll give the word—let’s hurl our spears 330  
 into all those suitors trying to kill us  
 and adding to the harm they did before.”

Once Odysseus said this, they all took steady aim  
 and threw their pointed spears. Odysseus struck down  
 Demoptolemus, Telemachus hit Euryades,  
 the swineherd struck Elatus, and the cattle herder  
 killed Peisander. As these three men lay dying,  
 their teeth chewed up the dirt. The suitors then pulled back [270]  
 to the inner section of the hall. The others  
 rushed up quickly to pull the spears out of the dead. 340  
 The suitors kept on throwing spears with frantic haste,  
 but, though there were a lot, Athena made them miss.  
 One suitor struck the doorpost of the well-built hall.  
 Another hit the closely fitted door. One ash spear,  
 weighted down with its bronze tip, was hurled into the wall.  
 But Amphimedon did hit Telemachus’s hand  
 a glancing blow across the wrist. The bronze spear point  
 sliced the surface of his skin. And with his long spear  
 Ctessipus grazed the swineherd’s shoulder above his shield,  
 but the spear veered off and fell down onto the ground. 350 [280]  
 Then the group surrounding sly and shrewd Odysseus  
 once more threw sharp spears into the crowd of suitors,  
 and once again Odysseus, sacker of cities,

hit a man—Eurydamas—while Telemachus struck Amphimedon, and the swineherd Eumaeus hit Polybus. The cattle herder Philoetius struck Ctesippus in the chest and then cried these words, shouting above the body:

“Son of Polythereses,  
 you love to jeer—but don’t yield anymore  
 to your stupidity and boast so much. 360  
 Leave that sort of bragging to the gods,  
 for they are far more powerful than you.  
 This is your guest gift—something to pay back [290]  
 the ox hoof you gave godlike Odysseus  
 back when he was a beggar in his home.”

That’s what the herder of the bent-horned cattle said.  
 At close range Odysseus wounded Damastor’s son  
 with his long spear, and Telemachus managed to hit  
 Leocritus, son of Evenor—he struck him  
 with his spear right in the groin and drove the bronze point 370  
 right through the body. Leocritus fell forward,  
 his entire face and forehead hammering the ground.  
 Athena held up her man-destroying aegis  
 from high up in the roof.<sup>1</sup> The suitors’ minds panicked,  
 and they fled through the hall, like a herd of cattle  
 when a vicious gadfly goads them to stampede, [300]  
 once spring season starts and days begin to lengthen.  
 Just as falcons with hooked talons and curving beaks  
 fly down from the mountains, chasing birds, driving them  
 well below the clouds, as they swoop along the plain, 380  
 then pounce on them and kill, for there is no defence,  
 no flying away, while men get pleasure from the chase,  
 that’s how Odysseus and his men pursued the suitors  
 and struck them down, one by one, all through the hall.  
 As their heads were smashed in, horrific cries arose,  
 and the whole floor in the hall was awash with blood.

Then Leiodes ran out, grabbed Odysseus’s knee, [310]  
 and begged him—his words had wings:

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<sup>1</sup>The aegis is a divine shield which, when held up in battle, has the power of terrifying human beings and making them run away.

“Odysseus,  
 I implore you at your knee—respect me  
 and have pity. I tell you I’ve never  
 injured a single woman in these halls  
 by saying or doing something reckless.  
 Instead I tried to stop the other suitors  
 when they did those things. They did not listen  
 or restrain their hands from acting badly.  
 So their own wickedness now brings about  
 their wretched fate. Among them I’m a prophet  
 who has done no wrong, and yet I will lie dead,  
 since there’s no future thanks for one’s good deeds.”

390

Shrewd Odysseus glared at him and answered: [320]

“If, in fact,  
 you claim to be a prophet with these men,  
 no doubt here in these halls you’ve often prayed  
 that my goal of a sweet return would stay  
 unrealized, so my dear wife could go  
 back to your own home and bear you children.  
 That’s why you won’t escape a bitter death.”

400

As he said this, Odysseus picked up in his fist  
 a sword that lay nearby—Agelaus had dropped it  
 and left it on the ground when he was killed—with it  
 Odysseus struck Leiodes right across his neck.  
 His head was rolling in the dust as he was speaking.

410

And then the minstrel Phemius, son of Terpes, [330]  
 who had been compelled to sing before the suitors,  
 attempted to evade his own disastrous fate.  
 He stood holding his clear-toned lyre by the side door,  
 his mind divided—should he slip out from the hall  
 and take a seat close to the altar of great Zeus,  
 god of the courtyard, where Laertes and Odysseus  
 had burned many thighs from sacrificial oxen,  
 or should he rush up to Odysseus’s knee  
 and beg him for his life. As his mind thought it through,  
 the latter course of action seemed the better choice,  
 to clasp the knee of Laertes’ son, Odysseus.  
 He set down the hollow lyre, left it on the ground,  
 between the mixing bowl and silver-studded chair, [340]

420

rushed out in person to clasp Odysseus's knee,  
and addressed him with this plea—his words had wings:

“I implore you, Odysseus, show respect  
and pity. There'll be sorrow for you later,  
if you kill me, a minstrel, for I sing 430  
to gods and men. I am self-taught. The god  
has planted in my heart all kinds of songs,  
and I'm good enough to sing before you,  
as to a god. Don't be too eager then  
to cut my throat. Your son Telemachus [350]  
could tell you that it wasn't my desire  
nor did I need to spend time at your house,  
singing for the suitors at their banquets.  
But their greater power and their numbers  
brought me here by force.”

As Phemius said this, 440  
royal Telemachus, who was standing near him,  
heard his words and spoke up, calling to his father:

“Hold on. Don't let your sword injure this man.  
He's innocent. We should save Medon, too,  
the herald, who always looked out for me  
inside the house when I was still a child,  
unless Philoetius has killed him,  
or the swineherd, or he ran into you  
when you were on a rampage in the hall.” [360]

Telemachus spoke. Medon, whose mind was clever, 450  
heard him, for he was cowering beneath a chair,  
his skin covered by a new-flayed ox-hide, trying  
to escape his own black fate. He quickly jumped out  
from underneath the chair, threw aside the ox-hide,  
rushed up to clasp Telemachus's knee, and begged—  
his words had wings:

“Here I am, my friend.  
Stop! Tell your father to restrain himself,  
in case, as he exults in his great strength,  
he slaughters me with that sharp bronze of his,  
in his fury with the suitors, those men 460  
who consumed his goods here in his own hall, [370]  
those fools who did not honour you at all.”



Resourceful Odysseus then smiled at him and said:

“Don’t worry! This man here has saved your life.  
 He’s rescued you, so you know in your heart  
 and can tell someone else how doing good  
 is preferable by far to acting badly.  
 But move out of the hall and sit outside,  
 in the yard, some distance from the killing,  
 you and the minstrel with so many songs, 470  
 until I finish all I need to do.”

After Odysseus spoke, the two men went away,  
 outside the hall, and sat down there, by the altar  
 of great Zeus, peering around in all directions, [380]  
 always thinking that they might be killed.

Odysseus then  
 began to search the house to check if anyone  
 was hiding there, still alive, trying to escape  
 his own murky fate. But every man he looked at—  
 and there were many—had fallen in blood and dust,  
 like fish which, in the meshes of a net, sailors 480  
 have pulled from the gray sea up on the curving beach,  
 lying piled up on the sand, longing for sea waves,  
 while the bright sun drains away their life—that is how  
 the suitors were heaped up, piled on one another.

Resourceful Odysseus then said to Telemachus: [390]

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

After Odysseus spoke, Telemachus obeyed  
 what his dear father said. He shook the door and called 490  
 to Eurycleia, saying:<sup>1</sup>

“Get up, old woman,  
 born many years ago—the one in charge  
 of female household servants in our home.

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<sup>1</sup>The doorway here is the entrance to the women’s quarters. At the start of the slaughter Eurycleia had locked it to prevent any of the women coming into the great hall.

Come on out. My father's calling for you.  
He has something in mind and wants to talk."

He spoke. But Eurycleia's words could find no wings.  
She opened up the door of the well-furnished hall  
and came out. Telemachus went first and led the way. [400]  
There she found Odysseus with the bodies of the dead,  
spattered with gore and blood, like a lion moving on 500  
from gorging on a farmyard ox, his entire chest  
and both sides of his muzzle caked with fresh-spilt blood,  
a terrifying sight, that's how Odysseus looked,  
with bloodstained feet and upper arms. Eurycleia,  
once she saw the bodies and huge amounts of blood,  
was ready to cry out for joy now that she'd seen  
such a mighty act. But Odysseus held her back  
and checked her eagerness. He challenged her and said— [410]  
his words had wings:

"Old woman, you can rejoice  
in your own heart—but don't cry out aloud. 510  
Restrain yourself. For it's a sacrilege  
to boast above the bodies of the slain.  
Divine Fate and their own reckless actions  
have killed these men, who failed to honour  
any man on earth who came among them,  
bad or good. And so through their depravity  
they've met an evil fate. But come now,  
tell me about the women in these halls,  
the ones who disrespect me and the ones  
who bear no blame."

His dear nurse Eurycleia 520  
then answered him and said:

"All right my child, [420]  
I'll tell you the truth. In these halls of yours,  
there are fifty female servants, women  
we have taught to carry out their duties,  
to comb out wool and bear their slavery.  
Of these, twelve women in all have acted  
without a sense of shame and no respect  
for me or even for Penelope.  
Telemachus has only just grown up.  
His mother hasn't yet let him control 530

our female servants. But come, let's go now  
to that bright upstairs room and tell your wife.  
Some god has made her sleep."

Resourceful Odysseus [430]

then answered her and said:

"Don't wake her up.  
Not yet. Those women who before all this  
behaved so badly, tell them to come here."

Once he said this, the old woman went through the house  
to tell the slaves the news and urge them to appear.  
Odysseus then summoned Telemachus to him,  
together with Eumaeus and Philoetius. 540  
He spoke to them—his words had wings:

"You three men,  
start carrying these corpses outside now,  
then punish those shameless servant women.  
Have them clean these splendid chairs and tables,  
and wipe them with sponges soaked in water.  
Once you've put the entire house in order, [440]  
then take those servants from the well-built hall  
to a spot outside between the roundhouse  
and the sturdy courtyard wall and kill them.<sup>1</sup>  
Slash them with long swords, until life is gone 550  
from all of them, and they cannot recall  
Aphrodite and how they loved the suitors  
when they enjoyed sex with them in secret."

