

Homer, Odyssey, Book 1

O Muse, speak to me of the many-sided man,
of his many wanderings after his destruction
of the mighty city of Troy. Many people
and places he came to know, their ways and habits;
astray at sea he suffered much to save his life 5
and return home with his companions. But his men
would not be saved, but perished, for like foolish children
they ate the cattle of the sun-god Helios : so the men asea
day by day were denied their return. O goddess,
daughter of Zeus, begin where you will and speak to me. 10

Now all of the rest who had slipped death by battle
or sunken wreck at the bottom of the seabed
were back home, having escaped combat and the waves :
one man alone yearned for the return to his wife,
but the goddess Calypso, o bewitching nymph, 15
detained him in her deep caves, desiring him
as husband. But the cycles of the seasons revolved
to the year when the gods who spin the thread of fate
encouraged his return to Ithaca (yet not
even there at home would he be free from conflict, 20
even among his own people). Now all the gods
as one took pity on him, apart from Poseidon,
who raged hotly against godlike Odysseus
until at length he finally reached his homeland.

Now Poseidon had gone to the uttermost land 25
of Ethiopia, which stretches east to west,
facing where Hyperion rises and where he sets,

to enjoy a great public sacrifice and feast
of a hundred sheep and oxen; and while he
was enjoying his contentment to the fullest, 30
the other gods gathered together in a hall
of Olympian Zeus, and he the father of gods
and men spoke first. The death of royal Aegisthus
by far-famed Orestes, son of Agamemnon,
he had in mind as he addressed the immortals : 35

“Hear, o gods, the accusation of humankind!
From us they say comes precedent of wickedness,
but the evils they see are their own; and their pains
of mind are irregularities not foreseen
by destiny : even as Aegisthus overleapt 40
his destiny and took the wife of Atreus
as his own matrimony, knowing he would fall
from that foul height to great destruction and death.
Did I not dispatch Hermes, sharp-eyed swift-appearing
Hermes, as warning neither to kill the husband 45
nor seduce his wife? For Orestes would repay
what was taken from his father, son of Atreus,
when reaching the prime of youth he sought his homeland.
Hermes spoke, yet the soul of Aegisthus would not
listen and be persuaded to good-mindedness. 50
And so all at once the vengeance was paid in full.”

And answered the goddess, shining-eyed Athena :

“O father of us all, majesty uppermost,
surely that human’s ruin is reasonable;
those who act that way will in that way be destroyed. 55

But my heart aches on all sides for the dark-fortuned,
 fertile-minded Odysseus, constantly
 miserable, far from his friends, on an island
 at the center of the sea. This wooded island
 is the dwelling place of the daughter of Atlas, 60
 who is destructive-minded. She knows every depth
 of every sea, while Atlas bears the huge columns
 separating heaven and earth. It's *his* daughter
 delaying the unhappy man, ever-suffering
 and ever-bewitched, both by her mildnesses 65
 and by her soft words, temptations to enchant him
 to utterly forget Ithaca. But sometimes
 he leaps up into the air and imagines smoke
 rising from his land : and he desires to die.
 Not now does your heart allow this, dear Olympian. 70
 Did not Odysseus perform sacrifices
 cheerfully, willingly, beside the Argive ships
 at far Troy? So why so vast a hate for him, o Zeus?"

Answer came to her from cloud-assembling Zeus :

"My child! 75
 What a word has winged through your lovely row of teeth!
 How shall I forget the godlike Odysseus,
 he who is superior to all men in sense,
 who favors the immortals with sacrifices,
 pleasuring those who hold the colossal heavens? 80
 No. Earth-trembling Poseidon, stubborn as always,
 detests Odysseus, who blinded the Cyclops,
 godlike Polyphemus, whose power excelled all
 of the round-eyed Cyclops : Thoösa is his mother,

daughter of Phorcys, who stably rules the seawaters : 85
 in those hollow caves that nymph lay with Poseidon.
 And it will happen that earthshaking Poseidon
 will not destroy Odysseus, but keep him lost
 and wandering far from the land of his fathers.
 Now come : we shall deliberate on his return; 90
 he shall go on his way : and Poseidon shall quit
 his bitter thoughts : for he is far from strong enough
 to fight the will of the immortal gods alone.”

And the goddess, shining-eyed Athena, replied :

“O father of all, Cronos’ son, ruler of all, 95
 if the blessed gods are truly content with this,
 that many-thoughted Odysseus return home,
 then may quick-bringing Hermes be sent to the island
 of Ogygia to deliver our resolve
 to the nymph Calypso, her of the beautiful braids : 100
 that patient-minded Odysseus return home.
 She should know that our decision will be enforced.
 I will go to Ithaca, to stir battle-rage
 in the heart of the son, to urge on his resolve
 to lead a council of the long-haired Achaeans 105
 and speak out against the mnesteressin (the wooers
 of his mother, the one hundred and eight of them),
 who are ever-slaughtering and ever-thinning
 his abundance of sheep, and killing his shambling
 twist-horned cattle. I will escort him to Sparta 110
 and to sandy Pylos, where he will seek knowledge
 of his dear father, if something is to be heard,
 if fortunate news of him is held among men.”

Just so she spoke. And she bound sandals to her feet,
 a beautiful golden habiliment belonging 115
 to the gods which bear her along over water
 just as over vast lands as quick as a breath of wind.
 She took in hand her hardy sharp-tipped spear, bright bronze
 heavy, large, and strong, which humiliates all heroes
 of men who anger her, daughter of mighty Zeus. 120
 She stepped down from the Olympian sky, darting
 from its peaks to the doorway of Odysseus
 in the land of Ithaca. Her feet settled down
 at the outer door of the entrance to the house.
 She had made herself strange; to others she now appeared 125
 As Mentos, a Taphian king with bronze spear in hand.
 In the courtyard she found the haughty mnesteres
 cheerfully bloated with an endless greed for life :
 they sat on the hides of oxen they had slaughtered :
 some were playing games, pushing oval stones on boards; 130
 most were busy mixing water and wine in bowls.
 Tables were cleaned with swelled-up sponges, and set out
 for division between them were many fresh meats.

 In among the many sat godlike Telemachus,
 sorrowing at heart, and did not see Athena. 135
 In his mind's eye he saw his noble father return
 to scatter the mnesteres away from the grounds
 and reestablish his honorable lordship
 over the house. Thinking such thoughts, seated idly
 with the others, he saw her, and walked to the door 140
 without hesitation; for he would feel ashamed
 to permit a stranger to stand long at the door.

He came near, and for warm greeting clasped her right hand;
and he relieved her of the bronze spear; and he spoke :

“Hail, guest! 145

You shall find welcome in this house. Once you have eaten,
you can speak to me then of what you have need of.”

So went his introduction. Then, leading the way,
with Pallas Athena following, he brought her
into the high and lofty house. Her spear he placed 150
in a gleaming spear-case by a thick-set column.

Many spears of the downhearted Odysseus
stood there in array. Telemachus brought a chair
for her and overlaid a coverlet of linen
on its well-carven beauty. He even arranged 155

its footstool. Beside her he placed a wondrous chair,
cunningly wrought with intricate carved subtleties,
and sat. He had set them apart from the others
so that his guest might not be bothered by the noise
of the mnesteres and disrelish the meal; 160

and, contemplating the swell of men around them,
ask after his father who was long gone from here.
Water from a lovely golden pitcher was poured
by a maiden into a silver bowl for them
to wash their hands : and a polished table was set 165

down beside them. And the reverent housekeeper
brought them bread, and filled the extent of the table
with diverse foods, giving freely what was at hand :
and a carver brought platters of meats of all kinds;
and placed before them were golden big-bellied cups 170
which were often filled with wine by passing servants.

In upon them came the haughty mnesteres.

They arranged themselves in rows on couches and chairs
and bid their servants pour water over their hands.

Maidens piled up bread in baskets, while the male youths 175

filled the mixing bowls for drinking. The mnesteres
reached eagerly for the refreshment laid before them.

Then after food and drink they turned to other things,
to song and dance, delightful adornment of feasts.

A servant gave the hands of Phemius a lyre; 180

his strum established a very beautiful mood
among the Mnesteres. He played measuredly,
slowly, coaxing from the strings a lyrical song.

Telemachus spoke to shining-eyed Athena

with their heads close, to avoid the ears of others : 185

“Guest, friend, will you be provoked with what I’m to say?

Those others cultivate these things, lyre and song,
so lightly, after consuming a man’s substance
so freely : man, father, husband, Odysseus.”

Telemachus continued with quick winged words : 190

“They do not know if he has decayed to white bones

which lie upon the mainland, or have rolled away

by a sea-wave! If those people were to see him

return to Ithaca, they’d trade their weight of wealth

and showy clothing for swift feet. . . . He was destroyed 195

by a terrible fate, and we are left cheerless.

Is there but one man on earth who says he will come?

Destroyed is the day of his return. . . . But come now!

You speak now. Speak of yourself from the beginning.

Where have you come from? What men? What city? What father? 200

What ship did you arrive on? How was it that sailors

brought you to Ithaca? Who did they say they were?

I am certain that you did not come here on foot.

And be true with me, please, so that I may know well :

do you come as a stranger or as an ally 205

to my father's house? Many men came to our house

at the time when he had many dealings with men."

Again spoke the shining-eyed goddess Athena :

"Surely then I will tell you all of my story.

I am Mentès, son of war-wise Anchialus, 210

and am king of the Taphians, who love the oar.

It is rightly so that I have come here by ship;

my crew and I have been sailing the wine-dark sea,

stopping at places of men who use foreign tongues,

and are bound for Temese, to barter for copper. 215

I bring shining iron. My ship is anchored by

the fields outside of the city, in the harbour

of Rheithron, by the rise of high wooded Neion.

Your father and I are friends, as our fathers were,

friends from long ago. You may inquire about me : 220

speak to the old warrior Laertes. They say

he no longer comes into the city, but keeps

to his far-off fields. It's said he bears much suffering

from the weariness of age upon his body

while he steps along the tracks of his vineyard soil. 225

An old woman serves as his handmaid, and provides

food and drink for him, the warrior Laertes.

And now I am here : for some said that your father
was back among his people. Ah, well! It's the gods
frustrating his forward way. For Odysseus 230

is not destroyed. The noble man lives yet somewhere
on earth : on a deep-sea island, where cruelty
and wildness rule over him against his will.

To you now I foresee, as if my heart were touched
by the immortals, that everything will work out 235

to fulfilment. I think this, though I am no seer;

I cannot read the flight or cry of birds positively.

He shall stand on the land of his beloved fathers.

Soon : not even chains of iron could restrain him.

I envision him returning, for he is a man 240

of many inventions. Now come! Speak to me truly :

are you the very child of Odysseus?

Truly your head and fair eyes very much resemble his.

He and I often had dealings before he sailed

for Troy, where all of the best of the Argives went 245

in the hollows of their ships. And Odysseus

and I : we have not seen each other since that day."

And so further did sharp-witted Telemachus

hold her eyes and speak : "It's for me now to tell all.

My mother says that I am his child, but I 250

do not know : and no man can himself name his parents.

Well . . . I might have been the son of a happy man

who reached an old age among his own property.

I am the son of the luckless man you ask of."

Again spoke the goddess, shining-eyed Athena : 255

“Surely the gods did not establish your family,
 only for you to remain forever nameless;
 no, not for that were you born to Penelope.

Come now! Speak to me truly : tell me of this feast.

Who are these people? Why all this festivity? 260

Is it a wedding banquet? What need have you of this?

It is plain to see that these people feasting here
 are indulgent and objectionable people.

A man would feel just resentment at this disgrace,
 any reasonable man who might come here to see 265
 these innumerable dishonorable deeds.”

And again spoke wise Telemachus face to face :

“Stranger, I will answer, since you ask and question
 so carefully. This house was once destined for wealth
 and nobility, back when my father was here 270

and among the people. The will of the gods, though,
 for some terrible reason, ripped him out of sight.

If he had been conquered among his companions
 in the land of the Trojans, in the arms of a friend,
 threaded up in war’s tangled web, I would have long 275
 since conquered my grief. Then all of the Achaeans

would have built his tomb. And the son, too, would have won
 great fame and praise in days to come. But it is so :

birds of prey, demon harpies, have used their whirlwinds
 to carry him away : not to be seen, nor heard of. 280

This grief I feel, and these tears that fall, are what’s left
 for me. No—new reasons bring me new suffering;
 as the gods have brought me still more hateful trouble.

All those royals in possession of the islands,
 Sáme and Dulichium and wooded Zakynthos, 285
 and all those who rule over rocky Ithaca,
 they are all competing to marry my mother!
 Meanwhile they are wearing out the house. But she
 refuses to refuse these contemptible wooers;
 she will not make an end of all this trouble. 300
 Their appetite will consume the entire house.
 Soon I will be ruined.”

Impatient with the boy Pallas Athena spoke :

“Ah, well! You have a great need of Odysseus
 to come and let go against these shameless people. 305
 If only he were here, standing before the doors,
 with helmet and shield and two spears! But he is gone.
 The man he once was! I first saw him in our house :
 he was drinking wine and overflowing with good cheer.
 He had sailed up to Ephyre, to the house 310
 of Ilus, son of Mermerus. In that quick ship
 of his he had gone in search of a man-killing drug,
 to bathe the bronze tips of his arrows : but Ilus
 wouldn't hand it over, concerned with what the gods
 might think, the immortal ones whom he greatly dreads. 315
 Odysseus was on his way home. My father
 provided what was sought, for he felt a great love
 for your Odysseus. Ah, if Odysseus
 kept company with these people here! They would find
 a quick death. They would come into a bitter marriage. 320
 Well! Everything lies on the knees of the gods :
 whether he return to these halls and and repay in full,

these people lodging in the halls of your palace,
whether to kill them by stratagem, or openly.

Do you not know of how the noble Orestes 355
killed the tricky Aegisthus in retribution
for his father's murder and won fame among men?
His glorious mother Orestes also killed.

You, friend, are as beautiful and as powerful
as he. Be brave, so that those after you will speak 360
well of your name. I must go. By this time my friends
will be tremendously upset with my delay :
you who have shown gracious care, remember my words."

Then again spoke wise Telemachus face to face :

"Stranger, truly you speak what you know with a kind heart, 365
like a father with his son, and I will not forget.
But come now! I see you are eager to go. Stay,
and bathe, and delight yourself here. I have a gift
I want to give you, a memory of our meeting,
something very beautiful, such as friend gives to friend. 370
It will gladden your heart on your way back to your ship."

And the goddess answered, shining-eyed Athena :

"I cannot stay. The gift *your* kind heart wants to give me,
give it to me when I see you again. Make it
very beautiful; I will keep it in my home : 375
in return you will receive what is worthy of you."

She spoke, then shining-eyed Athena stepped away.

Like a bird she vanished unseen up into the air :

in the core of him she had placed courage and strength;
 and thoughts of his father would weigh on his mind 380
 more than before : and his spirit was astonished :
 his mind had seen, and believed, that she was a goddess.

Later, he walked among the Mnesteres, a godlike man.

In silence they sat listening to the verses
 of the renowned singer of songs : of the return 385
 of the Achaeans, of their struggle back from Troy
 that Pallas Athena had required they suffer;
 and from an upper room thoughtful Penelope
 heard the graceful song, daughter of Icarius;
 and she came down the lofty staircase of the house 390
 with two handmaidens behind her. She stood by a pillar
 of the vast, solidly built hall with a veil
 delicately covering her face. Beside her
 to either hand stood her devoted handmaidens.
 And then she addressed the holy artist of song 395
 as her tears began to fall :

“Phemius, stop this
 song; its sadness hurts my heart, and incenses a grief
 that never ends. My heart is full of longing for him
 all the time, for my husband, whose fame is far-spread 400
 through Hellas and Argos. You know of many men
 and gods and celebrate their works; choose another
 of your songs to sing, as you sit here, and enchant them,
 and they will lie still and drink their wine in silence.”

In this way did wise Telemachus answer her : 405

“Mother, this singer of songs is not the guilty one.
Why reject the artist whose song is tuned to the times?

Someone else is responsible for your feelings :

Zeus is responsible. He grants to the courageous
what *he* wants, each and every day. It is not right 410
to resent the artist for the Danaans’ fate.

This theme is close to many men; and they enjoy
the sound of a new song. Let heart and soul stand firm
and listen : not only Odysseus was destroyed
that day in Troy. Many other men were also killed. 415

Or go back upstairs and attend to your spindle
and busy yourself with the spinning of the loom.
Speech is a man’s work, and is here exclusively mine,
as I have authority as head of the house.”

Penelope then went back upstairs to her room 420
with her handmaidens. And much weeping and wailing
went through the upper story of the house, weeping
for much-loved husband Odysseus, until sleep
was placed upon her eyelids by shining-eyed Athena.

Down in the shadowy hall the mnesteres’ 425
murmur rose to a din : each hoped to lie with her.

Then it was wise Telemachus began to speak :

“Enjoy yourselves for now : listen to the beautiful song.
No shouting, no clamour : just these beautiful songs.
In the morning we will sit in assembly 430
where I will speak clear : leave these halls. You are shameless

and contemptuous, both to my mother and to me!

Go from house to house and let each house host the feast!

But if you find it more agreeable to cut

through the substance of a man, fearing no vengeance, 435

do it. Answer will come from the immortal gods :

vengeance will come to this house and destroy the living."

In this way he spoke, and each man there clenched his teeth

and smouldered at Telemachus for his bold speech.

Antinous, son of Eupheithes, spoke in reply : 440

"Telemachus, the gods are evidently teaching you

large words and valour : may Zeus never give you rule

over Ithaca, like your father before you!"

And wise Telemachus stood face to face and spoke :

"Antinous, my words displease you? I will rule here, 445

God willing. You think that is the worst that can happen

to a man? It is good to rule: you have wealth and honour.

There are many here in Ithaca, both young and old,

who may rule, if they wish, as noble Odysseus

is dead. But I will be master of my own house 450

and of all that noble Odysseus has won."

Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered him :

"Telemachus, it lies on the knees of the gods

who among the Achaeans will rule the island

of Ithaca. All of your property is yours, 455

and rule this house as you will. No one shows violence
and robs you of your possessions, not in Ithaca.

But gladly now, good man, tell us of the stranger.

So quickly he darted out of his seat and left!

Who was this man? What land did he say he comes from? 460

Where is his family and his father's fields?

Had he news of your father's return? Or was it
some business affair of his own that brought him here?

He certainly was a handsome fellow to look upon."

Then wise Telemachus spoke : 465

"My father has lost his return. I trust no talk
about him now. My mother summons oracles
into the halls, but I take heed of none of it.

The stranger was a friend of my father's, from Taphos.

He called himself Mentès, son of Anchialus, 470
and was king of the Taphians, who love the oar."

So spoke Telemachus,

but his heart knew he had met the immortal goddess.

The others returned to the dance and riotous song,
to great delight and cheer while the evening-star 475
appeared: and black night came to rest upon their cheer;
then each man went his own way to his home, to rest.

Telemachus' inner rooms were built high up;
they were visible all round the open country,
a very beautiful dwelling. Kindly Eurycleia, 480
daughter of Ops, son of Peisenor, led the way,

bearing burning pinewood torches. Back in her youth,
Laertes had traded twenty oxen for her
from his own property, and had admired her
in the halls as he had admired his own wife 485
(yet he never lay with her, to avoid the rage
of his wife) : of all the handmaidens of the house
she loved Telemachus the most, and had nursed him
as a child; so she held the blazing torches
as he proceeded to bed. He opened the doors 490
to his inmost bedroom and stripped off his tunic
and passed it into the kindly old woman's hands.
She smoothed out the tunic and hung it on a peg
by an inlaid bed-post; then withdrew from the room,
closing its doors with their silver handles, and slid 495
the locking bolt home with the strap. There, all night long,
covered in fine wool, his mind meditated on
travelling and the directions of Athena.

End of Book I

Book II

O Early-Born, o rosy-fingered Dawn, when you came
 bearing light, the beloved son of Odysseus 5
 rose from bed. He wrapped his outer cloak around him,
 and belted his sharpened sword to an upper arm,
 and bound his smooth feet in his beautiful sandals,
 and left the room with a shining godlike presence.
 Straightaway he sent a clear-voiced herald to call 10
 the long-haired Achaeans to assembly.
 When they had gathered together in assembly
 he approached with bronze spear in hand, and was not alone :
 his two sleek hounds followed swift-footed beside him.
 He shone with the divinely sweet grace of Athena, 15
 and each man gazed at him as he walked among them;
 even the elders gave way. He sat down in his father's chair.

Aegyptius, a warrior weakened with age
 and possessor of much knowledge, would be the first
 to speak at the assembly. His son, spearman 20
 Antiphus, had sailed with good Odysseus
 in their hollow ships to the well-horsed land of Troy :
 but the savage Cyclops killed him and dragged him back
 to his deep cave and tore him to pieces for food.
 He had three sons now : Eurynomus, who banquets 25
 with the mnesterin; and two who still tend to
 their father's land. And the father still mourns his son,
 and while speaking in address his painful tears fell :

"Attend to the words, Ithacans, that I shall speak :
 neither assembly nor council have we held 30

since goodly Odysseus left in the hollow ships.

What needs are now so great to have gathered us here?

Does it touch the young, or the old? Has he gained news

of an approaching army, a matter observed

plainly with his own eyes? Or is something other

35

to be announced and explored in assembly?

He looks, I dare think, favoured by the gods. May Zeus

fulfil the good that this man's spirit desires."

In this way he spoke, and the dear son of Odysseus

rejoiced at the favourable speech; and so now

40

he stood up, eager to address the assembly :

and Peisenor, a minister wise in counsel,

placed the staff of precedence into his hand.

First he fixed on the Elder and spoke :

"Old man, not later but now you shall learn of the one

45

who gathered the people together : it was I.

For just now, of all the people here, I suffer

the most hardship. I bring you no news of movements

of any army. And I speak in the assembly

of no public matter. This theme is a personal one.

50

Evil has fallen on my house, in a double way :

I have lost a good father, he who once ruled here,

a gentle father : and now a fresh powerful evil

threatens to destroy my entire house altogether,

and ruin me. The fine sons of the noblest here

55

pursue my mother without invitation,

yet they draw back from going to Icarius

to gather up the fair marriage gifts for his daughter

and leave the choosing of the fairest man to him.

But through my house day by day to and fro they drift 60
 constantly in large numbers, a wild recreation
 slaughtering our oxen and sheep and fat goats
 and drinking our sparkling wine impudently.

In this way I will be used up. There is no man
 here as Odysseus was, to hold the house from ruin. 65
 I cannot resist such a company on my own;
 and afterwards I would be the pitiful one
 known for his weakness. I *will* speak plainly : in truth
 I would defend myself if I had power at hand,
 for intolerable deeds are taking place 70
 and have brought my fine house to ruin. You should feel shame
 for yourselves. Show respect for another man's work,
 and for your fellows who live in your neighbourhood.
 We live under the gods and should fear their vengeance.
 We should fear that they turn around angry at foul acts. 75
 I ask under Olympian Zeus and Themis,
 she who oversees correctness in the acts of men,
 leave me alone in my grief, my friends : stop yourselves :
 unless perhaps my noble father Odysseus
 worked some hostile evil against the Achaeans, 80
 and thus you repay him by tolerating this.

And there would be no profit in my recompense
 for all my treasures and abundance of cattle,
 so long would I be upon town demanding back
 what was mine, that by the time I had recovered 85
 all of my substance, I would have wasted away.
 Past fixing is this distress pressed upon my heart!"

He had spoken himself into exasperation.

He threw the staff to the earth and broke into tears.
 Compassion seized the men of the assembly. 90
 Yet there was silence. No man there dared bring himself
 to reply with angry words to Telemachus.

Antinous alone opposed him in speech :

“Such large talk, Telemachus! This wild intent
 to shame us : and to willingly ridicule us! 95
 You know the Achaean men are guiltless in this.
 Look to your own mother, who surpasses all in deceit!
 For three years now—soon to be four—she has been tricking
 the hearts of the Achaeans. She feeds us with hope,
 holding each man fixed, sending each man messages; 100
 but she is devoted to some other purpose.
 Indeed—in *her* heart she contrived this treachery :
 she set up an elaborate contraption in her halls
 and began weaving with the finest of threads :
 and she spoke to us : 105

‘Warriors, my sweethearts,
 good Odysseus is dead, and you are impatient
 for marriage. You must wait until I have completed
 my work, for I will not leave undone the spinning
 of a burial robe for warrior Laertes, 110
 to take with him when fate brings him long-lying death,
 so that there shall be no Achaean women displeased,
 were he who won so much to lie without a shroud.’

So our resolute hearts put our faith in her words,
 and day by day she wove her great web at her loom. 115

But at night she would have torches put beside her
 and she would unravel it. This art escaped detection
 for three years, and she misled the Achaean men :
 but as the seasons circled round and year four came,
 one among her women told us everything, 120
 and we caught her undoing the knit. So we forced her
 to finish : like it or not. And now we answer you :
 and you and all of the Achaeans hear this well :
 send her on her way and give her in marriage
 to whomever her father commands, or to him 125
 who pleases her. And if she continues to harass
 the sons of the Achaeans for much longer,
 understanding it all in her heart; and knowing
 that Athena has granted her above all others
 the capability of very beautiful handwork, 130
 and also a lovely spirit; and a cunning
 we have never before seen in women,
 not even among the long-ago well-braided
 Achaeans, Tyro and Alcmene and Mycene
 the well-crowned : not one of them can match the mind 135
 of Penelope : nevertheless she has not
 thought things out rightly. Indeed : in this at least.
 We will continue to feed on your property
 so long as she continues to follow her mind
 and heart as the gods see fit. Great fame she has gained 140
 for herself, while you regret its price of so-much wealth.
 We are not going away, not to our lands—
 not to a somewhere, not to an anywhere—until
 she is willing to marry one of the Achaeans.”

Then wise Telemachus faced him and spoke : 150

“Antinous, it is impossible to expect me
 to banish my mother from the house. As for my father,
 he is elsewhere; and no one knows if he lives or not.
 And if I sent my mother away cruelly I would
 have to repay Icarius her large bride-price. 155
 I would suffer hatred and abuse from her father,
 and the gods would deliver their own penalties,
 for my mother would summon the odious Furies
 to avenge her departure from the house; and men
 would treat me with contempt : so never will I give 160
 that word. And if your hearts take offense at me, leave.
 Come out of my halls and find your feasts elsewhere,
 banquet on your own wealth, moving from house to house.
 But if you think it better and wise to destroy
 a man’s substance with no fear of reprisal, do it. 165
 I call upon the gods, who will forever be,
 that Zeus may bring works of vengeance to completion :
 no one will bring help when you are destroyed in my house.”

So spoke Telemachus. Then, far-sounding Zeus
 set loose two eagles aloft from a mountain peak. 170
 Together they soared on a gust of wind with wings
 at full stretch : and they passed over the middle
 of the many-voiced assembly. Right there they whirled
 over all of the heads, and their fluttering wings
 sent raining down a scatter of heavy feathers, 175
 and the look in their eye threatened ruin and death.
 All watched as the two birds tore at each other’s throats
 and faces with their claws and faded away eastward
 over the houses of the people of the city.

The men were astonished at the sign-bringing birds, 180
 and all round they wondered in their hearts what was
 destined to be. Then stood the aged warrior
 Halitherses, son of Mastor : of all the elders
 he knew the most of reading fate in the flight of birds.

He spoke in the assembly with plain words : 185

“Hear me now, Ithacans, what I shall say to you.
 Of the suitors I have this to say and make known,
 since to you great calamity is rolling headlong :
 Odysseus is coming. Not far away,
 I think, or much longer absent, but already, 190
 by this time, is very near; and planted inside him
 are the Keres, the goddesses of doom. He comes
 cresting over all these men like one wave of death
 and will crush Ithaca one sunny afternoon.

And it will be bad for others, too, o Elders : 195

let us put an end to this before we are all killed.
 Or rather : these men should bring their wrongs to an end,
 and immediately. It would go better for them.

I have had much experience in prophecy :
 and what I once said would happen is happening, 200
 just as I told the many-thoughted Odysseus
 when he left with the Argives for Troy. I told him
 he would suffer many evils, and lose all his men,
 and return home in the twentieth year, a changed man.

And now all of this is coming to completion.” 205

Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered him :

“Old man, have some sense and go home. Go prophecy
 to your children—or they might suffer even worse,
 one of these days. I can read these signs just as well
 as you. Many birds fly around in the sunlight 210
 and they may teach us nothing at all. Odysseus
 is dead. You, too, should be wasting away somewhere,
 just as he is, wherever he is, instead of
 standing here ‘god-seeing’ and urging Telemachus on
 in his temper, expecting some gift for your household, 215
 if he offers it. And now I will speak to you,
 and believe what I say. If you continue to utter
 your ancient babble and influence this child
 and increase his anger, for himself first of all
 it shall go even worse, for how can he prosper 220
 against the power gathered here? And you, old man,
 will face a penalty that will be hard for you,
 and bitter to live with. To you, Telemachus,
 openly before all, I offer this advice :
 order your mother to return to her father. 225
 He will arrange a marriage, and assemble all
 the wedding gifts due to a beloved daughter.
 I say the sons of the Achaeans will not stop
 asking for marriage and you will have to stand it.
 We fear no man. No, not even Telemachus, 230
 with all of his many words. And *your* words, old man,
 mean nothing to us. What you say will never be :
 so speak, and you will feel our contempt all the more.
 We are not going anywhere, or changing our ways,
 so long as she wears away the time of the Achaeans 235
 waiting for marriage. Hour by hour, day by day,
 we wait, competing for her complete excellence.

We might go with others and find for each of us
 a reasonable match, but no other woman,
 however fit for marriage, much interests us.” 240

Wise Telemachus answered:

“Eurymachus and all you other noble suitors,
 let us carry this no further : for now I know it,
 the gods know it, and all the Achaeans know it.
 Come now, give me a swift ship and twenty men, 245
 to accompany me away and back. I’m to Sparta
 and to sandy Pylos, to search for my father.
 Someone may know something of his long absence.
 (And may the gods, who often interact with men,
 send signs I can understand.) While I am asea 250
 you can waste my wealth for another year :
 it will be worth it if I hear that my father
 is alive. If I hear he is dead, I will return
 and raise a burial mound, pour the libations,
 burn the offerings, and give him all the honour 255
 that he has earned; and I will make my mother marry.”

This then he said, and sat. Then Mentor stood, a friend
 of noble Odysseus. The old man had agreed
 to keep watch over the house while Odysseus
 was away with the ships, and keep things firmly footed. 260

He addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

“Give ear to me now, Ithacans, and hear what I shall say :
 Nevermore let there be such a kind and mild

and gentle man to raise the sceptre as leader,
 nor let this leader's spirit know right-mindedness, 265
 but let him be painful to bear, and act godlessly :
 since no one remembers Odysseus the godlike,
 who reigned over us all as mild as a father!
 But I hold no objection to these bold suitors
 and the abominable schemings in their minds : 270
 they are gambling their very lives while they eat
 through the house of Odysseus, who, they affirm,
 will nevermore return. I object to the silence
 I hear from all the other people sitting here!
 You volunteer not a single word to put a stop 275
 to this, though you are many and they are but few."

Leocritus, son of Euenor, answered him :

"The irrepressible, stray-spirited Mentor!
 What was all that you said, encouraging others
 to stop us? It's tough-going for a man to fight 280
 with many over his food. If Ithacan Odysseus
 snuck up on his own home with stratagems in mind
 to drive out the noblemen feasting in his halls,
 he would die on the spot. What his wife had craved for
 would bring her no joy. Right there he would meet his end 285
 if he fought us single-handed : a shameful fate :
 unfair. You have spoken foolishly. Let it be an end.
 Let us now separate, each to his own interest.
 Mentor and Halitherses shall hasten the boy
 on his way; they're old friends of his father's. 290
 But I think he'll be here a long time yet,
 if this journey happens at all, and any news

he hears will be heard here in Ithaca.”

Such was his reply, and the assembly adjourned.

The men scattered to their separate homes, 295
and the suitors returned to the house of Odysseus.

Telemachus withdrew to the sands by the sea.

He washed his hands in the grey sea-water, then called
to Athena :

“Hear me, goddess, who came to me : 300
you who brought your divinity into my house :
who saw me pass in a ship into the misty sea :
seeking in that distance knowledge of my father—
whose absence has been long. I seek to voyage out,
but the Achaeans are frustrating all this, 305
especially those exceedingly evil ones.”

Thus he spoke, and saw Mentor coming near :

it seemed his living body, and the voice seemed his,
but it was Athena. She let fly her winged words :

“Telemachus, in time to come you should never 310
be backward nor a fool, because the spirit
of your noble father flows within you,
a man who completed his every word in deed.

Your journey will not end aimlessly or without effect.

The son of Odysseus and Penelope, 315

I think, would complete the purpose he held in mind.

Few sons are equal to their fathers: most are worse,
but a few are superior to the father.

And since you should never be backward nor a fool,
 as the mind of Odysseus is inside you, 320
 I expect you to complete this work.

As for *those* people,
 let be their senseless minds and their mindless designs.
 They have no thought of the dark fate that is coming
 for them, that they will all die together in a day. 325

Not long now is the journey you have in mind :
 I am a friend to your father, and to his house.
 I will prepare a swift ship for you, and go with you.
 Go now back to the house. Blend in with those people.
 Ready yourself while I fit a ship together 330
 for you. You'll need food, and fit each container well :
 the wine in amphorae, the barley meal (for bread)
 in strong leather skins. I will go into the city
 and build a crew of willing-ones. There are many ships
 in sea-surrounded Ithaca, old and new. 335
 I will choose the best and make it ready for you
 to send it out onto the far-reaching sea."

Thus spoke Athena, daughter of Zeus.

After hearing her speak Telemachus went home
 sorrowing in his heart. He found the well-stomached ones 340
 in his halls. They were peeling back the flesh of goats
 and singeing the bristles off of pig carcasses
 in the courtyard. With hearty laughter in his look
 Antinous faced Telemachus, gripped his hand, and spoke :

"Large-talker Telemachus, ungovernable 345
 in spirit! Don't let all this concern you further;

and no more hostile words! Take a drink with us,
 and something to eat, as you always used to do.
 The Achaeans will complete your business for you,
 picking out a ship and carefully chosen oarsmen, 350
 so that you can be off for most holy, sacred,
 divine Pylos and hear news of your good father.”