Odysseus spoke. The crowd of women servants came,  
wailing plaintively and shedding many tears.  
First they gathered up the bodies of the dead  
and laid the corpses out beneath the portico,  
leaning them on one another in the well-fenced yard. [450]  
Odysseus himself told them what they had to do  
and hurried on the work. The women were compelled 560  
to carry out the dead. Once that was done, they cleaned  
the splendid chairs and tables, wiping off the gore  
with porous sponges soaked in water. Telemachus,  
along with Philoetius and Eumaeus,

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<sup>1</sup>The roundhouse is in one corner of the courtyard.

with shovels scraped the floor inside the well-built hall,  
 and women took the dirt and threw it in the yard.  
 Once they had restored due order in the hall,  
 they led the servant women from the sturdy home  
 to a place between the courtyard wall and roundhouse,  
 herding those household slaves into a narrow space  
 where there was no way to escape. Shrewd Telemachus  
 began by speaking to the others: 570 [460]

“I don’t want  
 to take these women’s lives with a clean death.  
 They poured insults on my head, on my mother,  
 and were always sleeping with the suitors.”

He spoke, then tied the cable of a dark-prowed ship  
 to a large pillar, threw one end above the roundhouse,  
 then pulled it taut and high, so that no woman’s foot  
 could reach the ground. Just as doves or long-winged thrushes  
 charge into a snare set in a thicket, as they seek 580  
 their roosting place, only to find they have been welcomed [470]  
 by a dreadful bed, that is how those women stood  
 all in a row, with nooses fixed around their necks,  
 so they might have a pitiful death. For some time,  
 their feet kept twitching, but that did not last long.

Then they brought Melanthius out through the doorway  
 into the yard. With pitiless bronze they sliced off  
 his nose and ears, then ripped off his cock and balls  
 as raw meat for dogs to eat, and in their fury  
 hacked off his hands and feet. After they’d done that, 590  
 they washed their hands and feet and went inside the house, [480]  
 returning to Odysseus. Their work was finished.  
 But he called Eurycleia, his dear nurse:

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

His dear nurse Eurycleia answered him:

“My child,  
 what you say is all well and good, but come,

BOOK TWENTY-TWO

I'll fetch you clothing, a cloak and tunic, 600  
so you don't stand like this in your own hall  
with nothing but rags on your wide shoulders.  
That would be the cause of some dishonour."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said: [490]

"Yes, but first make me a fire in the hall."

Dear nurse Eurycleia then followed what he said.  
She brought fire and sulphur, so lord Odysseus  
purged the house and yard completely. Eurycleia  
went back through Odysseus's splendid home to tell 610  
the women what had happened and to order them  
to reappear. They all came out, holding torches,  
and gathered around Odysseus, embracing him.  
They clasped and kissed his head, his hands, his shoulders,  
in loving welcome. A joyful longing seized him [500]  
to sigh and weep, for in his heart he knew them all.

BOOK TWENTY-THREE  
ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

*[Eurycleia wakes up Penelope to tell her Odysseus has returned and killed the Suitors; Penelope refuses to believe the news; Penelope comes down and sits in the same room as Odysseus but does not recognize him; Telemachus criticizes his mother; Odysseus invites her to test him and discusses with Telemachus what their next step will be to deal with the aftermath of the killings; they organize a fake wedding dance to deceive anyone passing the house; Odysseus is given a bath, and Athena transforms his appearance; Penelope tells Eurycleia to set his old bed up for him outside the bedroom; Odysseus tells the story of the bed; Penelope acknowledges Odysseus and embraces him; Odysseus tells her of the ordeals yet to come, according to the prophecy of Teiresias; Penelope and Odysseus go to bed, make love, and then she hears the story of his adventures; in the morning Odysseus gets up, tells Penelope to stay in her upper rooms, puts on his armour, instructs Eumaeus and Philoetius to arm themselves; Athena leads them out of the city.]*

Old Eurycleia climbed up to an upstairs room,  
laughing to herself, so she could tell her mistress  
that Odysseus, her dear husband, was in the house.  
Her old knees moved swiftly as her feet hurried on.  
She stood beside her lady's head and spoke to her:

“Wake up now, Penelope, my dear child,  
so you yourself can see with your own eyes  
what you've been wanting each and every day.  
Odysseus has arrived. He may be late,  
but he's back in the house. And he's just killed  
those haughty suitors who upset this home,  
used up his goods, and victimized his son.”

10

Wise Penelope then answered her:

[10]

“Dear nurse,  
the gods have made you mad. They can do that—  
turn even someone really sensible  
into a fool and bring a feeble mind  
to a path of fuller understanding.  
They've injured you—your mind was sound before.  
Why mock me, when my heart is full of grief,  
telling this mad tale, rousing me from sleep,  
a sweet sleep binding me, shrouding my eyes?  
I've not had a sleep like that since Odysseus  
went off to look at wicked Iliion,

20

a place whose name no one should ever speak.  
 Come now, go back down to the women’s hall. [20]  
 If another of the slaves that serve this house  
 had come to tell me this, woken me up  
 when I was sleeping, I’d have sent her back  
 at once to the woman’s quarters in disgrace.  
 But I’ll be good to you because you’re old.” 30

The dear nurse Eurycleia answered her and said:

“But I’m not making fun of you, dear child.  
 It’s true. Odysseus has returned. He’s back,  
 here in the house, exactly as I said.  
 He’s that stranger all the men dishonoured  
 in the hall. For some time Telemachus  
 knew he was at home, but he was careful [30]  
 to hide his father’s plans, until the time  
 he could pay back those overbearing men  
 for their brutality.”

Eurycleia spoke. 40

Penelope rejoiced. She jumped up out of bed,  
 hugged the old woman, tears falling from her eyelids,  
 and spoke to Eurycleia—her words had wings:

“Come now,  
 dear nurse, tell the truth. If he’s truly here,  
 back home as you maintain, then how could he  
 turn his hands against those shameless suitors?  
 He was alone, and in this house those men  
 are always in a group.”

Her dear nurse Eurycleia  
 then answered her:

“I didn’t see or hear about it. [40]  
 I only heard the groans of men being killed. 50  
 We sat in our well-built women’s quarters,  
 in a corner, terrified. Close-fitting doors  
 kept us in there, until Telemachus,  
 your son, called me from the room. His father  
 had sent him there to ask me to appear.  
 I found Odysseus standing with the bodies—  
 dead men on the hard earth all around him,

heaped up together, a heart-warming sight—  
 and he was there, covered with blood and gore,  
 just like a lion. Now all those bodies 60  
 have been piled up beside the courtyard gates,  
 and he's purging his fair home with sulphur. [50]  
 He's kindled a great fire. He sent me out  
 to summon you. Now, come along with me,  
 so you two can be happy in your hearts.  
 You've been through so much misfortune, and now  
 what you've been looking forward to so long  
 has finally happened. He's come himself,  
 to his own hearth while still alive—he's found  
 you and your son inside these halls and taken 70  
 revenge on all the suitors in his home,  
 whose actions have inflicted so much harm."

Wise Penelope then answered Eurycleia:

"Dear nurse, don't laugh at them and boast too much.  
 You know how his appearance in the hall [60]  
 would please everyone, especially me  
 and the dear son born to the two of us.  
 But this story can't be true, not the way  
 you've told it. One of the immortal gods  
 has killed the noble suitors out of rage 80  
 at their heart-rending pride and shameless deeds.  
 They did not honour any man on earth,  
 bad or good, when he came into their group.  
 They've met disaster through their foolishness.  
 But in some place far away Odysseus  
 has given up his journey to Achaea,  
 and he himself is lost."

Dear nurse Eurycleia  
 then answered her:

"My child, what words have slipped [70]  
 the barrier of your teeth, when you declared  
 your husband won't get home—he's in the house, 90  
 at his own hearth. Your heart just has no trust.  
 But come on, I will tell you something else—  
 it's a clear proof—that scar from a white-tusked boar  
 that he got years ago—well, I saw it.  
 I washed it clean. I was going to tell you,



but his hand gripped me by the throat—his heart  
 had other plans and would not let me speak.  
 But come with me. I'll stake my life on it.  
 If I've deceived you, then you can kill me  
 and choose a painful death."

Wise Penelope

100 [80]

then answered her:

"Dear nurse, you find it hard  
 to grasp the plans of the eternal gods,  
 even though you're truly shrewd. But let's go  
 to my son, so I can see the suitors  
 now they're all dead—and the man who killed them."

Penelope spoke and went down from the upper room,  
 her heart preoccupied with many things—Should she  
 keep her distance and ask her dear husband questions,  
 or should she come up to him, hold his head and hands,  
 and kiss them? Crossing the stone threshold, she went in  
 and sat down by the fire opposite Odysseus,  
 beside the further wall. He was just sitting there  
 by a tall pillar, looking at the ground, waiting  
 to find out if his noble wife would speak to him  
 when she saw him with her own eyes. But she sat down  
 and stayed silent a long time, wonder in her heart.  
 Sometimes her eyes looked straight at him, full in the face,  
 but at other times she failed to recognize him,  
 he had such shabby clothing covering his limbs.  
 Telemachus spoke up, addressing a rebuke  
 directly at her:

110

[90]

120

"Mother, you're a cruel woman,  
 with an unfeeling heart. Why turn aside  
 from my father in this way? Why not sit  
 over there, close to him, ask him questions?  
 No other woman's heart would be so hard  
 to make her this distant from a husband  
 who's come home to her in his native land  
 in the twentieth year, after surviving  
 so many harsh ordeals. That heart of yours  
 is always harder than a stone."

[100]

Wise Penelope 130

then answered him:

“My child, inside my chest  
 my heart is quite amazed. I cannot speak  
 or ask questions, or look him in the eye.  
 If indeed it’s true he is Odysseus  
 and is home again, surely the two of us  
 have more certain ways to know each other.  
 We have signs only we two understand, [110]  
 and other people will not recognize.”

As she spoke, lord Odysseus, who had borne so much,  
 smiled and immediately spoke to Telemachus— 140  
 his words had wings:

“Telemachus, let your mother  
 test me in these halls. She will soon possess  
 more certain knowledge. Right now I’m filthy,  
 with disgusting clothing on my body.  
 That’s why she rejects me and will not say  
 I am Odysseus. But we need to think  
 how this matter can best resolve itself.  
 Anyone who murders just one person  
 in the district, even when the dead man  
 does not have many to avenge his death, 150  
 goes into exile, leaving his relatives [120]  
 and his native land. But we have slaughtered  
 the city’s main defence, the best by far  
 of the young men in Ithaca. I think  
 you should consider what that act could mean.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Surely you must look into this yourself,  
 dear father. For among all men, they say,  
 your planning is the best—of mortal men  
 no one can rival you. And as for us, 160  
 we’re keen to follow you, and I don’t think  
 we’ll lack the bravery to match our strength.”

Resourceful Odysseus said this in reply:

“All right, I’ll say what seems to me the best. [130]  
 First of all, take a bath. Put tunics on.  
 Next, tell the female servants in the hall  
 to change their clothing. After that, we’ll let  
 the holy minstrel, with his clear-toned lyre,  
 lead us in playful dancing, so anyone  
 who hears us from outside—someone walking 170  
 along the road or those who live close by—  
 will say it is a wedding. In that way,  
 the wide rumour of the suitors’ murder  
 will not spread too soon down in the city,  
 before we go out to our forest lands.  
 Then later on we’ll think of our next move,  
 whatever the Olympian god suggests.” [140]

They listened eagerly to what Odysseus said  
 and were persuaded. So, to start with, they all bathed,  
 put on tunics, and women dressed in finer clothes. 180  
 Then the godlike singer picked up his hollow lyre  
 and encouraged their desire for beautiful songs  
 and noble dancing. The whole great house resounded  
 to the sounds of men enjoying a celebration  
 with women wearing lovely gowns. So any man  
 who listened in as he walked past outside the house  
 might offer a remark like this:

“It seems that someone  
 has married the queen with all those suitors.  
 A heartless woman. She lacked the courage [150]  
 to keep her wedded husband’s home intact 190  
 and persevere till he arrived back home.”

Someone might have said these words, in his ignorance  
 of what was going on. Meanwhile, Eurynome,  
 the housekeeper, gave brave Odysseus a bath,  
 rubbed him with rich oil, and put a tunic on him,  
 with a gorgeous cloak. Athena poured beauty on him—  
 her abundance made him taller and more robust  
 to look at. Then on his head she transformed his hair,  
 so it flowed in curls like fresh hyacinths in bloom.  
 Just as a man sets a layer of gold on silver, 200  
 a skilful artisan whom Pallas Athena [160]  
 and Hephaestus have taught all sorts of crafts,  
 so he produces splendid work, that’s how Athena

poured grace onto his head and shoulders, as he came out of his bath, looking like the immortal gods. He settled back in the chair where he'd been sitting, opposite his wife, and said to her:

“Strange lady,  
to you those who live on Mount Olympus  
have given, more than to any other wives,  
an unfeeling heart. No other woman  
would harden herself and keep her distance,  
if her husband, in the twentieth year,  
came back to her in his own native land,  
after going through so much misfortune.  
So come now, nurse, spread out a bed for me,  
so I can lie down by myself. The heart  
inside her breast must be made of iron.”

210  
[170]

Wise Penelope then answered him:

“Strange man,  
I am not making too much of myself,  
or ignoring you. Nor is it the case  
that you've offended me in any way.  
I understand the sort of man you were  
when you left Ithaca in your long-oared ship.  
So come, Eurycleia, set up for him  
outside the well-built bedroom that strong bed  
he made himself. Put that sturdy bedstead  
out there for him and throw some bedding on,  
fleeces and cloaks and shining coverlets.”

220  
[180]

Penelope said these words to test her husband. But Odysseus, upset at his true-hearted wife, replied and said:

230

“Woman, those words you uttered are very painful. Who's shifted my bed to somewhere else? That would be difficult, even for someone truly skilled, unless a god came down in person—for he could, if he so wished, set it elsewhere with ease. But among men there is no one living, no matter how much energy he has, who would find it easy to shift that bed.

For built into the well-constructed bedstead 240  
 is a great symbol which I made myself  
 with no one else. A long-leaved olive bush [190]  
 was growing in the yard. It was in bloom  
 and flourishing—it looked like a pillar.  
 I built my bedroom round this olive bush,  
 till I had finished it with well-set stones.  
 I put a fine roof on it and added  
 closely fitted jointed doors. After that,  
 I cut back the foliage, removing  
 the branches from the long-leaved olive bush. 250  
 I trimmed the trunk off, upward from the root,  
 cutting it skillfully and true with bronze,  
 so it followed a straight line. Once I'd made  
 the bedpost, with an augur I bored out  
 the entire piece. That was how I started.  
 Then I carved out my bed, till I was done.  
 In it I set an inlay made of gold, [200]  
 silver, and ivory, and across it  
 I stretched a bright purple thong of ox-hide.  
 And that's the symbol I describe for you. 260  
 Lady, I don't know if that bed of mine  
 is still in place or if some other man  
 has cut that olive tree down at its base  
 and set the bed up in a different spot."

Odysseus spoke, and sitting there, Penelope  
 felt a weakness in her knees, and her heart grew soft.  
 For she recognized that it was true—that symbol  
 Odysseus had described to her. Eyes full of tears,  
 she ran across to him, threw her arms around his neck,  
 kissed his head, and said:

"Don't be angry, Odysseus, 270  
 not with me. In every other matter  
 you've been the cleverest of men. The gods [210]  
 have brought us sorrows—they were not willing  
 that we two should stay beside each other  
 to enjoy our youth and reach together  
 the threshold of old age. Now's not the time  
 to rage at me, resenting what I've done  
 because I did not welcome you this way  
 when I first saw you. But in my dear breast  
 my heart was always fearful, just in case 280

some other man would come here and trick me  
 with his stories. For there are many men  
 who dream up wicked schemes. Argive Helen,  
 a child of Zeus, would never have had sex  
 with a man who came from somewhere foreign  
 if she had known Achaea's warrior sons [220]  
 would bring her back to her dear native land.  
 And some god drove her to that shameful act.  
 Not till that time did she start harbouring  
 within her heart that disastrous folly 290  
 which filled our lives with misery as well.  
 But now you have described that clear symbol,  
 our bed, which no one else has ever seen,  
 other than the two of us, you and me,  
 and a single servant girl, Actoris,  
 a gift my father gave when I came here.  
 For both of us she kept watch at the doors  
 of our securest room. You've won my heart, [230]  
 though it's been truly stubborn."

Penelope spoke,  
 and stirred in him an even more intense desire 300  
 to weep—as he held his loyal and loving wife,  
 he shed tears. Just as swimmers are overjoyed  
 to catch a glimpse of land, sailors whose sturdy ship  
 Poseidon has demolished out at sea, as winds  
 and surging waves were driving it, and a few men  
 have escaped the grey sea by swimming to the shore,  
 their bodies thickly caked with brine, and they are glad  
 to clamber up on land, evading a disaster,  
 that how Penelope rejoiced to see her husband.  
 She simply could not stop her white arms holding him 310 [240]  
 around his neck. And then rose-fingered early Dawn  
 would have appeared with both of them still weeping there,  
 if goddess Athena with the glittering eyes  
 had not come up with something else—for she prolonged  
 the lengthy night as it came to an end, keeping  
 Dawn and her golden throne delayed at Ocean's stream—  
 she would not let the goddess harness her swift horses,  
 who carry her light to men, Lampros and Phaeton,  
 the colts who bring on Dawn.

Resourceful Odysseus  
 then said to his wife:

“Lady, we’ve not yet come 320  
 to the end of all our trials. Countless tasks  
 must still be carried out in days to come,  
 plenty of hard work I have to finish. [250]  
 That’s what the spirit of Teiresias  
 prophesied to me when I descended  
 to the home of Hades to ask questions  
 concerning our return, my companions  
 and myself. But come, wife, let’s go to bed,  
 so we can lie down and enjoy sweet sleep.”

Wise Penelope then answered:

“You’ll have a bed 330  
 whenever your heart desires, for the gods  
 have seen to it that you’ve returned back here  
 to your own well-built home and native land.  
 But since you have thought of it and some god [260]  
 has set it in your heart, come and tell me  
 of this trial. For I think I’ll hear of it  
 in future, so to learn of it right now  
 won’t make things any worse.”

Resourceful Odysseus  
 then answered her and said:

“Strange lady, 340  
 why urge me so eagerly to tell you?  
 All right, I’ll say it, and I’ll hide nothing.  
 But what I tell you will not please your heart.  
 I myself get no enjoyment from it.  
 Teiresias ordered me to journey out  
 to many human cities, carrying  
 in my hands a well-made oar, till I reached  
 a people who know nothing of the sea,  
 who don’t put salt on any food they eat, [270]  
 and have no knowledge of ships painted red  
 or well-made oars that serve those ships as wings. 350  
 He told me a sure sign I won’t conceal—  
 when someone else runs into me and says  
 I’ve got a shovel used for winnowing  
 on my shoulders, he told me to set it  
 in the ground there, make a rich sacrifice

to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,  
 and a boar that breeds with sows—and then leave,  
 go back home, and make sacred offerings  
 to immortal gods who hold wide heaven, [280]  
 all of them in order. My death, he said, 360  
 will come from the sea, a gentle passing,  
 when I am bowed down with a ripe old age,  
 with my people prospering around me.  
 He foretold that this is what would happen.”

Wise Penelope then said to him:

“If it’s true that gods  
 are bringing you a more serene old age,  
 there’s hope you’ll find relief from these ordeals.”

While they kept talking to each other in this way,  
 Eurynome and the old nurse prepared the bed  
 with soft coverlets, by light from flaming torches. 370 [290]  
 Once they had hurriedly arranged the sturdy bed,  
 Eurycleia returned to her own room to rest,  
 and the bedroom servant, Eurynome, led them  
 on their way to bed, with a torch gripped in her hand.  
 Once she brought them there, Eurynome went away.  
 Odysseus and Penelope approached with joy  
 the place where their bed still stood from earlier days.

Telemachus, Philoetius, and Eumaeus  
 rested their dancing feet and made the women stop.  
 Then they lay down in the shadowy hall to sleep. 380

When Odysseus and Penelope had enjoyed [300]  
 making love together, they entertained themselves  
 telling stories, in mutual conversation.  
 The lovely lady talked of all she had to bear  
 in her own house, dealing with that destructive group,  
 the suitors, who, because of her, kept butchering  
 so many cattle and fat sheep and draining jars  
 of so much wine. Odysseus, born from Zeus, told her  
 all the troubles he had brought on men, all the grief  
 he had endured all on his own. Penelope 390  
 was happy listening, and Sleep did not swoop down  
 and close her eyes until his story had been told.