Wise Telemachus answered him :

“Antinous, sitting with your insolence at table,
 feasting mildly with cheerful face, appeals to me 355
 not at all. You people have been tasting our wealth
 since I was a child and still it’s not enough.
 But I am grown now and hear the words of others
 and learn, and my heart has grown with me. I will try
 to ruin you worthless people. My voyage will end 360
 with a point. Yet you would make me a passenger
 on some other’s ship?”

As he spoke he plucked his hand
 lightly out of Antinous’ hand. Along the halls
 the bold ones were busy feasting. They smirked at him 365
 and mocked him.

One of the smirking youths spoke :

“Surely Telemachus is planning our murder.
 Surely he’s to bring defenders back from Pylos
 or—what was it?—Sparta, so terrible he looks! 370
 Or he’s off to bounteous Ephyre to bring back
 some life-destroying drug to drop into our wine-bowl,

and kill us all.”

And another smirking youth spoke :

“Who knows? Maybe he, too, will die far away 375
 from his friends while wandering, another Odysseus.
 That would be an effort for us : we would have to
 divide up all of his possessions. His mother
 and whoever we hand her to can have the house.”

While the mnesteres carved him up with words, 380
 Telemachus went down to his father’s storeroom
 underground, a private spot with wide-arched ceiling.
 Gold and bronze lay heaped up beside garments in chests,
 and the air was well-scented with olive oil.

Large earthenware jars of wine, old and sweet to drink, 385
 stood side by side in close order along a wall,
 ready for Odysseus to taste, should he return home
 after suffering his many pains and troubles.

Just now the doors, solid and well-fitted, were shut
 and double-fastened. Both day and night a maidservant, 390
 the much-knowing Eurycleia, kept the room safe,
 and to her now Telemachus spoke the following :

“Good mother, I require wine, the second-best
 next to the sweet wine you preserve for our father,
 in case Odysseus somewhere escapes fate 395
 and the goddesses of death and returns home.
 Fill twelve amphorae to the brim and seal them well;
 and pour for me barley meal into well-stitched skins :
 let it be twenty measures of the crushed barley.

Have it all ready to go and tell no one of it. 400
 Tonight, as soon as my mother goes upstairs
 to take her rest, I will come for these things.
 I'm off for Sparta and Pylos to seek out news
 of my father's return, if there's anything to hear."

And after hearing this Eurycleia began 405
 to weep, and through tears she spoke to him urgently :

"Dear child, why? Who put this thought into your head?
 You will go away and travel to far places—
 you, the only son and darling of the house?
 The goodly Odysseus is dead. He lost his life 410
 in a strange place far from here. As soon as you go,
 these people will plan a tricky way to kill you
 and divide up the house among themselves. Please stay!
 Live quietly where your family is settled.
 You have no need to roam over the empty sea." 415

And wise Telemachus answered her :

"Good mother, have confidence in me : my journey
 is the will of the gods. Swear to me now to speak
 nothing of this to my mother for at least ten days—
 unless she hears that I am gone and asks you of it, 420
 as I would not have her beauty undone by tears."

So he watched the old woman swear a solemn oath.
 And after she finished in due and proper form,
 she began filling up the amphorae with wine,
 then poured the barley into well-stitched leather bags. 425

And Telemachus left her to join the men in the halls.

Meantime, the goddess' plans were evolving :

the shining-eyed Athena moved through the city

in the form of Telemachus, and to each man

she drew near she spoke her word, instructing them 430

to gather at the swift ship at sundown. She went

also to the famed Noemon, son of Phronius,

and asked for a ship : and he kindly promised one.

Now when the sun had set and the city lay dark,

she drew the ship into the sea and fitted it 435

with all the equipment carried by well-benched ships;

and she secured it at the mouth of the harbour.

The brave crew gathered, and the goddess cheered each man.

After this, Athena continued with her plan.

She went to the house of noble Odysseus 440

and poured sweet sleep into the mnesteressin,

dazing their minds while they drank; and the cups fell

from their hands. So, no longer content to sit idle,

they left for their rest, spreading out through the city

while sleep weighed down their eyelids. 445

And the shining-eyed goddess spoke to Telemachus,

summoning him out of the comfortable halls,

and appearing once more in body and voice as Mentor :

“Telemachus, already your brave companions

sit at the oar and await your command : come now, 450

let us delay no further our voyage out.”

So spoke Pallas Athena, then nimbly led the way,
 and Telemachus followed the steps of the goddess.
 When they had come down to the ship and the sea,
 they found on the shore his long-haired companions, 455
 and Telemachus, strong with the light of the goddess,
 addressed his crew :

“Come now, good men, let us retrieve the provisions;
 they’re gathered in my halls. My mother knows nothing
 of this, nor the housemaids—one alone heard my word.” 460

Thus he spoke, then led the way, and they kept pace with him.
 When they returned they stowed everything in the ship,
 as commanded by the son of Odysseus.
 And then Telemachus went up aboard the ship.
 Athena was already sitting in the stern, 465
 and Telemachus sat down near her. And the men
 unfastened the stern-cables, then stepped aboard
 and sat at their places on the rowing benches.

The shining-eyed goddess roused a favouring wind,
 a steady westerly singing over the wine-dark sea. 470

And Telemachus ordered his men to take hold
 of the tackling : and they hastened to obey him.
 They raised the mast of pine-wood and socketed it
 in the mast-box, making it fast with the forestays;
 then raised sail with the well-twisted leather ropes. 475

And the wind filled the white sail, and the ship went forth
 through the dark-gleaming waves that hissed around the prow :
 and so their journey began through the rolling sea.
 When all was made fast, they set out bowls of wine

and poured offerings to the deathless gods everlasting, 480

and especially to the shining-eyed daughter of Zeus.

All night long and into the dawn the black ship cleaved her way.

End of Book II

Book III

Now the horses of Helios burst from the sea
 and galloped up the sky, bringing beautiful light
 to the immortals above, and to mortals below
 on wheat-springing earth : and the ship came to Pylos,
 the stronghold of Lord Neleus. Standing by the shore 5
 of the sea the people were offering as sacrifice
 a flock of black bulls to the dark-gleaming earthshaker
 Poseidon. The assembly was separated
 into nine divisions, each of five hundred men,
 and in each stood nine bulls ready for sacrifice. 10
 Having tasted the inward parts, they were burning
 the thigh-slices to the god as the ship followed
 a steady track to port. And the well-balanced ship
 bundled the sail and secured it, and dropped anchor,
 and the men came ashore : and from out of the ship 15
 came Telemachus, and Athena led the way.

Then shining-eyed Athena was first to speak :

“Telemachus, there is no more time to be shy,
 not now, nor ever again : for you have sailed the sea
 to learn of your father, in what place he is buried 20
 in the earth, and what fate he met. So come! Time runs
 on : go now to Nestor, the tamer of horses :
 let us extract what knowledge he keeps in his mind.
 Stand strong, yet show due respect, to draw out his word :
 and he will not speak false, for he is very wise.” 25

And Telemachus answered her :

“But Mentor—I’m unsure. How do I approach him?
I am not yet skilled in carefully worded speech,
and it’s bold of a youth to question an elder.”

Then again spoke the goddess, shining-eyed Athena : 30

“Telemachus, some of the words your mind conceives
will be yours, and some words, I think, will be heaven’s :
for the gods have been with you since the day of your birth.”

Thus spoke Athena, who then nimbly led the way.

Telemachus followed in the steps of the goddess 35

and they came to the fire where the men of Pylos
were gathered in assembly. There the revered Nestor
sat with his sons. Busy around them the people
were preparing the feast. Some meats there were roasting,
while others on skewers were grilling. When they saw 40
the approach of the strangers they crowded round them,
greeted them warmly, and invited them to sit.

Peisistratus, Nestor’s youngest son, took their hands
and graciously seated them down on soft fleeces
on the sea-sand, by his brother Thrasymedes 45

and their father. He gave them portions of inward parts
and poured wine in a golden cup and raised the cup
in their honour : and spoke to Pallas Athena,
daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus :

“Pray now, guest-friend, to King Poseidon, for this feast 50

you come to is his. And when you have poured the wine
 in his praise, and have prayed, as it is right to do,
 pass the cup to your friend, so that he, too, may pour
 the honey-sweet wine and pray to the immortals :
 since all men have need of the gods. And as your friend
 is my equal in years, I give you the golden cup first.”

55

So he spoke, and handed her the cup of sweet wine :
 and Athena smiled at the man’s wisdom and sense
 in handing her the golden cup first : and she prayed
 to King Poseidon :

60

“Hear me, Poseidon, o earthshaker, and do not fail
 to answer our prayer and bring our work to completion.
 To Nestor, first, and to his sons, bring glory and renown;
 and bring beautiful return to all of the Pylians
 for this gracious sacrifice. Last, grant that Telemachus
 and I reach Ithaca when we have completed our work,
 which has brought us to this spot in our swift black ship.”

65

Thus prayed the goddess, who was herself completing all.

She then handed the splendid ornamented cup
 to Telemachus, who prayed in similar manner.

70

When the remaining meat was drawn off the skewers
 and divided between them, the people enjoyed
 an excellent feast. And when they sat satisfied
 after the food and drink, the master of horses,
 Nestor, spoke :

75

“Now the time is proper to inquire of our guests
 who they are, while they sit contented with our feast.
 O strangers, who are you? Why are you sailing
 the watery ways? Are you on a trading voyage?
 Or perhaps you’re wandering where the wind takes you, 80
 as pirates, who roam the wide sea risking their lives
 to bring evil to peoples of foreign places?”

Telemachus stood confidently before him
 and spoke, for Athena had placed courage in his heart,
 so that he might ask after his long-absent father 85
 and win the good word and admiration of men :

“Nestor, son of Nelius, glory of the Achaeans,
 you ask from what place I come : and I shall tell you.
 We are from Ithaca, that is below Mount Neion.
 This business I shall speak of is my own, and not 90
 a public matter. I come seeking after far-spread
 rumour of my father (if I may hear any),
 the noble stronghearted Odysseus, who, they say,
 once fought side by side with you in battle at Troy
 and obliterated the city. 95

We have learned where each man died his sorry death,
 but of my father’s Zeus has put knowledge of it
 beyond my reach, and no man can say where he fell :
 whether his enemies overpowered him on land;
 or was lost at sea on the waves of Amphitrite. 100

I have come now to my knees to ask for your favour :
 if you are willing to tell of his miserable death :
 if perhaps you saw it happen with your own eyes,

or heard from another some word of his wanderings :
 for he was born into a life of many sorrows. 105
 And take no pity on me and soften your words,
 but tell me truly what you saw. I beg of you,
 if ever my father, the noble Odysseus,
 showed you loyalty in word or deed in the land
 of the Trojans, remember it now, and speak true.” 110

Reply came from venerable Nestor of Gerenia :

“Friend, you bring to mind the misery we endured,
 we sons of the Achaeans, an overpowering force :
 all that misery of our ships on the murky sea
 roaming wherever Achilles might lead the way, 115
 on the track of spoils—”

The venerable Nestor hemmed, and stroked his beard,
 and continued his wide oration:

“And all of the contention on all sides of Troy :
 there the best of us were killed. There fierce Ajax lies; 120
 there Achilles; there Patroclus, peer of the gods
 in counsel; and there my beloved son, the noble
 and mighty Antilochus, swift-footed warrior,
 superior in both. Many more evils besides these
 befell us : who among men could recount the tale? 125
 Remain with us five years, six years, and ask of Troy,
 ask of the many pains the noble Achaeans
 suffered there : you would grow weary with the story
 and be off, and never stop until Ithaca.
 Nine years we busied ourselves with devising pains 130

of all kinds to bring ruin upon them; and Zeus
was late in completing the work, and only after
many pains were suffered. No man there, at any time,
chose to contend with Odysseus in counsel,
so superior was your godly father in crafts 135
of all kinds. Your father—if you're truly his son :
yes, if I see rightly with these old eyes, indeed
I look upon you with astonishment. You speak
as he would : curious, that a man much younger
in years would resemble him in this way. All the time 140
we were there, the godly Odysseus and I
not once spoke divided in the assembly
and in the Council of Elders, but with one mind
we counseled the Argives with sense and thoughtful word
how to devise the way to the very best success. 145
But after destroying the lofty city of Troy
and leaving in our ships, a god scattered us all
on the sea. Ten years of battle and even then
Zeus chose a miserable return for the Argives,
for not all of them were thoughtful or just : 150
thus many of them met a miserable fate,
from the destructive anger of goddess Athena,
daughter of a mighty father. She brought contention
between the sons of Atreus. These two brought together
all the Achaeans in assembly, thoughtlessly, 155
without order, at sundown, and the Achaeans
came heavy with wine and the two began to speak.”

The venerable Nestor stroked his beard : and then
Nestor's experienced tongue continued apace :

“Menelaus urged all the Achaeans 160
 to think of returning to the broad-backed sea.
 This did not please Agamemnon at all, not at all :
 he would rather hold back the army and offer
 a sacrifice of a hundred oxen : with just so much
 he sought to mollify the mighty Athena. 165
 Silly man did not know that with her there is no thought
 of complying. Gods don’t lightly turn their heads.
 The two stood there chattering and the bronze-suited
 Achaeans rose up in marvellous unity,
 wondering over the dual council. That night, 170
 while resting, a gloom hung over the camp :
 each wondered why Zeus was arranging for us
 a terrible misery. In the morning some of us
 launched our high-hoisted ships onto the holy sea;
 we brought aboard our treasures and our shapely 175
 Trojan women : half of the army stayed behind
 and stood with Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
 herder of men : half embarked and rowed away :
 very swiftly the ships sailed over the deep sea :
 a god had made the surface level. At Tenedos 180
 we sacrificed to heaven, hoping to reach our homes :
 and yet Zeus did not allow us to return. Cruel god,
 who brought disaster on us for a second time!
 Some turned back their weary ships and went on their way :
 the company of Odysseus : the skilful 185
 and many-minded one : paying respect once more
 to Agamemnon, son of Atreus.
 I, however,
 with ships crowded together behind me, took flight :
 I knew the god was planning something terrible. 190

The warrior son of Tydeus fled with his ships;
 and fair-haired Menelaus appeared behind us
 finally, only to overtake us in Lesbos,
 where we were considering the long voyage,
 whether we should sail seaward of rocky Chios 195
 by the island of Psyria, keeping this to our left;
 or landward of Chios, passing by windy Mimas.
 We asked of heaven to reveal the way for us,
 and the way was revealed : we were to cleave the sea
 to Euboea, the quickest route out of hardship. 200
 A favourable wind was awakened, and the ships
 sailed swiftly over the monster-breeding deep,
 and at night we put in at Geraestus, where we
 offered many thighs of bulls to King Poseidon
 for allowing us across the sea. On the fourth day 205
 Diomedes and his men dropped anchor at Argos;
 but I held on for Pylos, and the wind held strong
 and never abandoned me, a blessing of heaven."

And now venerable Nestor gave straight answer :

"Thus I returned, dear child : and I have no news 210
 of Odysseus, nor of any other man
 who went with him : whether they were saved, or were lost."

Wise Telemachus listened : and Nestor continued :

"These days I sit quietly in my halls, and hear
 reports from elsewhere : these I shall relay to you, 215
 as is right, and hold nothing back :
 the spear-bearing Myrmidons, it is said, returned

safely, led by the high-spirited Neoptolemus,
 son of glorious Achilles. Philoctetes,
 glorious son of Poias, returned safely. 220
 Idomeneus came with all his company
 to Crete : warriors surviving the war and the sea.
 All the world knows of Atreus' son : you yourself
 must know how Aegisthus devised his unhappy death :
 and paid for it in full. How good a thing, to have 225
 a son remaining after death to bring vengeance
 on the father-murderer : tricky Aegisthus,
 killed by Orestes, son of Agamemnon. You,
 also, I see, are exceedingly handsome, and tall :
 have courage, so many yet to come will speak of you." 230

Wise Telemachus answered him :

"Nestor, son of Neleus, exalted Achaean,
 triumphantly that son brought vengeance : and his name
 shall spread everywhere, so that men in times to come
 may hear of it. If only the gods would grant me 235
 power as great as his! I would punish those people
 for their audacity in conspiring my ruin.
 But the fates have refused to spin me the happiness
 I seek, to destroy those wooers, and my father
 and I feel no peace, and I must bear it as I can." 240

And Nestor answered him :

"My friend, since you bring this to mind and speak of it :
 they say that many wooers populate your halls,
 competing for your mother's hand in marriage, and plan

much evil against you. Tell me, are you willingly 245
 oppressed, or do the people of your land hate you,
 urged on by rumour and idle talk? It may be
 that Odysseus returns some day to repay them
 for their violent acts with violence of his own :
 either alone, or with the entire army 250
 behind him. If only the shining-eyed Athena
 cared for you just as she cared for Odysseus
 at Troy, where the Achaeans suffered many woes.
 Never have I seen the gods so openly loving
 as goddess Athena loved him, standing by his side. 255
 If she cared for you as much as she cared for him,
 many of those people would soon forget marriage.”

Then wise Telemachus answered him :

“I expect nothing. What you say is tremendous :
 I dare not imagine it. Such things are beyond 260
 hoping for. Even though heaven destined such a thing,
 I cannot believe I’ll ever have such kindness.”

Then Athena (in the shape of Mentor) spoke :

“Telemachus, what a word you speak! Easily 265
 a god delivers man from evil, if the god
 chooses, no matter where a man may be. As for me,
 I would rather suffer to reach a peaceful home,
 than reach home only to suffer my death at home,
 as Agamemnon was murdered by the trickery
 of Aegisthus and his wife. Though death is common 270
 to all. No god can save even a beloved man

when destructive fate overmasters, bringing long death.”

Telemachus answered :

“Mentor, let us speak of this heartache no further.

I have no hope my father will ever return : 275

the gods long ago chose for him ruin and death.

But I would ask Nestor to speak another word,
since in thinking and wisdom he surpasses all others.

(It is said he has reigned for three generations,
and he appears to me an immortal in look.) 280

O Nestor, king of men, speak and tell me truly :

how was wide-ruling Agamemnon murdered?

Where was Menelaus? What death did tricky Aegisthus
devise for a man far superior to himself?

Was Menelaus elsewhere from Achaean Argos, 285
wandering among men, thereby emboldening
Aegisthus to kill?”

And Nestor answered him :

“Child, I will tell you all that you wish to hear.

Indeed, you yourself have imagined how the matter 290

would have fallen if Menelaus had returned

to find Aegisthus living in his halls. His death

would have brought him no burial mound, only dogs

and birds tearing at his corpse, exposed on a plain

far from the city; nor would any Argive woman 295

have wept for him; for his work was wicked. While

we were struggling to complete our task at Troy,

he rested at ease in a corner of Argos,

seducing Agamemnon's wife with artful words.

The royal Clytemnestra spurned the shameful plan, 300

for her heart was pure : and moreover a songster

watched over her (at the word of Agamemnon

before sailing for Troy). But when the gods bound her

to her terrible fate, then Aegisthus took him

to a desolated island and left him there 305

as food for birds of prey; and she went willingly

to the bed of Aegisthus. And on the altars

of the gods he offered many sacrifices,

and many treasures he hung there, embroideries

and gold, since he had succeeded beyond his hopes." 310

And venerable Nestor continued :

"Now we were sailing in convoy home from Troy,

Menelaus and I, the best of friends; but when

we came to sacred Sunium, there the Bright One,

Phoebus Apollo, fired an arrow bringing 315

a mild death to the helmsman of Menelaus,

as he held in his hands the tiller of the swift ship :

that was Phrontis, Onetor's son, most excellent

pilot when wind gusts rage. So there at the headland

of Athens Menelaus delayed, though eager 320

to carry on, and buried his friend. When he set sail

back on the wine-dark sea, Menelaus

swiftly came to the mountain heights of Malea.

There, Zeus the far-sounding thunderer planned for him

hateful confusion, exhaling breaths that raised 325

up the waves to towering heights equal to mountains.

The hollow ships scattered : some toward the isle of Crete,

where the Cydonians dwell by the waters of Iardanus.

There is a headland of steep smooth peaks on the outskirts
of the land of Gortyn in the hazy sea : where 330

the southwest wind drives huge waves against the headland
all the way to Phaestus. Here some of the hollow ships
shattered against the reefs : but the crews painfully
escaped death. And the winds rushed five ships to Egypt.

There, Menelaus gathered gifts and gold, roaming 335
with his ships among a strange-tongued people.

Meanwhile, back home Aegisthus planned his sorry work.

For seven years he ruled in golden Mycenae
after killing Agamemnon, and the people
suffered his tyranny. But in the eighth year came 340

Orestes as a disaster upon him. Orestes,
back from Athens, murdered the father-murderer,
tricky Aegisthus, avenging his father's death.

After this, he honoured both his vile mother
and weak Aegisthus with a banquet for the people 345
of Argos. On the same day, Menelaus returned,
bringing many treasures, as much freight as his ships
could carry.

So do not wander long from home, my friend,
abandoning your wealth to those hateful people, 350
who will divide and devour everything that's yours :
and you will have gone on a useless journey.

But I advise and urge you to go to Menelaus :
whom the storm winds once sent wide of his course.

He has lately returned from a land so distant 355
that travellers who reach there lose hope of return.
Birds couldn't cross that distance if they had a year
to fly, so terrible it is. Now go your way

with your ship and your crew : or if you prefer land,
 I offer you chariot and horses; and my sons 360
 will escort you to glorious Lacedaemon,
 where fair-haired Menelaus lives. Ask for the truth,
 and he will not speak false, for he is very wise.”

While he spoke the sun had descended under the earth,
 and darkness came. 365

And shining-eyed Athena spoke :

“O majesty, you have spoken well. Now the tongues
 of our offerings must be cut out; and mix the wine,
 and pour libations to Poseidon and all the gods.
 Then may we sleep, for the hour agrees. Light has gone 370
 down to the world below, and we should not linger
 at a feast to the gods (as it is unseemly),
 but go on our way.”

Thus spoke the daughter of Zeus, and they heard her word.

Manservants poured water over their hands, while boys 375
 mixed water and wine in bowls : then poured the drops
 for libation into each cup, moving from man to man.
 Then they laid the tongues onto the fire and rose
 to their feet and poured out the offering over them.
 When the libations were poured, and each man had drunk 380
 to contentment, then Athena and Telemachus
 (beautiful as a god)
 were ready to return to the hollow ship :

but Nestor detained them, and spoke :

“Heaven and the immortals forbid you leaving here 385
 as from a poor man wanting clothing, who has no
 cloaks and blankets at home for guests to rest mildly on.
 Indeed, I have many soft blankets and fine cloaks.
 Surely I cannot allow the son of Odysseus
 to sleep on the deck of a ship, not while I live : 390
 and my children living after me in the halls
 will receive whatever stranger might come to my house.”

Then spoke the goddess, shining-eyed Athena :

“You speak well, my friend. It befits Telemachus
 to accept your honourable invitation 395
 and find rest in your halls. I will go to the ship
 and see to the crewmen and their several duties.
 I am the only man among them old in years :
 the others are young in years like Telemachus,
 and follow the great-hearted voyager in friendship. 400
 There I will lie down to sleep by the pitch-black ship.
 (And at dawn I’m off to the noble Cauconians
 to collect an old debt, a considerable matter.)
 Do send Telemachus onward with chariot,
 and with one son, since he a guest in your house, 405
 and give them your strongest and fastest horses.”

So spoke shining-eyed Athena. She stepped away,
 and taking eagle’s shape uprose into the air :
 and at the sight all looked on with astonishment;
 the old man was awestruck when his eyes beheld it. 410

Nestor seized the hand of Telemachus and spoke :

“O friend, I expect courage and goodness from you :
already the gods regard you, though young in years!

Truly this is no other god on Olympus

but the Head-Born, most glorious daughter of Zeus, 415

who favoured your brave father among the Argives :

O Queen, show goodwill, and grant to me a good name,

glory for me, for my sons, and for my revered wife!

In return I will offer you in sacrifice

a bright white heifer, broad-browed and unbroken; 420

and I will decorate her curved horns with gold leaf.”

Thus he spoke in prayer, and Athena heard him.

Then Nestor of Gerenia, master of horses,

led them, his sons and the husbands of his daughters

to his glorious palace. And when they had come 425

to the king’s beautiful palace, and had sat down

in rows on couches and chairs, the king mixed a bowl

of sweet wine (eleven years old when the mistress

of the house lifted the lid). As he mixed a bowl

the old man prayed passionately to Athena, 430

daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus.

When the libations were poured, and each man had drunk

to contentment, each man went to his room to rest.

The venerable Nestor led Telemachus,

the beloved son of godly Odysseus, 435

down a colonnade echoing by the courtyard,
 to an inlaid bed; and by him he put warrior
 Pisistratus, a leader of men, who was one
 of King Nestor's unmarried sons. As for himself,
 he slept furthest back in the lofty palace, 440
 and beside him lay his wife, mistress of the house,
 who had prepared the bed.

When the rosy-fingered Dawn touched Nestor with light,
 he rose from bed and trod the length of the palace
 to the tall doors at the front. Just outside, before 445
 the entrance, were shining white seats of polished stone
 glimmering with oil. Long ago, Neleus
 sat here, but the goddess of death took him (wise as gods)
 down to Hades; and now venerable Nestor sat here,
 sceptre in hand, protector of the Achaean people. 450
 As they came from their rooms his sons gathered round him,
 Echephron and Stratius and Perseus and
 Aretus and noble Thrasymedes; and the sixth
 was warrior Peisistratus, good with the spear.
 And they entreated the godlike Telemachus 455
 to sit with them.

And Nestor was first to speak :

"Quickly now, dear children, fulfil my word : I will
 honour goddess Athena, who graciously appeared
 at the banquet yesterday. Come now! Fetch a cow 460
 from the plain (and the herdsman will drive her); one go
 to great-hearted Telemachus' ship and bring
 back his men (leaving two behind); another go

fetch the goldsmith Laerces, so the heifer's horns
 will be wrapped in gold. As for all the rest, stay here 465
 together, and tell the handmaidens to prepare
 for a feast within our halls : to gather the seats,
 and the firewood to place around the altar;
 and to bring clear water."

So he spoke, and they went. 470

And the heifer was led in from the plain;
 and the crew arrived; and the smith brought his bronze tools,
 the instruments of his art : the anvil and hammer
 and tongs : with these he shaped and fashioned the gold.

And Athena (unseen) came to receive the gift. 475

And venerable Nestor provided the gold,
 and the goldsmith prepared it, and applied gold leaf
 lightly round the horns, to delight Athena's eyes.

Then Stratius and noble Echephron led her in
 by the horns, and Aretus brought forth the water 480
 in a bowl decorated with flowers in relief;
 and in his other hand he carried the barley

in a reed basket. Steady Thrasymedes stood by,
 with sharp axe in hand, to strike the heifer;
 and Perseus held the bowl to receive the blood. 485

Then venerable Nestor began the sacrifice :
 the washing of hands, the sprinkling of barley meal :
 and while praying earnestly to Athena
 he cut the forelock off the heifer and dropped it
 into the fire. 490

When they had finished praying,

and had thrown crushed barley toward the altar,
 then bold Thrasymedes, Nestor's son, dealt the blow :
 the axe carved through the living fibres of the neck
 and drained the animal's strength : and the holy cries 495
 (of joy and satisfaction) came from the daughters
 and the sons' wives, and the honoured wife of Nestor,
 Eurydice, oldest daughter of Clymenus.

And the men raised its head from the wide-open earth
 and held it : and Peisistratus cut its throat. 500

And when the dark blood had run out and the bones lay
 lifeless, they cut the body into pieces. They cut
 the thigh-slices and wrapped them in a double layer
 of fat and laid raw pieces of flesh on top. Nestor
 burned them on the fire and poured sparkling wine 505
 over them; and when the thigh-slices were fully burnt,
 and they had tasted the inward parts, they cut up
 the rest and skewered the pieces on five-pronged spits
 and roasted them, holding the spits over the fire.

Lovely Polycaste, meanwhile, youngest of all 510
 of Nestor's daughters, bathed Telemachus.

And when she had bathed him, she rubbed a rich oil
 into his skin, and dressed him in linen tunic
 and elegant cloak : and he came forth from the bath
 with the beauty of the immortals : and he went 515
 and sat beside Nestor, king of men.

So now they drew the roasted pieces off the spits
 and sat down and feasted, and excellent manservants
 attended them, filling their golden cups with wine.
 And when they were satisfied with the food and drink : 520

Nestor, master of horses, spoke :

“Come now, my sons! For great-hearted Telemachus
find horses with beautiful manes and put them
to the chariot, so that he may continue on.”

Thus he spoke, and they heard, and readily obeyed : 525

soon the swift horses were yoked to the chariot.

And the mistress of the house placed in the chariot

bread and wine and delicacies suitable for kings

beloved of Zeus. And Telemachus mounted

the beautifully ornamented chariot. 530

Peisistratus stepped up beside him and took the reins

into his hands; and sparked the horses with the whip,

and the pair galloped eagerly to the open plain,

leaving behind them the lofty stronghold of Pylos.

All day long they rattled the harness fastened round 535

their necks. And the sun set and the open earth grew dark.

At Phaerae they stopped at the house of Diocles,

descended (through Ortilochus) from Alpheus.

There they rested for the night, and were shown due care.

When the rosy-fingered Dawn delivered first light, 540

they yoked the horses to the inlaid chariot

and stepped on and trotted out through the front gateway :

then Peisistratus sparked the horses with the whip,

and the pair rushed eagerly on. So they came

to the wheat-bearing plain, and in time made headway 545

to their journey's end, so well the swift horses moved.

And when the sun set, the wide-open earth grew dark.

End of Book III

Book IV

And they came to the city of Lacedaemon,
standing on a valley floor cracked with many rifts,
and rolled up to the palace of noble Menelaus.
A feast in celebration of two marriages
was in its second day : his daughter was being sent
away to enemy-crushing Achilles' son :
in the land of Troy he had consented to the match,
and promised to give her in marriage, and the gods
now advanced this design toward completion :
she prepared for travel with horses and chariots
to Phthia, the famous city of the Myrmidons :
and regnant over her now was Neoptolemus.
And for his son he had arranged for a wedding
there in Sparta with the daughter of Alector :
a union for the best-beloved of his sons,
mighty Megapenthes, issue of a slave-wife.
(After Helen had birthed the delightful Hermione,
whose splendid figure rivalled Aphrodite's,
the gods granted Helen no further children.)
Cheerfully they feasted in the cavernous hall,
noble Menelaus and his family and neighbours;
and a heavenly songster sang to the lyre,
and two acrobats tumbled every which way
up and down through the midst of the company,
as he strummed his song.

And at the gate of the palace
the two adventurers, the hero Telemachus
and the brave son of Nestor, drew in the reins

and the horses brought the chariot to a stop.
And the lord Eteoneus, the first minister
to noble Menelaus, stepped out and saw them,
then circulated through the busy hall to bring news
to his great king.

And he came to him and spoke :

“O Menelaus, two strangers are here, two men
that seem of a lineage beloved of Zeus.
Shall we take their horses to rest, or advise them
to find another host to welcome them as guests?”

And with great anger Menelaus responded :

“Eteoneus, up to now your father’s son has been
no fool, but now I hear from you foolishness.
I remember well that I enjoyed the table
of many men before returning home, while
hoping that heaven would grant me peace hereafter.
See to their horses at once, and bring them forward
into the house : they will enjoy the feast with us.”

So he spoke, and Eteoneus strode through the hall
and waved for the busy attendants to follow him.
They freed the sweating horses from the chariot
and secured them in the stalls, and fed them a mix
of spelt and white barley. They leaned the chariot
upright against the bright gateway wall, and led the men
into the beautiful palace. The two visitors
marvelled at the palace of the king beloved

of Zeus : a dazzle as from sun or moon glistened
through the high-roofed home of noble Menelaus.
And when their eyes were full with delight, the two men
went into the brightly glistening baths and bathed.

And when the handmaids had bathed them and applied oil
onto their bodies, and had draped them in tunics
and woollen cloaks (fastened with a shoulder-pin),
the two sat on chairs by Menelaus, son of Atreus.
Waiting-women brought water for washing the hands
in an elegant golden pitcher, and poured it
over their hand-washing into a silver basin;
and a polished table was set up beside them.
The gracious housekeeper brought them many fine foods,
all the agreeable things the house could offer;
while a carver placed before them platters of meats
of all kinds; and golden big-bellied drinking cups
were kept full with wine.

And Menelaus raised his cup
to them and spoke :

“Enjoy your meal and feel welcome.
Questions are for later, who among men you are :
I already see in you the nobility
of your family : only sceptre-bearing kings
could bear such sons as you.”

Thus he spoke, and honoured them
with the tenderest cuts of meat, setting before them
with his own hands the rich back-piece of the ox,

which had been laid before himself as the privilege
of the king. So they reached their hands for the fine gifts
put before them. And when the two were satisfied
with food and drink, Telemachus spoke to Nestor's son,
bringing his head close so others might not hear him :

“Do you see this, Pisistratus, great friend to me,
this bronze-like gleaming in these echoing halls?
All the gold and silver and amber and ivory :
I picture Zeus' halls upon Olympus like these,
so past utterance is this vast place, with so much
to look on : I have never seen such a wonder.”

And Menelaus overheard him, and replied :

“Dear children, no man can challenge Zeus : for his wealth
is everlasting. Maybe a man may challenge me,
if he likes. Eight years I roamed in misfortune with my ships
before my return. By Cyprus and Phoenicia
and Egypt I roamed, and saw the Ethiopians
and Sidonians and the Erempi. I saw Libya,
where the lambs are born with horns already sprouting :
there the sheep give birth three times in only one year.
There neither king nor shepherd lacks for meat and milk
(and the flocks supply ample sweet milk all year long).
While I roamed round those parts gathering all this wealth,
my brother was killed—treacherously, deviously—
through the deceit of his vile wife : so what you see
of this wealth brings little pleasure to its master.
And you are likely to have heard from your fathers,
whoever they may be, of all I have suffered.

I would trade most of this wealth for the prosperity
of all the men I lost at Troy to return to me :
and to be safe and well in horse-breeding Argos.

But I weep painful tears of sorrow for them all.
Here in these halls my heart often overfills with tears,
but then I cease : for quickly one wearies of cold death.
I mourn all the fallen, and yet for one even
more than all : when I think of his loss, all life
becomes hateful to me : and sleep shuns me, and food
ceases to appeal. Not one of the Achaeans
laboured as much as Odysseus laboured,
and tolerated. (Perhaps all of his troubles
were destined to be?) Just now, as always, I think
of him with heartache : he remains among the missing,
with no word whether he lives or not. His old father
Laertes and his caring wife Penelope
mourn him, as does his son Telemachus, who was
but an infant when Odysseus left for Troy.”