He began by telling her how he first destroyed [310]  
 the Cicones, and then came to the fertile land  
 of Lotus-eating men, and what the Cyclops did—  
 how he compelled the beast pay a penalty  
 for the brave companions he had killed and eaten—  
 then how he came to Aeolus, who welcomed him  
 with hospitality and sent him on his way.  
 But that was not the destined time he was to reach 400  
 his dear native soil. Instead, stormy winds once more  
 caught up with him, drove him across the fish-filled seas,  
 for all his weary groans. He told how he came  
 to Telepylos where the Laestrygonians live,  
 huge men who destroyed his ships and all his comrades,  
 and how Odysseus and his crew were the only ones [320]  
 to escape in his black ship. He went on to talk  
 of Circe's devious magical skill and how  
 in his ship with many oars he had then gone down  
 to the shadowy house of Hades to consult 410  
 the spirit of Teiresias of Thebes and seen  
 all his companions and his mother, who bore him  
 and raised him as a child, and how he listened to  
 the Sirens' voices, in their never-ending song,  
 and then reached the Wandering Rocks, dread Charybdis,  
 and Scylla, whom no man had ever yet escaped  
 without being harmed, how his companions slaughtered  
 the oxen of sun god Helios, how his ship  
 was shattered by a flaming lightning bolt thrown down [330]  
 from high-thundering Zeus, how his fine comrades died, 420  
 all together, while he alone escaped from fate,  
 how he reached the nymph Calypso on her island,  
 Ogygia, how she kept him in her hollow cave,  
 longing for him to be her husband, nurturing him,  
 and telling him she would make him an immortal  
 who through all his days would not get any older,  
 but she could not convince the heart within his chest,  
 how, after suffering a great deal, he had come  
 to the Phaeacians, who had greatly honoured him,  
 as if he were a god, and sent him in a ship 430 [340]  
 to his dear native land, after offering gifts  
 of bronze and gold and rich supplies of clothing.  
 He stopped his story at that point, when sweet sleep,  
 which eases tension in men's limbs, came over him,  
 and calmed the anxious worries he had in his heart.

BOOK TWENTY-THREE

Then Athena, goddess with the glittering eyes,  
came up with something else. When she thought Odysseus  
and his wife had satisfied their hearts with pleasure  
and with sleep, she stirred up Dawn, enthroned in gold,  
to move from Ocean's stream and bring her light to men. 440  
Odysseus rose from his soft bed and told his wife:

“Lady, the two of us by now have had [350]  
enough of trouble—you here lamenting  
my hazardous return, while, in my case,  
Zeus and the other gods kept me tied up  
far from my native land, in great distress,  
for all my eagerness to get back home.  
Now that we are here, in the bed we love,  
you should tend to our wealth inside the house.  
As for the flocks those haughty suitors stole, 450  
I'll seize many beasts as plunder on my own,  
and Achaeans will give more—they'll fill up  
each and every pen. Now I'm going out  
to check my forest lands, and there I'll see  
my noble father, who on my behalf [360]  
has suffered so much worry. So, dear wife,  
since I know how intelligent you are,  
I'm asking you to follow my advice—  
once sunrise comes, the story will be out  
about the suitors slaughtered in our home. 460  
So you should go now to your upstairs room  
with your female attendants and stay there.  
Do not visit or question anyone.”

Once he said this, he put his splendid armour on,  
around his shoulders, and summoned Telemachus,  
Philoetius, and Eumaeus, and told them all  
to get weapons in their hands ready for a fight.  
They did not disobey, but dressed themselves in bronze,  
opened the doors, and went outside, with Odysseus [370]  
in the lead. By now light was shining on the ground, 470  
but Athena kept their group hidden by the night,  
and quickly escorted them outside the city.

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR  
ZEUS AND ATHENA END THE FIGHTING

*[Hermes conducts the shades of the dead suitors down to Hades, where they meet Achilles, Patroclus, Antilochus, and Agamemnon; Agamemnon and Achilles talk; Agamemnon gives details of Achilles's burial; Amphimedon complains to Agamemnon about his death at Odysseus's hands; Agamemnon pays tribute to Odysseus and Penelope; Odysseus goes out to find his father; Laertes and Odysseus talk in the vineyard, and Odysseus tests his father with a false story and then reveals his identity; the two men return to Laertes's house, where Eumaeus, Philoetius, and Telemachus have prepared dinner; Laertes's appearance is transformed; Dolius and his sons arrive; the men in Ithaca hear about the slaughter and collect their dead; Eupheithes urges action against Odysseus; Medon and Halitherses advise against such action; the majority decide to follow Eupheithes; Athena questions Zeus about his intentions regarding Odysseus; Zeus tells her to deal with the situation; Odysseus and his followers arm themselves and go out to meet the Ithacan army; Athena urges Laertes to throw a spear; Laertes kills Eupheithes; Athena stops the Ithacan army and sends it back to the city; a thunderbolt from Zeus stops Odysseus; Athena, in the guise of Mentor, establishes a lasting oath between both sides.]*

Meanwhile, divine Hermes of Cyllene summoned up  
the spirits of the suitors. In his hand he held  
the beautiful gold staff he uses to enchant  
the eyes of anyone he wishes or to wake  
some other man from sleep. With it he roused and led  
these spirits, who kept squeaking as they followed him.  
Just as inside the corners of a monstrous cave  
bats flit around and cry when one of them falls down  
out of the cluster on the rock face where they cling  
to one another, that is how these spirits shrieked  
as they moved on together. Hermes the Deliverer  
conducted them along the murky passageway.<sup>1</sup>  
They went past the streams of Ocean, past Leucas,  
past the gates of the Sun and past the land of Dreams,  
and very soon came to the field of asphodel,  
where spirits live, the shades of those whose work is done.<sup>2</sup>

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[10]

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<sup>1</sup>Hermes, in addition to his other roles as messenger of the gods, traditionally escorted the souls of the dead down into Hades, hence the epithet "Deliverer."

<sup>2</sup>Leucas is the "White Rock" at the entrance to Hades. These details of the approach to the underworld are not entirely consistent with the details given in Book Eleven, where Odysseus communicates with the spirits of the dead.

Here they met the shade of Peleus' son Achilles,  
 and of Patroclus, too, of brave Antilochus,  
 and of Ajax, who had the finest form and shape  
 of all Danaans, after the son of Peleus, 20  
 who had no equal. These dead shades were gathered there,  
 in a group around Achilles. Then to them came [20]  
 the spirit of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
 full of sorrow. Around him were assembled shades  
 of all those who had died with him and met their fate  
 in Aegisthus' house. The shade of dead Achilles  
 was the first to speak to him:

“Son of Atreus,  
 we thought of you as one well loved by Zeus,  
 who hurls the thunderbolt, for all your days,  
 more so than every other human warrior, 30  
 because on Trojan soil you were the king  
 of many fighting men where we Achaeans  
 went through so much distress. And now it seems  
 destructive Fate was destined to reach you,  
 as well, and far too soon, the mortal doom  
 that no man born escapes. O how I wish [30]  
 you'd met your fatal end in Trojan lands,  
 still in full possession of those honours  
 you were master of. Then all Achaeans  
 would have made a tomb for you—for your son 40  
 you would have won great fame in future days.  
 But as it is, your fate was to be caught  
 in a death more pitiful than any.”

The shade of Atreus' son then answered him:

“Noble Achilles, great son of Peleus,  
 killed in the land of Troy, far from Argos.  
 Other men fell round you, the finest sons  
 of Trojans and Achaeans, in the fight  
 above your corpse. You lay in swirling dust,  
 a great man in your full magnificence, 50 [40]  
 with your skill in horsemanship forgotten.  
 As for us, all day long we battled on—  
 we never would have pulled back from the fight,  
 if Zeus had not brought on a storm to end it.  
 We took you from the battle to the ships,  
 laid you on a bier, and wiped down your skin,

washing your corpse with water and warm oil.  
 The Danaans stood and wept around you,  
 shedding many tears, and cut off their hair.  
 Your mother heard about your death and came 60  
 with her immortal nymphs up from the sea.<sup>1</sup>  
 A wondrous cry rose above the water—  
 all Achaeans there were seized with trembling.  
 The men would have jumped up and run away [50]  
 to the hollow ships, if one man, well versed  
 in ancient wisdom, had not held them back.  
 I mean Nestor, whose earlier advice  
 had seemed the best. Using his wise judgment,  
 he addressed them all and said:

‘Hold on, Argives.  
 You young Achaean men, don’t rush away. 70  
 This is his mother coming from the sea  
 with her immortal sea nymphs to look on  
 the face of her dead son.’

Nestor said these words,  
 and the flight of all those warriors ceased.  
 The daughters of the Old Man of the Sea  
 stood round you in a piteous lament,  
 as they put immortal clothing on you.<sup>2</sup>  
 And Muses, nine in all, sang out a dirge, [60]  
 their lovely voices answering each other.  
 You’d not have seen a single Argive there 80  
 who was not weeping, his heart deeply moved  
 by the Muses’ clear-toned song. We mourned you  
 for seventeen days and nights together,  
 both mortal humans and immortal gods.  
 On the eighteenth we gave you to the fire.  
 Around you we killed many well-fed sheep  
 and bent-horned cattle. You were cremated  
 in clothing of the gods, with sweet honey  
 and much oil. Many Achaean warriors  
 moved round the funeral pyre in armour, 90

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<sup>1</sup>Achilles’s mother is Thetis, a minor deity of the sea.

<sup>2</sup>Homer uses the phrase Old Man of the Sea to refer to different minor sea gods. The father of the sea nymphs is Nereus, who is not the same god as Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea whom Menelaus talks about in his adventures in Egypt in Book Four. Homer also calls Phorcys the Old Man of the Sea in Book 13.

as you lay there in the flames, foot soldiers [70]  
 and charioteers, making a huge noise.  
 Then, Achilles, once Hephaestus's fire  
 was finished with you, we set your white bones  
 in unmixed wine and oil. Your mother gave  
 a two-handled jar of gold. She claimed it was  
 a gift from Dionysus, something made  
 by glorious Hephaestus. In this jar,  
 illustrious Achilles, lie your bones,  
 mixed in with the bones of dead Patroclus, 100  
 son of Menoetius.<sup>1</sup> Apart from these  
 lie Antilochus' bones—you valued him  
 above all the rest of your companions  
 except Patroclus.<sup>2</sup> Then, over these bones,  
 we—the sacred host of Argive spearmen— [80]  
 raised a huge and noble burial mound  
 on a promontory projecting out  
 into the wide Hellespont, so that men,  
 those now alive and those in future days,  
 can view it from a long way out at sea. 110  
 Your mother asked the gods for worthy prizes  
 and set them out among the best Achaeans  
 for a competition. In former days  
 you attended many funeral games  
 for warriors, when, once a king has died,  
 the younger men prepare for competition  
 and steel themselves to win. But if you'd seen [90]  
 that spectacle you would have truly marvelled—  
 the goddess, silver-footed Thetis, gave  
 magnificent prizes in your honour. 120  
 The gods had that much special love for you.  
 So even in death, your name did not die.  
 Your glorious fame, Achilles, will endure  
 among all men forever. As for me,  
 I finished off the war, but what pleasure  
 does that give me now? When I got back home,

<sup>1</sup>Patroclus is Achilles's closest companion in the *Iliad*. In that poem, his dying request to Achilles is to have their bones placed together in a funeral urn when Achilles is killed.