Thus he spoke, and awakened in Telemachus
his grief and longing for his father. The tears fell
when he heard his father’s name, and he raised his cloak
of violet to conceal his eyes. Menelaus, meanwhile,
settled into contemplation : should he let be,
or should he voice the suspicion felt in his heart?

It was then that Helen came, fresh from her fragrant
sumptuous bedchamber, her beauty a rival to
golden-arrowed Artemis. And her handmaiden
Adraste prepared a handsome couch for Helen,

and Alcippe brought a woollen blanket to soften further the couch; while Phylo fetched a silver basket, a gift from Alcandre, the wife of Polybus, who lived in Egyptian Thebes, the wealthiest spot on earth. And to Menelaus Polybus gave two silver bathtubs, two cauldrons, and ten measures of gold. And his wife gave Helen more besides these : a gold-tipped distaff, and the silver basket (on wheels, with rims finished in gold) : this the handmaid Phylo rolled in and placed beside her, full of fine-spun yarn, and laid atop it was the distaff wound about with violet-purple wool. And Helen lowered herself down onto the couch, and rested her feet on a footstool, and straightaway asked her husband :

“Menelaus, have these men yet given their names and revealed themselves? Shall I tell you what I think, or keep silent? Ah, my heart compels me to speak. Truly I look upon this man with amazement : never have I seen one look so like another. Am I right to say that the son of Odysseus has come into our home? The young Telemachus? —whom the great-hearted warrior left as a baby when the Achaeans sailed for Troy, fierce with war burning in their hearts, and all on account of me?”

And fair-haired Menelaus answered in reply :

“I think so, too, my dear, just as you judge it so. In this youngster’s whole demeanour I see the man : such were his arms, and the look in his eyes; also

the shape of his head, and the hair upon that head.
 And just now as I was speaking of Odysseus,
 and all the misery he suffered for my sake,
 hard tears fell from the eyes of this youth, and he raised
 his cloak up before his face to hide them from me.”

Then Peisistratus, son of Nestor, gave answer :

“Menelaus, son of Atreus, beloved of Zeus,
 commander of men, truly he is the son you say :
 this is Telemachus. But he is of modest mind,
 and feels shame at heart to come all ablaze with words
 before you, whose voice, so like a god’s, delights us.
 My father, horseman Nestor of Gerenia,
 sent me to stand by him as guide, for Telemachus
 desired to see you, hoping you might satisfy
 his heart with some word, or perhaps a track to follow.
 For a son has many sorrows when the father
 is gone from the halls, and none come to support him.
 So it is with Telemachus now: his father is gone,
 and his people offer him no help against evil.”

And Menelaus replied :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Sitting here before me in my house
 is the son of a man I loved well, who struggled
 with many troubles for my sake : I had long hoped
 to welcome him most excellently beyond compare,
 when Olympian Zeus, far-sounding thunderer,
 granted us our safe return from beyond the sea.
 I would have given him a city in Argos,

and built him a house there; and I would have brought him
from Ithaca, with his wealth, his wife, and his son,
and all his people (after clearing out for him
one of the cities there which obeys me as king).
We would have been the best of friends, heartening
each other with the greatest affection. Nothing
would have separated us, until the coming
of the black cloud of death. Well, I suppose the god
himself was angry with jealousy, for him and for us;
but to him alone the gods cut off his return.”

So he spoke, and all wept in sadness for love lost.
Helen wept, mortal daughter of Zeus; and the son
of Odysseus wept; and Menelaus, Atreus' son;
and the dry eyes of Nestor's son began to fill
when he brought to mind and heart his noble brother
Antilochus, who took a chest-piercing spear
to save his father, whose chariot horses
had been wounded (by the powerful King Memnon
of Ethiopia, one of the many sons
of shining Dawn), long ago in the land of Troy.

Nestor's son, remembering his brother, spoke out :

“O King, Nestor always spoke of you as the wisest
of men, whenever we spoke of you in our halls :
and indeed I have heard a great deal about you.
If it be in any way possible, hear now
my kind word : what man takes pleasure in tears at table?
And early-born Dawn is near : yet I feel no shame
in weeping for the dead who were taken by fate.

Indeed, mourning is our sole offering to the dead,
 to cut our hair, and let our tears drop to the ground.
 My brother died at Troy, a very fine warrior :
 perhaps you might have known of him : I never knew him :
 but they say Antilochus was a swift-footed
 warrior, and superior in both.”

And in answer fair-haired Menelaus replied :

“O friend, vast is the word you speak. Even to one
 older than yourself your words are wise. Your father
 Nestor is wise : therefore you speak wisely.
 It’s clear that the quality the son of Cronos
 spun for your father—at his birth, then at marriage
 (and who has now been granted a long span of days
 of rich retirement in his halls)—would produce
 sons noble and courageous. Let us put away
 this weeping, and again turn our mind to the food.
 Come : pour. Words are for the light of the morning :
 then, Telemachus and I will talk through to the end.”

Thus he spoke; and Asphalion stepped forward,
 a good minister to noble Menelaus,
 and he poured the water over their hands :
 then they reached for the many gifts set before them.

So they ate : and Helen, daughter of Zeus, fulfilled
 a plan of her own direction : in one swift movement
 she dropped a drug into the wine all were drinking,
 a grief-allaying opiate, bringing forgetfulness
 to all who drank, once the wine had absorbed the drug :

no tear would fall, even if mother and father
 should lie dead before them; or brother or loved son
 be cut down with sword in eyeshot. Zeus' daughter
 had many such remedies and medicaments,
 given to her by Polydamna, wife of Thon,
 in Egypt, where the grain-gifting soil bears fruitful
 magic (drugs, remedies, potions, herbs, charms, ointments) :
 many beneficial when mixed, and many deadly.
 There, every man is his own physician, and wiser
 in this than other men, much like the followers
 of Apollo the Healer. So when she had infused
 the drug, and had bade the wine be poured for drinking,
 Helen began to speak :

"Menelaus, son of Atreus, beloved of Zeus,
 and you good men here, sons of the noble (though Zeus
 to one, and then to another, grants good, or gives
 evil, as he alone fulfils every act) : just now
 you sit here feasting : and what better fits the time
 to delight and satisfy than a well-told tale?
 I have a tale that fits the time that I shall
 tell you now : I cannot recount all the toils
 of stronghearted Odysseus, but I know one.
 (What a service that powerful man worked for us
 among the Trojans, whenever the Achaeans
 faced difficulty!) He battered his own body
 with terrible force, then wrapped an ugly old cloak
 around his shoulders : and so he looked like a slave.
 And he went down into the wide-open city
 of our enemy, and, concealed beneath his act,
 he made like a beggar man. When he entered Troy

he looked nothing like the stronghearted man standing
 tall by the ships of the Achaeans. I alone
 recognised him : and I spoke to him : and at first
 he was so clever he professed to know nothing.
 But when I had bathed him, and had anointed him
 with oil, and had dressed him in clothing, and had sworn
 a solemn promise not to reveal him to anyone
 inside Troy as the warrior Odysseus
 (before, that is, he had snuck back safe to his ships
 and his encampment), then he told me everything
 of the Achaeans' intentions. He killed many
 Trojans with his wide-reaching sword before retreating
 back to the Argives, bringing with him much vital
 information. The Trojan women around me
 wailed without any restraint, but I was happy
 in heart, because my heart was already turned back
 for home, and I lamented the delusion
 that Aphrodite had forced on me, when she led
 me away from my beloved homeland, and child,
 and my husband, who is both beautiful and wise."

And fair-haired Menelaus answered her :

"In all you say, dear wife, indeed you say rightly.
 Over time I have come to learn the thoughts and minds
 of many : of many men, of many warriors :
 and have visited many places spread over the earth :
 but I have yet to meet a second man as outstanding
 as Odysseus. What a cunning plan it was :
 what the stronghearted man devised : a wooden horse.
 The bravest of us were lying in wait within

its hollow shape, waiting to bring slaughter and death
to Troy; and then you happened to come to that place :
a god must have led you to us, wishing to grant
success to the Trojans; and you had the warrior
Deiphobus with you. Three times, Helen, you went round
the hollow-horsed ambush, touching it all over,
and you were even calling out the names of some
of the finest warriors of the Achaeans,
making your voice sound like the wives of the Argives
inside. Now Diomedes and I and godlike
Odysseus sat still inside the hollow belly
and heard you speaking out; and I, there and then,
along with Diomedes were ready to come out
and reveal ourselves, or else to speak out from within :
but Odysseus stopped us : then the other sons
of the Achaeans also held back, and kept silent.
—except for Anticlus, who was about to speak,
but Odysseus pressed his hands on his mouth hard
enough to stifle all sound, and so saved all of us.
Some say he fell upon Anticlus and held him
so tightly that he lost his breath and died, but that
is embellishment. What he did was hold him there
until Pallas Athena lured you away.”

Then wise Telemachus spoke :

“Menelaus, son of Atreus, beloved of Zeus,
leader of men, all the harder it is for me
to hear that : I wonder what miserable ruin
it was that his iron heart beating inside him
was unable to defend against : what his mind

couldn't reckon with.

But come : shall we turn our steps
toward bed now? That way we can put to rest these thoughts
for a time, and take the benefit of sweet sleep."

Thus he spoke. And Helen requested of her handmaidens
to prepare beds under the columned portico
by the courtyard. So the handmaidens left the hall
and prepared the beds by the firelight of torches.
Following Helen's word, they spread over the beds
purple blankets, then a layer of coverlets,
and on top they placed fleece cloaks for the guests to wear.
And then a minister led the guests to their beds.
So the two slept by the courtyard of the palace,
noble Telemachus and the warrior son
of Nestor. While in the innermost bedchamber
of the lofty palace the son of Atreus slept,
and beside him lay Helen in a flowing night-robe :
a woman, yet as beautiful as a goddess.

When Dawn, the rosy-fingered, delivered first light,
Menelaus (good at the battle cry) rose from bed,
fixed his clothing and shoulder-sheathed his sharp sword,
and bound his smooth feet in his beautiful sandals,
and left the room with a shining godlike presence.

And Menelaus sat beside Telemachus,
and addressed him as a friend :

"Good Telemachus, what need has brought you to me,
to fair Lacaedemon, over the broad-backed sea?

Is this a public matter, or affair of your own?"

And wise Telemachus answered :

"Menelaus, son of Atreus, beloved of Zeus,
commander of armies, I come seeking after
any news of my father. His house (now my house)
is collapsing under the ill-will of enemies :
the halls are full of men devouring my wealth :
contemptible arrogant mediocrities
consuming my house and land, ever-slaughtering
my abundance of sheep and twist-horned cattle :
these are the men who seek to marry my mother.
I have come now to my knees to ask for your favour :
if you are willing to tell of his miserable death :
if perhaps you saw it happen with your own eyes,
or heard from another some word of his wanderings :
for he was born into a life of many sorrows.
And take no pity on me and soften your words,
but tell me truly what you saw. I beg of you,
if ever my father, the noble Odysseus,
showed you loyalty in word or deed in the land
of the Trojans, remember it now, and speak true."

And with great anger Menelaus responded :

" ὦ πόποι ! It is daring of cowards to choose
to occupy the bed of a stronghearted man.
Imagine the tender new-born young of a deer
laid to sleep in a thicket where a destructive
lion lives. Their mother wanders to gentle hills

and grassy dells to graze : meanwhile the lion
enters his den and sets on them a terrible death :
just so will Odysseus set a terrible death
on those crude people. O father Zeus! Athena!
Apollo! If Odysseus shows the strength he had
when he challenged Philomeleides to wrestle,
in beautiful Lesbos, and threw him down powerfully,
and all the Achaeans cheered : then when he faces
those people in battle they will find a quick death.
They will come into a bitter marriage. As for me,
I will answer you thoroughly, and not speak false :
I will neither gild nor conceal from you any word
the far-seeing old man of the sea told me.”

And King Menelaus continued :

“In Egypt, by the snaky Nile, my men and I
hotly fought to return, but I was held back yet
longer, because (I am certain in retrospect)
the gods found no favour in the sacrifices
I offered them : and the gods demand we follow
their word. Now facing Egypt in the all-waving sea
is an island men call Pharos, as far away
as a ship can make in a day with a fresh breeze
favourable behind her : a harbour there
is well-sheltered, where the level ships drive smoothly
into the sea (after drawing their spring water).
There the gods held me for twenty days : with no breath
of seaward wind to bring us to the broad-backed sea.
Now I faced starvation, and the death of my men,
but pity came to me : the curious daughter

of Proteus, the old man of the sea : Eidothea :
 of all the gods, she was the one moved to help us.

One day I drifted away from the men on my own :
 the men, wearied by the hunger in their bellies,
 roved through the island and bent over curved fish-hooks :
 and she came near to me : and spoke :

‘O strange one : with empty blindness so vast!
 Or do you day by day take pleasure in your grief?
 Long have you been stranded on the island
 and day by day the hearts of your friends are failing.’

This she said, and I answered her :

‘Allow me to speak, whoever of the goddesses
 you are : it is not failure that confines me here :
 it must be I have offended the Immortals,
 who possess far-reaching heaven : so please tell me
 (since there is nothing a god does not know)
 who of the Immortals confines me, and disrupts
 my way; and how to return to the shifting sea
 and homeward.’

This I said, and the marvellous goddess answered :

‘I will tell you plain and true, stranger. To and fro
 the constant old man of the sea : deathless Proteus :
 who knows every depth : a servant to Poseidon
 the earthshaker : to and fro he comes and goes.
 It’s said he’s my father. If you think yourself strong,

wait for him, and overtake him : seized in your hands
 he will mark your way, and sound the time of your path,
 and how to return to the shifting sea and home.
 Beloved of Zeus, he will tell you, if he chooses,
 what good and evil have come to your halls
 while you wander on your long and painful way.'

She said this, and I answered her :

'You now, goddess, purpose an ambush to capture
 the constant old man, so that he not see, and know,
 and flee from me : gods are hard for men to deceive.'

And she answered :

'I will tell you plain and true, stranger. To and fro
 the sun rounds both sides of heaven : at its mid-point,
 then from the sea-surf comes the constant old man,
 concealed under the dark-gleaming rippling sea,
 and he rises up on a panting breath of air,
 and he comes, and lies down to sleep in a deep cave.
 And grunting and smacking the water the earless seals
 emerge out of the grave sea, and collect round him,
 toothed and claw-footed, and sleep : and breathe
 in and out the odour of the sea :
 and foul is the smell of the measureless sea.

I will bring you there, when new light comes, and place you
 here and there : you and three of your best men,
 the best from your foul-smelling ships. Hear me now
 speak of the destructive old man who undoes light :

he will walk among the heavy body-slapping seals
 and gather them in fives and behold them, and lie
 among them, as a herdsman holds among his sheep.
 When you see him asleep, come with courage and force
 and fix him there : and hold his fury and frenzy in hand :
 and you will see shapes set and unset furiously :

(a strange and fantastical fuming it was)

shape following shape will measure the reach of your strength.
 Hold on : you will see (like grappling colours foaming)
 every beast that creeps on earth and moves in water,
 as he seeks escape : as if in your grip you hold
 blazing god-light : go on and hold him to the full :
 and if you see the constant old man's shape return,
 hold back and let him go, and you will hear his voice.
 And ask *him* which god it is who is hard on you,
 and how to return to the shifting sea and home.'

Thus spoke far-seeing Eidothea of the deep."

Telemachus listened to Menelaus speak :

"The weird goddess sank beneath the boiling seawaves.
 I went down to my ships on the sands by the sea :
 and my mind wondered on many things as I went.
 And when I had come to my ship by the sea,
 and supper was prepared, and heavenly night shone :
 then we rested by the seasurf thrashing on the shore.

When Dawn, the rosy-fingered, delivered first light,

I walked along the shore by the far-roaming waves,
praying fervently to the gods : and I brought with me
three men : the best of my crew to trust in battle.

Meanwhile : curious Eidothea of the deep
had withdrawn into the dark hollow of the sea :
she returned with the slippery skins of four seals,
freshly peeled from sea-bred flesh : she had trickery
in mind against her father. With one glance
she gouged out craters in the shore-sand by the sea,
creating four nests, where we lay still and held good
where we were : then the Weird One came very near :
and she spread over each of us the slippery skin
of a sea-fed seal : this trickery oppressed us
and would have undone us, so foul and deadly
was the stink of the seals : and who in his right mind
would willingly lie under such filthy creatures?
But the far-seeing Eidothea of the deep
preserved us with heavenly invention : she dabbed
ambrosia under each man's nose, and we breathed in
a gentle lovely scent, and the creatures no longer.

Our courageous hearts held fast in place all morning,
in our craters under the skins, and claw-swimming
seals swarmed heavy-bodied out of the salty waves
and lay on the sand by the up-rushing seawater :
and we stayed this way til midday.

At midday the constant old man of the sea came
out of the waves and walked among the plump seals,
reckoning up their number : and we were the first

of the creatures he counted, yet he saw no trick :
 and then he lay down. And raising the battle cry
 we rushed him and each flung his arms around him :
 and the constant old man of the sea came alive :
 in our tight grip he tossed us about as he changed
 strangely first to a mighty, spiky-clawed lion
 with even longer teeth : and then a hissing snake
 twisted from our fingers and coiled up our arms
 : : : : : *Ἐλληνεβulosuspirerising* : : : : :
 and remaining prisoned in our arms he slithered
 from a writhing leopard into a long-toothed boar :
 then he changed again and we held foaming seawater :
 then a dense tree high-bound with close foliage :
 but we had courage and held our grip to the full :
 and then the old man came, and we let go at once.

The constant old man of the sea began to speak,
 and I heard weariness in his word :

‘Son of Atreus! Which god purposed such trickery,
 instructing you in ways to seize me through deceit?
 What do you want with me?’

And I answered him :

‘You know what I want. (Why purpose to mislead me
 with words?) How long am I confined on this island?
 No sure sign has come to show me a direction,
 and so we waste away. The gods know all, and so
 you know : who of the Immortals shackles me here
 and disrupts my way? How do I return to the sea?’

Then he answered me, the Old Man of the Sea :

‘Perhaps your victims were not slaughtered fairly?
Zeus and all the deathless ones expect a well-done
sacrifice : *then* you will see if you return home
to your palace, sailing over the wine-dark sea.

You must go back to the Nile and its dark waters.

You have lost your friends, and your house, and your homeland,
as fate has determined : and you want to return :

You must go back to the Nile and its dark waters.

Go by the river Zeus keeps in continual flow
and offer sacrifice of one hundred oxen :
perform the slaughter of the kindly victims rightly
for the gods
who sit in boundless superiority in heaven :

then you may go on your way, at the gods desire.’

And I heard this : and, finally, I felt a broken
spirit : I faced a long and difficult sail
back to Egypt : but I must follow the command :
I must return to the dark waters of the Nile.

But still I spoke to the Old Man, and asked him :

‘I will follow your command, old man, to the end

of it. But come : if you know in full what is true,
 speak to me now and reveal it : did all the ships
 of the Achaeans return home safe, all those left
 behind when Nestor and I sailed from Troy?
 And did any man find hateful death on the sea;
 or by Troy's walls, settled in the arms of a friend?'

And the Old Man of the Sea answered me :

'You invite painful answers upon yourself?
 Son of Atreus, your fate is full of weeping :
 now see my mind, and hear : many are dead :
 of the leaders of the bronze-suited survivors
 of Troy, all but two of the best of them perished
 on the sea, struggling for home. As for the struggle
 at Troy—you were there. (One leader lives, but is lost
 on the far-reaching deep.)

Ajax is dead. Poseidon
 drove his long-oared ships against the rocks of Gyrae :
 but kept him alive : and he would have escaped death
 (though detested by Athena), if he hadn't
 shouted an insolent word of great delusion :
 he claimed victory over the gods and the sea.
 And Poseidon heard his proud word and drove
 forth the three-pronged trident in his powerful hands
 and shattered the great rock of Gyrae : one fragment
 yet stands, but where Ajax had sat in his delusion
 was carried away by the raging waves of the sea,
 and there he died, when he drank the salt water.'

And the Old Man of the Sea continued his tale :

'Your brother ably escaped the goddess of death
at Troy, and fled asea safely in his puny ships :
Queen Hera watched over him. And he was nearing
the peak of Malea and a raging whirlwind
spun his ship round over the monster-breeding deep :
the wood-planked ship groaned heavily, and thunderclouds
flung him at the edge of rocky ground where the house
of Thyestes stands—held just then by Aegisthus.
But from there it seemed your brother was to return
happy : the gods shaped the winds to favourable,
and the ship came home. Happily he stepped onto
his heartland, and scooped up a handful of soil
and kissed it : and many hot tears spilled down his face,
for he was happy to see his home. Your brother
did not see the watchman posted in the lookout
atop the palace. For the promise of two pieces
of gold the watchman had persevered there a year
at the word of tricky Aegisthus, who contrived
to stop your bold-springing brother from returning
unseen. The watchman saw, and brought the news below.
This put a treacherous construction into action :
tricky Aegisthus gathered his twenty best men
and hid them in the palace, and prepared a feast.
And then he went to receive King Agamemnon,
and returned with him on chariot and horses.
So Aegisthus led your brother to the table,
and after dinner he killed him. A vile death,
as one slaughters an ox in its stall : and no man
escaped the feast alive : as the many allies

of the son of Atreus and those of Aegisthus
slaughtered each other in the glorious halls.'

This he said. My heart was crushed. I wept in the dust
by the waters. I had no more heart to see sun
and sky and earth. But when I had wept myself empty,
the constant Old Man of the Sea said to me :

'Enough, son of Atreus : the time has withered
with your long-drawn tears. Now you must answer with skill :
struggle homeward to your heartland to find *him* there :
and make haste, or Orestes will overtake you
and kill Aegisthus himself, and *your* only peace
will be your share of his burial rites.'

This he said, and my courageous spirit swelled inside,
despite the grief, and I said to him :

'I know now of two men left alive : now speak this :
who is the third man? He that lives, yet is lost
on the cavernous sea; or is dead? Tell me this.'

And the Old Man answered me :

'The son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca.
Him I see on an island crying his eyes out,
in the steamy halls of cruel nymph Calypso,
who charms him powerless and keeps him there.
He has no men there to turn the oars of a ship
to bring him homeward over the broad-backed sea.
Nor does he have a ship.

As for you, Menelaus,
I see your death, and your god-spoken fate, and I
shall tell you, o beloved of Zeus : you shall die
far from the horses of Argos. The Immortals
shall take you to the limit of the heavy earth,
to the Elysian Plain, home of the fair-haired
Rhadamanthus : and there life is easy for men.
No snow, or winter-frost or rainstorm, but always
the whistling west wind that Oceanus breathes out,
that cools men and ever brings relief : in their eyes
the gods see you as husband to a daughter of Zeus:
Helen.'

And then he sank beneath the boiling seawaves.

And I went to my ships and my noble companions,
and my mind wondered on many things as I went.
And when I had come to my ship by the sea,
and supper was prepared, and heavenly night shone :
then we rested by the seasurf thrashing on the shore.

When Dawn, the rosy-fingered, delivered first light,
we unknotted our tethers from the stones and launched
into the holy sea : we set the mast upright
and raised sail in the well-balanced ships : the men
sat in rows at the rowing benches, and lashed the sea
with the oars : and along the grey-waved ancient sea
we sailed back to Egypt, to the Nile that flows
from the will of Zeus. There, along the riverbank,
we anchored our ships, and I offered sacrifice
of a full number of oxen, each without blemish,

to bring an end to the anger of the gods,
 who are forever : and stone by stone I raised
 a grave-mound to my brother King Agamemnon,
 to advance his fame always. And the Immortals
 gave me a favourable wind and escorted me
 swiftly to my beloved homeland.

But come now!

Telemachus, remain here with me in my halls
 until the eleventh or the twelfth day has come.
 I will send you on finely with beautiful gifts,
 three horses and a shining chariot : and also
 a graceful cup, so that when you pour to the gods
 you will remember me always.”

And wise Telemachus answered :

“Son of Atreus, I can delay here no longer.
 I would sit content beside you even for a year
 and not feel a want for home or parents
 and listen to you and your remarkable talk,
 but my men await my return in blessed Pylos.
 Whatever gracious gift you choose to give will keep
 you rooted in my memory always. But the horses
 should stay in your royal stables for your delight,
 to ride through your superb plains of yellow clover,
 and by your waters where the tall grasses grow,
 and by your rising wheat and spelt and white barley.
 In Ithaca we lack wide-open meadowlands,
 and not one of the islands resting on the sea
 is fit for horsemanship : Ithaca is rugged
 above all the others, a place to pasture goats,

without grassy meadows for galloping horses,
and yet I love it as it is.”

Thus spoke Telemachus : and kind Menelaus
(good at the battle cry) raised a gentle smile,
and took the young man’s hand, and spoke to him :

“Your fine words, dear child, tell of noble blood.
It shall please me to present a different gift :
among all the beautiful treasures around you,
you shall have my most prized possession in the house :
a mixing bowl of the most delicate handwork,
solid silver with gold rim, the art of Hephaestus.
It will give me delight for you to take this with you.”

Thus they spoke in mutual respect and friendship,
King Menelaus and Telemachus.

Back in Ithaca, meanwhile, by the palace
of hero Odysseus, those loathsome wooers,
the contemptible arrogant mediocrities,
with bared bodies oiled and in loincloths,
were playing games on a level lawn of green grass,
throwing the discus, and aiming the javelin.
Antinous and the powerful Eurymachus,
the two men who directed the mnesteres,
(the one hundred and eight of them), sat together,
confederate in superior wickedness.

And Phronius’ son Noemon walked over and spoke :

“Antinous, do we know when he comes from dusty
 Pylos, or do we not? The ship Telemachus took
 is one of mine, and I want her back, to cross to
 Elis : I have twelve broodmares with work-mules
 unbroken over there : and if I had my ship
 I’d bring one back and break it in.”

So he spoke,
 and the men sat amazed : they thought Telemachus
 was tending his sheep in his fields or was somewhere
 with the swineherd : and not off at Pylos, stronghold
 of Neleus, a son of Poseidon.

So Antinous answered Noemon :

“Explain yourself : when did he go? How did he raise
 a crew? Are they sons of Ithacans? Or hired men
 —or slaves? It’s no easy effort to manage all that.
 Now I ask you, and I expect a true answer :
 did the boy prise your ship from a reluctant grip;
 or perhaps you gifted it to him in friendship?”

And Noemon answered him :

“I did not refuse him the ship when he asked me :
 his weakness was difficult for me to laugh at
 because I thought of all the cares inside his heart.
 Ithacan sons, the best after us, go with him.
 But I saw something I do not yet understand.
 I saw Mentor board the ship that left for Pylos :
 and yet, yesterday, at dawn, I saw Mentor here.”

And the eyes of Antinous blazed as with fire,
 and darkest rage twisted in his heart; and Noemon
 swiftly left for his father's house; and Antinous
 and powerful Eurymachus, hot with anger,
 broke off the games, and gathered the hateful people
 around them.

And Antinous spoke out angrily :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Telemachus is laughing at all
 of us while he makes the journey he spoke of!
 Launching a ship with Ithaca's best men : and yet
 but one person here knew of it? He may return
 with trouble. Or Zeus will strike him down in anger
 for his pride before he even becomes a man.

Come now! Give me a swift ship and twenty men,
 and I will keep watch and await him at the strait
 of clear water between Ithaca and Samos :
 there his journey for his father will come to an end.”

Now inside the palace, the kind minister Medon
 (of use both to the mistress and to the arrogant
 occupiers of the halls) overheard the suitors'
 treacherous intentions, standing within earshot
 of their conference to one side of the courtyard :
 he heard all of their deadly weaving. So he rushed
 straightaway through the halls to inform his mistress.

Inside the women's quarters Penelope spoke :

“Medon, have my noble suitors sent you to me,
 with word to bid the maids of good Odysseus
 to cease their present work, and prepare another feast?
 I regret my nature that listened to their lures,
 and hope that this will be their last meal in the house.
 You have helped them waste my wise son’s wealth and property.
 Did you not hear, in the days of your childhood,
 your father speak of such a man as Odysseus,
 who never was unjust in word or deed, though kings
 are commonly otherwise : but Odysseus
 stood among all just men : he hated the hateful,
 and loved the beloved : and never willingly
 worked evil or cruelty upon any person.
 How am I to forget this heart of yours, Medon?
 Its dishonourable deeds have been plain to see,
 and I rather wish for you to have left behind you
 well-done work, worthy of gracious remembrance.”

Then Medon, prudent in speech, made answer to this :

“O Queen, the worst evil has yet to be spoken :
 those people downstairs are planning terrible deeds.
 (May Zeus forbid it!) Their intent is to murder
 Telemachus with sharp sword as he sails homeward—
 for he has gone to Pylos and Lacaedemon
 to seek out any knowledge of his father’s fate.”

This he said, and Penelope’s heart sank. She sat
 in silence for a long while. And all her strength
 left her body. Tears overfilled her eyes. And sobs

broke the flow of her voice when she finally spoke :

“Why did my son go? Medon, why must he sail
over the ship-stealing sea? Maybe to be pulled
down into the deep, without a son after him
to preserve his name?”

And careful Medon answered her :

“I do not know if a god counselled him, or if
his own heart led him to Pylos, to learn the fate
of his father, and if perhaps his father lives.”

And when kind minister Medon left his mistress,
he walked through the house of godly Odysseus.

And she suffered a heart-breaking sorrow :
and though her bedchamber was comfortable
with many couches, she sank to the floor and wept.
And the handmaidens of the house gathered round her,
the young and the old, and wept violent tears with her.

And amid this misery Penelope spoke :

“Hear me, women : for to us the Olympian
has given many sorrows. I lost my husband,
a good man excellent in whatever he touched :
superior among men, and his fame is wide
in Hellas and Argos. And now my much-loved son
is carried away from the island by seawinds :
and I heard nothing of this! Hard-hearted women!

Not one of you, in whom I have placed all my trust,
thought to stir me on my couch, though your hearts well-knew
when my son left with his ship for the pitch-black sea!
If I had known of his plan, my son would have stayed :
no matter how eager he was for his journey
he would not have stepped over my dead body to go
away. Now one of us summon the venerable
Dolius, a servant whom my father gave me
as marriage-gift : he tends the Palace's many trees.
Send him to sit with Laertes and tell this tale.
Maybe the father of Odysseus can weave
a plan, and with weeping appeal to the people,
who seek to ruin the house of Odysseus."

Then the kindly nurse Eurycleia spoke out :

"Dear lady, take my life or let me live, but I
must speak either way, and hide my word no more :
I knew all of this, and gave him all that he asked :
bread and sweet wine. I swore a solemn oath to say
nothing of this to you for at least twelve days—
unless you desired him and asked me of him :
as he would not have your beauty undone by tears.

Now let us bathe you, and dress you in beautiful
garments, and come with you, all of the handmaidens,
up into the highest chamber of the palace,
and pray with you to Athena, daughter of Zeus :
she may hear your voice, and thereby save him from death.

But let us bring no more trouble to an old man :

and perhaps the family of Arcesius
(the father of Laertes and himself a son
of Zeus) cannot be wholly hated by the gods?
I think one shall come to lift up this solid house
and bring abundance even to its farthest fields.”

So she spoke, and soothed the sobbing Penelope,
and dried her tears. Thereafter the lady of the house
bathed, and sweetened her body, and the handmaidens
dressed her in pure clean garments : and Penelope
ascended to an upper chamber with her maids,
where she put barley grains in a basket, and prayed
to Athena :

“Hear me, child of Zeus, war-goddess Athena!
Bring to mind the many-minded Odysseus :
remember the thick thigh-slices he burnt for you
in these halls, holy fragrances of heifer and ewe,
remember these now and save my beloved son,
and protect him from those contemptible people.”

Thus Penelope spoke, and released a piercing cry,
a wordless prayer, and goddess Athena heard her.

And downstairs the horrible men raised a wondrous
noise when Penelope’s cry echoed down the halls :
and one of the arrogant youths spoke out in jest:

“We hear our much-loved queen preparing for marriage!
—while we’re preparing the death of Telemachus!”

In such wise the suitors spoke, yet had no idea
how matters really were.

Then Antinous spoke out :

“Noble Ithacans, avoid all such jests in the halls,
so that no report of insult is sent upstairs.
Let all of us now fulfil our work in silence :
our plan which has pleased us unitedly in heart.”

So he spoke, then chose twenty of the best men.
They went down to the ship on the sands by the sea,
and drew the pitch-black ship into the deep water,
and set the mast upright, and slotted the oars
into the leather straps, and raised the white sail :
and everything was done well. And their servants
readied the weapons. The ship was left anchored
far out in the harbour, while they returned to shore
for the evening meal, and waited for night to fall.

And thoughtful Penelope lay in her chamber,
high upstairs in a secluded part of the house,
contemplating her fortunes : her excellent son
might escape death; or those excruciating men
might kill him. She lay in need of food and drink,
but lost in fear she took no notice of it.

In her mind she saw the eyes of a lioness
lose hope, while a ring of men narrowed round her :
and she relaxed into pacifying sleep.

And a shape moved through the darkened halls of the house :

a shadow that yet cast a shadow : a phantom,
 handmade by shining-eyed Athena, in the shape
 of Iphime, daughter of kind Icarius,
 wife to Eumelus who took her away to Pherae.
 But here she was in Penelope's bedchamber,
 and was hovering over Penelope's head :
 and she spoke :

"Is your sleep, dear Penelope, full of sorrow
 at heart? The gods, who are ever at ease, will stop
 your weeping, and wipe away your distress : your son
 will return to Ithaca, as he has done no wrong
 in the eyes of the gods."

And in sleep Penelope
 answered her at the gates where dreams are made :

"Sister! Why have you come? You have never come here
 before. You live in a house far away from here.
 You come to take away my grief? All my distress
 in mind and heart? Long ago I lost my good husband,
 the lion-hearted : a powerful man, excellent
 in whatever he touched. Superior among men,
 and his fame is wide in Hellas and Argos.
 And now my much-loved son is on a hollow ship,
 a child, knowing nothing of hard labour
 and the business of men. I grieve for him the most. . . .