<sup>2</sup>Antilochus is a son of Nestor. He was killed in the fighting around Troy. His name is mentioned in Book 3 when Telemachus visits Nestor in Pylos.

Zeus organized a dreadful fate for me,  
thanks to Aegisthus and my accursed wife.”<sup>1</sup>

As they talked this way to one another, Hermes,  
killer of Argus, came close to them, escorting 130  
the shades of those dead suitors Odysseus had killed. [100]  
When they observed this, the two, in their amazement,  
went straight up to them. The shade of Agamemnon,  
son of Atreus, recognized the well-loved son  
of Melaneus, glorious Amphimedon,  
a guest-friend of his from Ithaca, his home.  
The shade of Agamemnon spoke to him first and said:

“Amphimedon, what has happened to you,  
all excellent young men of the same age,  
to come down here beneath the gloomy earth? 140  
If one had to choose the city’s finest men,  
one could not wish for any group but these.  
Did Poseidon overwhelm you in your ships  
by rousing savage winds and giant waves? [110]  
Or did hostile forces on the mainland  
kill you off, while you were taking cattle  
or rich flocks of sheep, or were they fighting  
to protect their city and their women?  
Answer what I’m asking. For I can claim  
I am your guest-friend. Do you not recall 150  
the time I made a visit to your home  
with Menelaus—to urge Odysseus  
to voyage with us in our well-benched ships  
to Ilion? It took us a whole month  
to cross that open sea, and it was hard  
to win Odysseus, sacker of cities,  
over to our side.”

Amphimedon’s shade [120]

then answered him and said:

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<sup>1</sup>This is the second fairly direct accusation in the *Odyssey* that Clytaemnestra was complicit in the actual murder of Agamemnon. Most other references place the blame squarely on Aegisthus or else are ambiguous about Clytaemnestra’s role in the killing. The shade of Agamemnon in 11.509 says she butchered Cassandra and insulted him as he lay dying. Further on, he states she slaughtered him (11.573). There’s another fairly explicit accusation from Agamemnon later in this book, at line 263.

“Noble son of Atreus,  
 Agamemnon, Zeus-fostered king of men,  
 I do remember all these things you say, 160  
 and I’ll describe for you every detail,  
 the truth of how we died, an evil fate,  
 and how it came about. Since Odysseus  
 had been away from home for many years,  
 we wooed his wife. She was not unwilling  
 to think about a marriage she detested,  
 but she would not go through with it. Instead,  
 she organized our deaths, our murky fate.  
 In her heart she also devised a trick.  
 She had a huge loom set up in her rooms 170  
 then on it wove a delicate wide cloth. [130]  
 When she began, she told us this:

‘Young men,  
 my suitors, since lord Odysseus is dead,  
 you’re keen for me to marry. You must wait  
 until I’m finished with this robe, so I  
 don’t waste this woven yarn in useless work.  
 It’s a burial shroud for lord Laertes,  
 for when the lethal fate of his sad death  
 will seize him, so no Achaean woman  
 in the district will get angry with me, 180  
 because a man who won such rich estates  
 should have to lie in death without a shroud.’

That’s what she said, and our proud hearts agreed.  
 So day by day she’d weave at that great loom.  
 At night she’d have torches placed beside her [140]  
 and unravel it. She tricked Achaeans  
 for three years with this scheme—they believed her.  
 But as the seasons changed and months rolled on,  
 and many days passed by, the fourth year came.  
 Then one of her women, who knew the plan, 190  
 informed us, and we came in and caught her  
 undoing the lovely yarn. So after that  
 we made her finish it against her will.  
 Once she’d woven it and washed the fabric,  
 she displayed the robe—it shone like the sun  
 or like the moon. Then a malignant god  
 brought Odysseus back home from overseas,  
 to pastures bordering where the swineherd [150]



has his house. And Odysseus's dear son  
 went to that house, as well, once he returned  
 in his black ship, back from sandy Pylos.<sup>1</sup> 200  
 The two hatched a plan against the suitors,  
 to bring them to a nasty end, then left  
 for the well-known city. Telemachus  
 went there before his father—Odysseus  
 got there later. The swineherd led his master,  
 who wore shabby clothing on his body—  
 just like an ancient worn-out vagabond  
 leaning on a staff, rags covering his skin.  
 So none of us could recognize the man 210  
 when he suddenly showed up, not even  
 older men. We pelted him with insults,  
 hurled things at him, but for a little while  
 his firm heart kept enduring what we threw  
 and how we taunted him in his own home.  
 But when aegis-bearing Zeus aroused him,  
 with Telemachus' help he took away  
 his fine weapons, put them in a storeroom,  
 and locked the bolt. Then, with his great cunning,  
 he told his wife to place before the suitors 220  
 his bow and iron axes, a contest  
 for those of us who bore an evil fate,  
 the prelude to our death. No suitor there  
 could bend that great bow enough to string it. [160]  
 We simply did not have sufficient strength.  
 When the bow was handed to Odysseus,  
 we all called out to say we should not give  
 that bow to him, no matter what he said.  
 Telemachus alone kept urging him  
 and told him he could try. Once Odysseus, 230  
 who had endured so much, picked up the bow,  
 he strung it with ease and shot an arrow  
 through the iron axes. He went and stood  
 inside the doorway with a fearful glare  
 and kept shooting volleys of swift arrows.  
 He hit Antinous and went on shooting, [170]  
 aiming at other men across the room,  
 letting lethal arrows fly. Men collapsed, [180]

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<sup>1</sup>It's not clear just how Amphimedon, who was one of the suitors in Odysseus's home, could know all these details about what went on between Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Telemachus. Death in Homer's world does not usually convey such knowledge.

falling thick and fast. Then we realized  
 some god was helping them, when all at once 240  
 they charged out in a frenzy through the house,  
 butchering men everywhere. The screaming  
 was horrific, as heads were smashed apart.  
 The whole floor swam with blood. That's how we died,  
 lord Agamemnon, and now our bodies  
 lie in Odysseus' yard, still untended.  
 Our families back home don't know we're dead,  
 the ones who'd wash the black blood from our wounds,  
 then lay our bodies out and weep for us, [190]  
 the necessary rites for those who've died." 250

The shade of Atreus's son then answered him:

"O happy Odysseus, Laertes' son,  
 an enterprising man, who won himself  
 a wife whose virtue was beyond reproach.  
 How fine the heart in such a faultless wife!  
 Penelope kept Odysseus in her heart,  
 her husband, true to the man she married.  
 The story of her excellence will not die—  
 immortal gods will make a pleasing song  
 for men on earth about Penelope. 260  
 Tyndareus's child was not like her—  
 she planned to carry out an evil act  
 and slaughter the husband she had married.<sup>1</sup> [200]  
 Men's songs about her will be filled with hate.  
 She gives all women evil reputations,  
 even those whose acts incur no shame."

So these two talked to one another, as they stood  
 in the house of Hades, deep underneath the earth.

Once Odysseus and his men had left the city,  
 they soon reached his father's fertile, well-managed farm, 270  
 which Laertes had once won by his own efforts,  
 after much hard labour. His house was there, with sheds  
 surrounding it on every side, where his servants,  
 bonded slaves, who worked to carry out his wishes, [210]  
 ate and sat and slept. An ancient Sicilian woman  
 lived inside his house, looking after the old man,

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<sup>1</sup>This is a reference to Agamemnon's wife, Clytaemnestra, a daughter of Tyndareus, king of Sparta.

caring for him at the farm, far from the city.  
 Odysseus then spoke to his servants and his son:

“You men should now go in the well-built home  
 and quickly kill the finest pig they have, 280  
 so we can eat. I’ll sound out my father,  
 to find out if he recognizes me,  
 sees who I am, once he’s laid eyes on me,  
 or if he doesn’t know me anymore,  
 since I’ve been away so long.”

Odysseus spoke,  
 then handed his battle weapons to his servants.  
 They quickly went inside the house. Then Odysseus, [220]  
 walking out to test his father, made his way down  
 to the fruitful vineyard and then continued on  
 to the extensive orchard, where he failed to find 290  
 Dolius or any children of his father’s slaves.  
 They had gone away to gather large rocks for the wall  
 around the vineyard, with the old man in the lead.  
 In the well-tended vineyard he found his father.  
 He was digging around a plant, all by himself,  
 dressed in a disgusting, shabby, patched-up tunic,  
 with laced-up shin pads on his legs, stitched from ox-hide,  
 to protect himself from scratches, and on his hands [230]  
 he wore gloves, for in that ground many thistles grew.  
 On his head he had a goatskin cap. In these clothes 300  
 he was dealing with his grief. When lord Odysseus,  
 who had endured so much, saw him worn down with age  
 and bearing such a load of sorrow in his heart,  
 he stood beneath a tall pear tree and shed a tear,  
 debating in his mind and heart whether he should  
 embrace and kiss his father and describe for him  
 in detail how he got back to his native land  
 or start by asking questions, to test Laertes  
 on every point. As he thought about his options,  
 the best decision seemed to be to test him first, 310 [240]  
 using words which might provoke him. With this in mind,  
 lord Odysseus walked directly to his father,  
 who was rooting around a plant with his head down.  
 His splendid son stood there beside him and spoke out:

“Old man, from the way you tend this orchard  
 you’ve no lack of skill. No. Your care is good.