I shake in fear that something will happen to him,
 where he has gone, either on land, or at sea.
 Many enemies stand against him and will kill him

before he comes home.”

Then the shining vision spoke :

“Take my power from me and fear no more :
 your son has an escort many men would pray for,
 for she is very powerful : Pallas Athena.
 She feels your sorrow, and she says to you : fear no more.”

And thoughtful Penelope answered her :

“If truly you are as a god, and follow the voices
 of gods, tell me this: does he live and see the sun?
 Or has he sunk down to the dead in Hades’ house?”

The glimmering dream-shape spoke in her room :

”I came to dry your tears. I will not speak of him.
 Now the winds of sight flee : and idle talk is pointless.”

Thus it spoke, and by the door the shadow vanished.
 And the daughter of Icarius rose from sleep
 eagerly : the dream had cheered her, and brought her peace.

But the mnesteres raised anchor and sailed
 into the wide-spreading sea. In their hearts they saw
 Telemachus murdered. Now, between Ithaca
 and Samos is a rocky island : Asteris,
 a small place, but with a double harbour for ships
 to lie in : there the Achaeans awaited Telemachus.

End of Book IV

Book V

Dawn rose up beside noble Tithonus
 and spread her arms, bringing light to all beings :
 and the gods were in session : and with them
 Zeus the far-sounding thunderer, unsurpassable :
 and Athena recounted for all the many sorrows
 of Odysseus (as he had entered her mind) :
 it unsettled Athena to see him perplexed
 in the deep cave of the nymph :

and she spoke :

“Father Zeus, and all the fortunate who see forever,
 nevermore let there be such a kind and mild
 and gentle man to raise the sceptre as leader,
 nor let this leader’s spirit know right-mindedness,
 but let him be painful to bear, and act godlessly :
 since no one remembers Odysseus the godlike,
 who reigned over men as mild as a father!

He broods on an island, suffering terrible troubles
 in Calypso’s cave : her sorcery keeps him there.
 He is unable to return to his homeland
 because he has no friends by him, nor has he a ship
 with oars to carry him over the broad-backed sea.
 And now *those people* purpose to murder his son
 as *he* sails homeward :
 for he has gone to Pylos and Lacaedemon
 to seek out knowledge of his father’s fate.”

Answer came to her from cloud-assembling Zeus :

“My child!

What a word has winged through your lovely row of teeth!

Is this not all your own design? That Odysseus

shall come bringing vengeance on those shameless men?

But have it that Telemachus learn your wisdom

as his own : you can instruct him : and he shall go

safely to his homeland : and *those people* shall also

go back.”

Thus spoke Zeus : and then to his faithful messenger,

his beloved son, he spoke next :

“Hermes, tell the tight-braided nymph our settled word :

Odysseus returns home : and he goes without

god’s guidance (such as his son received), nor help

from any mortal man : but atop an artful raft,

and suffering miserably, he may come

on the twentieth day to fertile Scheria,

land of the Phaeacians, a race close to the gods :

and as if before a god they shall honour him

with pure hearts : and they shall send him forth in a ship

to his beloved home, with gifts of bronze and gold

and garments in abundance, more than Odysseus

would have otherwise returned with from Troy :

in this way is it fated for him to see his friends,

and come to his beloved land.”

Thus spoke father Zeus.

And sight-bringing Hermes, messenger of gods, obeyed.

Swiftly he bound shining sandals to his feet,
a beautiful golden habiliment belonging
to the gods which bear him along over water
just as over vast lands as quick as a breath of wind :
and he took the magic wand which charms men to sleep,
or lifts their eyes awake : with this magic in hand
the mighty light-footed Hermes sprung away.

And speeding to Pieria he dipped beneath
the clouds and soared like a bird over the waves :
a sea-raven, eyeing the finely pleated sea
and plucking fish shining through, its superb plumage
drenched in sea-spray : in this way Hermes skimmed along
the promiscuous waves. And after a long reach
he saw the island : and from the violet sea
he stepped onto land : and he came to the deep cave
where the tight-braided nymph lived : and found her inside.
A great fire flashed in a fireplace, scenting
the air with juniper and resinous cypress
as the softwoods blazed. And she sang out with lovely voice
while pattern-weaving with a golden weaver's stick
at her loom, levelling warp and weft with fine skill :
and on the cross beam she rolled her lengthening cloth.
A luxuriant forest surrounded her cave,
alder and poplar and the sweet-scented cypress,
wherein broad-winged birds lay enfolded in their nests :
owls and falcons and long-chattering sea-crows :
all those who pursue their business on the waters.
And a garden vine grew vigorously over
the hollow cave, bountiful with bunches of grapes.
And four springs of sparkling water circulated

in assorted bends, through meadows of violets
 and wild celery and juicy herbs : a soft spot
 where a god might stop to look, to cheer the spirit :
 there the light-footed Hermes had stood enchanted.
 And when his heart felt refreshed, he entered into
 the deep cave. Calypso, o dazzling goddess,
 knew him at once when she looked him in the face
 (for no god is unknown to any other, though one
 may live vast distances from the rest). But Hermes
 did not find the much-suffering Odysseus there :
 for he was off by himself, sitting on the shore,
 lost in sighs, in pains, in memories that bring grief :
 and while staring into the restless sea, he wept.
 But Calypso happily brought Hermes a chair,
 that in brilliance resembled solid sunbeams,
 and questioned him :

“Do tell, Hermes, bringer of luck, why you flatter me
 with this welcome visit? I don’t often treat you
 to my hospitality. Speak your wish, special one,
 and if I can, I shall fulfil it in my way.
 But come now! Let me take you further in,
 where I shall please you with delights.”

So after this

the goddess loaded a table with ambrosia,
 and stirred the red nectar : and Hermes the Busy One
 sat there and ate and drank, and pleased his spirit
 with her agreeable gifts.

Then he spoke his word :

“You question me, goddess to god, so I shall speak
my word to the end, as you desire. Zeus sent me
against my will. Who willingly would cross the vast
salt water? The journey here felt endless.

I passed no city of men where prime victims
are sacrificed to pleasure us. But which god
gets around the will of Zeus? It’s folly to pretend
it doesn’t exist.

He says a man is here with you, the most miserable
of all the warriors who fought around the city
of Troy for nine years, and in the tenth destroyed it
and went home. But along the way they offended
Athena : so she battered them with wind and wave
and all his men sank to the sea floor and died.
But those awful winds and lofty waves brought one man
here : and you are now commanded to let him go
at once. His fate is not to die far-off from friends :
he shall return to his high-roofed house and homeland.”

Thus Hermes spoke, and Calypso bristled :
and the dazzling goddess let fly her winged words :

“You gods! You’re cruel, but most of all sick with envy,
and worse in that way than all mortal men and beasts!
You hate seeing me lying openly with men :
goddesses aren’t allowed to taste their passion in bed!
So when Eos took Orion in her rosy fingers,
you gods, who sit ever at ease, resented her,
til Artemis, that virgin hunter of wild beasts,

that wholesome prudish virgin showering arrows
 in forests, sent her shafts into him, pinning him
 to a forever death. And when Demeter
 of the Furrows burned for warrior Iasion,
 and lay with him in love in a thrice-ploughed place,
 Zeus soon heard of it, and threw his flaming thunderbolt
 and killed the man. Now I am envied! ὦ πόποι !
 —because a mortal man sleeps with me. I saw him
 alone in the sea, floating on ship-timber (a keel)
 and I saved him : after Zeus (*not* Athena) threw
 a thunderbolt and blasted his ship to fragments
 on the wine-dark sea : and all his men sank to the
 sea floor and died. But wind and wave brought him here,
 and I welcomed him, and fed him, and pledged to keep him
 in eternal youth beside me here forever :
 as an Immortal.

But : so it is : no one gets around the will of Zeus.

Let him go then and flit away homeward over
 the restless and breath-stealing waves, if Zeus
 is so excited about it, and commands me.
 But how am I to send him anywhere? I have
 no ship, nor oars, nor crew to cross the broad-backed sea.
 But I will kindly tell him what you have told me,
 and keep no secrets, so that he may return home
 in perfect health.”

And the eyes-blinding messenger spoke :

“So send him on his way, and respect Zeus’ will,

or feel his fury in time to come.”

Thus spoke mighty Hermes, and stepped away and left :
so the tight-braided nymph went to Odysseus,
after hearing Zeus’ word.

She found him sitting by the sea with eyes leaking
tears : for his one life was flowing away :
and he sighed sadly for home. The nymph had saved him
from the misty sea, but she no longer pleased him.
Her spells compelled him to sleep beside her at night :
not willingly would he lie with the willing nymph
in her hollow cave : and by day he sat watching
the restless sea from the rocks and sands of the shore,
and he sighed with many heartbreaking groans and griefs,
and through his tears he watched the moving waves.

So the dazzling goddess came close to him and spoke :

“Bid goodbye to sighs and sorrow and nasty fate :
you’re going home. Love me now? So go! Take an axe
and cut some long timber and build yourself a raft :
broad-beamed, and with a deck to keep you high and dry
on the waves. And I’ll lay in a plentiful store
of bread and water and red wine, so you won’t starve :
and I’ll give you garments to wear : and just for you
I’ll send a favourable wind to rush you along,
so you can go safe and sound to your homeland—
if the gods who hold heaven will it. They know best :
and best know how to exercise their will on us.”

So she spoke, and much-suffering Odysseus
had bristled at her speech : and answered her :

“Before God, you speak some trick and not my sending :
you would have me leap the open throat of the sea
on a raft. Even the fastest ships cross that horror
only with a struggle, even with fairest winds.
I will not ride any raft : unless, goddess,
you swear a mighty oath, to send me into no
evil misery.”

So he spoke, and the dazzling goddess Calypso
smiled, and caressed his hand, and answered him :

“You’re wicked to say such things, you clever man.
But to think that I would plan evil against you!

Know this, earth and heaven, and river Styx
that flows in darkness (the mightiest oath
of all for gods) : I will not send Odysseus
into evil misery!

Clever man, I have no such thing in mind for you.
The instruction I give you is what I would do,
if I were facing the open throat of the sea.
My heart beats fairly for you behind these breasts.”

This she said. And Odysseus followed her
back to the cave : and they entered, goddess and man :
and he took a seat where Hermes had arisen
from : and Calypso, charming nymph, set a table

of all kinds of food and drink that mortal men eat.
 But she herself had ambrosia and nectar prepared :
 and she sat down face to face with Odysseus.
 And they reached for the many gifts set before them;
 and when they were satisfied with the food and drink,
 Calypso was first to speak :

“O Odysseus, son of Laertes the Zeus-born!
 My many-minded Odysseus! You truly
 intend to leave me? So soon you will leave me?
 Even now, just now, you’re eager to go home
 and leave me! O Odysseus : Odysseus :
 farewell. If in your heart you knew of all the woe
 fated to fill you before you come to your home,
 here on this spot you would stay, and keep house with me.
 And you would be immortal. Yet you would leave me
 for your wife : your mortal wife whom you desire
 all day long : here! Surely my body, this figure
 you see, is equal to hers : and I say solemnly
 that mortal women resembling gods is unseemly!”

And Odysseus answered her :

“Goddess, do not be angry. You and I well know
 that thoughtful Penelope cannot surpass you
 in body and figure. She is a mortal woman,
 and you are deathless, and undecaying.
 Even so I desire all day long to go home.
 And if any god wrecks me on the wine-dark sea
 again, I’ll endure it. I’ve become patient
 in suffering. By now I’ve tolerated

so many troubles and so much misery
from wave and war. So let this go with all that.”

As he spoke, the sun had set and darkness came :
and they moved deeper into the cave to its inmost
part, where they lay together and enjoyed themselves.

When Dawn, the rosy-fingered, delivered first light,
Odysseus covered himself in tunic and cloak :
while Calypso slipped into a silver-sparkling
robe of linen, which snugly fit her figure
with twelve golden brooches fastened down one side
of her body : and on her shoulders lay a shining veil,
and she drew down this fine netting over her head
and face : and she went to assist Odysseus
on his way. She handed him a sharp double-axe,
well-balanced in his grip, its bronze blades well-pinned
to its handle of olive-wood of swirling grain :
and she also gave him a short-handled adze :
then led the way to a far end of the island
where tall trees stood : alder and poplar and silver fir
rising sky-high : but dried out long ago : she knew
the well-seasoned timber would float lightly for him.
So she showed him where the tall trees stood, then went home,
the dazzling goddess Calypso, and he began
cutting beams of wood, and swiftly his work took hold
of him. Twenty trees fell : and he trimmed off their limbs
roughly : then skilfully smoothed them, chipping away
with the adze, shaping each straight to the line, to fit
the next : and Calypso brought him augers : and he
hand-drilled the beams, and fitted wood-pegs and dowels

in the holes : then hammered all the parts together.
As wide a span that a skilled carpenter measures
out for a cargo-ship, just this wide did Odysseus
make the floor of his raft. And he fixed to the floor
uprights to support the level boards of a deck :
then bolted planks crosswise along the craft's edges,
to fasten the floor securely. And he fitted
a mast, and a spar : and made a broad-bladed oar,
to steer with : and he hedged everything round with walls
of plaited osier as a shelter from the waves :
and shored that up with many bundles of brushwood.
And Calypso brought him robes and cloaks and mantles
to make a sail : and he made that, too : and fastened
the braces, that shift the sail to the wind :
and the halyards, to raise sail, and lower it :
and the sheets, which use the winds finely.
Then he dug a trench, and carefully brought the raft
down along rollers into the sparkling sea.

And that was on the fourth day : and his work was done.
Yet tight-braided Calypso kept Odysseus
for one day more : and so she bathed him : and dressed him
in freshly cleaned clothes : then sent him from the island.
She stowed for him on the raft a skin of dark wine :
and a larger one of water : and a well-stitched leather sack
of provisions : and inside she had given him
many agreeable delicacies :
and she gifted him a fresh breeze, gentle and warm.

Joyfully he spread his wings : good Odysseus :
his raft sailed on the breeze : and he sat

and guided his passage with the steering-oar :
 and took no sleep, but kept his eyes ever upon
 the Pleiades, on slow-setting Boötes, and on the Bear
 (which men also call the Plough), which circles in place
 and eyes the hunter Orion, and never sinks
 below the sea : beautiful goddess Calypso
 had counselled him to keep the Bear left of his hand.
 So for seventeen days he sailed the sea : and on
 the eighteenth he saw dim mountains in the distance :
 the land of the Phaeacians rising before him
 as a blessing on the misty deep.

But earthshaking

Poseidon, lord of the sea, rising up the sky
 from Ethiopia, saw the man from afar,
 peering down by the mountains of the Solymi :
 the god saw Odysseus sailing on the sea :
 and the anger deep in his heart went deeper still :
 and he shook his head : and he murmured to himself :

“ ὦ πόποι !

So the gods changed their mind about the man
 while I was feasting in Ethiopia.
 And now he nears the Phaeacian land,
 where fate would have him escape the wide net
 of suffering flung round him. But I can
 bring him to his fill of misery on the way.”

So he gathered the clouds : and agitated the sea
 with trident in hand : and he roused all kinds
 of whirling storm winds obscuring land and sea :

and night dropped from heaven. And the East Wind
and the South Wind and the ferocious West Wind
fell on him together : and the North Wind
rushed down from the heights and pushed up over him
a tremendous wave.

And Odysseus lost heart,
and crushed in spirit he spoke to his mighty heart :

“Ah, God! So what will it finally be?
She spoke true of the misery of the sea.
Clouds surround me all the way up to Heaven
and Zeus : and the waves are in confusion
from contrary winds : and towering ruin
comes for me at last. Blest, three times blest, four times blest,
all those who died at Troy : to please the sons of Atreus.
If only fate had taken me the day
I was showered with the bronze-tipped Trojan spears,
fighting for the body of dead Achilles :
then I would have received funeral rites,
and the Achaeans would have carried my name far :
now the death fated for me comes miserably.”

And a great wave struck him down from above,
rushing over him with terrible force and whirling
his raft round and round : and he was flung from the raft :
and he let the steering oar slip from his hand :
and the mast snapped in half in the midst of the winds
lashing around him in rage, and sail and spar
fell into the sea. And the sea held him under
a long time : and he was unable to surface through

the rush of the waves : and the garments he wore,
gifts of Calypso, weighed him down further :
but at last he broke through, and spat out
the hateful sea that rippled all around him.
At once he rushed through the waves for his raft
and took hold of it, and sat down in its midst,
hoping to escape his oncoming fate and death.
And the winds and crosscurrents tossed him to and fro :
just as in late summer, when the north wind
lifts feather-light thistles up and above the plain
and crowds the air : just so the wind carried the raft
here and there along the sea. Here the South Wind
flung the raft to the North Wind to hurry it on :
there the East Wind relented, and the West Wind worked it along.

And now appeared the shapely ankles of a sea-goddess :
it was the fair-faced Ino : once mortal woman,
now a nymph of the foamy sea : shining Leucothea :
a daughter of warrior Cadmus, who contrived
the alphabet. Leucothea saw, and felt a pang
of sorrow for Odysseus, as he wandered
with his many troubles. Rising over the waves
like a seagull she landed on the well-built raft,
and the harmony of her voice was as a god's
as she spoke :

"O unlucky man! How have you brought earthshaking
Poseidon to such a terrible rage? I see
many horrors growing. You are far from mad,
so do as I tell you. Strip off your garments,
and leave the raft in the hands of the angry winds.

Reach your climbing arms towards the Phaeacian shore,
 and escape this fate. Here : stretch this veil around
 your chest and tie it tight, and you shall not be lost :
 but when your hands touch land, untie it and cast it
 far out in the wine-dark sea : and then turn yourself
 away.”

This the goddess told him. And she gave him
 the veil and dived like a sea-bird into the waves,
 and the darkness there concealed her.

And the godlike

Odysseus wondered at his unceasing misery,
 and crushed in spirit he spoke to his mighty heart :

“What now? Some god telling me to step off the raft.
 No : they weave more trickery for me : I’ll stay here.
 I saw land out there—she called it my chance of escape.
 Right here will do well, I think. I think this is best.
 As long as the beams hold together I’ll sit here
 and wait out the misery : I’ll swim for it—
 if I have to : I can think of no better plan.”

While Odysseus pondered in mind and heart,
 earthshaker Poseidon roused a towering wave,
 hard and horrible: it curled over him from above,
 and the god shoved it on him and shattered the raft.
 And even as a strong wind shakes a heap of chaff,
 scattering the dry straw, some here, some there : just so
 the wave scattered the long beams of the raft.
 But Odysseus hung on to a plank, then got a leg over

as if mounting a horse : and he put off the garments
 that Calypso had given him : and he knotted the veil
 around him : and he dived into the sea with arms
 extended : and he began to swim. And the lord
 of the sea shook his head at all this and murmured :

“Enjoy your suffering as you claw through the sea,
 til you come to those people beloved of Zeus.
 You won’t say you lacked for misery along the way.”

And he lashed his horses and came to stormy Aegae,
 where his shining palace stands.

And Athena,
 daughter of Zeus, carried out a plan of her own :
 she tied the wind-streams in a knot : and in that way
 they lay silent and at rest : then let the North Wind
 loose : to smooth the waves before him, so that he might
 reach the Phaeacians : godlike Odysseus,
 escaping death and the fates!

Then for two nights and two days the waves baffled him :
 and floating on the heavy swells he saw his death by water.

But when the bright-haired Dawn birthed the third day,
 the wind stopped : and the sea was quiet : and the air
 was still : and atop a swelling wave he saw land
 near at hand : so even as children cherish the life
 in a father who lies in illness, suffering
 long-enduring pains, a long ebbing away, the work
 of some cruel god : then to their joy the gods

cure him of pain : so Odysseus welcomed
the land and the trees; and he swam in a hurry
to put his feet on land. But when he was as far
from shore as a man's shout can travel, and heard
the roar of the sea rushing at the reefs : the rush
of the massive waves crashing into the headland
with a terrible roar and splash of sea-spray :
he saw no harbours for ships to shelter in,
no safe spot,
only crags and rocks pointing up through the sea-spray.

And Odysseus lost heart, and crushed in spirit
he spoke to his mighty heart :

"And now? Zeus gave me sight of land to raise my hopes,
and I have cut across this waste somehow, but now
I see no way out of the grey sea. The coast is rocky,
and the waves run into a sheer cliff : I see no way
to get a footing and flee out of this evil.
If I try to haul myself out, I fear the winds
may snatch me up again and fling me back
onto the horrible sea, and all this effort
will be pointless. Or some god or other
will unleash on me a monster from the deep :
and many kinds are bred by glowing Amphitrite :
and I know that glorious Poseidon is angry with me."

While he wondered in mind and heart, a great wave
shoved him against the rocky headland. His skin
was ripped away and his bones were shattered—
if not for a thought that the goddess Athena

put into his mind. As he swept along he grabbed
onto a rock with both hands, and with a loud cry
he clung there until the roaring wave rushed by.
So he escaped the wave : but redounding
from the headland the great wave smashed into him
and pushed him into the sea. And just as when
a squid is pulled from its hole and pebbles stick
to its suckers, just so the rocks were stuck with skin
ripped from his strong hands : and the great wave covered him.
And miserable Odysseus would have outfoxed
his appointed fate and died just then :
but Athena had granted him a quick-moving mind.
He rose to the surface and swam out and away
from the breaking waves, all the while looking
landward for a sandy beach, or harbours of the sea.
As he swam he came to a bay where a river
ran into the deep : it appeared to him the best spot
to stop. The land held tall trees, and the water
was smooth. And he hailed the river as a god,
and prayed in his heart :

“Hear me, many-powered one (whoever you are) :
I have sought you in my many prayers :
help me escape from Poseidon’s angry sea.
Holy in the eyes of the Immortals
is one who comes lost in his way : thus I have come
after much trouble, and wrap my arms round your stream.
I ask for mercy,
and with righteous plea declare myself your suppliant.”

Thus he spoke, and at once the river-current ceased,

and took him into its calm, and carried him safe
to a grassy bank. And he let his two knees bend
and his strong hands drop and he fell to earth.
The sea had crushed his spirit. His body was dark
with many bruises, and seawater leaked from his mouth
and nose. He lay there, breathless and unable to speak,
in utter exhaustion. But his spirit rallied
in his heart, and he came round, and untied the veil
of the goddess, and let the river take it down
into the sea, where a great wave rose under it,
and Ino received it into her hands. Then dropping
back to earth Odysseus sidled up onto
soft grass and kissed the benevolent soil.

And he spoke to his mighty spirit :

“This isn’t good. And now? What’s the kill blow to be?
If I stay here by the river, the frost and dew
will kill me by morning : I feel too weak to fight.
And the wind off the sea blows cold in the morning.
But what if I get up the hill to those shady trees,
and find a sheltered place and lie down and rest,
and sleep in the hope that the cold and exhaustion
leave me? Maybe then a ravenous beast finds me,
and I become food.”

So he wondered : and this seemed better to him :
Odysseus made his way up into the woods
overlooking the water. Two olive bushes
growing from a single root stood here : and he knew
their fanned-out branches would block the damp winds,

and also the bright beams of the sun, and the rain :
the two grew together so close and so dense,
their branches were interwoven one with another.
Odysseus got himself under them and reached out
and gathered fallen leaves together as a bed
to lie on : for very many leaves lay around him,
enough to cover two or three men in winter-time,
and shelter them, though the air be hard and wild.
And good Odysseus, the much-suffering one,
covered himself over with leaves and was glad.
Just as a man, living amid remote fields,
preserves a seed of fire in a heap of embers
(so he need not seek out a light elsewhere) :
so Odysseus had sunk himself into the leaves.
And Athena poured sleep into his eyes,
so that he might cease, finally, from all
his heavy fatigue, and his eyelids closed.

End of Book V

Homer, Odyssey, Book 6

Book VI

So here he lay asleep, the good Odysseus,
overburdened by sleep and weariness : while
Athena of the Winds, clear in foresight, whisked
to the land and city of the Phaeacians.
Long ago they came from spacious Hypereia,
which lay near the caverns of the man-destroying
Cyclopes, the one-eyed giants who tormented them,
and plundered them, towering in strength : so from there
the godlike Nausithous had taken his people away
and settled them in Scheria, far from the busy
world : and around the city he raised a wall.
And he built houses : and temples, to sacrifice
to the gods : and divided the open fields into farms.
But by this time the goddess of death had taken
him down to the house of Hades; and Alcinous now
led the people, with god-gifted wisdom in judgment.
Athena the shining-eyed now appeared at his house,
with the return of great-hearted Odysseus
in mind. She stepped into a chamber decorated
with many works of art : here was Nausicaä :
now SEE kaa ah! : a young woman sleeping : beautiful
as a goddess in aspect and poise : the one daughter
of wise King Alcinous. Her two handmaids, blest by
the Graces with charm and ease, slept by their princess
before the two doors : and the shining doors were shut.
But like a breath of wind Athena rushed upon her
and the sleeping girl saw : for the goddess entered

her dreams as the daughter of Dymas, famed for ship-
building : a girl of Nausicaä's age, and dear
to the princess' heart. So in this shape the goddess
spoke, and the quiet child heard her in her mind :

“Now SEE kaa ah! Truly did your dear mother birth
such a daydreaming daughter? Look at all these clothes
strewn about your chamber, beautiful yet neglected!
Your time for a wedding has come, when you shall stand
in glittering clothing, and dress your friends, who shall
walk with you to the house of your husband, whomever
he shall turn out to be. From such sumptuous style,
you know, people shall spread a good word about you,
and your father and honoured mother shall rejoice.
So at the rising of the dawn why don't we go
wash these clothes? And I shall follow along with you
and help, so that you shall be ready : for not much longer
will you remain a virgin daughter. Even now
the best men in the land come hither a-wooing,
the noblest of the Phaeacians, befitting
your family's dignity. So come now! Towards morning
request of your father to make ready a wagon
with mules, to carry your sashes and robes and wraps :
and you ride, too, which shall be far finer than going
on foot : for the washing basins are a ways out
of the city.”

Thus spoke the goddess Athena
and stepped back to Olympus, the home of the gods
who live forever in the clear light of the sun,
blissful and happy for all of their days : but her words

remained behind, inside of the child in sleep.

So Dawn arose upon the fair throne of earth,
and Nausicaä rustled awake in her fine robe
and was straightaway lost in wonder at her dream.

She proceeded through her house to find her parents :
and found them : her dear mother and father.

Mummy sat by the fireplace with her handmaids,
spinning woollen yarn of sea-purple on the distaff;
while her father she met on his way out to attend
an assembly of the Council of Nobles.

But she embraced her dear father and took his hand
and spoke:

“Papa, may I have a cart made ready, to bring
clothes down to the river? Look at your spotless clothes!
You go to stand with the best men in Phaeacea,
and you should have spotless clothes. And you have five sons
living in these halls : two have wives, yes, but three love
being free for now : and they definitely need
clean clothes to wear when they go to the dance. So I’ll
clean the household’s clothes. This task . . . interests me.”

So saying, the princess blushed red to speak of marriage.

And her dear father keenly noted all, and said :

“The mules are yours to use, loveliest child,
and all else that you wish for. You can go. The men
will prepare a four-wheeled wagon for you : strong-wheeled,
and with seats.”

So saying, he instructed the servants, and they obeyed. Outside the palace the mule-wagon was made ready, and the mules were yoked to it : and the young woman came from her chamber with clothes in her arms. She laid them in the varnished wagon-bed while her mother put in a basket of many delightful foods, and poured wine into a well-sewn goat's-skin. And the girl rose up into the wagon. And she took from her mother a measure of light olive oil in a golden flask, so that she and her handmaidens might apply it while bathing together. And so Nausicaä took whip and reins in hand, and touched the two mules to set them on : and the solid wagon wheels creaked on the axles as the mules moved mildly forward. And so went the princess, with her handmaids, to the river.

There, where the waters rambled through a blooming woodland spot, they loosened the mules from the yoke; and the mules nibbled on the soft grass. The washing basins had been dug in the earth : and water rushed up and out from the depths below, ever-abundant and flowing clear : and good to clean all kinds of clothing. They led the mules along the burbling river : and brought the clothes to the basins, and immersed them in the pure water : then placed them in shallow trenches and trod on them, washing the clothes by foot-power : and as the mules grazed on honey-sweet field-grass nearby, the three women began treading faster and faster in good-natured rivalry, with smiles

and laughter. Now when all the clothes were washed, they spread everything out in rows on the shore of the wide sea, where the racing surf had smoothed and best cleaned the pebbles. In the seawater the three women bathed themselves, and applied oil richly onto their skin : then returned to the riverbanks to enjoy their food, and wait for their clothes to dry in the brilliant sun. And when they had eaten to their fullest pleasure, they flung aside their veils and began to dance and play at ball : and slender-armed Nausicaä led the song. And as Artemis, shooter of arrows, rises the heights of Taygetus and Eurymanthus, thrilling in the wild boar and light-leaping deer, and here and there the nymphs of the wood appear, and enter in with her play (those daughters of Zeus of the dazzling bolt who holds everything) : just then does modest Leto raise a smile, as she sees her daughter standing head and shoulders above all beauty : just so the princess outshone her companions. Now the princess was about to yoke the mules, and fold the fine clothes, and return home : goddess Athena, however, fixed for her a different way. So when the princess sent a slow underhand ball to one of her handmaids, the ball soared past her and splashed into a whirling eddy of the river : and they all raised a cry, and Odysseus awoke, and sat up, and at once wondered in heart and mind, and to himself he said :

“And this is what now? And where am I? What people are here? They may fear God in their thoughts, or they may

be as cruel and hurtful as wild beasts. That was
 an outcry of women that woke me. Perhaps nymphs?
 They haunt the heights, and where rivers spring from the soil,
 and grasslands. Those are human voices. Well, let's find out."

Odysseus slid out from under the bushes.

Reaching up into the branches overhead he broke off
 a leafy branch with his strong hand : and he held it
 before him, to cover himself, and moved forward
 with eyes like a mountain-haunting lion trusting
 in his strength who moves through the wind and rain with eyes
 blazing fiercely : and goes in among the cattle,
 or the sheep, or the light-leaping deer : goaded by
 his belly. Just so did he seem to the fair women
 as he stepped out before them : for he was in great
 need. And they saw him : terrible to look upon :
 spoiled all over with dirt and salt-water mixed :
 the women fled in terror, one up the riverbank,
 one down : but the daughter of Alcinous stood her ground :
 for Athena placed courage in her heart, and took fear
 from her joints. And as Odysseus looked upon
 the fresh-faced girl he almost fell to the ground
 to clasp her knees and pray : but he wondered if he
 should keep his distance, and address her with mild words
 from afar, and plainly ask for clothes, and the way
 to a town. And as he wondered he decided
 to stand apart and address her with mild words :
 and so he spoke, with cunning in his intent :

"Respectfully I address you, o Queen : even
 a goddess? : one who holds wide Heaven? Might you be

Zeus' daughter Artemis? Your poise and figure
 are nearest to hers. But if you live upon the earth,
 as I do, then three times blest are your father
 and honoured mother, three times blest is your family.
 I'm sure they look gladly on you when they see
 their fine twigling thriving at the dance. Most blest,
 though, will be the man bearing superior gifts
 who leads you home as wife. For I have never seen
 a woman so beautiful, nor man : and I lose
 myself as I look upon you.

Once I saw, in Delos,
 by Apollo's altar, a young sprout of a palm tree
 springing up : (I went there, and with many people,
 and we went on that long-lasting way of trouble) :
 but that day my heart almost burst in gladness,
 for I had never seen such a sight rising up
 from the earth : and I feel that feeling as I look
 and wonder at you. I hesitate to touch your
 knees, o noble lady, but I am long in suffering.

From the island of Ogygia I suffered
 rushing stormwinds and waves for twenty days, until
 yesterday, when I escaped the man-stealing sea.
 Fate threw me onto your coast, to suffer further
 evil—I think heaven has much more to give me
 before they leave off. Please see me, o queen :
 for after my long troubles you are the first
 I have come to, and I know no one in this land.
 Will you show me to a town? And perhaps you have
 something to throw round me as a wrapper? Maybe

a rag you brought to carry your clothing? And for you :
 may the gods give you all you hope for : a happy home,
 and a partner to go with you through life. When each
 lives for the other, both become their strongest self :
 and this is a gift as from the gods : when woman
 and man live well together : a delight to friends,
 and a powerful requital to enemies.
 And those who know this best are the happiest.”

Thus he spoke, and kind Nausicaä answered him :

“Stranger, your word is neither evil nor thoughtless :
 yet all know that Olympian Zeus himself chooses
 the fortunes we face, the good and the bad, as he
 wills it for each of us. To you he has given this :
 and we must accept how things are. But you have come
 to our land and city, and here you shall have clothes
 and all else you require, as this is proper
 when a suppliant in need happens along the way.
 I will take you to the city; and I will tell you
 the name of the people: we are the Phaeacians.
 I am the daughter of King Alcinous, who rules
 wisely, and protects us with courage and strength.”

And so it was, and next she gently raised her voice
 so her handmaidens could hear, and she spoke to them :

“Hold still, my friends. Why do you fly away? You think
 this man an enemy? There is no living man
 who would come bringing battle to the Phaeacians,
 for we are beloved of the Immortals.

and from his head he wrung away the horrible sea.

And when he had washed and oiled his skin, and put
 on the garments that the pure girl had given him,
 then Athena, sprung from Zeus, made him mightier
 and massive in their eyes : and his hair flowed down
 like curls of Hyacinth. And just as when a man
 gilds silver with a cover of glittering gold,
 using arts taught by Hephaestus and Athena
 to fashion his works of grace : just so the goddess
 showered round his head and shoulders a shining grace.
 Then he went by himself to the shore of the sea
 and sat down, looking out at the glittering waves.

And Nausicaä saw him, and wondered, and quietly
 spoke to her handmaids :

“My friends, listen to these words :

by the Gods of Olympus this man has come to us.
 When I first saw, I thought there was nothing to see,
 but now he is of the Gods of Olympus : who
 hold everything. Such a man I would call my husband,
 if it pleased him to remain here . . . in this land . . . with us.

But come! my handmaidens, my friends, give to this man
 food and husband—I mean drink.”

So spoke Nausicaä.

(The last word the princess spoke was πόσις : ‘husband’
 and ‘drink’ at once : a homograph : ὁμώνυμος .)

The two handmaidens obeyed the princess and placed food and . . . drink . . . by Odysseus. And he set to the gifts ravenously : he hadn't tasted food in days.

Meanwhile the slender-armed Nausicaä went her own way : she folded the clothes and placed them in the well-wheeled wagon, and lightly put the yoke to the mules standing mildly on their tough hoofs : then went up into the seats. And she encouraged Odysseus to follow.

Then, with winged words
that flew ever-faster and faster, she spoke to him :

“Come now! stranger, come up so I can bring you to my house. I will present you to my father, the wisest of men. There you'll meet the most excellent of the Phaeacians. But let us do things this way : because you do not lack understanding, I think : while we pass by the men working in the fields, you walk with my handmaidens behind the wagon : I will lead the way. When we come to the city— our city is surrounded by a high wall, and to get there we have to cross a narrow bridge of ground, and we have two lovely harbours, one on either side of that ground, and curved ships are brought up all along the roadway, each in its own yard : and we have a beautiful temple to Poseidon built with huge squared stones of marble : and all around it men are busy making ropes and

sails for ships; and ropes; and carving oars, because the Phaeacians are not interested in bows and arrows, but masts and ropes and beautiful ships which happily sail the sea. But sometimes people are—not happy. On our way someone may look at me and say (for not everyone here is respectful) :

‘Who is this tall and handsome stranger who goes with Nausicaä? Where did she find him? I suppose he’ll be a husband for her. He must be a wanderer she’s brought in from a ship from a strange people from far away, since no one lives near us. Or some god has come from heaven to answer her prayers, and she will have him beside her all of her days. She should go off with him elsewhere, since she dishonours the Phaeacian land, where many good young men want her hand.’ They will say this of me, and to my face, and if it were someone else I would think the same : I would think, ‘How could she go openly with a man before the day of her marriage? She’s a disgrace to her mother and father!’”

So she spoke, and Odysseus heard and readied to answer, but Nausicaä swiftly continued, and said :

“Stranger, if you hear me you will find a way back to your land—if you want that—But we must hurry here because I’m wanted at home—On our way you’ll see a spot for Athena : it’s beautiful : tall poplars standing in a meadow of flowers, and inside is a spring where fresh water flows :

wait there, and when you think we're back at home, come out,
 and go into to the city and ask for the house
 of 'great-hearted Alcinous' : my father. Everyone
 knows it : any child could bring you there, even
 a baby. No other house in the city
 looks like the palace of King Alcinous. So when
 the house takes you in, you'll go through a courtyard,
 and then down the Hall. You'll be brought to my mother :
 she'll be sitting by the fire spinning yarn of sea-purple—
 a beautiful colour—and her handmaids will be
 sitting behind her. My father will be there,
 on his throne, drinking his wine as the Immortals do.
 Go up to our mother first and put your arms
 around her knees : do this if you want to get home
 quickly. If you win *her* heart, there's hope you'll see
 your friends again, and return to your house, and land,
 however far away it may be."

Thus she spoke,
 and touched the two mules with the shining whip,
 and they left the rushing waters of the river.

The mules trotted along the pathway, their hoofs
 ringing on the stones, and she held the reins well :
 while her maids and Odysseus followed on foot.
 Mindful of them, she only seldom snapped the whip.
 As the sun set they came to the grove of poplars.

There, Odysseus sat down, and began to pray :

"Hear, child of Zeus, the Unwearied : hear me

now, since you did not hear me when I was wrecked
by the glorious Earthshaker. Grant to me
a gentle welcome from the Phaeacians.”

So he prayed, and Pallas Athena heard him :
but not yet did she show herself to him and shine
in his presence : because she feared her earthshaking
uncle : who would rage and roar and keep seeking
to destroy Odysseus before he reached home.

End of Book VI

Book VII

So Odysseus prayed, alone in the poplars
 where fresh water flowed from a spring : while the two
 strong mules took the girl to the city. And when
 she came to the shining palace of her father,
 she drew rein at the front gate, and her many brothers,
 in her eyes resembling gods, gathered round her,
 and freed the mules from the wagon, and carried
 the clothes inside : and she went to her rooms. A fire
 there was kindled by Eurymedusa, nanny
 to the girl, herself an old woman from Apeire.
 Long ago the oar-waving ships brought her over
 the sea from Apeire, and from all the captives
 she was given as gift of honour for Alcinous,
 King of the Phaeacians, whose word the people
 hear as from a god. She had raised Nausicaä,
 and they were close in heart : so she kindled the fire,
 then went through the halls and brought back supper
 for the slender-armed girl.

And Odysseus rose

to go to the city. And an owl landed
 in a poplar and furlled its wings, and looked upon
 Odysseus with shining yellow eyes. And he
 thought :

“Go quietly now. Look no one in the eye. But
 shall I speak? Who tolerates strangers? I do not
 think I will receive an affectionate welcome.
 They trust in their ships. The glorious earthshaker

lets *them* cross the sea.”

And Odysseus turned from
the bird, whose voice he heard in his heart, and it said :

“Their swift ships flow as a bird soars on the wing,
and as a thought moves in the mind.”

And Athena
poured a colourless mist onto Odysseus,
so that he might walk among the Phaeacians
unseen, and escape any disdain, or questions.

So Athena led the way, and he followed her
track to the city. The Phaeacians, famous
in ship-building, took no notice of Odysseus
as he moved among them : the goddess allowed this,
shining Athena, whose veil of mist concealed
him all round : because her heart was kind to him.

And as he moved among them he admired
their harbours and well-built ships; their marketplaces
and assembly halls; and the high wall around
the city, fitted with sharp spikes upright all down
the line : an impressive sight. And sharp-eyed Athena
approached him as a girl carrying a pitcher :
she stood before him, and good Odysseus asked :

“Dear child, might you point me the way to the house
of the man they call Alcinous, king of the people
here? I’m from far away, a far-away land

over the water; and I know no one in this city.”

And goddess Athena answered him :

“Good stranger, I will show you to the palace, as you ask : as it is on the way to my own good father.”

So they came to the shining palace of the king,
and sharp-eyed Athena spoke :

“Good stranger, this is the palace you asked to see :
many kings beloved of Zeus feast inside here
together : but what have you to fear? In a man
courage is best, no matter the circumstance :
and he may be heard, though he be a stranger
from far away. Go in, and you will find the queen
first, as you walk down the hall : our Queen Arete :
this is her name. She and the king share a common
forefather. I can tell it to you. A great man
of the Phaeacians was Nausithous, born
of earthshaking Poseidon and Periboea,
beautiful woman, youngest daughter of mighty
Eurymedon, who was once king of the Giants.
But recklessly he brought ruin to his people,
and was himself destroyed : but his youngest daughter
Periboea lay with Poseidon and produced
a son : the great-hearted Nausithous, wise king
of the Phaeacians. Nausithous had two sons :
Rhexenor and Alcinous. One day Apollo
of the silver bow killed Rhexenor in his hall,
though he was newly married and without a son :

but he left behind him a daughter : Arete :
and she and her uncle Alcinous were married.
He treasures her as no woman has known before,
all those who live in households bound to their husbands :
Arete is the most cherished : by her children,
by King Alcinous, and by the people, who see
her as a goddess, and recognise her kindly
when she walks among the city. She is herself
as shining a light as the king : and her wisdom
is well known : for friends she fixes marriage quarrels;
and she also settles problems for their husbands.
If you win *her* heart, there's hope you'll see
your friends again, and return to your house, and land."

Thus spoke shining-eyed Athena, and the goddess
stepped from charming Scheria, the Phaeacian
land, and came to well-composed Athens : and entered
the marble house of Erechtheus, founder of cities.

But Odysseus went up to the lofty palace
of Alcinous : and marvelled as he stood before
the bronze gates : a gleam, as from sun or moon, came
from the palace of King Alcinous. A wall of bronze
surrounded the house, tipped with a deep blue cornice.
And golden doors shining in doorposts of silver
shut in the many chambers of the opulent
palace : and its handle was curved gold. And protecting
the doors were two dogs, sculpted in silver and gold
by all-taming Hephaestus, to guard the palace
of Alcinous, and all those inside : such artwork
is immortal, and shall never age, though days renew

always.

Inside, seats led along the walls from the entrance
down though the Hall and on into the inner rooms :
and laid over the seats were fabrics decorated
with fine embroidery, the craftwork of the women
of the house. Here the Phaeacian leaders came
and assembled to eat and drink : and their abundance
was year-long. And along the rows stood well-built youths
of marble on tiptoe, holding blazing torches
in both hands to give light to the guests of the Hall.
And fifty handmaids saw to the house : some of them
turning the hand-mill and grinding the yellow grain :
while some spun the yarn, and some wove the fabrics :
and they sat at thread-work united like quavering
poplar leaves : and the linen they wove was smooth as oil.

As the Phaeacian men are skilled in crossing
the sea in their swift ships, just so are the women
full of art at the weave : for goddess Athena
above all had given them good hearts : and so they
showed great artistry in their beautiful handwork.

Now outside the palace, to one side of the court,
an orchid in full bloom stands tall : and a hedge runs
round its many acres. There the trees grow heavy
with fruit : pear and pomegranate and shiny apples
and figs sweet to the taste : and flourishing olive
trees. There, no fruit fades wholly from the branches :
the orchid holds steadfast through winter and summer
and bears fruit all year long, while the steady west wind

blows : and as one crop is picked, another begins
to sprout : and so it is with pear and apple and fig :
a clustering bunch is always hanging ready.
And a flourishing vineyard is rooted nearby,
and its level ground is sectioned into four parts :
there are grapes laid out and drying in the sun,
while others are being plucked and trod upon :
and the unripe grapes are dropping flowers, while
some are growing deep purple. And farthest back,
past the last row of vines, garden-beds of all
kinds grow : fresh and abundant all year long. Two springs
flow there in the well-ordered garden : one is run
through grooves to water all the beds at once : while
the other flows back to the house and dips under
the court and streams through a fountain-head there : from this
stream the people of the city fetch their water.

So these were some of the splendid god-given gifts
of the palace of Alcinous.

And Odysseus,
man of sorrows, let his heart grow full of all this
charm : then he crossed the threshold into the palace.
There he found the Phaeacian leaders and ministers
pouring from their cups in tribute to dream-bringing
Hermes : as the last libation before their night's
rest. And Odysseus moved among them along
the Hall, wrapped in the colourless mist decreed
by Athena : and he came to Queen Arete
and to Alcinous the king.

Sinking to the floor

good Odysseus threw his arms round Arete's
knees, and the mist lifted from him as a breath fades
in air : and the room fell silent : as all wondered
at what they saw.

And Odysseus made his prayer :

“Arete, daughter of noble fathers, I come
to you, and to your husband, after much suffering :
and to these your guests as well : may the gods grant them
good fortune in life, and may their children receive
their wealth, and be given equal honour by the people.
I beg for assistance to return to my homeland :
for a long time I have suffered far from my friends.”

Thus Odysseus spoke, then sat down in the ashes
of the fire : and all of them had come to silence.
And after a time the old lord Echeneus
rose to his feet, eldest of the Phaeacians
and therefore of longest sight. Excellent with words,
and wise with all the wisdom of the ancients,
he with kind heart addressed the assembly :

“Alcinous, this will not do, to have a stranger
χαμαί ἧσθαι, sitting on the ground, in the dust
of the hearth : the people await your word. Come now!
Have the stranger rise to his feet, and find for him
the silver-studded chair, and give the servants word
to mix the wine so that we may together pour
to Zeus, who delights in thunder, yet shows compassion

for respectful strangers. And the mistress of the house shall serve him supper from the abundance in store.”

And Alcinous heard of heaven’s favour towards strangers, and he took the hand of Odysseus, the crafty and subtle-minded one : and with a nod he brought him to his feet : and led him from the fire to a marvellous couch, its embroidered cover glittering in the firelight : and the king bid powerful Laodamas to rise from the couch, his most beloved son : and Odysseus sat down in his place, by the king and Queen Arete. A servant brought water for washing the hands in an elegant golden pitcher, and poured it over his hand-washing into a silver basin; and a polished table was set up before him. The gracious Arete brought him many fine foods, all the agreeables the palace could offer : and much-enduring Odysseus ate and drank.

And Alcinous looked to his ministers and spoke :

“Pontonous, mix the bowl and serve the wine to all of us here in the Hall. We shall pour to Zeus, who delights in thunder, yet shows compassion for respectful strangers.”

So Pontonous mixed the honey-sweet wine, and granted each his cup : and when all had poured, then drunk their hearts full, Alcinous addressed the assembly,

and said :

“Hear me : all you who lead, and minister
to the people : hear what I shall give you from my
heart : you have feasted, so go now to your sleep :
in the morning we shall have a session of the elders.
We shall receive this guest : and give exceptional
sacrifice to the gods : and think on this : how our
guest shall return to his homeland without labour
or trouble, and find happiness, however far
away it lies : and not delay in the middle,
and come to harm : but he shall reach his land : and step
on its soil. Thereafter he faces the length
measured out for him at birth, when his mother
brought him to life.

But if he is an Immortal
come down from Heaven, then the gods plan something new
for us. Before now they have come to us truly,
such as at our most glorious sacrifices;
and privately at well, sitting with us at feast.
And if a traveller from our city meets them
along the way, they do not hide themselves :
as we are near to them : as are the Cyclopes
and the wild Giants.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“Alcinous, take thought of this understanding :
I am not immortal, who enjoys endless Heaven :
this body and this physique are a mortal man’s.

Whomever you know who bears great woe, to that man
of sorrows I compare myself. I could tell a long
tale recounting all I have suffered at the will
of the gods. But hateful is the belly that doglike
reduces thoughtful man to beast, and would even
have me ask for food amid my distress : hunger,
like grief, comes strong : and urges me to eat
and drink : urges me to forget myself and have
my fill. And at dawn may you fulfil your promise
to send me home—finally, after terrible
struggle. Then my death shall have no hurt, if I see
my family once more.”

Thus spoke Odysseus,
and all approved the king’s command to send
the man home : as all thought the man had spoken well.
So when all had poured, then drunk their hearts full,
each walked to his house to rest, and left in the Hall
good Odysseus sitting by stately Arete
and King Alcinous : while the handmaidens took away
the dishes of the feast. And stately Arete
appraised his garments, and recognised them, the cloak
and tunic, as her own handwork : and so she spoke :

“Good stranger, there is a question I would have you
answer first : Who gave you those garments? Who are you?
You said you came wandering from over the sea?
From where, exactly?”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered her :

“Gracious queen, it would be hard to tell the tale
from beginning to end : for the gods in heaven
have given me much to tell. But I will give such
answer as I can make.

Far from here over the sea is an island called
Ogygia : there Atlas’ daughter lives,
the subtle Calypso of the beautiful braids,
a dangerous goddess, and neither mortal
nor god has voluntary dealings with her.
But fate brought me to her when Zeus’ white lightning
shattered my ship in the middle of the wine-dark
sea. All my good companions perished. But I held
onto the keel with both arms for nine days : and on
the tenth black night the gods brought me to the island
of Ogygia, home of dangerous Calypso
of the tight braids. First she kindly welcomed me,
and fed me. Then she took hold of me : and kept me
there : and she promised to make me an Immortal,
undecaying all of my days : but I refused,
and kept refusing. So seven years of tears soaked
the godly clothes she put me in : but in year eight
she let me leave : but I do not know why. Perhaps
Zeus commanded her, or she simply changed her mind.
She let me make a well-built raft, and gave me bread
and sweet wine, and more godly clothes, and let me sail
away. That day the wind was warm and kind, her last
gift to me. So I sailed the sea for seventeen
days, and on the eighteenth I saw the wooded
mountains of your homeland, and I (the ill-fated
one) was happy. Then Poseidon shook the earth :

and set the winds rushing : and confounded my way.
He moved the seawaves beyond imagination :
and on my whirling raft I let out many sighs.
So the stormwinds smashed my raft to pieces and I
swam for your land, clawing my way through the deep,
until wind and water brought me near—then stopped me
from coming ashore. The rushing wind raised up waves
that threw me against the rocks, and would have drowned me
in that cheerless spot : but I fell back : I swam out,
and stayed out, until I saw a river which looked
favourable to me : here there was shelter
from the wind—and no rocks. So I came ashore
and fell to earth, breathing precious air, and night came
with its stars. So I went away from the river
and concealed myself in bushes : and I gathered leaves
around me : and heaven granted me boundless sleep.

I slept there in the leaves through the night and into
the dawn and down into midday. In the afternoon
I saw your daughter and her maids at play on the shore
by the sea, and in truth I thought her a goddess.
I made my prayer to her : and she was thoughtful
and understanding : as you would hope her to be
when meeting a stranger : though youth is forever
thoughtless. But she gave me bread and sparkling wine,
and after I bathed in the river she gave me
these garments. All this I have told you is the truth.”

Then Alcinous answered him :

“Stranger, surely my daughter was *not* thoughtful

in this. For she did not bring you back to our house
with her maids, though you approached her in prayer.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“Good king, your daughter is wholly innocent in this.
Indeed she invited me to join with her maids
and follow her : but I refused. I was afraid
of the anger of her father if he saw it :
as we men of earth are quick to anger.”

And again Alcinous answered him :

“Good stranger, I am not one of those men whose heart
fills with empty anger : better is to always
behave with grace and measure. Before father Zeus,
and Athena, and Apollo, I would have you,
so fine a man, and in thought so like myself,
as a husband to my daughter, and I will call
you my son, and you will live among us, and I
will give you a house, and wealth, if you choose to stay.
But no one here will make you stay against your will :
let that not be the decision of father Zeus.

The question of your setting forth shall be settled
tomorrow. Then you might lie in sleep if you like,
while we wing you over the calm sea until
we come to your homeland, and to your house, or to
wherever you desire to go, even if it be
far beyond Euboea, where our people carried
wise Rhadamanthus to see Tityus, Gaia’s

son, mother of life. There the Phaeacians sailed,
to the farthest of lands, and were successful in
their journey, and on the very same day came back.
You shall come to know by how far my ships are best,
and how my sailors stroke the seawaves with the oar.”

So he spoke, and Odysseus was glad. And he
prayed :

“Father Zeus, may these hopes be fulfilled. Then the name
of Alcinous shall spread through the grain-gifting earth
and be inextinguishable in fame : and I
shall come to my homeland.”

Thus they spoke together.

At Arete’s word the handmaidens prepared a bed
with purple blankets and a layer of coverlets,
and on top they placed fleece cloaks for the guest to wear.
And when the bed was ready, the handmaids came
with torch in hand and saw Odysseus, and spoke :

“Come now, friend, your bed is made.”

And good Odysseus, the much-enduring one,
lay down to sleep on a sumptuous inlaid bed
by the echoing courtyard of the palace.
While in the innermost bedchamber
of the palace Alcinous lay in sleep,
and beside him lay his wife Arete,
who had prepared their bed.

End of Book VII

Book VIII

When the early-born rosy-fingered Dawn spread her light, King Alcinous, holy and strong, rose from bed : and up rose Zeus-born Odysseus, destroyer of cities. Together, with wise Alcinous leading the way, they came to a cluster of stones, each smoothed pure, and shining, and set in close array, and in sight of many pine ships in construction by the sea. Here was the place of assembly of the Phaeacians. Here one sat with one's fellows and spoke. And Athena μηχανεύς crossed the city, working the return of great-hearted Odysseus : and in the shape of the king's first minister she stood before the leaders and the ministers of the Phaeacians : and to each she came close, and spoke :

"Come now! good man, to the assembly, to learn of the stranger who came wandering over the sea to the palace of wise Alcinous. His physique is of the Immortals."

This she said, to rouse the hearts and minds of each : and quickly the men gathered together and sat at assembly : and many marvelled at the son of wise Laertes : for Athena showered round his head and shoulders a shining grace, which made him mightier and massive in their eyes, and all of the Phaeacians admired him,

and showed him respect, and deference—for they knew he might manage well the contests they wished to test him with. When they had sat and discussed together awhile, Alcinous addressed the assembly, and said :

“Hear me, Phaeacian leaders and ministers, hear what I shall give you from my heart : this stranger —whom before now I have never seen—has come here in his wanderings to my house : whether from east or west, I do not know. He seeks transport, and prays for assurance : so let us do this, as we have done so before, and send him swiftly over the sea : as no man who enters my house sorrows long for lack of transport. So come now! draw a pitch-black ship down into the beautiful sea : and it shall be her maiden voyage : and select fifty-two youths from the people, even some of the very best: and when they have fitted the oars, let them come enjoy a feast at the palace : I will provide well for all. And now the sceptred kings and I shall welcome the stranger in our shining palace : and let no man refuse me : and summon the holy singer of songs Demodocus : the songs his god-given heart move him to sing delight us, and bring cheer.”

And so wise Alcinous, leader of men, went forth to his home, and all the sceptred powers followed with him : while a minister went for the holy singer of songs. And fifty-two youths were brought down

to the shore of the sea, as the king had spoken,
and drew the pitch-black ship into the deep water,
and set the mast upright, and slotted the oars
into the leather straps, and raised the white sail :
and everything was done well. And they left the ship
anchored far out in the harbour : and they returned
to shore and went to Alcinous' shining palace.

There, the people of the city had assembled
within the yard-wall of the palace : and also filled
the many rooms inside : for many men had come,
both young and old. And for his guests the king slaughtered
twelve full-grown sheep, and eight white-tusked boars, and two
calm-hearted oxen : all these were skinned and prepared
for the tables of the splendid feast.

Then a servant
stepped forward with the holy poet, whom the Muse,
who loved him, had touched with an excess of light :
that was light and dark mutually : his two eyes
were blind : yet he lighted the obscured world with song.

Pontonus set a chair for him in the middle
of the guests, by a high pillar : and hung the lyre
on a peg overhead : and guided the hands
of Demodocus to the lyre, that sings as birds
do : and a servant placed a table by the poet,
and put a basket of food and a cup of wine
on the beautiful table, for him to drink from
at his heart's word.

So they reached for the many gifts set before them,
and when they were satisfied with the food and drink,
the Muse sent through him the songs of heroes :
of victory : of courage. He sang a song
of noble warriors of an earlier time :
of heroes praised even in far-reaching heaven :
dissent between Odysseus and Achilles,
son of Peleus : of the wrath of Achilles,
given no summons to a feast for the honoured
and quarrelling over it with Odysseus
the many-minded one : and glorious Achilles
flung terrible words for not being summoned :
and the quarrel threatened separation
into larger factions at a sumptuous feast
to the gods : and Agamemnon, king of men,
was quietly happy at heart to see
the best of his army at variance : for he
had heard of this from Apollo the Foreseeing,
in holy Pytho, when he had entered the stone
doorway to receive a prophetic vision : before
the woe of the war that rolled over Danaans
and Trojans both, at the will of all-powerful Zeus.

So the splendid singer strummed his verses, while
Odysseus clutched his purple cloak with his strong
hand, and drew it to his head, and hid his striking
face : for he would not have the Phaeacians see
the tears rolling from his brows. And when the holy
poet ceased, Odysseus wiped away the tears,
and lowered the cloak, and poured to the gods
with his sparkling drinking cup. But the excellent

Phaeacian kings encouraged Demodocus
to continue his eloquently strummed verses,
as they took delight in melody and poetry :
so again Odysseus drew his cloak over
his face to hide his sighs. And Alcinous alone
of all the assembly saw, and understood :
for he sat near him, and he heard his heavy sighs.

So straightaway he addressed the Phaeacians,
lovers of the oar, and said :

“Hear me, Phaeacian leaders and ministers :
now we are heartened by the feast, and by song :
now let us go and meet in friendly games of skill,
so when this stranger returns home to his friends,
he will speak of how far superior we are
to all other men in boxing, and in wrestling,
and in speed.”

Thus the king spoke : and he led the way,
and the people followed him. And a servant hung
the lyre on its peg, and led Demodocus
by the hand out of the hall, and indicated
the way all the others had gone to go see
the trials of strength. And the crowd grew
enormous behind the noble Phaeacians
walking to the field of assembly. Among
them were many notable youths eager to win
a prize : there walked Acroneus, and Ocyalus;
Elatreus and Nauteus and Pymneus;
also Anchialus and Eretmeus,

and Ponteus and Proreus, and Thoon;
and Anabesineus; and Amplialus,
latest in line of Polyneus and Tecton;
and with them was Euryalus, looking equal
to man-killing Ares : the son of Naubolus,
he was in size and physique the preeminent
Phaeacian after excellent Laodamas.

And walking with them were Alcinous' three sons :
Laodamas, and Halius, and powerful
Clytoneus. The first competition to win
was the foot-race.

So a starting point and turning-post were measured
and marked, and at once the men flew swiftly, raising
clouds of dust along the level course : and far
the best was Clytoneus, who passed his hopeful
competitors and met the crowd cheering
at the halfway point and turned back : and he
passed over the fresh soil like a bowshot.

Then they competed in the hard art of wrestling :
and here Euryalus defeated all others
and proved himself the superior man :
and Amplialus carried the day in leaping :
and Elatreus was best with the discus :
and the boxing champion was the good king's son,
Laodamas.

Now, with all hearts beating with passion, the king's son
Laodamas spoke out :

“Come now! friends, we must ask this stranger if he knows any games. He *looks* powerfully built, the thighs and calves and arms and powerful neck : he *looks* strong. And he’s still young. But he’s been weakened by many troubles. As I see it, nothing can reduce a man like the sea can, no matter how strong he may be.”

And Euryalus responded to him and said :

“Very well spoken, Laodamas! Why don’t you challenge him, and prove your words?”

When the good son of Alcinous heard this, he walked up to Odysseus, and stood before him, and said :

“Come! honoured stranger : come test your skill in games with us. You *must* know them : for in all the world over a man best shows himself through his own hands and feet. So come! Measure yourself up to us, and forget your troubles for a while. Your trip won’t be put off for long : already a ship and crew await you in the harbour.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“Laodamas, why do you insult me with this? I have already been tested with many trials before this : I have already suffered many sorrows —many ‘tests of skill’. Now I sit with your people at your assembly, yet all the while I think

of returning home, as I pray to your king
and to all of the Phaeacian people.”

So then Euryalus challenged him face to face :

“So the answer is no, stranger? I don’t think you’re
skilled in competition, as most other men hope
to be. I think you’re a man who comes and goes
on freight ships like a bird of prey, or hungry lion,
keeping your eye on trials of profit-making.
You’re no athlete.”

And Odysseus gazed on him darkly, and said :

“Stranger, I think your words are unkind—and reckless.
Don’t you know how Heaven deals out all our gracious
gifts, the grace of our body, our mind, our eloquence?
Some may be modest in beauty, and the god puts
a crown of beauty on their words, and they receive
admiring looks from the people as they speak
mildly, and unflinching; and are distinguished
among the people as they walk through the city
admired as a god. While those as beautiful
as gods may lack that crown of beauty on their words.
And you are distinguished with beauty : and no god
could change it for the better : but your mind is out
of shape. (The anger in my heart is roused to speak
in this unseemly way.) I know your games, though you
think otherwise. Yes, since my youth I have depended
upon my hands. I may have been among the first
of athletes of my age. But now I carry trouble

and torment. I have seen much of the wars of men,
and the hard waves. I have put up with this and so
much, but your words have struck me to the heart : I'll join
your games."

So he stood up in his cloak, and with his strong hand
he picked up a discus larger and heavier
than the others already thrown. And he whirled round
and let the stone go : and the long-oared Phaeacians
ducked as it hummed through the air and soared past the marks
of all the others and came to earth. And a man
came to mark the throw : and it was Athena : and she spoke :

"Stranger! Even a blind man could call you victor!
His fingers would find yours far ahead of the rest—
it is by far the first! Take courage from this contest!
No Phaeacian will throw beyond this—or even
reach it!"

This she said, and long-enduring Odysseus
was glad to find a kind friend among the crowd.
So with lighter heart he eyed the Phaeacians,
and said :

"Now reach that, young men. Or shall I send another
one even farther? If any man wants to box,
or wrestle, or run : let him come and try.
You have made me angry. I'll refuse no challenge
from any Phaeacian—except from Laodamas,
because I am his guest, and who would willingly
fight with his host? Only a thoughtless man challenges

the one who welcomes him as guest in a strange land :
 that's self-ruin. But I'll take anyone else on.
 I'm willing to meet you : and ignore none of you :
 and I'll face off man to man in any contest
 known among men. If you like—hand me a polished
 bow. I am always the first to shoot and strike
 a man in battle, no matter how many warriors
 stand by me and draw their bowstrings. One man only
 surpassed me in the land of the Trojans : master
 bowman Philoctetes, who shot his winged arrows
 with the Achaeans, and his aim was unailing.
 But of all other men on earth who eat the bread
 as we do, I say I am the best. Though I would
 not care to shoot against men of earlier times :
 with Heracles, or Eurytus of Oechalia :
 those men competed with the gods in archery.
 Indeed—for that reason Apollo killed Eurytus
 in his own halls, because the man challenged the god
 to a game with the arrow. Or, if you like, watch
 my spear fly farther than you can shoot an arrow.
 But I can be run past in the foot-race, because
 I *have* been weakened by the waves : my ship was hard
 in all ways, and my limbs are still weak."

Thus he spoke, and all of them had come to silence.

Alcinous alone raised his voice to answer him :

"Stranger—guest, your eloquence before us is well
 received by this assembly. Now you wish to prove
 the merit that comes with you—angry with some man
 or other who stood before you and spoke out without

sound judgment—words which no man of sense would repeat.
 Come now! Hear *my* words, so when you sit in your halls,
 feasting with wife and children, you shall speak of our
 merit, which Zeus gave us from our forefathers'
 times uninterrupted to now. Surely we're not
 faultless in boxing or wrestling, but we run fast,
 and our ships are best. And we show all due honour
 to the feast, and the lyre, and the dance, and garments
 for all occasions, and warm baths, and beds.

Come now!

the best of the dancers among us, let us dance!
 So our guest shall tell his friends at home how far
 superior we are in sailing and in foot-races;
 and in dance; and in the song. And someone go
 swiftly to the palace and bring us the lyre
 that Demodocus has left somewhere in our halls."

At the king's word a servant went to fetch the lyre.
 And nine men, chosen of the people to order
 public assemblies, measured out a wide circle
 for dancing. When the servant returned with the lyre,
 Demodocus moved to the middle of the crowd,
 and strummed his clear-voiced strings as prelude to the song.
 Around him fresh-faced boys in precious youth began
 to dance : and Odysseus soared in heart to see
 agile youth's quick-moving feet dash through the ring :
 as the song began :

"Listen and hear of the secret congress
 of bright-bodied Aphrodite and Ares,

wrinkling the marriage-bed of Hephaestus
shamelessly. But trusted servant Helios
saw their mutual delight, and at once
the tale travelled to lord Hephaestus,
who, hearing this heart-grief, brooded in dark
thought, then slammed an anvil down on the block,
and he hammered chains indestructible,
to keep the pair right where they wanted to be.
The god's fury forged the trap, then he went
home, where his bed stood innocent and neat.
Round the bed-posts he wrapped his subtle net,
so delicate it seemed a spider's art;
such could not so much as be seen, these threads,
even, he hoped, by gods. Up to the rafters
he stretched his chains, this first of artificers,
and spread a cunning web all round the place.
When he was satisfied with this criss-cross,
he made great show of sailing to Lemnos,
the well-built city he favoured above
all other lands. And Ares, whose love
of Cytheria kept him attentive
to her husband's business, saw him depart.
Gladly then he sped swiftly to his sweetheart
and the celebrated artist's bedroom.
Now, the bright-bodied goddess had just come
from her father, mighty Cronos' son,
and had just sat herself down when her love
arrived. He took her by the hand, and spoke:
'Come, love, let us lie together and cheer
each other, for now Hephaestus is far
from here; off, I think, to visit Lemnos

and see the wild-sounding Sintians.’

And bright-bodied Aphrodite welcomed
him close beside her on the marriage-bed,
where they lay together in gentle sleep.

Then did the cunning art of Hephaestus trap
the amorous pair unawares, who learned—too late,
in panic—they could not so much as move
a finger, though wrestled with leg and arm
to break the bonds that clung : but in alarm
they knew they were caught. Then the halting, dire,
heavy tread of the crooked-footed fire
god came close, and closer; and he stood there
looming over them; for he had turned round
before Lemnos, when Helios sent word
of the issue of his watch. So, sad at heart,
bitterly angry Hephaestus sent a shout
up to all the gods, and hear now his part :

‘Father Zeus! and all the gods in happiness
forever, come! and mock this ridiculous
sight (which yet is intolerable to see).

See how the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite,
scorning my misshapen feet, dishonours
me, and instead loves all-destroying Ares!
He is beautiful and healthy in build,
but I was born lame. This I haven’t caused,
but was born this way—my parents share the blame!
(If only they’d never given me life!)

So the gods came to the house of shining brass.
Earthshaking Poseidon came; and Hermes,
bringer of luck; and Apollo, who works
far : but the goddesses stayed in their homes,

mortified. Now the gods, giver of blessings,
at the doorway sent up laughter to rattle
the sky, seeing the art of inventive
Hephaestus, who queried the gods in humour :
'You think they want to lie a little longer?
No. Their desire has fled, but my snare
and my chains will keep them stuck together
until my marriage gifts are given back
to me by her father—given for the sake
of this dogfaced girl!—his heartless daughter.'
So the gods sent sidelong glances hither
and thither; and one, then another, spoke out :
'Evil work does not end well. The patient
seizes the swift;—as this limping artist
now has Ares in his grip, the fastest
of all the blest gods who hold Olympus!
The god of crooked feet has used his wiles
to catch Ares, who now must pay the debt.'
So now the gods held an impromptu court.
Apollo said to Hermes, son of Zeus :
'Wise translator Hermes, would *you* feel nice
to lie in bed by golden Aphrodite,
even if bound in solid chains?' And Hermes
answered : 'Lord Apollo, master archer,
let three times as many bonds hold me there,
and let all the goddesses look on, and still
I say yes, I would sleep by beautiful
Aphrodite.' So he spoke; and laughs again
broke out among the gods. But Poseidon
didn't laugh. Instead, he prayed to crafty
Hephaestus ('in the name of Zeus') to free

Ares, and said : 'Free him and I promise
 that he'll pay all that is due to the gods.'
 And the god of the crooked feet spoke next :
 "Sorry, earthshaker, I will not do that.
 If the slippery Ares refuses
 to pay, where's the virtue in your promise?
 I cannot keep the earthshaker in chains
 until the debt is paid.' And the god of the sea
 said : 'Hephaestus, if Ares chooses to flee,
 and fails to pay, I myself will pay.'
 At last the crooked one had this to say :
 'So be it. To refuse you is unseemly.'
 So mighty Hephaestus released the chains,
 and springing out of bed the two freed ones
 departed at once without even speaking.
 Ares went to Thrace, while laughter-loving
 Aphrodite went to Cyprus; and to Paphos,
 where her home and altar are steeped in fragrance.
 There the Graces bathed her, and anointed
 her skin with glistening oil; and clothed
 her in charming garments, lovely to behold."