There's nothing here—no plant, fig tree, or vine,  
 or olive, pear, or plot in all this field—  
 that needs attention. I'll tell you something else—  
 don't let this make you angry in your heart— 320  
 you yourself are not being well looked after.  
 You are very old, but covered in muck, [250]  
 and badly dressed in those disgusting clothes.  
 You master cannot be denying you care  
 because you're lazy—that just can't be true.  
 At first glance, you don't seem to be a slave,  
 not when one sees your stature and your shape.  
 You're like a king, the kind of man who bathes  
 and eats and goes to sleep in a soft bed,  
 as old men should. So come now, tell me this, 330  
 and speak out candidly. Whose slave are you?  
 Whose orchard are you tending? And tell me  
 the truth about this, so I understand—  
 Is this place we've reached truly Ithaca,  
 as some man I just met on my way here [260]  
 informed me. His mind was not too clever—  
 for he could not give me any details  
 or listen to my words when I asked him  
 whether a friend of mine is still alive  
 or is now in Hades, already dead. 340  
 I'll explain it to you. Listen to me,  
 and hear me out. In my dear native land,  
 I once welcomed a man who had arrived  
 at my own home. No other mortal man  
 from far away has visited my house  
 as a more pleasing guest. He said he came  
 from Ithaca. He told me his father [270]  
 was Laertes, son of Arcesius.  
 I took him to the house, entertained him  
 with lavish hospitality, and gave him 350  
 a kind reception with the many things  
 I had inside my home, providing him  
 appropriate friendship gifts. I gave him  
 seven talents of finely crafted gold,  
 a silver mixing bowl etched with flowers,  
 twelve cloaks with single folds, twelve coverlets,  
 as many splendid cloaks, and, besides these,  
 as many tunics and four women slaves  
 skilled in fine handicrafts and beautiful,  
 the very ones he wished to choose himself." 360

Then his father shed a tear, answered him, and said: [280]

“Stranger, yes indeed, you’ve reached the country  
 you asked about. But it’s been taken over  
 by arrogant, reckless men. Those presents,  
 the countless gifts you freely gave, are useless.  
 If you’d come across him still living here,  
 in Ithaca, he’d have sent you on your way  
 after paying you back with splendid gifts  
 and hospitality—that is the right  
 of him who offers kindness first. But come, 370  
 tell me this, and make sure you speak the truth.  
 How long ago did you welcome this man,  
 this unlucky guest, my son, if, indeed,  
 such an ill-fated man ever was alive? [290]  
 Somewhere far from his native land and friends  
 the fish have fed on him down in the sea,  
 or savage beasts and birds have eaten him  
 somewhere on land. His mother and father,  
 those who gave him life, could not lay him out  
 for burial or lament his passing. 380  
 The wife he courted with so many gifts,  
 faithful Penelope, could not shed tears  
 over his corpse or close his eyes in death,  
 as is appropriate, though that’s a rite  
 we owe the dead. And tell me this, as well—  
 speaking the truth so I can understand—  
 Among men who are you? Where are you from?  
 What is your city? Who are your parents?  
 Where did you and your god-like companions  
 anchor the swift ship that carried you here? 390  
 Or did you come on someone else’s ship  
 as passenger, men who let you disembark  
 and then set off again?” [300]

Resourceful Odysseus

then answered him:

“All right, I’ll tell you everything  
 quite truthfully. I come from Alybas,  
 where I have a lovely home. I’m the son  
 of Apeidas, lord Polypemon’s son.  
 My name’s Eperitus. But then some god

made me go off course from Sicania,  
 so I've come here against my will. My ship  
 is anchored over there, close to the fields 400  
 far from the city. As for Odysseus,  
 this is the fifth year since he went away [310]  
 and left my country. That unlucky man!  
 There were auspicious omens from some birds  
 flying on the right, when he departed.  
 So when I sent him off, I was happy,  
 and so was he. The hearts in both of us  
 hoped we would meet again as host and guest,  
 and exchange fine gifts with one another." 410

As Odysseus said these words, a black cloud of grief  
 swallowed up Laertes. With both hands he scooped up  
 some grimy dust and dumped it over his gray hair,  
 moaning all the time. He stirred Odysseus's heart.  
 As Odysseus gazed at his dear father, he could feel  
 sharp pain shooting up his nostrils. He jumped over,  
 embraced Laertes, kissed him, and then said: [320]

"Father,  
 I'm here—the very man you asked about.  
 I've returned here in the twentieth year,  
 back to my native land. Stop your grieving, 420  
 these tearful sighs. I'll tell you everything,  
 although we have to move with all due speed.  
 I've killed the suitors in our home, avenged  
 their evil and heart-rending insolence."

Laertes then answered him and said:

"If that's true,  
 if you are indeed my son Odysseus  
 and have come back, show me some evidence,  
 something clear so I can be quite certain."

Resourceful Odysseus replied to him and said: [330]

"First, let your eyes inspect this scar—a boar 430  
 inflicted that on me with its white tusk,  
 when I visited Parnassus, sent there  
 by you and by my honourable mother,  
 to her cherished father, Autolycus,

so I could get the gifts he'd promised me,  
 what he'd agreed to give when he was here.  
 Come, I'll tell you the trees you gave me once  
 in this well-cultivated vineyard—back then  
 I was a child following behind you,  
 and I asked about each one. It was here— 440  
 we walked by these very trees—you named them  
 and described them to me. You offered me  
 as a gift thirteen pear trees, ten apple trees [340]  
 and forty fig trees. And in addition,  
 you said you'd give me fifty rows of vines,  
 bearing all sorts of different types of grapes,  
 when Zeus's seasons load their stems with fruit."

As Odysseus spoke, his father's fond heart and knees  
 gave way—he clearly recognized the evidence  
 Odysseus had presented. He threw both his arms 450  
 around the son he loved and struggled hard to breathe.  
 Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, held him.  
 After he'd revived and the spirit was restored  
 inside his chest, Laertes spoke again and said: [350]

"Father Zeus, it appears you gods are still  
 on high Olympus, if it's true those suitors  
 have paid the price of their proud arrogance.  
 But now my heart contains a dreadful fear—  
 all the men of Ithaca will rush here  
 against us, and they'll send out messengers 460  
 to every town in Cephallenia."<sup>1</sup>

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"Take courage, and do not allow these things  
 to weigh down your heart. Let's go to the house,  
 the one close by the orchard, where I sent  
 Telemachus, together with the swineherd  
 and the keeper of the goats, telling them  
 to prepare a meal as quickly as they could." [360]

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<sup>1</sup>Cephallenia is a large island neighbouring Ithaca, named after Cephalus, grandfather of Laertes and great-grandfather of Odysseus. The term Cephallenians is sometimes used to designate all of Odysseus's people.

After they talked like this, they went to the fine house.  
 Once they reached his father's well-furnished home, they found 470  
 Telemachus with the goatkeeper and swineherd  
 carving large cuts of meat and mixing gleaming wine.

Inside the home, the Sicilian servant woman  
 gave great-hearted Laertes a bath, then rubbed him  
 with rich oil and threw a lovely cloak around him.  
 Athena then approached them and fleshed out the limbs  
 on that shepherd of his people. The goddess made him  
 taller than before and sturdier to the eye.  
 When he left the bath, his dear son was astonished— [370]  
 as he looked at him he seemed like the immortals. 480  
 Odysseus spoke to him—his words had wings:

“Father,  
 surely one of the gods who live forever  
 has made you look more handsome than before—  
 both your form and stature.”

Wise Laertes  
 then answered him and said:

“By Father Zeus,  
 Athena, and Apollo, I wish I were  
 just like I was when I took Nericus  
 on the mainland coast, that well-built fortress,  
 when I was the Cephallenian king.  
 With strength like that, I could have stood with you 490  
 yesterday, my armour on my shoulders, [380]  
 and driven off the suitors in our home.  
 I'd have made many of their knees go slack  
 inside the hall—your heart would have been pleased.”

In this way, the two men conversed with one another.

Meanwhile, the other servants had finished working,  
 and dinner was prepared. They sat down one by one  
 on stools and chairs. As they were reaching for the food,  
 old Dolius appeared. He had his sons with him,  
 exhausted from their work. The old Sicilian woman, 500  
 their mother, had gone out and told them to return.  
 She fed them and took good care of old man Laertes, [390]  
 now that his age had laid its grip on him. These men,



saw Odysseus there, and their hearts took note of him.  
They stood in the house astonished. Then Odysseus  
talked to them all with reassuring words and said:

“Old man, sit down here. Have something to eat.  
Forget being so amazed. For some time now  
we’ve been keen to turn our hands to dinner,  
but we kept expecting you’d be coming, 510  
so we’ve been waiting in the house.”

Odysseus spoke.

Dolius went straight up to him, both arms outstretched,  
grabbed Odysseus’s hand and kissed it on the wrist.  
Then he spoke to him—his words had wings:

“My friend, [400]

you’re back with us, who longed for your return  
but never thought to see it! Gods themselves  
must have been leading you. Joyful greetings!  
May gods grant you success! Be frank with me  
and tell me so I fully understand—  
Does wise Penelope now know for certain 520  
you have come back, or should we send someone  
to let her know?”

Resourceful Odysseus answered him

and said:

“Old man, she already knows.  
Why should you be so concerned about her?”

Odysseus said these words, and Dolius sat down  
on his polished stool. Then the sons of Dolius  
also came up around glorious Odysseus,  
clasping both his hands with joyful words of welcome. [410]  
Then they sat down in a row beside their father.  
So these men spent the time finishing their dinner 530  
inside the hut.

Meanwhile, Rumour the Messenger  
sped swiftly through the entire city, spreading news  
of the suitors’ appalling deaths, their destiny.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rumour the Messenger is the goddess PHEME, who was responsible for gossip, fame, and scandal.

People heard about it all at once and came in  
 from all directions, gathering with mournful sighs  
 before Odysseus's home. Each one brought his dead  
 outside the house and buried them, and all the men  
 from other cities they sent home, carrying them  
 aboard swift ships to be taken back by sailors.

Then, with sorrowful hearts, they all went in person  
 to meet in an assembly, and, once they met there  
 together in a group, Epeithes rose to speak.  
 Constant grief weighed down his heart for his own son,  
 Antinous, the first man killed by lord Odysseus.  
 As he wept for him, he spoke to the assembly:

540 [420]

“My friends, this man has planned and carried out  
 dreadful acts against Achaeans. He took  
 many courageous men when he embarked,  
 then lost his hollow ships, with all men dead.

Now he's returned and killed the best men by far  
 among the Cephallenians. So come,

550

before he can hurry off to Pylos  
 or holy Elis, where Epeians rule,

[430]

let's get started. If not, in future days  
 we'll be eternally disgraced, since men  
 yet to be born will learn about our shame,  
 if we don't act to take out our revenge  
 on those killers of our sons and brothers.