This the holy singer sang : delighting Odysseus
 and the long-oared Phaeacians, famed for ship-building.

Then Alcinous requested of Laodamas
 and Halius to dance : for no one equalled them
 in this. So a friend tossed them a fine purple ball,
 a toy made by artful Polybus; and they entered
 the wide ring of youths on the threshold of manhood :
 and one bent back and hurled the ball up to the clouds

fringed in gold : and the other leapt into the air
 and caught the ball before his feet came back to earth.
 When they had demonstrated this skill sufficiently,
 the two began dancing to the well-measured tune
 while passing the ball one to another in frequent
 interchange with graceful good humour in their faces;
 and the other youths clapped their hands and stamped their feet
 in time to the dance : and a mighty noise arose.

And Odysseus remarked to the king :

“Alcinous, most distinguished of men, you boasted
 of the perfection of your dancers—and your word
 is true. Astonishment fixes me as I watch.”

So said Odysseus, and the holy king was happy
 to hear it; and he spoke to the Phaeacians :

“Hear me, Phaeacian leaders and ministers!
 I think this stranger who has come to us is blest
 with wisdom, and with virtue. Come now! Let us give
 him gifts, to show how much we value his friendship!
 I ask the twelve princes of our land, with whom I
 stand as thirteenth, to each contribute a fresh cloak
 and tunic, and also a measure of pure gold,
 so that our guest shall go to his supper with his arms
 full, and happy at heart. As for Euryalus—
 he must make amends, for he spoke not one word right.”

This, then, was the king’s command : and all praised his word :
 and each sent a servant to return with the gifts.

And Euryalus spoke :

“Alcinous, good king, wisest of men, I shall make
amends to the stranger, as you ask. I give him
my sword : all of bronze, with silver shaft, and scabbard
of ivory carved all round. It shall satisfy him.”

And Odysseus took the silver-studded sword
into his hands while the young man addressed him :

“Good stranger, I wish you good fortune. If any
ungraceful words were spoken, may the winds carry
them away. And may the gods give you your homeland
and wife, and an end to your long suffering far
from your friends.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“Great good fortune to you, too, friend. May the gods grant
you many blessings; and may you never miss this
sword, which you have given me with words well spoken.”

So saying, Odysseus put the silver-studded
sword round his shoulders. By sundown all the fine gifts
had been brought to the shining palace of Alcinous,
where his noble sons had received them, and placed them,
all the beautiful gifts, before their honoured mother.
And the holy and strong Alcinous led the way
back to the palace : and the princes came into
the Hall : and together they sat on high and beautiful chairs.

And mighty Alcinous spoke to Arete :

“Most lovely queen, have a beautiful chest, our best,
be brought here : and in with the gifts of others place
a fresh cloak and tunic, as your own gift : and warm
for him a cauldron on the fire, and have the water
hot : and after our guest has bathed, and has seen all
the gifts offered him by the noble Phaeacians,
he shall enjoy the feast and our melodious songs.
I shall give him this gold cup (admire its fine art!),
so that in days to come he shall remember us,
as he pours in his halls to Zeus, and all the gods.”

Thus he spoke : and with a word to her handmaidens
Arete had a large cauldron set upon a fire
at once : and they poured water into the cauldron
set upon the blazing fire : and added wood
to the all-consuming flames. The fire flickered
busily around the belly of the cauldron :
meanwhile Arete chose a very beautiful
chest from the inmost rooms, and she filled it neatly
with her guest’s beautiful gifts, the garments and gold,
which the Phaeacians had given him. And in
with the other gifts she placed a fresh cloak and tunic.

And she spoke to him :

“Wrap this string around it, and tie it tight, so no
one shall get up to any mischief with your gifts,
when you lie down in sweet sleep on the painted ship.”

And when good Odysseus heard this, he wrapped the string
tight around the chest, and worked an intricate knot
(an artfulness that the queen Circe had taught him).
Then the mistress of the palace invited him
to the bath : and he welcomed the sight of the hot
bath, glad at heart at all this : the first such care since
Calypso's cave, she of the beautiful braids, where
he had been cared for continuously as a god.

Now when the handmaidens had bathed him and rubbed oil
onto his body, and had draped him in tunic
and beautiful cloak, he stepped from the bath, and went
through the palace to the men seated at their wine.
And Nausicaä, beautiful as a goddess,
stood by the doorway of the vast Hall : and the girl's
eyes widened as she looked upon Odysseus :
and she spoke to him :

"Goodbye, stranger. Remember me when you are safe
at home. I saved your life : we are bound together
always."

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered her :

"Nausicaä, great-hearted daughter of Alcinous,
it shall be so always—if loud-thundering Zeus,
Hera's husband, allows me to get to my home.
If so, I shall pray to you ever and always :
for it was you, young woman, who gave me my life."

So he said this, then took his seat beside the king.
 And now they were serving the portions, and mixing
 the wine. And a servant brought the godly singer
 Demodocus, whom the people revered : and he
 was sat in a chair in the middle of the guests,
 by a high pillar. And Odysseus cut off
 a portion of the best piece of a white-tusked boar,
 and handed it, the succulent meat rich with fat,
 to a servant : and subtle Odysseus said :

“Good sir, take this piece to Demodocus, for him
 to eat. I salute him well, though his songs are sad.
 Our poets win honour and respect all over
 the earth : for the Muse has given them ways to all sights :
 and loves them.”

This he said. So the servant brought the portion and put
 it into the hands of godly Demodocus :
 and the poet was happy at heart to receive it.

And they reached for the many gifts set before them
 and when they were satisfied with the food and drink

then subtle Odysseus spoke to Demodocus :

“Demodocus, I call you far the best among us.
 The Muse loves you; and Apollo, who knows all time :
 for you sing well and exactly of the fate
 the Achaeans suffered, all that miserable
 effort, as if you’d been there yourself, or heard it
 from someone who was. Come now! Pass over and sing

of the handicraft of the wooden horse, which Epeius
 built with Athena. This horse, full with Odysseus
 and his warriors, was rolled up to the walls of Troy :
 and the men hidden inside came out and destroyed
 the city. If you sing this rightly, I will praise
 your name among men, and say the gods have given you
 power in inspiring song.”

So said good Odysseus, and Demodocus,
 blest by the gods, saw, and began his song, taking
 up the story in this way :

“Safe one night inside their lofty city walls,
 the Trojans saw the Greek camp all aflame,
 and saw the Greek ships depart on the waves :
 but in concealment lay Odysseus
 with his warriors within the wooden horse.

Now the Trojans rolled the horse to the walls
 of the city : and stood round it : and spoke
 long about it, yet stood undecided.

Of three possible plans, one must be deemed
 best : to split the hollow wood with sharp sword;
 or to push it from the heights down to break
 upon the rocks; or to leave it standing
 for the gods as a pious offering.

And a pious offering it would be.

Their fate was to be obliterated
 when their walls took in the lofty wooden horse,
 wherein sat waiting all the best Argive
 warriors, bringing to the Trojans red

slaughter and fate, when they poured from the horse,
 forth from its hollow, and destroyed the city.

And Odysseus, moving like Ares,
 went forth with the godlike Menelaus
 to the house of mighty Deiphobus.

There, it is said, was a grim and bloody
 battle, and Odysseus emerged victorious,
 with Athena the shining-eyed goddess."

This song the poet of many visions sang.

And Odysseus was overcome : many tears
 streamed down his face from his far-away eyes.
 Such a weeping recalled the sight of a woman
 who, wailing, drops to her beloved husband,
 who has fallen before the eyes of his people
 and city, after fighting against the cruel day
 to protect his city, and his children : and as
 she sees him gasping, and struggling to resist death,
 which is coming, she embraces him and shrieks high :
 while the enemy batters her back and shoulders
 with the spear's wooden shaft : and as she is taken
 away to a lifetime of servitude and sorrow,
 her face is most pitifully consumed with grief.

So Odysseus' pitiful sorrow fell
 in drops from beneath his brows, but the only man
 to notice was Alcinous, who sat beside him,
 and heard his heavy sighs, and understood.

So at once the king spoke to the Phaeacians :

“Hear me, Phaeacian leaders and ministers!

Demodocus, hush your melodious lyre :

beauty may not soothe all alike. Since the holy
poet began his song, our guest has been sighing
and weeping : a great grief has gripped his heart.

Come now! That shall cease : and now we shall all enjoy
ourselves : ourselves, *and* our guest! Indeed, what we see
here is *for* our honoured guest : this joyous farewell
and the gifts we give him are tokens of our love
and respect. Even a man who touches wisdom
only lightly knows enough to treat a stranger
and suppliant as a brother. Guest, you see our
kindness, so cover your clever thoughts no longer.
Hear now what I shall ask you, and for you to answer
is of advantage to all :

Tell us the name your mother and father call you
there where you live, in town and country. For no
man on earth is nameless, whether good or terrible,
but when he is born his parents give him a name.

Tell us of your homeland, your people, and your city :
so that we may aim the minds of our ships : for ships
built by Phaeacians require no steersmen
such that other ships require, nor any oar either :
our ships understand the mind of men : and know all
places, and the fertile fields of all peoples : and cross
the sea concealed in mist : and have no fear of ruin
and death. But this story I heard from my father
Nausithous, who said Poseidon was angry
with us, because of our power to move asea

utterly safely. Someday, he told me, a well-
 built Phaeacian ship, coming back from a mission,
 will shatter apart on the misty sea,
 and a mountain of water will crush our city.
 This is what my old father told me : but if it
 comes to be, or remains undone, whatever happens
 is at the pleasure of the god.

But come now! Speak

to me truly! Describe for us your wanderings :
 what places you saw, and people, and lofty cities.
 Tell us of the wild and savage ones, those who live
 without reason : and also of those who respect strangers,
 and bear in mind a fear of god. And why these tears
 when you hear of the fate of the shining Argives
 and of Troy? This the gods prepared, and spun the thread
 of destiny down to this time, so that we might
 hear of it in song. Perhaps a relation of yours
 fell at Troy? A good nephew, or father-in-law?
 Perhaps one close to your family whom you'll never
 know? Or maybe a friend, someone agreeable to know?
 Close as a brother is a friend with an understanding heart."

End of Book VIII

Book IX

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him:

“Alcinous, most just, and wise teacher of all men,
 it soothes me to know the beauty of this poet :
 his songs are equivalent to voices of gods.
 I say the most charming perfection there is, is
 all this good cheer bringing the people together :
 all the guests in the halls, sitting at well-ordered
 tables, with bread and meat : and the pourer of wine
 dips into the bowl and carries it round to each cup :
 and all the while everyone is charmed by song.
 To my mind this is the most wonderful blessing.

Your heart inclines to ask of my cares that cause me
 many sighs. What shall I say first? (For the sky gods
 have given me many troubles from first to last :
 and my sighs, I think, are not yet done.) I shall tell
 you my name, and then you will know : and if in time
 to come I prevail over pitiless day,
 you will be *my* guest in *my* home, still far away.

I am Odysseus, the son of Laertes.

The gods consider me clever enough to pay
 me much mind : my glorious fame reaches Heaven.

I live in Ithaca : an island seen from far out
 on the sea. There is a mountain there called Neion
 that quivers constantly with leaves : and is seen all
 over : and all round are islands close by one another :

Dulichium and Sáme and wooded Zakynthos.
 It lies spread out and low on the sea, and closer
 than the others to the west : the others lie towards
 the Dawn and the sun. The ground is rough, but a good
 nurse of youth. There would be nothing finer for me
 than to see this land again. But there was a goddess,
 Calypso, who kept me in her deep caves. Circe,
 too, the subtle one of Aeaea, held me in her
 Halls. Each wanted me as husband : but neither could
 persuade the heart within me. As I say, nothing
 is sweeter to a man than his home, where his parents are :
 home is preferable to wealth in a strange land,
 far from one's father and mother.

But come now!

I will tell you of my many troubles on the way
 home from Troy, which Zeus dropped on me, and on my men.
 From Ilium the winds carried us and brought us
 to the Ciconians—to Ismarus. They'd fought
 as spearmen for the Trojans against us. So we
 obliterated the city. We destroyed all the men,
 and took their wives and their considerable wealth,
 and divided both among us : and I ensured
 that none of my men went away without his fair share.
 Then came great idiocy. I gave the order
 to flee at once, but my men would not obey me :
 instead, they chose to drink their wine, and to slaughter
 the sheep and the twist-horned cattle by the seashore.

While this was happening among us, our enemy
 called to their neighbours, a huge force of superior
 warriors : men living inland, and skilled in fighting

from chariots : and good fighters on foot as well,
 when the battle demanded it. So, as leaves and flowers
 spread thick in their season, so in the dew of early
 morning the terrible goddess of fate appeared
 in the shape of soldiers in full battle array,
 sent from Zeus to give us much hardship to suffer.
 We found ourselves in combat beside our swift ships,
 with spears flying in both directions—and they threw
 bronze-tipped spears as we did. So all this went on till
 the sun reached its summit. We kept pushing them back
 —though they were larger in number—until dusk :
 then the battle turned, and they overpowered us.
 Seventy-two of my men were killed : but the rest
 of us fled : and escaped death and fate.

So we sailed on :

glad, yet in grief. We had escaped death, but had lost
 many friends doing so. (And we did not sail on
 till all of us had cried out three times for the men
 cut down miserably on the Ciconian plain.)

Then Zeus swelled the North Wind into a cataclysmic
 storm. Both land and sea became lost in cloud : and night
 dropped from heaven. The wind drove our ships sidewise
 across the sea, and tore our sails to pieces.

So we lowered what sails we had left and rowed
 strenuously for the mainland, waiting for death.

There for two days and nights we waited, our hearts
 eaten up with pain and fatigue. But on day three
 beautiful Dawn came : so we set our masts in place
 and raised the white sails, and the steersmen guided

us back out.

And by this time I should be at home.

But when we were rounding Malea, the North Wind rushed us off our track again : and the rippling waves drove us away from Cythera—though I had planned to pass between the cape and the island—and we were put into the open sea.

So nine more days

of hard winds pushed us over the monstrous deep : and on the tenth we found the land of Λωτοφάγοι—the Lotus-Eaters. They eat a flowery fruit that charms both mind and body. So we went ashore, found fresh water to drink; then my crew ate a meal by the ships. When all were feeling fit again, I sent two men out to learn of the people living there, with a third as leader. So they went among the Lotus-Eaters : and the Lotus-Eaters had no plan to destroy us. Instead, they gave my men the lotus to eat. And all who eat the lotus, a honey-sweet fruit, lose all desire to send word or to return : but there they wish to lie, with the lotus, and with the Lotus-Eaters : with no more thought of return. These men I forced back into the ships : and while they thrashed in tears we dragged them to the benches and bound them to the oars : and I urged my faithful men to launch our ships before any other man ate of the lotus : and forget all thought of return. So they swiftly boarded their ships and manned the benches, and rowing

pace for pace, our ships turned the grey deep white
while we struck with our oars.

So we sailed on,
facing trouble everywhere : and we found the land
of the Cyclopes. Tall creatures ὑπερφίαλος—
hyper-demanding : yet lawless. They put their trust
in the generosity of the gods and plant
nothing with their hands : nor have the plough. From untilled
soil spring their wheat and barley : and their grape-vines
prosper without their help : Zeus makes everything grow
for them with his rain. They do not meet in assembly,
nor collectively follow established law.
They live apart from one another on the peaks
of high mountains : and make their homes in hollow caves.
Each one is law-maker to his children and wives :
and each one cares nothing for his neighbour.

Now an island of rich soil lay outside the harbour :
neither too close to the Cyclopiian land, nor
too far : a long wooded island swarming with wild
goats. They stand without fear when men step past,
for hunters have never come to this place
(though hunters are accustomed to adversity :
in forests, and rambling the summits of mountains).
The soil lies uncultivated, knowing nothing
of men, and feeds only the bleating goats.
The Cyclopes have no red ships floating by their shores,
because the Cyclopes lack knowledge of ship-building.
They don't travel between cities, as other men
sail the sea on well-benched ships to one another.

No one knows of them, so no one comes to this place :
and that rich soil remains unbroken by man.
Yet season by season this island could produce
all the wealth of the earth. There are grassy meadows
all along the shores of the grey sea : well-watered,
and wondrous soft. The grape vine would grow excellently
there. And if they knew of the plough, the level land
there would yield boundless harvests, for the rich soil
is deep. And the harbour is good, and requires
neither stern-cable nor anchor : a man can easily
beach his ship and wait till the wind blows fair again.
But no one knows this place, so no one yet had come.

At the mouth of the harbour a spring of sparkling
water gushes out of a cave : and all round
stand black poplars. We sailed in, and lost the light
of the moon. A deep fog surrounded us. But some
god led us onward, as we could not see a thing.
Cautiously we moved through the cloudy night, aiming
towards the sound of the searurf crashing on the shore.
And though no eyes could see, our ships slid up the shore,
and we beached our ships along the long-rolling waves.
We lowered sail and went out onto the beach,
and there we fell asleep, waiting for heavenly Dawn.

Early-born rosy-fingered Dawn came (as they say),
and we roamed the island : and marvelled. And the nymphs,
the daughters of Zeus the Orderer, stirred the goats
up into wild excitement, so that my crew
might have a meal. Straightaway we brought from our ships
our curved bows and long hunting-spears : and in three groups

we set off on the hunt : and the god granted us
 an agreeable chase. Twelve ships sailed with me,
 and we divided up over one hundred wild goats.

So all day until the sun went down we feasted,
 and drank our sweet wine. (And we had plenty of it :
 each of my ships carried many amphorae of red wine
 from the destroyed Ciconians, and my crewmen
 hadn't yet run through it all.) But all the while
 we watched the land of the Cyclopes across the way :
 we saw smoke, and heard something like voices, and sheep,
 and goats. Then when the sun went down and darkness came,
 we slept by the surf of the sea. And then at Dawn
 I gathered my men together and spoke to them :

'Crewmen, hold position here, while I, with my ship,
 and a few more men, go sound out these people :
 whether they be wild and insolent and unjust,
 or respectful of strangers, and fearing God in heart.'

So then I went aboard my ship : and my men came
 with me and untied the stern-cables from the stones,
 then came aboard : arranged themselves on the benches :
 and in orderly array they struck the sea with the oars.
 As we closed in on the place we spotted a cave
 in a high cliff overlooking the sea. Inside
 there slept a monstrous thing. Something all alone,
 tending his flocks far off from others, whom he cared
 nothing for : and he lived to no law but his own.
 In truth he was wondrously made : not typical
 in size, but enormous : like a high woody peak

of a mountain that stands alone.

When we reached land,

I had my crew guard the ship while I and my twelve best men went on ahead. I carried a skin of sweet dark wine, which Maro had given to me—the son of Euanthes, a priest of Apollo, the god who protected Ismarus. When we flattened the city we let him live, with his wife and child, out of respect : because we wouldn't sack a grove sacred to Healer Apollo. So the holy priest gave me many gifts : seven measures of pure gold : a silver mixing-bowl : and he filled twelve amphorae with an unmixed wine he concealed from his slaves and handmaids in his home : only his wife and one housekeeper knew of it. He poured a cup for me and mixed in twenty measures of water, and still a fragrance rose from the cup that would delight gods : no man could stop himself from tasting such sweetness.

So I carried this wine with me in a large skin, and also some provisions in a leather bag : and when we reached the summit of the high cliff I wondered if these things would work against something savage, without justice or law.

We came to the cave

overlooking the deep. Many flocks of sheep and goats were dozing by its opening. All round were tall pines and oaks; and shaded within them was an open space, with stones set firm in the earth—like a courtyard,

leading to the cave.

It turned out he wasn't there,
but was off feeding his fatted sheep in the fields.
So we went into the cave to have a look at things.
There were baskets overloaded with cheese, and pens
crowded with lambs and baby goats. The flocks were kept
separate from one another : the newborn lambs
by themselves; the younglings by themselves; and then
by themselves the yearlings. And there were all kinds
of pails and bowls he milked into, and they were full
of whey. So my men urged me—in a whisper—to take
the cheeses back with us, then let the goats and lambs
out of their pens and drive them quickly to our ships
and sail away over the salt sea. But I did not
listen—though, in hindsight, all that would have been better.
I wanted to wait and see if we would receive
the hospitality due to strangers. As it
turned out, my men did not welcome his appearance.

So this is what happened : we kindled a fire
and feasted on his cheese (offering to the gods
first), and waited for him to return. He came back
with a massive weight of dry firewood in his arms,
and when he threw it on the floor the sound of it
was deafening. We stood wide-eyed in amazement,
then crept back to the farthest corner of the cave,
and watched.

He drove his flocks into the huge hollow of his home,
all the ones he intended to milk. He left the males—

the rams and the he-goats—outside in the courtyard.
 Then he rolled a huge door-stone in place, sealing us in.
 This stone was so heavy that twenty-two four-wheeled
 wagons, no matter how well made, wouldn't move it
 at all—and this heavy stone now blocked our way out.

Then he sat down and milked his sheep and bleating goats,
 all in due time, then placed the newborns under each one.
 We watched him curdle half the white milk, then pour it
 into wicker baskets and store it all away.
 The other half he poured into pails to drink
 with his supper. We kept silent while he moved
 busily through his tasks : yet when he lit his fire
 he turned to us and asked :

'Strangers, who are you? Why are you sailing the sea?
 Are you traders? Maybe you wander with the wind,
 as pirates, who roam the wide sea risking their lives
 to bring evil to peoples of foreign places?'

This he asked us, and our hearts froze in terror.
 His voice was powerfully deep and made us shudder.
 Yet I managed to speak, and said :

'We are Achaeans.

Leaving Troy we were driven off our way by every
 wind that blows over the dark sea; so now, at Zeus'
 pleasure, we're following a wandering way home.
 We are men of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
 whose fame is greatest under heaven, now that he
 has reduced to dust so great a city and so many

people. But to you we come on our knees, in hope
of hospitality, and only what strangers
reasonably expect. O most powerful one,
do you fear heaven? We are suppliants, and Zeus
avenges suppliants and strangers. Zeus protects
the rights of hospitality : and he has it
that strangers should be respected.'

So I said this,
and he straightaway answered with pitiless heart :

'You, stranger, are a nothing, a little man. You know
nothing of where you have come, if you think I will
fear your gods. What do the Cyclopes care for your Zeus?
We are happier than all of those "blessed gods"
because we're better and stronger. I might spare your
life, or those of your friends, but not from fear of Zeus :
but simply if I choose to. Tell me where you put
your ship when you came here. Is your ship tied to land,
or floating out at sea? Tell me—I want to know.'

He said this, trying to draw me out—a silly
attempt. So I answered him back deceitfully :

'Earthshaking Poseidon pushed our ship to your land
and the wind threw us onto the rocks of your shore
and our ship shattered into pieces. I alone,
and these men, survived the sea.'

I said this, but he
did not answer me. Instead, he flung out his arm

and grabbed two of my men at once and smashed them
—helpless as puppies—against the ground. Their brains gushed
out of their cracked heads and soaked into the soil.
He tore off all their limbs, and prepared his supper,
then ate everything, like a lion in the wild,
flesh and entrails, leaving nothing behind.
Hearing the crunch of the bones we sent up a cry
to Zeus, and lifted our hands; and we felt helpless.
Finally, when the Cyclops had filled his huge belly
with human flesh, and had washed it all down with milk,
he lay down in his cave in the midst of his sheep,
and fell asleep.

And I drew my sword from my side :
and I went nearer to him : and I felt for the place
where his body held his liver : and I prepared
to run it through with my sharp sword : but a second
thought held me back, and I gave up the plan.
We would go to ruin with him : for we would never
have been able to move that tremendous door-stone.
So with many sighs we waited for Dawn to come.

When Dawn the child of morning came, he kindled
a fire; and milked his bleating flocks, all in due time,
then placed the newborns under each one. Busily
he moved through his tasks, then he grabbed two men at once
and prepared his meal. When he had eaten his meal,
he drove his fat flocks from the cave, effortlessly
rolling aside the door-stone : and then he rolled it
back again, sealing us in. We heard him whistling
to his flocks, leading them away to the mountain :

and I was left to plan how to get my revenge,
if Athena might allow me victory.

So this was the best plan in my mind : the Cyclops
kept a huge stick by the sheep-pen : green olive-wood
he meant to use as a walking stick when it was dry.
As we looked we thought it a mast for a twenty-oared
ship : large enough to bring the ship across the deep
sea, so massive a shape it was to look upon.
I went to this stick and cut off a length as long
as the span of my outstretched arms. I told my men
to taper one end of it. So they smoothed it out :
then I sharpened it to a point : and hardened it
in the fire.

When this was done, and our weapon
was hidden under one of the many piles
of dung heaped up and down the cave, I instructed
my men to pitch pebbles to select who would dare
lift the spear and plunge it in his eye. And as luck
had it, the four chosen were those I'd have chosen :
and I counted myself in as fifth.

He returned
at dusk, herding his woolly flocks, and drove his fat
flocks straight into the cave, every last animal,
leaving none in the courtyard outside, as if from
some foreboding or suspicion : or because some god
made it happen. Then he rolled the heavy door-stone
in place, sealing us in. Then he sat down and milked

his sheep and bleating goats, all in due time, then placed the newborns under each one. Busily he moved through his tasks, then he grabbed two men at once and prepared his meal.

And then I came near to the Cyclops : and I spoke :
holding up for him a cup of ivy-wood,
full of dark wine.

‘Cyclops! Drink this wine after your meal of human flesh, so you will know what sort of drink our ship brought. I present this to you as a holy offering. I hope you will show mercy on us and let us leave for home.’

So he took the cup out of my hands
and drank it dry : and was very happy with it :
and demanded a second cup of the sweet drink :

‘Kindly give me more, and tell me your name, quickly now, and maybe I’ll give you a present, too, to make you glad. The grain-giving earth gives the Cyclopes grapes for wine : and Zeus’ rain makes them grow—but *this* is like a drop of ambrosia and nectar in one!’

Thus he spoke, and I poured him more of the red wine. Three cups in all he drank in his folly : and when I saw him witless from the wine, then with mild

words I spoke to him :

‘Cyclops, you ask me my famous name : and now I shall tell you : and give us a guest-present as you have promised. My name is No-Man. To my mother and father and to all others I have always been No-Man.’

So I spoke, and he straightaway answered with pitiless heart :

‘No-Man, I’ll eat all of your friends first, and you I will eat last : and this shall be your “guest-present”.’

As he said this he sank back and fell to the ground. He lay there with his thick neck bent backwards, and sleep, the all-subduer, took hold of him. From his throat he vomited out scraps of human flesh and wine : the sleeper was very drunk. Then I drove the spear into the ashes of the fire, until it grew hot : and I encouraged my men with strong words, so none would hesitate at the final point. And when fire was about to ignite the olive-wood, green though it was, I drew it from the fire and it glowed red-hot and horrible : and my friends came round me, and a god breathed great courage into all of us. They took the spear of olive-wood, sharp at the point, and plunged it into his eye : and I up above forced it round and round : as when a workman drills through a plank of ship-timber, and his mates underneath keep it spinning with their leather straps,

and the drill runs continuously, for as long
as they like : just so we took the fiery-pointed
spear and whirled it in his eye : and hot blood flowed out
and around it : and his eyelid and eyelashes
were singed by the flames when the eyeball burst :
and our fire burned to the root. And as a man
making a battle-axe dips it in cold water
and a great hiss rises as the iron gathers
strength : so his eye hissed round the spear of olive-wood.
His horrible cry filled the hollow of the cave.
We retreated in terror : and watched him pull out
the spear, wet with dripping blood, from his eye-socket.
He flung it away, his arms frantic : and he shouted
to the Cyclopes living round him on the windy
peaks : and they heard and came quickly from all around.

Standing by the cave they asked about the trouble :

‘What is it, Polyphemus, that makes you cry out
in the terrible night and wake us up? Is some
little man actually trying to steal your flocks?
Is some little man killing you through trickery?’

Then from inside the cave came answer from mighty
Polyphemus :

‘No-Man is tricking me! No-Man is killing me!’

And they answered him back :

'If no man is beating you, then you must be ill.
If Zeus has brought you sickness in your loneliness,
we cannot help you. You must pray to our father,
master Poseidon.'

Thus they spoke, and went away.

And I laughed at heart that my name had deceived them,
and that my plan had worked perfectly. And the Cyclops,
moaning and writhing, in agonies of anguish,
groped with his hands till his fingers found the door-stone,
and he lifted it up and away : then he sat
in the doorway with arms spread wide, hoping to catch
anyone leaving with his sheep. This hope of his
to catch me was idiotic. So I thought on
how my men and I might get past him : and many
plans went through my head. I wove many tricks and ways
quickly, as our lives depended on an idea :
for we still had tremendous danger before us.
To my mind the following appeared the best plan.
There were many fat and thick-fleeced rams around us,
well-grown and very beautiful, with wool the colour
of violets. These sheep I tied together quietly,
using the willow twigs the Cyclops normally
slept on—that godless monster's bed. I took three sheep
at a time : and tied a man under the middle one :
and the one on either side covered him further.
In this way I saved my friends : each pack of three sheep
held a man. As for me—there was a ram far finer
than the others : I seized him by the back, then curled
myself under his woolly belly and held on
with my hands to the marvellously thick fleece,

having twisted myself into it : and I hung on
firmly, with patient heart. So then with many sighs
we waited for the Dawn.

When bright Dawn came,
the males of the flocks hurried to pasture, while
the females bleated by the pens, their udders
bursting with milk. And their lord and master,
broken by heavy pain, ran his hands all over
the backs of his sheep as they rose to a stand :
but the idiot didn't notice my men fastened
under the bellies of the woolly sheep.

The last of the flock to go towards the door
was the ram weighed down by his lavish fleece
and my shrewd self. I listened as Polyphemus
ran his hands all over his back and spoke :

'Good ram, why are you leaving the cave last?
You never let yourself get outdistanced by sheep.
You always lead the way to the soft grass
of the meadows with your quick steps, always the first
to reach the rushing river; and the first eager
to return to the stalls in the evening. But now
you're last of all. Are you sad for the eye
of your master? Blinded by an evil man
and his miserable friends, who conquered my mind
with wine. No-Man. He has not escaped his death yet.
If we agreed in mind and speech you would tell me
where that person is prowling around, hiding
from my power—then his brains would shatter all over
the cave, and pour onto the ground : and then my heart

would rest easier from the evil given to me
by the nothing No-Man.'

So saying, he sent the ram
out. And the sheep walked a little way from the cave,
then I came out from under the ram and set my
friends free. Quickly we gathered the long-legged flock
and drove them on—often turning our heads around—
until we came to the ship. The crew greeted us
joyfully : then wept for the men the monster had killed.
But I threw back my head to silence the men :
and gave each a hard look : then ordered them to get
the sheep aboard and set sail on the salt water.
So every man came aboard and sat on the benches,
and rowing pace for pace struck the sea with the oars.
And when we were about as far from shore
as a man's shout can travel, I called to the Cyclops
with heart-stinging words :

'Cyclops, that little man was not so little after all—
as you see! You monstrously ate his friends in your cave!
And now your evil work comes back on you,
to the uttermost! Hard-hearted horror!
You nothing! You did not show us proper respect!
Eating up your own guests in your house!
Now how does it feel to know the vengeance of Zeus?'

I said that : and I made him very, very angry.
He broke off a mountaintop and tossed it at us :
a big peak passing by our heads : just missing us :
it splashed beyond our dark-prowed ship and sent water

surging back towards the shore, carrying our ship
 on the deep-rushing wave : and I urged the men
 to lay to their handles : and I poled the ship off
 the rocks while the men struck the sea with the oars.
 When we had escaped with our lives and were nearly
 out of range, I meant to address the Cyclops again,
 but my men from all sides stopped me with sensible words :

‘Madman, why provoke this savage thing’s anger any further?
 Who just now tossed a mountaintop into the sea
 which brought the ship landward and almost killed us!
 If he had heard another voice, even a sound,
 he would have hammered us to timbers with huge rocks,
 so powerful is his throw.’

This my friends said to me,
 but I would not be stopped.

I shouted out in anger :

‘Cyclops, if any man asks of your ugly eye,
 tell them Odysseus, destroyer of cities,
 blinded it ! Laertes’ son, whose home is Ithaca !’

I said that : and he cried out, in pain or in grief,
 and answered :

‘ὦ πόποι ! Some old words are coming back to me!
 There was a seer, a good man, a mighty man,
 Telemus, son of Eurymus. He saw furthest :
 and lived his life and grew old among the Cyclopes.

Long ago he told me I would see something
 taken from me by the hands of Odd - eye - zeus. . . .
 I have waited all this time for a tremendous
 and terrible monster, clothed in power, to come here :
 but a little nothing of a man has blinded me!
 Through trickery : with wine.
 But come now! Odysseus! I have "guest-presents" for you!
 May the Earthshaker himself give you a "present"!
 I am his son! He boasts to all that he is my father!
 He will cure me! Not any of those other gods,
 or men!'

This he said, and I answered :

'You're more likely to be killed by me than cured by *him*!'

I said that, and he stretched out his hands to heaven
 and prayed to master Poseidon :

'Hear me,

Poseidon, dark-haired earth-mover : if I truly
 am your son, and you truly are my father,
 then may Odysseus—"destroyer of cities",
 "Laertes' son", "whose home is Ithaca"—*never*
 reach his home and homeland! But—if fate commands
 that he see his friends and return to his homeland,
 may the time be long before this is so : and may
 all of his crewmen be lost with his ship : and may
 he find misery in his house!'

End of Book IX

Book X

And so then we came to an ice island floating
 on the sea, the home of air-filling Aeolus,
 son of Hippotes, and Caretaker of the Winds.
 A wall of indestructible bronze surrounded
 the high island rising glimmering from the deep.
 The Aeolian palace moaned with strange noises
 heard while still asea : and the white island rattled.

His twelve children lived with Aeolus in his halls :
 six daughters, and six vigorous sons : so he gave
 his daughters in wedlock to his sons. These children,
 thus, beside their noble father and dear mother,
 feasted through all their days in infinite comfort.
 The steam of holy sacrifice scented their halls :
 and their glad voices carried into the courtyard
 all their days. And at night they slept by their honoured
 wives in canopy beds behind curtains.