As far as I'm concerned, the life we'd live  
 would not be sweet. I rather die right now  
 and live among the dead. So we should act,  
 in case those men have a head start on us  
 and get across the sea.”

560

As Epeithes said this,  
 he wept, and all Achaeans were seized with pity.  
 Then Medon and the godlike singer, just released  
 from sleep, approached them from Odysseus's house,  
 and stood up in their midst. The crowd there was amazed.  
 Then Medon, a shrewd man, spoke out.

[440]

“Men of Ithaca,  
 listen. Odysseus did not plan these acts  
 without the gods' consent. I myself observed  
 an immortal god who stood beside him,  
 looking in every detail just like Mentor.

570

The deathless god appeared before Odysseus  
 at that time to spur him on to action,  
 and, at another time, charged through the hall,  
 panicking the suitors. They collapsed in droves.”

As Medon spoke, pale fear gripped each of them. And then, [450]  
 old Halitherses, son of Mastor, rose to speak.  
 He was the only man who could see past and future.  
 Bearing in the mind their common good, he spoke out, 580  
 saying these words:

“You men of Ithaca,  
 listen to me. Hear what I have to say.  
 What’s happened now, my friends, has come about  
 because you’ve all been acting stupidly.  
 You refused follow my instructions  
 or Mentor’s, that shepherd of his people,  
 and make your sons cease their reckless conduct,  
 their monstrous acts of wanton foolishness,  
 squandering a worthy man’s possessions,  
 dishonouring his wife, claiming the man 590 [460]  
 never would come back. So now, let that be,  
 and follow what I say in how you act—  
 we should not move out, in case some men here  
 run into trouble they’ve brought on themselves.”

He ended. Some men stayed together in their seats,  
 but others, more than half, jumped up with noisy shouts.  
 Their hearts had not responded to what he just said,  
 for many had been persuaded by Eueithes  
 and quickly hurried away to get their weapons.

After they put gleaming bronze around their bodies, 600  
 they gathered in a large group on the spacious grounds  
 before the city. Eueithes was the leader  
 in this foolishness. He believed he could avenge [470]  
 the killing of his son, but he would not return,  
 for he was marching out to meet a lethal fate.

Then Athena spoke to Zeus, son of Cronos, saying:

“Father of us all and son of Cronos,  
 highest of all those who rule, answer me  
 when I ask this—What are you concealing

in that mind of yours? Will you now foster  
 further savage war and fearful battle,  
 or bring both sides together here as friends?" 610

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

"My child, why are you asking this of me?  
 Why these questions? Were you not the one  
 who put this plan in motion by yourself,  
 so Odysseus could take out his revenge 480  
 against these suitors, after he got back?  
 Do as you wish. But I'll lay out for you  
 what I think is right. Since lord Odysseus 620  
 has now paid the suitors back, let them swear  
 a binding oath that he'll remain their king  
 for life, and let us make them all forget  
 the way their brothers and their sons were killed  
 and love each other as they did before.  
 And let there be wealth and peace in plenty."

His words roused Athena, who was already keen.  
 She left, swooping down from lofty Mount Olympus.

Meanwhile, after his men had satisfied their hearts  
 with a meal as sweet as honey, lord Odysseus, 630 [490]  
 who had borne so much, was the first of them to speak:

"Someone should go outside and look around,  
 to see if they are getting close to us."

Once he said this, a son of Dolius got up,  
 as Odysseus had ordered, walked to the doorway,  
 and saw a crowd of armed men moving to the hut.  
 He called out to Odysseus—his swift words had wings:

"They're here—and closing in! Let's get weapons—  
 we'd better hurry!"

At these words, they leapt up  
 and put on their armour. Odysseus and his men 640  
 were four, the sons of Dolius six, and with them  
 Dolius and Laertes, though they had gray hair,  
 were dressed in armour, too, forced to be warriors.  
 Once they put glittering bronze around their bodies, [500]

they opened up the doors and went outside. Odysseus led them out. But then Athena, Zeus's daughter, with the shape and voice of Mentor, came up to them. When Odysseus, who had endured so much, saw her, he was glad and spoke some swift words to Telemachus, his dear son:

“Telemachus, now you've reached  
the field of battle, where the finest men  
are put to the test. Soon enough you'll learn  
not to disgrace your father's family—  
for we have always been preeminent  
for strength and courage everywhere on earth.”

650

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said: [510]

“Dear father, if that's what you want, you'll see  
that I, with my heart as it is right now,  
will not shame us. For I'll do what you say.”

When he said this, Laertes felt great joy and said: 660

“You dear gods, what a day this is for me!  
I'm truly happy when my son and grandson  
compete for excellence with one another.”

Then Athena with the glittering eyes came up,  
stood by Laertes, and said:

“Child of Arcesius,  
by far the dearest of those I cherish,  
pray to the young girl with the flashing eyes  
and to Father Zeus. Then without delay  
brandish that long spear of yours and hurl it.”

Pallas Athena spoke and then breathed into him enormous power. Laertes said a prayer to great Zeus's daughter, and quickly lifting up his long-shadowed spear, he threw it. It hit home, piercing the cheek piece on Eupheithes's helmet, which did not stop the spear—its point continued on. Eupheithes collapsed, falling with a thud, his armour crashing round him. Odysseus and his splendid son charged at the fighters in the front, attacking them

670 [520]

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR

with swords and two-edged spears. They would have killed them all,  
cut them down so not one of them returned, had not  
Athena, born from aegis-bearing Zeus, cried out—  
her voice made men on both sides pause: [530]

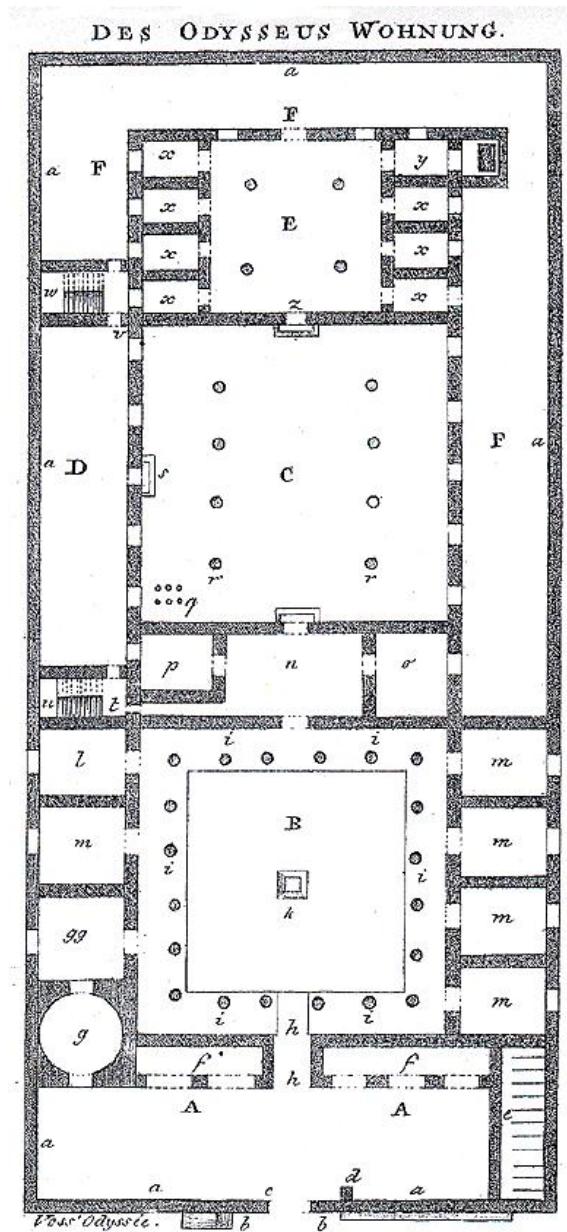
“Men of Ithaca,  
you must stop this disastrous war right here,  
so you can quickly go your separate ways  
without spilling any blood.”

Athena spoke,  
and pale fear gripped the men. They were so terrified  
they let go their weapons, which all fell on the ground,  
at the sound of her ear-splitting voice. They turned around,  
back towards the city, eager to save their lives.  
Then much-enduring lord Odysseus gave out 690  
a blood-curdling shout, gathered himself, and swooped down  
like an eagle from on high. But at that moment,  
Zeus, son of Cronos, shot a fiery thunderbolt.  
It struck between the feet of the bright-eyed daughter [540]  
of almighty father Zeus. And then Athena,  
goddess with the glittering eyes, said to Odysseus:

“Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
and child of Zeus, hold back. Stop the fighting,  
this all-embracing war, in case thundering Zeus,  
who sees far and wide, grows angry with you.” 700

When he heard Athena’s words, Odysseus obeyed,  
joy in his heart. And then Pallas Athena,  
daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, in shape and form  
appearing just like Mentor, had both parties swear  
a solemn treaty designed to last forever.

POSSIBLE FLOOR PLAN OF ODYSSEUS HOUSE (VOSS 1820)



EXPLANATION OF DIAGRAM

- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room
- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room, various rooms
- n. vestibule
- o. room for bathing
- p. activity room
- q. wine preparation room
- r. pillars
- s. simple doors
- t. door from vestibule
- u. stair to Odysseus' rooms
- v. door to women's rooms
- w. stairs to Penelope's room
- x. ground floor rooms
- y. Penelope's bedroom
- z. door
- A. courtyard and fence
- B. level middle court
- C. the hall
- D. passage by-passing the hall
- E. Penelope's work room
- F. rear courtyard.

When Odysseus kills the Suitors he is standing with his bow at the lower entrance to the main hall, C. The doors to the women's quarters (at v and z) have been locked. The only way out for the Suitors is a small door at s, which leads to the passageway D. Odysseus places Eumaeus at the end of the passage (at point t) to prevent any Suitor getting out into the courtyard B.

(Diagram and explanation courtesy of Carlos Parada, The Greek Mythology Link, with permission)

## GLOSSARY

The following glossary includes the names of the main characters and places in the *Odyssey* and a few others. Guides to pronunciation are provided in square brackets. Note that the syllables in capital letters in the pronunciation guide indicate where the stress falls.<sup>1</sup>

ACHAEANS: [*ah-KAY-ans*] a collective name of the Greeks (used interchangeably with Danaans [*DAN-eh-ans*] and Argives [*ARE-gyves*]).

ACHILLES: [*ah-KILL-ease*] son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaean warriors at Troy, where he died and was buried.

AEGISTHUS: [*eh-GISTH-us*] son of Thyestes, lover of Clytaemnestra and murderer of Agamemnon.