So we came

to his city and palace, and he welcomed us
 for a month : and he asked me most every question
 about Troy and the Argive ships and the return
 of the Achaeans : and I told him all in order,
 and at length. Then I asked him if I could go.
 He refused me nothing, and prepared my sending.

And he gave me a skin-bag of a full-grown ox
 he had flayed : and inside he bundled howling winds :
 for Zeus gave him permission to manage the winds.

At the will of Aeolus the winds cease—or rise.
 And he bundled them with a fine silver cord
 so that not even the slightest breath of a wind
 might escape. Then he sent out the West Wind to blow,
 to carry our ship forward. But it was not to be :
 because we were lost through our own idiocy.

We sailed the sea for nine days and for nine nights :
 and on the tenth day we saw our homeland. We came
 so close we saw kind fires burning among the fields.
 By then I was drained, for I had handled the sheet
 myself the entire time, and had let no crewman
 touch it : and we made it home as fast as possible.
 So as we came close, I closed my eyes, and sweet sleep
 took me. And my crewmen began to talk to one
 another : and eventually they told one
 another I was bringing gold and silver home
 from great-hearted Aeolus. So one said to the next :

‘ὦ πόποι ! All the honour and respect this man
 receives wherever he goes—city or country!
 He brings many beautiful treasures from the land
 of Troy, *his* share of the takings. We, however,
 went the same way as he, yet *we* come back
 carrying empty hands. And now he’s received more
 love—from Aeolus! Come! Let us see how much gold
 and silver is in the bag.’

So they spoke, and idiocy carried the day :
 they loosened the cord around the bag and the winds
 all rushed out. So they watched, weeping, as the stormwinds

whisked the ship away from our homeland, and flung us
back into the open sea. When I awoke I wondered
whether I should leap from the ship into the deep
sea and die;—or endure (in silence) with the living.
I chose to endure : and lying there, I covered
my head with a blanket while the evil winds
brought us back to the Aeolian island :
and my crewmen sighed.

We went ashore and found water; then my crew ate
a meal by the ships. And when we were satisfied
with the food and drink I took two crewmen with me
and we returned to the palace of Aeolus.

We found him and his wife and family at the feast.
When we sat down in the doorway they gazed at us
in wonder, and asked us :

‘Why are you here, Odysseus? Which god punishes you?
We prepared your journey carefully, so that you
might reach your homeland and your home, or wherever
else you wished.’

This they said : and sick at heart I answered :

‘My brainless crew worked evil on me as I slept.
Cure this, most exalted friends, for you have the power.’

I said this, placing my words gently : then they sat
without a sound. And so their father answered me :

‘Away with you, imbeciles! Get off my island!

It's unsuitable for me to help a man hated
by the high-throned gods. Away with you, since you
come here hated by the gods!

This he said to us.

And, sighing deeply, we withdrew from the palace.

So we sailed on, troubled at heart. And the men
pulled the oars discouraged with their wearisome work
and their own idiocy, since now no wind blew
to speed us home. We sailed the sea for six days
and for six nights : and on the seventh dusk we came
to the Laestrygonian town of Telepylos.

The nights are short there. A flock is no sooner driven
in for milking than another is brought out to feed.
A man needing little sleep could earn double wages :
tending the cattle, and then the sheep : for the dawns
meet closely there.

So we sailed into the splendid harbour. Before
us rocky heights ran all the way round the water
to a narrow mouth : and we brought our ships through :
and moored in the hollow harbour in close order :
for there were no waves there : just bright sparkling calm.
I alone kept my black ship outside. At the far
edge of land I tied my stern-cables to the rocks,
then followed a dusty walk up to a summit
of a high hill to find a prospect of the land.
From there I saw no cattle, nor men, nor worked soil :
only smoke fumes rising from the earth.

I sent three men to go see what was what.
So they went ashore : and followed old wagon ruts :
and met a girl drawing water at a fountain
outside of town. She was the daughter of mighty-
boned Antiphates, and had come to carry back
the beautifully flowing Artacian spring
water that the Laestrygonians enjoyed.
They asked her where they were, and who was king there,
and she led them to the house of her father.
When they entered the high-roofed house they met his wife
and stood numb with terror. She was an awful sight :
large as a mountain, with ugly eyes peering down.
She cried out, and glorious King Antiphates,
her husband, burst in, bringing terrible ruin.
He seized one of my men and prepared to eat him
while the other two fled and rushed back to the ships.
The king roused the mighty-boned Laestrygonians,
who came in a terrible multitude from all over,
looking not like men, but like the monstrous Giants.
And from the rocky heights running round us
the Laestrygonians threw down boulders larger
than a man could lift : so then came the clamour
of the crush of ships shattering one by another,
and the cries of my men while they were speared through
like fish and plucked from the water, and taken
away as odious meals. While my men
were being killed within the deep harbour,
I drew my sword from my side, and cut the cables
from my dark-prowed ship. I ordered my crew to grab
the handles and row us away from the shower
of stones. Quickly, then, they sliced up the sea with their oars,

in terror of death, and left the rocky heights behind :
and they were glad to be back out on the open sea.

So my ship sailed on. But all the other ships
were lost there.

So our hearts were eaten up with awful sorrow.
We were glad to be among the living, yet our
thoughts were with our dead friends.

Then we reached the island

of Aeaëa : Eye - Eye - Ahh : where lived the dark-eyed
Circe : Ker - Key : dangerous sorceress with sweet-
sounding voice : the very sister of destructive-
minded Aeëtes. Both are children of Helios,
who gives man light. And the water-nymph Persis,
who mixes herbs into magic, is their mother,
herself the child of earth-encircling Oceanus.

So to this place some god had led us : and we put
in to shore in silence. Worn down from our torments,
we lay there for two days and two nights : and our hearts
were eaten up with awful sorrow.

But on the third day, when Dawn flooded rosy light
up from beyond the sea, I took my sharpened sword
and advanced up a steep slope to a rugged spot
at the summit, to take in the view of the wide-
open earth. I hoped to see signs of men, and hear
their voices. And I saw rising from the midst of an
overgrown forest a pillar of mingled flame
and smoke, coming from Circe's halls. I thought it over :

then started back to the ship by the shore of the sea,
to give my crewmen their meal : then send them out
to go see what was what. And while on my way
back to the long-travelled ship I heard a rustling
in the twilight of the wild and a powerful
stag came into my path, his eminent antlers
raised high towards heaven. He was coming from pasture,
stepping through the leafy woods down to the river
to drink : for the sunlight lay heavy on him.
Silently I came to a stand, and straightaway
took aim and let fly : and my bronze-tipped spear struck him
dead-center in his back (his spine) and shot straight
through him : and he stumbled to the dust with a shriek :
and from his gasping mouth he breathed out his spirit.
Then I set my foot on him and pulled the spear out
of the wound. And I left him lying on the ground
while I gathered together slender twigs and willow
branches, and I braided them into a well-twisted
cord one fathom long and tied together the feet
of the divine wonder. I walked back to my black
ship carrying the weight on my back, and I had
to support myself with my spear, for this holy
creature on my shoulders was unnaturally
large. And I flung it down by my men at the ship,
and spoke encouragingly to each of them :

‘We’re not dead yet, friends, though our troubles are many :
so as long as Hades waits for another day,
let us turn to this rich meat and eat, and think on
food and drink, so we won’t waste away in hunger.’

I said this, and my men obeyed me. They lowered
the cloaks from their weeping faces, and saw with wonder
the stag on the sands by the restless sea :
for this holy creature was unnaturally large.
Their eyes took him in until they were satisfied,
then they washed their hands and prepared him for a feast.
So all day long until the sun went down we ate
the inexpressibly wondrous flesh, and drank
our sweet wine. But when the sun sank behind the sea
and darkness came on, we rested by the busy
seasurf : and then at dawn I called an assembly,
and I spoke to my men, and said :

'My friends, here it is in short : we're in trouble. *And*
we have no idea where we are. We may never
learn where the Dawn goes when she sets behind the sea,
or what the darkness is, before the Dawn returns :
but we can find out what we can. Though I wonder
how many moves are left for us to make. I fear
not many. But let us do what we can. I know
we're on an island. From a hilltop vantage I saw
the land surrounded by a crown of ceaseless waves.
Most of this land is low-lying : and I saw smoke
rising from the middle of an overgrown forest.'

I said this to them, and their hearts sank as they thought
of the mouth of Laestrygonian Antiphates,
and the hard heart of the man-eating Cyclops.
Deeply they sighed, and dropped many tears : but weeping
wouldn't help us just then, so I armed us heavily
and divided the men into two companies

and chose a leader for each. I gave the command
of one to powerful Eurylochus, while I
took charge of the other. And without wasting time
we shook pebbles in a helmet and out came
the lot of great-hearted Eurylochus.

So he sighed, and off he went with two-and-twenty
companions, all sighing with him : while the rest
of us were left behind with concern for our friends.

Thus they went into the trees, and found the house
of Circe. It was made of polished stone, and hidden
by leaves. Prowling round were wolves and lions,
charmed by dark-eyed Circe's spells. She had given
them detestable drugs. So they did not charge on
my men, but wagged their tails, and stood up on hind legs :
just as dogs do when their master returns from feasting,
their excited hearts hoping he's brought them treats.
So the wolves and sharp-clawed lions wagged their tails,
and looked expectant, as if they might speak :
but my men were full of fear, for these creatures were huge
and strange. So they moved on, and stood at the front gates
of the beautiful sorceress Circe :
and heard her tuneful singing coming from across
the courtyard as she wove her fine threads at the loom
into a shining web of marvellous intricacy :
such artful hand-work only goddesses could weave.

So among the men the first to speak was Polites,
whom I thought the most careful-minded of my friends :

'Look, men : she sings at the loom, working a wondrous web : and all the air echoes with her lovely song : is she woman, or goddess? Come now! Let us speak out to her.'

So that carried the day with my men,
and they called out to her. And the shining gates
opened : and she invited them in : and my men
in their ignorance went in. Eurylochus alone
held back—he sensed something unlucky there.

So she led them in and sat them down on soft
couches : and she brought them cheeses and barley bread
and fresh honey and raisin wine. But she had mixed
her detestable drugs into the fiery drink.

So when they had drunk it all, she struck each man
with her magic wand. Then their hair grew bristly
on their bodies, their voices roughened, their noses
and mouths thickened into snouts, and their bellies
sank toward the floor as they turned into hogs.

But their minds were the same as before : and their cries
came out as snorts. And Circe shut them in the pig-pens,
and flung for them oak berries and acorns and dogwood
cherries, and all that which mud-wallowing hogs eat.

But Eurylochus rushed back to the black ship
to report on his friends' peculiar fate. His heart
sought to speak, but he could get no sound out,
so full of panic he was, and trembling in terror.
Tears filled his eyes : and he let out many sighs
while we questioned him in wonderment.

At last we got the story of the witchery
of his friends, as Eurylochus explained :

‘We went into the trees, as you told us, mighty
Odysseus. We found a house of polished stone,
hidden by leaves. We saw some woman, or goddess,
weaving a wondrous web at her loom, and we heard
her tuneful song, and the men called out to her.
And the shining gates opened and she invited
them in, and the men in their ignorance went in.
I alone held back—I sensed something unlucky.
And that was the last I saw of any of them,
though I sat long, and watched.’

So he told this story.

I slung my silver-studded sword round my shoulders,
and also my bow : and I asked him to lead me
there. But he seized my knees and begged me in terror
and said :

‘Don’t bring me back there! Beloved of Zeus, if you
go you will not come back alive, nor will any
of the others! While we live we must flee,
and maybe we can avoid the day of evil!’

Thus he spoke in panic, and I replied :

‘Eurylochus, stay here.’

This I said. And I went
up from the ship by the sea and entered the trees

with my bronze sword and bow. And as I was moving
through the dark forest to the house of sorceress
Circe, I heard a voice call my name from high up
in the leaves : a young man in all the charm of youth.

And he spoke to me :

‘Again, unlucky man, you roam on your own
through hills, while knowing nothing of where you are?
Where do you think you’re going? Circe has your friends
locked tight in pig-pens. You’re coming to set them free?
No. You will be penned in with the others, and will
not come back.’

Then he dropped to the forest floor, and continued :

‘I have a better idea for you. I will free
you from your evil fate and keep you safe.
Come! Do you see this fine herb growing here?
If you take it to the house of Circe
it will hold the “day of evil” off your head.
Listen now as I tell you of the magic arts
of Circe. She will pour a drink for you with drugs
mixed into it. But her potion will have lost
its power to charm you—because of the fine herb
at your feet. All right, I will tell you everything.
When Circe strikes you with her magic wand,
draw the sword from your hip and rush at her,
as if you mean to cut her down. She will cower
before you, and invite you to share her bed :
and you will not refuse her bed, so that you may

set free your friends from captivity—and enjoy
Circe’s pleasures besides. And you must make her swear
a solemn oath to cause you no further trouble,
and plan no evil, so she won’t leave you idle
and weak when you’re stripped bare and in her bed.’

So saying, Hermes the Contriver (for it was he)
plucked the herb from the soil and gave it to me.
It was black at the root but its flower was white
as milk. “Moly” is what the gods call it, and it
has no human name : and mortal men lack power
to uproot it from the soil. But the gods do
whatever they like. So then Hermes left the island,
off to high Olympus or wherever, and I
continued through the woods to the house of Circe,
and my heart was beating fast as I went.

When I came to the gates of the dark-eyed goddess,
I stood there and called out, and the goddess heard me.
She came and opened the shining gates and invited
me in : and I followed her with trouble in heart.
She brought me in and sat me on a wondrous chair,
cunningly wrought with intricate carved subtleties,
and placed a footstool under me, to rest my feet.
Then she prepared her potion in a golden cup
for me to drink, and the evil-minded goddess
mixed her drug into it. She handed me the cup
and I drank it dry, but I felt no enchantment.
Then she struck me with her magic wand and said to me :

“Now away to the sty! Go see your hog friends there.’

Instead, I drew my sword and rushed at her,
 as if I meant to cut her down. And shrieking she
 ran in under my weapon and embraced my knees,
 and with a mighty passion she spoke to me :

‘Who are you? Where do you come from? What men?
 What father? My charm has not enchanted you—
 I’m amazed! No other man has resisted
 my *φάρμακον* once it has passed through his lips.
 But will you stay unsexed in your mind and breast?
 You are Odysseus the subtle-thoughted.
 Long ago Hermes the Busy One told me you’d
 come to me on your swift black ship on your return
 from Troy. Come now! Put your sword in its sheath,
 and let us lie upon my bed in love and trust.’

She said this to me and I answered in reply :

‘Circe, you would have me be gentle with you,
 and lie with you on your bed in your chamber,
 while my men are changed into hogs in your halls?
 It is a tricky-minded request. When you have
 me stripped naked you’ll render me idle and weak.
 But if you swear a solemn oath to bring me
 no further trouble, and to plan no evil,
 I will go with you and lie on your bed.’

I said this, and straightaway she swore the solemn
 oath I’d requested of her. And when she had sworn
 in due form, only then did I go with Circe

into her very beautiful bed.

Her handmaidens meanwhile were busy in the halls.
Four servants, daughters of the springs in sacred groves
that flow down into rivers and go on into
the sea. One spread soft, colourful blankets over
the couches, and underneath them spread linen.
Another placed a silver table by each couch,
and set out golden baskets. And the sweet honeyed
wine a third mixed in a silver bowl, and brought out
the golden cups. And the fourth, moving to and fro,
brought water to fill a large three-legged cauldron;
and lit the fire beneath, which warmed the water.
And when the water was boiling in the dazzling
bronze cauldron, I sat inside it, and Circe bathed
me with the water from the cauldron, letting it
fall upon my head and shoulders, so that she might
take the heart-wasting weariness from my body.

When I was washed and oiled, and dressed in fine cloak
and tunic, she led me to the intricate seat
and the footstool for my feet. And a handmaiden
poured water from a beautiful golden pitcher
into a silver basin, and I washed my hands
in the stream : and before me a shining table
was set with bread and many foods that the mistress
of the house brought me from her store. She invited
me to eat : but my heart felt no pleasure
in any of it. My thoughts were elsewhere—my heart
sensed evil.

And when Circe saw me sitting there,
not reaching for the food, but dull with grief, she came
to me, and said :

‘Odysseus, you sit in silence,
eating your heart out. Why not taste the food
and drink? Do you sense another trick? You have no
need to fear. You’ve heard me swear a solemn promise
not to hurt you.’

She said this, and I answered her :

‘Circe, only a wretched man would dare to eat
food and drink before he’s seen his friends set free.
If you truly want me to eat with you, as you
say, set them free, and let me see my loyal men
with my own eyes.’

I said this, then Circe walked the length of the halls
with magic wand in hand, and unbolted the doors
of the pig-pen, and drove out the fat full-grown hogs.
Then they stood there looking at her : and she went
among them, and into each she rubbed a strange lotion.
Then their bodies shed their bristles, and as they grew
their shoulders came back and their hooves stretched into feet
and their arms hung down as they were before : and now free
of her despicable drug they stood as men again :
yet younger-looking, and far more beautiful.
They saw me, and reached out with their hands and embraced
me, holding me fast by the neck and drawing me
close : and the house resounded with their heavy tears :

and not a word was spoken till they could pronounce their gratitude. And the goddess herself looked on with compassion.

So radiant Circe came near to me and spoke :

'Zeus-born son of Laertes, deep-thoughted Odysseus, go to your ship by the shore of the sea and draw it up onto the sands. Store the tackle in the caves. Then come back to me here with your loyal men.'

This she told me, and I obeyed her. I walked back to our swift ship by the seashore, and found my friends sighing miserably, and dropping heavy tears.

And like calves in a cow-yard who run to the cows coming home from pasture, scurrying out of their pens to leap round and call loudly to their mothers : just so my men lit up when they saw me come.

They threw themselves on me, weeping as if we were celebrating our return to our homeland, and rugged Ithaca, where they were born and bred.

And amid much weeping they spoke to me :

'Zeus-beloved! We're as happy to see you as if we've returned to our homeland and Ithaca! But come! Tell us of the fate of our friends.'

And I answered them as gently as I could :

'First draw the ship onto the beach. All possessions

and tackling store in those caves. Then come with me
and see your friends in mystic Circe's house, eating
and drinking—her abundance is ever-flowing.'

So I said this, and my men obeyed me.

But Eurylochus stopped them : and raising his voice
he spoke :

'Unlucky ones! What are we doing? You so love
evil that you long to go down to the halls
of Circe? She will change us into hogs or wolves
or lions, or deer, and under her spell we will
watch over her house as her guards! Just as our friends
were caught by the Cyclops, when Odysseus
rashly sent them on—and for that recklessness
they were killed!'

And by the time he had finished his speech I'd drawn
my sword to bring his head to the ground with one stroke,
brother-in-law though he was : but my men restrained
me one after another with sensible words :

'Zeus-beloved, let it go. He'll stay by the ship
and guard it—if you allow it—and we'll follow
you to mystic Circe's house.'

They said this,
but when we went up from the ship and the sea,
Eurylochus did not stay behind with the ship.
He came with us, for he feared my sharp reproof.

Meanwhile, back at her house, Circe kindly bathed and oiled the rest of my men, and dressed them in fleece cloaks and tunics : and we found them feasting heartily in her halls. And when all my men came face to face and saw each other, they wept and wailed, and filled the house with loud sounds of lamentation.

Then radiant Circe came near to me and spoke :

‘Please have them stop these wild tears! I know of all the hardship you men have suffered on the woeful sea, and the hurt that hateful creatures brought you on land. I see you’re weary and downhearted, and haunted with thoughts of your hard odyssey. Have your many pains taken all good cheer from your hearts forever? Come! Let it go! Enjoy the food, and drink the wine, until your hearts are again as strong in your breasts as when you first left your homeland and Ithaca.’

So she spoke, and their bold hearts obeyed. We stayed there a year. And day by day we feasted on the flesh and sweet wine—her abundance was ever-flowing. And as the seasons rolled on and a year had past; and as the months died out; and the long days came to a close, then my loyal men summoned me, and spoke :

‘Demon-driven man! *Now* is the time to remember your home—*if* fate wants you rescued : *if* fate wants you returned to your land and your high-roofed house.’

They said this to me : and *my* bold heart obeyed.

So then all day until the sun went down we sat
and feasted on flesh and sweet wine. When the sun set,
and darkness came, the men lay down to rest along
the shadowy halls. And I lay in Circe's
very beautiful bed, and embraced her, and spoke :

'Circe, remember your promise to me? My heart,
and those of my men, are eager to return home.
My men wear me down with long faces whenever
you turn your back.'

So I spoke, and radiant Circe replied :

'Go, Odysseus. Distasteful are unwilling
guests in my house. But there is only one way out :
through Hades. You must go to the house of awful
Persephone, and find Theban Teiresias.
The vision of his mind remains clear down below.
He alone after death enjoys understanding :
while the rest drift as shadows without body.'

When she said this my heart broke in me. I sat up
and sighed, and writhed about, and lost all heart to live.

When I found words to speak, I answered her :

'No one has ever yet reached Hades in a ship.
Circe, who will lead the way?'

And the radiant goddess replied :

'Zeus-born son of Laertes, deep-thoughted Odysseus,
your ship will need no guide. Set the mast and spread
wide the white sail, and ride : Boreas' breath
will carry you to the ring of Oceanus,
the Earth-Encircler, whose waters whirl round us
ceaselessly. Cross the stream, then you will come to dark
groves to Persephone : black poplars, and willows
dropping unripened fruit. Beach your black ship
by the swirling eddies of Oceanus and go
forward on foot, and enter the house of Hades.
There, into the Acheron flow the streams
of flaming Phlegethon and icy Cocytus:
these roaring currents unite at a jagged rock.
Listen now, hero. When you're near that spot,
dig a pit a forearm's length this way and that,
and pour round it an offering to the dead.
First, a mixture of milk and honey : then sweet wine :
then water : then sprinkle white barley over all.
And pray to the miserable dead that when you
return to Ithaca you will offer the best
of your unmated heifers, and fill your house's
altar high with gifts. For Teiresias alone
sacrifice a black ram, the finest in your flock.
And after you have prayed to the glorious best
of the dead, offer a ram and a pitch-black ewe,
holding their necks downward to Erebus—
but you yourself turn away and set eyes
on the swirling eddies of river Oceanus.

Then many shades of the dead will come to you.
Order your men to flay and burn the sheep
lying there, their throats cut by the resolute bronze :
and pray to the gods, to imperishable Hades,
and to awful Persephone. And draw your sword
and hold off the dead from the blood till you've heard
of Teiresias. The seer will come to you.
Leader of men, he will tell you of the measure
of the way of your return—how you may survive
the open pit of the sea.'

Thus she spoke, as Dawn rose to her golden throne.
Circe fitted round me my fine cloak and tunic :
and she wore a long, graceful robe of fine fabric,
and belted her waist in brilliant gold, and placed
a veil over her face.

Meanwhile I walked the length of the halls,
and roused each man, and spoke :

'Sleep no more! We're leaving. Circe has told me all.'

This I said to them, and my men obeyed me.

But then one man there found a curious death.
Elpenor, of all the men the youngest, and not
especially brave in battle, nor steady in mind,
had filled himself with drink the night before :
and seeking cool air to sleep in, had let Circe
lead him away from his friends. Now he came awake
when he heard the others moving around. Eagerly

he sprang forward and fell headlong from the roof
and broke his neck. He had utterly forgotten
about the long ladder, and so his spirit went
down to Hades.

So then I spoke to my men :

'I think you expect we're heading homeward. We're not.
We're going elsewhere first. Circe has spelled out
a path to Hades and awful Persephone.
We must speak with the spirit of Theban Teiresias.'

I said this and I broke their hearts. My men sat down,
and sighed, and tore at their hair, and wept heavy tears :
but all to no purpose.

So as we walked to our swift ship on the beach,
sighing and weeping along the way, Circe
tethered a ram and a pitch-black ewe by the side
of the ship, having easily slipped past us. For
who can see a god who does not wish to be seen?

End of Book X

Book XI

“So we came down to the ship and the sea. First, we
 brought the ship out onto the shining salt water.
 We raised the mast and sails, and took in the sheep;
 then we departed, in grief and sorrow, dropping
 heavy tears as we looked ahead. And behind our
 dark-prowed ship a powerful wind was flung forward
 into our sails by our faithful friend Circe,
 the beautiful dark-eyed goddess of tuneful song.
 So we secured the ropes throughout the ship then sat
 back, and the wind and steersman headed us straight on.
 All day long the wind stretched our sails while we
 moved along the sea. Then when the sun went down
 our way went dark.

And we came to the limit
 of the earth : to the deep waters of round-flowing
 Oceanus. The place is neither light nor dark.
 When the sun rises in the sky, clouds of mist obscure
 his rays, and the miserable people living
 there, the Cimmerians, are kept in endless dusk,
 in an air without horizon. We beached our ship :
 and led out the sheep : and followed the flow
 of Oceanus under the grey gloom
 to the spot indicated by Circe.

There,
 Perimedes and Eurylochus held the victims.
 I drew my sword and dug a pit a cubit square,
 then poured around it an offering to the dead :

first, a mixture of milk and honey, then sweet wine,
then water : then I sprinkled white barley over all.
And then I prayed to the miserable dead.
I promised that when I returned to Ithaca
I would offer the best of my virgin heifers,
and fill my house's altar high with gifts.
And for Teiresias alone I would sacrifice
a black ram, the finest in my flock. Then after
my prayers to the multitude of dead I cut
the throats of the sheep. I held their heads down over
the pit, and their dark blood spilled out into it.
Then shadows began coming out of the darkness
from all sides. These dead spirits flitted around us
in a frenzy with a vast shrieking : and the horror
of it seized me with panic. And I shouted a
command to my men : to flay the sheep lying there
(with throats cut by the cold bronze) and burn them. Meanwhile,
I prayed to the gods, to imperishable Hades,
and to awful Persephone. And with sharp sword
in hand I did not permit the feeble dead
to approach any nearer, until I had heard
of Teiresias.

The first of them I let approach was the shadow
of my friend Elpenor. He was a dead man,
but not yet buried in the dense soil.
When we'd sailed off, rushing to other trouble,
we had left his body behind us in Circe's
house, unlamented and unburied. Now, when I
saw him my heart felt sorry for him and I wept.

And then I asked him :

‘Elpenor, how did you get to the gloom below?
You got here faster than I did with my swift ship.’

I said this, and he cried out in grief, and answered :

‘Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus,
an evil fate from some unseen god undid me,
and an ungodly amount of wine. When I fell
asleep at Circe’s house I forgot all about
the long ladder to bring me down again.
So I fell from the roof and snapped my neck
from my spine, and my spirit went down to Hades.
Now I beg of you, by all those we left behind,
by all those who are not here with us, by your wife
and father, who brought you up from a little thing;
and Telemachus, the son you left behind at home :
I beg of you to hear me now. I know that when
you leave Hades your long-travelled ship will close in
on Aeaea. Then and there, leader of men,
I beg you to remember me. Do not leave me
behind unlamented and unburied. Do not
forget about me. Or I might bring the anger
of the gods down on your head. No. Instead, burn me
with my armour and weapons, everything that is mine,
and make for me a burial mound on the sands
by the ancient sea. So that in times to come
people may learn of this unlucky man. Do this.
Fix my oar into the mound, which I rowed with when
alive, and with my friends.’

So he asked me of this,
and I answered him :

‘All this you told me, unlucky man, I will do.’

Throughout this sad exchange I stood by the pit
with my sword raised, keeping him away from the blood :
and near it the shade of my friend stood and spoke of
this and that.

Then came the shadow of my dead mother.
Her name was Anticleia, daughter of sly-minded
Autolycus. She had been living when I left
her behind and went to awful Troy. My eyes filled
with tears, and my heart hurt with sorrow, but I beat
her away from the blood, though in deep grief. No one
would come near until I’d heard of Teiresias.

Then forth from out of the freakish crowd of maddened
dead came the shadow of aged Teiresias.
He looked to be feeling his way with his golden
staff, and he recognized me, and he spoke to me :

‘Zeus-born son of Laertes, ever-inventive Odysseus,
unlucky man—what do you want? Why did you leave
the sunlight to come and see this unlovely place?
Many a time has experience taught me this :
the seers who speak prophecy are foolish men.
For Truth is unwelcome, to god and man alike,
as the earth is complacent even in its pain.

So? What shall it be? Do now step back from the pit,
and lower your sharp sword, so I may drink the blood;
and then I will tell you all you will wish to hear.'

So I drew back, and sheathed my silver-studded sword,
and he drank the dark blood. After that, the prophet,
far-seeing, spoke his word to me :

‘νόστον μελιγδέα : your honey-sweet return,
bright Odysseus, is your wish. But a god makes
your wish hard. And you can never outrun the Earth-
Shaker, who looks on you with hate and derision
in his heart, furious that you blinded his fine son.
And yet you may suffer your way forward through all
kinds of evil and make it home, if you can keep
your heart firm, and those of your men. When you sail
your scrupulously-pieced ship near to the island
of Thrinacia, you must keep to the violet
sea. For there Helios pastures his flocks of fat
cattle, and he oversees and overhears all.
If you let them be and leave them untouched,
and keep your honey-sweet return in mind,
you may yet suffer your way forward through all
kinds of evil and make it home—*if* you let them
be and leave them untouched. But if you hurt them, I
see ruin for your ship and your men. And even
if you have the wit to escape this fate yourself,
you will return, after long years, to find your home
an evil place, and you will be alone, coming
on someone else's ship, and all of your men friends
will be dead : and you will see violence in your

home. Right there, right now, are many men, “arrogant mediocrities”, who are eating your life away, and are thinking of your wife, who loves you : yet *they* speak of “giving in marriage” and “bride-prices”. But you will come and powerfully repay them for their trouble. Then, when the “mnesteressin” lay dead in your halls, either from your cunning tricks, or openly, using the bronze spine of your blade, even then, even then, you will take hold of an oar, a well-balanced oar, and will come to know the sea. But your death will come to you far from the sea. I have told you now, Odysseus.’

So he spoke, and I heard the way of his prophesy. And in that starless hour I replied :

‘Teiresias, my destiny is as the gods spin it, and all that is, is as it is.

I see

my mother is here, by the blood, hovering with the dead. But she does not look her son in the face. Or speak to him. Come now! Tell me truly, for you know these things : how may she recognize me?’

I asked him this, and Teiresias answered me :

‘You would hear *more* words? Whoever of the dead drinks of the blood, will speak with you—if you fancy more truth. But those discontented ones you deny, they will go away. Your mother? “*Anticlia Autolyki filia mater Ulixis*

nuntio falso audito de Ulixē

ipsa se interfecit. . .”

On those words

the shadow receded into the house of Hades,
Teiresias the far-seer, having spoken
Truth. Then, just there I held fast and sure till my mother
came and drank of the dark blood. Straightaway she knew
me, and called out to me in sadness, as one cries
'alas' in prayer to the gods, and she said :

'My son! Why are you here in this heartsick place?
You are living. Have you strayed here along the waves
with your friends on your way home from Troy? Have you not
yet seen Ithaca? Have you not yet seen your wife
in your house?'

She asked me this, and I answered her :

'Mother, I came to Hades to have a question
answered by the Theban seer Teiresias.
I haven't yet even come close to Archaëa,
nor breathe the air of our land. I've wandered in hardship
from the first moment I left with Agamemnon
"ἴλιον εἰς εὐπωλον, to "gloriously" fight the Trojans.
Tell me : how did you die?'

And my honoured mother

answered me :

'First I will tell you this, and it will

be true. Your wife waits for you. The tears drop from her mild eyes as the days darken to nightfall; and no man trespasses on your privilege. Telemachus lives quietly on your property. Already he attends the many feasts that men of position *should* properly host. Fine boy that he is, all invite him! But now your father. He never comes down to the city. He stays in the fields. Winter-time, he sleeps with the slaves in the dust by the fire, without blankets or any bedding. And the clothes he wears are rough against his skin. And in summer, in the luxuriance of the season's last hours, the vineyard on the grape-yielding hill-slope is spread over with a bed of fallen leaves. There he stays in sorrow, waiting for your return. His grief is immovable in his heart, and old age comes painfully. That was the fate I met that brought me to my end. I was not pierced by the shafts of the sharp-seeing and all-watchful : nor did I die of illness, which wastes away so many and takes their life away. No. Missing you, bright Odysseus, your guidance, your gentleness, your honey-sweet heart, robbed me of myself. And now I cease to be.'

So she spoke, and I wondered over it; and reached out to embrace the shadow of my mother. Three times I reached out for my mother. Three times her shadow fled from my touch, escaping like a light in a dream. Three times I felt a piercing sorrow.

And then I spoke :

'Mother, why do you slip out of the reach of my arms? I am eager to embrace you. Even in Hades we may put our arms around each other and find comfort—in weeping. Or is this only a game to awful Persephone, to make me grieve all the more?'

I asked this, and my mother said :

'Son, sad-fated man, this is the way with us when we die. Persephone, daughter of Zeus, does not trick you. The fibres no longer hold flesh to bone. The fierce bite of the fire consumes these, once life has left the white bones behind : and the spirit flies away like a dream. But now I drift to and fro aimlessly. So hurry back to the light of day—quick-thoughted Odysseus!—and remember this, so that you may tell your wife.'

So we spoke together. And then women began to appear : out of the starless mist one by one came the discontented dead, encouraged by awful Persephone. They crowded around me and the dark blood, and I wondered what to do. To my mind the following appeared the best plan. I raised my sharp sword and refused to be overcome : I would allow each to drink the dark blood in turn. So one by one they came by me and stood, and each made known her name, and I listened to each in turn.

I saw Hecuba, first lady of lofty Troy,
Priam's well-tended wife and queen of a kingdom.
Once she wore long robes embroidered with stars that gleamed
silver, and golden chains around her neck, and stood
radiant before her silver mirrors, and slept
in her royal chamber. But then Troy was destroyed.
Glorious Ilium was left a smoking ruin,
with all its songs silenced. And Priam was slaughtered
in his own house; and all her children were destroyed;
and she saw that her life had come to nothing.
Then, she was given over to hard slavery,
and for all her prayers to the gods, that is what
she had come to. So, wild with sorrow, she tore
ragefully at the face of her captor, and stole
the light from his two eyes wholly and forever.
And while her fingers dripped with the blood of his eyes,
and her sharp nails trapped tatters of his skin,
some god changed her into a dog, and her jaw growled
horrible sounds; and with fiery eyes she leapt
howling down into the sea from a cliff
near Madytus—which seafaring sailors now call
Cynóssema, “the Dog’s Tomb”, and they steer their ships
by it. I felt a terrible loathing come from her.