AEOLUS: [*EH-oh-luss*] son of Hippotas, god of the winds, living on the island Aeolia.

AGAMEMNON: [*ah-ga-MEM-non*] son of Atreus, king of Argos, leader of the Achaean forces which attacked and destroyed Troy.

AGELAUS: [*ah-gel-AH-us*] son of Damastor, one of the Suitors.

AJAX: [*EH-jacks*] son of Telamon, greatest Achaean warrior after Achilles at Troy, where he died and was buried.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the main sources of concern in the pronunciation of classical Greek names involves ones which end with the letters *-aus* or *-eus* or *-ius* or *-ium*. These endings are in almost all cases two syllables: e.g. *Menelaus* (four syllables), *Atreus* (three syllables), *Agelaus* (four syllables), *Dolius* (three syllables). The ending *-ous* is, however, commonly (though not always) one syllable: *Antinous* (three syllables) and *Alcinous* (three syllables). A double vowel combination in the final letters of a name is usually pronounced as two syllables: e.g. *Cephalenia* (five syllables), *Dulicium* (four syllables), *Nausicaa* (four syllables), *Ogygia* (four syllables), *Aeaea* (three syllables), and so on. With polysyllabic names it is not always clear nor is there always agreement about where the stress should fall. In many cases, the stress comes on the penultimate syllable (the second one from the end): *ag-a-MEM-non*, *men-eh-LAY-us*, *pol-iff-EE-mus*. However, there is also a tendency to move the stress to the antepenultimate syllable (the third one from the end). Hence, there is uncertainty: Should we pronounce *Demodocus de-MOD-ok-us* or *de-mo-DOKE-us*, *Eurylochus you-RIL-oh-kuss* or *you-ri-LOH-kuss*, *Amphinomus am-PHI-no-moos* or *am-phi-NO-moos*, and so on. My own tendency when in doubt is to stress the antepenultimate syllable.

The name *Odysseus*, like a number of others, is a special case, because, following the usual practice with a familiar English word, people generally pronounce it with three syllables, although if we adhere to the first convention mentioned above, the classical Greek name should be pronounced with four (the final *-eus* forming two syllables). However, it is a common (though not universal) practice in English translations of Homer to render names that are familiar to readers of English literature in their English form and to pronounce them as we do the English word: e.g., *Achilles* (Greek: *Akhilleus*), *Ajax* (Greek: *Aias*), *Circe* (Greek: *Kirke*), *Hercules* (Greek: *Herakles*), *Ocean* (Greek: *Okeanus*), *Sirens* (Greek: *Sirenes*), *Troy* (Greek: *Troia*), *Zeus* (one syllable, not two), and *Phaeacians* (three syllables not four). One name for which there does not seem to be general agreement is *Nausicaa* (this translation treats the name as a four-syllable word).



## GLOSSARY

ALCINOUS: [*al-KIN-oo-us* or, more commonly, *AL-kin-oose*] son of Nausithous, husband of Arete, king of the Phaeacians.

AMPHIMEDON: [*am-fee-MED-on*] son of Melaneus, one of the Suitors.

AMPHINOMUS: [*am-fee-NO-moos*] son of Nisus, one of the Suitors from Dulichium.

ANTICLEIA: [*an-ti-CLAY-ah*] daughter of Autolycus, mother of Odysseus.

ANTINOUS: [*an-TIN-oh-us* or, more commonly, *AN-tea-nous*] son of Eupheithes, one of the leaders of the Suitors.

ANTIPHATES: [*an-TIFF-a-teez*] king of the Laestrygonians.

APHRODITE: [*aff-roe-DYE-tee*] divine daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of erotic love.

APOLLO: [*ah-POLL-o*] divine son of Zeus and Leto, often called Phoebus or Phoebus Apollo.

ARES: [*AIR-ease*] divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of war.

ARETE: [*ah-REE-tea*] wife of Alcinous, queen of the Phaeacians.

ARGIVES: [*ARE-gyves*] see ACHAEANS.

ARTEMIS: [*ART-em-iss*] divine daughter of Zeus and Leto, goddess of the hunt.

ATHENA: [*ath-EE-na*] divine daughter of Zeus, goddess of wisdom.

CALYPSO: [*kal-IP-so*] daughter of Atlas, goddess living on the island of Ogygia.

CEPHALLENIA: [*keff-ah-LEN-ee-ah*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom, often applied to that kingdom and its people generally.

CHARYBDIS: [*ka-RIB-dis*] a divine sea monster who acts as a whirlpool and water spout.

CICONES: [*SICK-oh-neeze* or *KICK-oh-neeze*] inhabitants of Ismarus, a city close to Troy.

CIRCE: [*SIR-see*] a goddess living on the island of Aea.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: [*kly-tem-NEST-ra*] daughter of Tyndareus, wife of Agememnon.

CYCLOPES [*SIGH-klop-es*] (singular CYCLOPS [*SIGH-klops*): monstrous creatures with one eye.

CRONOS: [*KRON-oss*] father of Zeus, overthrown by his son and imprisoned deep in the earth.

DEMODOCUS: [*de-MOD-ok-us* or, less commonly, *de-mo-DOKE-us*] the blind minstrel in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.

DOLIUS: [*DOLL-ee-us*] an old servant of Laertes and Penelope.

DULICHIUM: [*doo-LICK-ee-um*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.

EUMAEUS: [*you-MAY-us*] a servant of Odysseus, keeper of pigs.

EUPEITHES: [*you-PEITH-eeze*] father of Antinous (one of the Suitors).

## GLOSSARY

**EURYCLEIA:** [*you-RICK-lay-a*] daughter of Ops, elderly family servant to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.

**EURYLOCHUS:** [*you-RILL-oh-kuss*] one of Odysseus's companions, related to him by marriage.

**EURYMACHUS:** [*you-RIM-ah-kuss*] son of Polybus, one of the leading Suitors.

**EURYNOME:** [*you-RIN-o-mee*] housekeeper in Odysseus's and Penelope's home.

**HEPHAESTUS:** [*heff-EYE-stuss*] divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of the forge, divine artisan.

**HERCULES:** [*HER-cue-lees*] mortal son of Zeus, made into a god after his death.

**HERMES:** [*HER-meez*] divine son of Zeus and the nymph Maia, messenger god, often called "killer of Argus."

**HYPERION:** [*high-PEER-ee-on*] god of the sun (also called **HELIOS** [*HE-lee-os*]).

**ILION:** [*ILL-ee-on*] another name for TROY.

**ITHACA:** [*ITH-ack-ah*] island off the west coast of mainland Greece, kingdom ruled by Odysseus.

**LAERTES:** [*lay-AIR-tees*] son of Arcesius, father of Odysseus.

**LAESTRYGONIANS:** [*lay-stri-GON-ee-ans*] race of giants living in Telpylus.

**LEIODES** [*LIE-od-es*] son of Oenops, one of the Suitors, a soothsayer.

**LEOCRITUS:** [*lay-OCK-ri-tus*] son of Euenor, one of the Suitors.

**MEDON:** [*MEH-don*] a herald in Odysseus's palace.

**MELANTHIUS:** [*meh-LANTH-ee-us*] son of Dolius, a goatherd friendly to the Suitors.

**MENELAUS:** [*men-eh-LAY-us*] son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, king of Sparta.

**MENTOR:** [*MEN-tor*] son of Alcimus, steward of Odysseus's place, an old companion of Odysseus.

**NAUSICAA:** [*now-SICK-ah-ah* often also *now-SICK-ah* or *now-SICK-ee-ah*] daughter of Arete, princess of the Phaeacians.

**NESTOR:** [*NES-tor*] son of Neleus, king of Pylos.

**OCEANUS:** [*oh-SAY-an-us*; or *oh-KAY-an-us*] the river running around the outer rim of the world; the name is often written OCEAN and pronounced like the English word.

**ODYSSEUS:** [*oh-DISS-eh-uss*; more commonly in English *oh-DISS-yus*] king of Ithaca, son of Laertes, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus.

**OLYMPUS:** [*oh-LIM-puss*] mountain in northern Greece where the major deities live (the Olympians).

**OGYGIA:** [*oh-GIDGE-ee-ah*] island where Calypso lives and where she detains Odysseus.

**ORESTES:** [*or-ESS-tees*] son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, killer of Aegisthus.

## GLOSSARY

- PENELOPE: [*pe-NEL-oh-pee*] daughter of Icarius, wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachus.
- PERSEPHONE: [*per-SEFF-oh-nee*] wife of Hades, goddess of the underworld.
- PHAEACIANS: [*fay-AH-kee-ans* or, more commonly in English, *fay-EE-shuns*] inhabitants of Scheria, master sailors.
- PHEMIUS: [*FEE-me-uhs*] son of Terpes, the professional minstrel in Odysseus's palace.
- PHILOETIUS: [*fill-oh-EE-tee-uhs* or *phil-oh-ea-shus*] a goat and cattle herder on Ithaca friendly to Odysseus.
- POLYPHEMUS: [*poll-iff-EE-mus*] a cyclops, son of Poseidon.
- PONTONOUS: [*PON-toe-nous*] a herald in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.
- POSEIDON: [*po-SIGH-don*] god of the sea, brother of Zeus, often called "encircler of the earth" or "Earthshaker."
- PRIAM: [*PRY-am*] king of Troy, killed when the city was captured by Achaeans.
- PYLOS: [*PIE-loss*] city state in the south Peloponnese ruled by Nestor.
- PYTHO: [*PIE-tho*] the location of the shrine of Apollo.
- SAME: [*SA-mee*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.
- SCHERIA: [*scare-EE-ah* or *share-EE-ah*] distant land where the Phaeacians live.
- SCYLLA: [*SILL-ah* or *SKILL-ah*] a monster with many heads.
- SIRENS: [*SIGH-rens*] two singers who lure sailors to their destruction.
- SPARTA: city in the central Peloponnese ruled by Menelaus.
- STYX: [*STICKS*] river in Hades by which the gods swear their most solemn oaths.
- SUITORS: aristocratic young men courting Penelope in hopes of marrying her.
- TEIRESIAS: [*tie-REE-see-ass*] a blind prophet from Thebes.
- TELEMACHUS: [*te-LEM-ah-kuss*] son of Odysseus and Penelope.
- TROY: city in Asia Minor, near the Hellespont, besieged by the Achaean (Greek) forces for ten years.
- ZACYNTHUS: [*za-KIN-thuhs*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.
- ZEUS: [*ZOOSE*] major divine presence on Olympus, often called "son of Cronos."