And I saw Ino, daughter of Cadmus, who leapt
with her son Melecertes into the deadly sea.
And Stheneboea was there, she the wife to her
father Proteus. She killed herself out of love
for mighty Bellerophon, after he mocked her
advances; and her daughters followed her into
madness.

And I met Evadne, who flung herself on her husband's funeral pyre at Thebes. And I spoke with Aethra, a free spirit serene as bright sky, who killed herself at the death of her sons.

And Deïanira was there, she who had followed her husband Heracles into death, by her own hand, after she poisoned his lionskin clothing, which roasted his mortal frame in flames. And I saw Laodamia, child of Acastus, who died of a broken heart when her would-be husband Protesilaus was first to fall at Troy.

And after her Hippodamia came, Pelops' wife. She persuaded her sons Atreus and Thyestes to drop their brother, the beautiful Chrysippus, down a well; so then out of guilt she hanged herself. And I saw Neaera who ran a sword through her belly when her son, swift-riding Hippothous, was killed by his cousin, a tricky son of Heracles.

And then I saw Alcestis, who gave her life so that her husband Admetus might live.

And I met with Iliona, daughter of Priam, who swallowed poison when her parents faced ruin. And I spoke with Themisto, princess of Thessaly, who in monstrous error killed her own children, so took her own life. And then came Erigone. Her husband Icarius learned of wine-making from Dionysus, and cheerfully introduced wine to his people of Athens. But when they drank

and felt drunk, they suspected poison, so the men
of Athens killed him and buried his body.
But his daughter Erigone followed her dog
Maera to the spot, and she hanged herself there.
After that, her mother Phanothea invented
our hexameters, to seek the light of the gods.

And I saw the mother of *Οἰδιπόδαο*
the swollen footed, delicate Epicaste,
who in awful error lived as wife to her son,
and also in unwitting error the son
humiliated and killed his father, and lived
as husband to his mother. So the gods swiftly
made this known to the people of lovely Thebes,
where he ruled as king of the Cadmeans, and brought
much suffering to them. But she tied a noose to
a high roof beam and in horror went down to Hades,
leaving behind for him the hate of the Furies.

And then I met Phaedra, daughter of Minos, who
was so sickened at her love for her stepson
Hippolytus that she hanged herself. After her,
I saw Phyllis, wife to Demophon of Athens.
Heartsick with grief from waiting long for her husband
to return from the war at Troy, she set their house
in order, then put a noose around her neck and
hung from an almond tree. And over time a god
wedded her to the tree, and her arms turned upwards
as branches. When the king returned and learned of it,
he embraced the trunk of the tree with the spirit
of a bridegroom, and she sensed his arrival, and

sent out leaves. And I saw Byblis, who poured out
 a terrible passion into print, working and
 reworking a love letter addressed to her brother,
 only to receive the pain of his rejection;
 and in a mania she advanced again and
 again until her brother fled the land for good;
 yet even then did Byblis follow him out
 into the world. So she roamed the fields howling,
 and the naiads saw her watering the ground with tears.
 So when Byblis ceased to be, the nymphs honoured her
 with a spring. And its waters remember her tears,
 and the horror that beauty brought. Its stream runs out
 from under the shadow of a great scarlet oak
 in a valley of Phoenicia.

And I met

a lovely young lady of the far East, Thisbe.
 Pyramus, her lover, lived next door in a city,
 and they shared an interior wall; but their parents
 forbade their union. When she put her ear up to
 the wall she could hear him moving. So their love found
 a way. They discovered a cranny in the wall
 that had gone unnoticed all that time, and through that
 slender channel they spoke love-whispers, and listened
 to each other breathing, and plotted a secret
 marriage. What happened next—the lovers' flight ended
 in eternal union, as ashes mixed together
 in one common urn.

But if I spoke the names of all of the women
 I saw, the wives and daughters, the immortal night

would blend into the dawn, and we would miss our time
for sleep. So I shall return to my ship and crew
for the night, or shall stay here. The choice lies with you,
and with the gods.”

So he spoke. And everyone in the shadowy
hall sat in silence, spellbound. Then of all of them
the first to speak was gracious queen Arete, who said :

“Phaeacians, how does this man look to you in
beauty and stature? And do you approve the mind,
so steady and composed, inside? He is my guest,
yet all of us share in this honour together.
Let us not send him off until we have gathered
from each of you gifts of honour from the treasures
in your halls, which are yours by the will of the gods.”

Then Echeneus spoke, one of the noble elders
of the Phaeacians, and said :

“O friends, our queen hits the mark of my own judgment,
and the wisdom of her words must be yours as well.
Let us then hear her with prudence. And yet this matter
remains in the hands of our good king Alcinous.”

So Alcinous gave answer and spoke :

“We shall follow the word of my wife, as surely
as I live and rule over the Phaeacians,
who love the oar. May our brave guest, who longs for home,
remain with us a short time longer, so that I

may bring to a perfection our gifts of honour.
 His sending shall be the concern of all our men,
 and above all with me : for the power of this land
 is held by me.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him:

“Great monarch Alcinous, distinguished above all
 men, if you requested I stay in your great land
 even a year, to grant you time to gather your
 glorious gifts and send me on, I would welcome
 that. And far greater would that be for me, to go
 back to my homeland with my hands full of gifts—all
 the more love and respect would I receive from all
 the men who see me when I return to Ithaca.”

And Alcinous answered him :

“O Odysseus, courageous Odysseus,
 valiant Odysseus! It is plain to
 see that you are no deceiver, no mischief-maker.
 There are many such men roaming the dark earth
 telling their lies so well that no one can expose
 them as false. With you, however, is the opposite.
 There is a godliness to the beauty of your words :
 the false cannot hide itself behind such goodness;
 it is beyond their power. Your beauty, stature,
 steadiness, composure, cultivation—hardy
 Odysseus! You tell your tale with the grace
 of a heavenly poet at the lyre!
 All the misfortunes, all the miseries you speak

of—your own, and that of the Argives—you speak of
with a powerfully-minded persuasiveness.

But come now! Speak to me truly, tell me of this :
did you meet with any of the godlike heroes
who went to Troy together with you, and there found
their death? Our night is before us, inexpressibly
wondrously long : and it is not yet the hour
to sleep in these halls. So speak your wondrous tale.
I will hold up and sit to bright dawn so long as
you speak of all the evil you overmastered.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him:

“King Alcinous, most distinguished of men,
there is a time for many words, and then a time
for rest. But since you long to hear them, I will tell
you more sad stories. I will tell you of a man
who came safely through the war-cries of the Trojans
(so horrid that the birds overhead dropped in fright),
only to perish on his return through the word
of a vile woman. . . .

So I stood where I was by the blood in the dark.
Awful Persephone scattered the delicate
shadows of the women back in all directions,
and the shadow of Agamemnon, Atreus’
son, came up to me in grief. And gathered round him
were the shadows of many dead men. He knew me
as soon as he had tasted of the dark blood.
Weeping shrilly, and letting his heavy tears drop,
he reached out his arms eagerly to embrace me,

but his strength was steadfast no longer, and the force
of his agile body was gone : and I wept
to see this, and my heart ached : and I spoke to him :

‘Most glorious king of men, Agamemnon,
how was it that the goddess of death brought you here?
Did Poseidon rouse odious blasts of winds
to destroy your ships? Or were you cut down by men
as you were taking their cattle and flocks of sheep?
Or were they defending their city and women?’

So I asked him this, and he answered :

‘Zeus-born son of Laertes, ever-inventive
Odysseus, it wasn’t odious winds flung
by Poseidon at my ships that overpowered
me. Nor did just any random adversary
bring me down. My death was a work of Aegisthus.
He killed me, with help from fate, and my vile wife.
He invited me to his house to honour me
with a feast, then killed me as one slaughters an ox
in his stall. So I died a terrible death. And
around me my friends were butchered like beasts for a
marriage-feast of the wealthy. You’ve had your own share
of the killing of men—in hand-to-hand combat,
and in cutting through open warfare. But never
have you seen dark blood decorating a banquet,
filling the mixing bowls, and flooding the floor.
Your heart would have wailed seeing us lying there.
Miserable to hear were the cries of Priam’s
daughter Cassandra, while my foul wife murdered her

at my side. From the ground I tried to raise my sword
to bring my vile wife down to death with me, but
she stepped away. And when I died there, and went down
to Hades, my wife did not take her fingertips
and close my eyelids, nor did she close my mouth.
No man has had such a doglike, treacherous wife
as I had, who devoted all her heart and mind
to evil, and carefully planned most disgraceful
work, bringing death to her husband. I had returned
to welcome my children, and servants . . . ! Now my wife's
miserable heart has brought disgrace on herself,
and on all women now and to come, even those
who do right.'

He told me all this, and I answered him with :

' φεῦ ! φεῦ ! Far-resounding Zeus has spread his hatred
for the children of Atreus, using the consequences
of women, from the beginning, through to the end.
Many of us were killed on account of Helen.
And now, while you were away, Clytemnestra
planned treachery against you.'

I said this, and he answered me :

'And so I say to you to be not too trusting
with women. For all that you tell women, keep all
the more hidden. But your death, Odysseus,
will not come from *your* wife. She is very wise,
and her heart knows how to do all things well :
daughter of Icarius, thoughtful Penelope.

When we sailed to the war she was a young bride
 with a boy at the breast, just a baby, who now
 must sit among the best of men, blest : for his dear
 father will come to see him, and father and son
 will embrace, as it is right to do. But my wife
 did not allow me to see my son. She cut me
 down before I could see my son . . . ! So listen now
 to what I say to you, and keep it in your mind :
secretly, and not in open sight, steer your ship
up to the shore of your homeland—for our trust
 in women has died. But come now! Tell me of this,
 and speak truly : have you heard any word of my
 son? If he lives in Orchomenus, or sandy
 Pylos, or perhaps with Menelaus in Sparta?
 For he still walks upon the earth, my godly son
 Orestes.'

This he asked me, and I answered him :

'Son of Atreus, why ask me this? I cannot give
 an answer. I don't know whether he's living or dead,
 and it pains a man to speak imprecise words.'

So we two stood together, grieving and dropping
 heavy tears, and the shadow of the swift-footed
 son of Peleus approached us, the fierce-hearted
 Achilles. And also the shades of Patroclus
 and of noble Antilochus; and of Ajax,
 whose physique and stature had raised him over all
 the rest of the Danaans, after Achilles.

And then the shadowy spirit of man-breaking
 Achilles recognized me, and he sighed, and spoke :

‘Odysseus! Quick-thinking Odysseus! Bold
 man! What great plan are you working in your mind now?
 Why do you dare to come *here*, where the puny dead
 collect, here where men who have finished their struggle
 come down as phantoms?’

So he spoke, and I answered him :

‘O Achilles, far the best of the Achaeans,
 son of glorious Peleus, I came to Hades
 to consult with Teiresias, if he might say
 any word to aid my return to Ithaca.
 I haven’t even come close yet to Archaëa,
 nor breathed the air of my land, but after Troy
 I’ve suffered nothing but evil after evil.
 But you, Achilles : no superiority
 in men came before you, nor will ever come again.
 We Argives honour you as we honour the gods.
 And here your superiority continues,
 as you rule among the dead. So do not grieve at
 your death, Achilles.’

And while I said this I brought into my mind
 a word of Achilles, said to me in his tent
 by the shore of the sea at Troy. His mother is
 goddess Thetis, born of the bright rushing searurf.
 She had once told him that his fate had two faces :
 if he fought round the walls of Troy, he would be lost,

but he would win imperishable fame throughout the earth. Yet if he fled Troy just then for his homeland, lost forever would be his wondrous glory, but his life would be a long one. He made his choice : to stay.

And as I thought of this he spoke to me :

‘No! Do not speak consolingly of death with me, bright Odysseus. *I would rather be a slave among the living than king of the dead.*’

So he said.

And so that would be his final answer on that : the dead know one thing : it’s better to be alive.

Then he continued to speak :

‘But come now! Tell me of that noble son of mine. Did he follow his father to the war, and fight at the front, or did he not? And tell me of my father Peleus, if you’ve heard anything. Does he still hold honour among my raging Myrmidons, or do men esteem him lightly now in Hellas and Phthia, now that age hobbles his arms and legs? I cannot help him there in the light of the sun, with the strength I enjoyed at lofty Troy, when I cut down dead the best of their men, in defence of all the Argives around me. If I could get to my father’s house, even just for an hour—

all those awful ones who dishonour his dignity
would suffer the strength of my invincible hands!’

So he spoke, and I answered him :

‘Of strong Peleus I have heard not a word.

But of your beloved son Neoptolemus

I will tell you all the truth I know, as you ask.

I myself brought him in my swift ship from Scyros,

to join the ranks of the well-armoured Achaeans

at Troy. And in assembly there, by the walls

of the city, where we devised our plans, always

first to speak was Neoptolemus, and his words

always hit the mark. I say he surpassed in speech

all but Nestor and myself. And caught in the crush

and tumult of the fighting on the Trojan plain,

he never stayed unseen, but always cut his way

forcefully to the front, and he gave way to none,

and he killed many men in that horrible tumult

of battle. All those he killed defending the Argives

would be too many for me to know or name.

But I saw him slaughter the son of Telephus,

powerful Eurypylos, whom many arrows

couldn’t bring down, and many of his warriors

fell around him as well. Truly Eurypylos

was the most beautiful man I’ve set my eyes to.

(Other than Memnon οὐράνιος.)

And when Epeius built us a huge wooden horse

for all the best of the Argives to hide inside

as ambush, and I was tasked to guard the hatchway,

to know when to open it, or to keep it shut—

then, there in the dark, the leaders and counsellors
of the Danaans wiped away their tears, and each
warrior's limbs were trembling beneath him, but
I never saw your son's lovely face turn pale,
nor tears pour from his cheeks. Instead, he kept pressing
me to let him loose out of the horse, his hand tight
on the handle of his bronze-heavy sword—χαλκο-
βαρής—eager to bring evil on the Trojans.
And when Priam's lofty city was utterly
flattened, and your son received an honourable
share of the gifts of victory, he went aboard
his ship *unscathed*—not a scratch on him!—not from spear-
tip nor from hand-to-hand fight—all those wounds that come
to many men in the panic of war, while
Ares rages in confusion.'

So I said this.

Then the shadow of Achilles drifted away.

And my memory brought me to when Achilles
fell in the dust. And neither tears, nor grief, nor fear
had prevented me from lifting up his body
from the ground. On these shoulders I carried him back,
his body still in its armour.

(Indeed, Alcinous, there are times when it is fine
not to think.)

And I recalled an afternoon on the Trojan
plain by the wandering streams of the Scamander.
All at once many arms of men rose, and they stung

their horses with the snap of the whip, and shouted
 encouraging words to the beasts; and straightaway
 the chariots went swiftly over the plain,
 and from the ground rose whirlwinds of dust that hung
 in the air as the loose-flowing manes rushed like winds.
 Now the chariots would bend to the earth,
 now they'd bounce high into the air and hang there :
 and the charioteers stood in the chariot-
 box, the heart of each beating fast and eager for
 victory, as the horses flew over the plain
 in clouds of dust.

Now the shade of Achilles was gone.

What allies are taken from us when heroes die!
 I pictured his long strides back to the meadows
 of the dead, where sprigs of asphodel grow. He must
 have been glad to hear of the glory of his son.

Then the shadows of other dead men came to me
 in grief, each with his cares, to ask after their loved
 ones. Ajax alone kept his distance. Telamon's
 son was still angry at my victory over him
 in assembly, when we fought each other
 with words in dispute for the arms of Achilles.
 His godly mother had offered them as a prize.
 I know now I never should have won that prize,
 now that Ajax is covered by earth, in consequence
 of all that prize-winning. Ajax—who was superior
 in form and in deed to all the other Danaans,
 except mighty Peleus' son. So I spoke
 to him with respectful words :

'Noble Ajax, even in death you hold on to
your disgust at me over that wretched armour?
Surely the gods made it happen, to bring trouble
to us all. Over a heap of armour
the Argives lost the powerful force of Ajax?
Our grief at your death was equal to that of Achilles.
Let Zeus be responsible, whose hate of the Danaan
army of warriors gave rise to your fate. Come
now! Powerful one, hear my words, and my purpose :
and allay the fury in your bold heart.'

So I spoke. But he did not answer me. He went
along with the other spirits of the forever
dead down to the rest of the shadows in the dark
of Erebus.

King Alcinous, there are five I see in my mind,
and though I do not remember living through it,
yet I took in the sickly breath of their regions
of sorrow :

I saw Zeus' son Minos holding the golden
sceptre, claiming his right over the newly dead,
while shadows gathered round his throne, as they drifted
through the wide gates of the house of Hades,
waiting to hear of confirmation of their death.

I saw huge Orion chasing the shadows of
his beasts of prey through the asphodel fields,
all those he himself had reaped in lonely places.

In his hand was a sword of bronze never to be broken.

I saw Tityos, son of Gaia, stretched along the ground. There were sharp-beaked vultures rooting around in the pit of his body and digging at his vitals, tearing at his liver, while his hands flailed uselessly, to shoo them away : and night repaired what was torn away in the day, and fresh food awaited the monsters at dawn. For one day he had laid violent hands on Leto, a wife of Zeus, as she crossed the lovely valleys by Panopeus, heading to Pytho.

I saw Tantalus, victim of unrestrained speech, standing wearily in marsh-water up to his chin. And whenever he bent to drink of the water, it rushed back from his lips and dried up to arid desert, and his gaping jaws held a mouthful of dust. And there were lofty trees with branches full with flourishing fruit : pears and apples and sweet figs and olives : and the branches curved down to his lips from the weight of the abundance, but whenever the man reached out with his hands, to taste of the ripe wealth, then the branches idly reared out of reach, prompted upward by the mellow sigh of a breeze, leaving his greedy mouth gaping uselessly at shadows.

Who but the gods can devise such torments?

I saw Sisyphus clenched in terrible torment.
 With both hands he pushed a slippery stone up a
 pause, gripping it here and there while it pushed him,
 hand and foot, sluggishly, piteously, without
 stop, to his disgusted grunts; and while rolling
 the stone over the summit, the weight of the stone
 brought it rolling back down to the plain behind him.
 Straightaway he stretched out his hands and pushed the stone
 back up with head bent, while sweat ran from his body,
 and his face took in the dust.

And then there with me was the strength of Heracles.
 Not his shadow, for he was immortal : a man
 made god : and enjoyed the θάλαρα of the gods,
 the good cheer of the feasts : and his wife was καλλι-
 σφυρος Hebe, the delicate-ankled daughter
 of Zeus and of Hera the χρυσο-πέδιλος ,
 the golden-sandalled. Around him was the κλαγγή
 of the dead, the warrior-scream, the screech of birds
 of prey, kindling fear. And he moved like the dark flow
 of Night. His eyes were terrifying—his fingers
 were stretching the naked sinew of his bowstring,
 ready to let his certain arrow fly. Striking
 my eyes hard, his golden breastplate told of many
 wonders, hand-work only gods could bring to being :
 imagery of flashing-eyed animals in conflict :
 bears, and wild boars, and lions in single fight :
 and murder : and bloody man-slaughtering combat :
 monstrous sights that nothing living should look upon.
 May the artist of that skilful scene create no
 more such scenes! (Whoever it was whose distant voice

bestowed such bright jostling life to art, through skill.)

So there was Heracles, Zeus-born son of Alcmene :

the greatest of heroes who walked the earth.

Born mortal, now immortal, he tastes ambrosia,

and lives among the blest in the starry sky.

His heart and strength the world will never know again.

In passing he said to me :

‘Ah! Resourceful Odysseus! The grandson of sweet Chalcomedusa, finest artist of metal-work! You, too, have come to these parts, to see the miserable ones, abandoned here by fate? I’ve left the light of the sun to come see my mother Alcmene—she married Rhadamanthus, who sits by Minos. You know that Zeus once tried to coerce your great-grandfather Hermes into stealing my mother’s body from her coffin? Perhaps you’re here to complete a difficult labour? Once upon a time I was tasked to catch the watch-dog who walks the grounds here. Hermes—who’s everywhere—and bright-eyed Athena were mixed up in it, and that hateful hound was more trouble than he was worth! I caught the hound skulking in the dark, and threw chains round his three necks with my bare hands, all the while getting a faceful of his triple-mouthed howling. I hauled that monstrous bulk up into the light, where three-headed hounds shouldn’t be moving around. Anyhow the wily dog got loose and found his way back to this sunless place.’

So he spoke, and did not wait for an answer.

Heracles went down into the deepest dark,

where the king and queen, Hades and Persephone,

live in royal comfort in their palace,

and the sorrows of shadows mean nothing to them.

There, the sagging sky is supported by silver

pillars.

And I lingered where I was a while longer,

in case a hero of the past might come to me,

warriors of former times whom I hoped to see :

Theseus, and Peirithoös, the children of gods.

Instead, the shadows I saw rising up out of
 the pit, up from the funeral pile of Erebus,
 where thousands were heaped there together like leaves,
 were young brides, and children lost before their parents,
 and world-weary old men; and light-hearted girls knowing
 a new sorrow; and many men killed in battle
 by the bronze-tipped spears and still wearing their armour.

As I lingered where I was, shadows swarmed around
 me, the flocks of the dead, never to be counted
 (I had not thought death had undone so many),
 and their cry was god-awful. I felt pale fear,
 then a terror that left me dizzy. I wondered
 if I would be allowed to leave, or if Hades
 would keep me forever. I feared Persephone
 sending up from the pit of Hades the Gorgon Head :

*snakes lashing out
 in affray around a face and
 two eyes revealing empty eternity. a
 sight to freeze you at failure without
 end, poisoning your fortunes :
 the Gorgon Head.*

So I went to the ship and commanded the men
 to unfasten the stern-cables and embark at
 once. And the men went aboard and ordered themselves
 at the oars. And the ship was let loose on the current
 of Oceanus' waters. First we rowed;
 afterwards a favourable wind carried us."

End of Book 11

γενναίων δ' ἀρεταὶ πόνων
τοῖς θανοῦσιν ἄγαλμα.

high-aspiring efforts

are gifts from the dead.

Euripides, *Heracles*, 357–8

Book XII

“So then through the crawling hours we left behind
that unlovely place. We breathed in the sweeter air
along the fresh-water current while our ship sailed
the edge of the world. We followed the ceaseless stream
of earth-encompassing Oceanus, and saw
on our way his many happy children in frolic :
we were smiled upon by the Naiades,
the sparkling ones haunting the crystalline streams;
and the Anthousai, the nymphs who lie in fragrance
on the grasses by crocuses and daffodils;
and the numberless sisterhood of the Aurai,
those cooling breezes who bring comfort to sailors.

And so we returned to the deep, wide-open sea
and the island of Aea, where the Dawn lives.
She is the mother of the morning star Venus
Eosphoros, that spark of day confined in night,
who wakes the Dawn with her sparkle. On the island,
Dawn’s bright palace has green lawns for the choral dance,
and from here she rises, heated from the night
of lying with one of her many lovers, and she leads
the way to day.

So we ran our ship onto the sands
of the shore by the sea, and we set foot on land,
and there we rested, and fell asleep, and waited
for the morning star to rise, which brings lovely Dawn.

And when Dawn came I sent my men to Circe’s house

to bring back the dead body of Elpenor.
 We cut firewood then burned the body at the edge
 of the sea. We wept in grief while his body
 and armour were consumed by the flames.
 Then we built him a burial mound; and upright
 at the summit we placed his oar.

While we fixed
 upon our several tasks, our return from the house
 of Hades had not escaped the notice of Circe,
 who very swiftly made herself ready and then
 came among us, the beautiful goddess, bringing
 her handmaidens along, who put sparkling red wine
 and other many fine things into our hands :

and she spoke :

‘Bold men! I shall call you the “twice-dead” now. Because
 when all other men go down there, they don’t come back.
 But you went to Hades and you are still alive.
 So come now! Enjoy yourselves here with all this food
 and wine all day long. Then when Dawn rises from
 her warmed bed you will set sail. I will show the way,
 to keep you safe along Fate’s entangling threads,
 whatever might bring you trouble on land, or when
 riding the sea.’

Thus the goddess Circe spoke to us, and our hearts
 relaxed. So we enjoyed ourselves there with the food
 and sweet wine all day long. Then Helios withdrew,
 and darkness came, and my men lay down to rest by

the stern-cables of the ship. And Circe led me
by the hand away from my friends to a bower,
and I sat, and she lay looking up at me, Dawn's
niece, ripe with life. She asked me all about
my adventures : and I told her all in order,
and at length.

After that, beautiful Circe gave answer to me :

'So you follow my Word, and thus I follow yours.
Listen to what I shall say now and remember it,
since no other kindly god may be there to bring it
into your mind.

First, you will come to the Sirens.

These shapely daughters of Earth, with their monstrous
beauty and pleasing-sounding song, so calm and mild
an enchantment and enticement, like the peaceful
splash of waves around the rocks in the ancient sea,
swaying in light dance in their meadow, lull to sleep
your reason, and charm all men who come close, and hear.
Whoever approaches and unsuspectingly
hears the voice of the Sirens, never again thinks
of young wives and children and "high-roofed homes".
He will never again brighten up his loved ones,
for he will never return. While the Sirens sing
their song in the loveliest clearest throat
and charm you, they lie back on dewy grass, and here
and there round them are dead men in decay, rotting
down to dry bones.

I suggest you row past them.

(One of me is more to your taste than two of them.)

Work on beeswax until it's softened, then plug up
your ears and those of your men, so no one will hear.

But if you are curious enough to listen
to the tender and lovely and youthful-sounding
daughters of Earth (if you are courageous enough),
have your friends tie you head to foot to the mast
tightly with the ends of the πρότοναι (*the two
ropes, to bow and stern, that secure the mast upright*).

That way you may delight in the song of the Sirens.

And when you beg your friends to untie you, and when
you command them to untie you—then you will let
them tie you tighter still. And then your friends will row
past.

But now I shall not speak as in assembly,
at length, from beginning to end, but will describe
two ways to proceed. Your mind must deliberate
on which way to take : and perhaps you should start
thinking now.'

When she said this I answered :

'I am thinking.'

So the beautiful goddess continued
her counsel, and spoke :

'One way you can go is
to the Planctae, what men call the Wandering Rocks.

Dark-eyed Amphitrite crashes her waves against these.
 Not even a bird can get through, not even one
 of Zeus' placid doves who carry the ambrosia
 to father—they are crushed between the floating stones.
 (So then our father sends a replacement along.)
 No ships pass through the Wandering Rocks. When men come,
 the sea-waves take away the timber wreckage
 and the dead men, amid the lightning that two stones
 scraping together spark, as the whirlwinds drive on
 the Wandering Rocks.'

When she said this I recalled hearing of the wit
 of Euphemus, on Jason's ship. Into the rocks
 ceaselessly clashing he sent out before the ship
 a fast heron, whose tail feathers were clipped
 by two rocks crashing together, but the heron
 got through, so the sacred Argo followed its path.
 And much later Athena raised that ship into
 the stars. Looking up into the night sky I saw
 the figure of the stern, the keel, and the sail,
 moving westward low on the horizon,
 as Circe spoke :

'One ship only has passed through the Wandering Rocks :
 the Argo, known to all men everywhere. Coming
 from Aeëtes, child of the sun and keeper
 of the golden fleece, the ship would have been quickly
 crushed against the rocks, but Queen Hera sent them through,
 for she loved handsome Jason.'

So said lovely Circe, and I replied :

'Brave beyond vision were those pioneers who first
launched their fragile ship on the treacherous sea.
Entrusting their lives to unreliable winds,
and resting their confidence on slender timber,
they cleaved the open sea on an uncertain course
to the golden fleece.'

This I wondered at, and goddess Circe answered :

'The sparkling Nereids surrounded the Argo,
and Thetis the silver-sandalled guided the ship
past danger. *You*, however, shall receive *my* help.'

So she said, then continued:

'The other way you can go
is through a narrow channel between two cliff-faces.
One cliff rises to a peak covered by storm-clouds
all year round. They never draw away to reveal
clear sky, not in summer, nor autumn. No mortal
man can climb this peak and plant his foot on its tip,
even if he had however many hands and feet,
because the peak is smooth all round as if polished.
You must steer your ship towards this cliff, bright Odysseus.
But somewhere in this cliff is a cave facing west—
facing Erebus. It's high up, and your best bowman
in full strength couldn't surely send an arrow
into the hollow of that cave. Inside there is
Scylla. You will hear a terrible whimpering,
so your men might think a puppy is in the cave.

But Scylla is a disgusting monster no one would be happy to see. None of the high-placed gods has yet to visit with her properly. Scylla is terrible to look upon. She has twelve feet, each one in its way imperfect, or wrong-jointed, or mutilated. She has six ponderous throats, and on each a head of singular deformity. Furthermore, each head is distorted by three rows of teeth, overgrown and misshapen, and her breath is full of dark death. And whatever is beyond her belly is hidden in the dark of the cave. But she pokes her heads out of her horrible pit, and she slides her slender tentacles out along the cliff-face, feeling eagerly for food here and there, catching fish and snatching up dolphins and lizards and whatever larger creature she might seize on out of the infinite store of loud-moaning Amphitrite. No ship can yet celebrate slipping past Scylla unharmed. Each of her heads always takes a sailor back with it.

Now, Odysseus, for the other cliff.

It lies lower to the waves, and is near enough to the other that you could send arrows across; and standing up on its summit is a fig tree prosperous with leaves. But at the bottom of the cliff is Charybdis. This whirlpool rages insatiably, sucking the black water down then heaving it up and out again powerfully enough to hit the stars. If your ship is caught in the suck while she swallows water down into her pit, nothing

can wrest your ship back from her evil digestion,
not even the strength of the Earthshaker himself.

So steer your ship towards Scylla's cliff and pass it by
quickly—this is your only choice. Would you rather
mourn the loss of six men, or the loss of all of you?’

All this she told me, and then I responded :

‘Come now, goddess, tell me all this truly. Is there
no way to get round implacable Charybdis?
And no way to defend myself if the other
steals away my men?’

This I asked, and beautiful Circe replied :

‘Bold man! *Again* you would wish for war and struggle?
You do not believe the word of an Immortal?
Ageless, too, is that “other” you speak of : Scylla.
Her evil is painful, ferocious, terrible—
and cannot be bested. Your only defence
is to flee from her : that is your one chance to live.
Otherwise, as you busy yourself with your weapons
you’ll see her many heads come again and again,
and finally she’ll take away all the crewmen
who populate your ship. So you must have your men
keep their oars active with all their strength, while you
pray to Hecate, whom the gods call Crataeis—
the horrible one, the night-wandering queen of spells
who birthed Scylla for one reason only : to bring
misery to men. And perhaps your prayers

may hold back the misery.'

So she said this, and I responded :

'My bravest course—is to run away?'

And as I wondered on this, Circe answered me :

'You shall find out for yourself, Odysseus, soon.

But if you trust me, and sail past these monsters,
you will come to the island of Thrinacia.

There in abundance feed the cattle of the sun,
and his superior flocks of sheep. It's well-known
there are seven herds of cattle, and seven flocks
of sheep, with fifty head in each. These animals
produce no young, yet their numbers never diminish,
as the flocks of Helios know nothing of decay
and death.

Their shepherds are goddesses, two beautiful nymphs :

shining Phaëthusa and bright Lampetia,
the daughters of Neaera the early riser
and Helios Hyperion, our god of sight.

When young, these two daughters were sent by their mother
to the island of Thrinacia, far from home,
to watch over their father's sheep and twist-horned cattle.

If you leave these beasts untouched and let them be,
and keep your return in mind, you may make it home
to Ithaca, however worse for wear. But if
you hurt them, I see ruin for your ship, and death

for all of your men. And even though you yourself
may live, your return will take long years, and bring you
to a place of evil.'

All that she said to me. Then when early Dawn came,
Circe went up the island, and I went to the ship
and ordered the men to unfasten the stern-cables.
Then the men came aboard and sat at the benches,
and in orderly array they struck the grey water
with the oars. And a favourable wind was flung
forward from behind us, to fill our sails and speed
our dark-prowed ship, a gift from faithful friend Circe,
the beautiful dark-eyed goddess of tuneful song.
So we secured the ropes throughout the ship then sat
back, and the wind and steersman headed us straight on.

Then with trouble in my heart I spoke to my men :

'O friends, our current situation is reaching
a point that goddess Circe has foretold to me
in prophecy, and I don't think it proper that
only one or two of us should know of these things;
so I will speak out to all of us together;
and whether we live or die—and surviving seems less
likely just now—at least we all will know the truth
of our meeting with the goddess of death.

Just now we're heading on a course to the Sirens.
We've been told to avoid their heavenly singing
and flowery meadow. I alone may hear their voice.

But you must first tie me tightly in bonds, shackles,
and ropes, so that I may stand firmly set against
the mast, upright and bound up tight on the mast-block;
and you'll also tie the mast's rope-ends to the mast
itself, and then the whole ship will be firmly set.
And if I ask or order you to set me free,
then you'll make my bonds, shackles, and ropes tighter still.'

And as I spoke to my men we approached the Sirens
in our long-travelled ship, as the favourable wind
was kindly hastening us on towards the island.
Suddenly the wind ceased. All the waves fell silent,
and the stillness of the air rested on the flat
surface of the sea. Perhaps some god produced this
lull, which felt strangely endless. So my men lowered
sail and stowed it away in the hollow ship;
then filled the benches. Smoothly they made the water
silvery with their shapely oars cut from our own
silver fir. Meanwhile, with my razor-sharp bronze I
cut little pieces from a large wheel of beeswax,
and kneaded each one in my fingers. My effort,
along with far-beaming Helios Hyperion,
warmed the wax, and softened it. Then I blocked up each
of the ears of my men one after another.
After that, they tied me head to foot to the mast,
upright and bound up tight on the mast-block; and they
tied the rope-ends of the mast to the mast itself.
Then they sat back down and struck at the ancient sea
with their oars. And then as we came within earshot
on our swift-moving ship, our swift-moving ship did
not escape the notice of the Sirens. And then

their sweet song began :

*“O loveliest mortal Odysseus,
 why not turn your ship in, so that we two
 may say something softly into your ear,
 and you will hear our song. Here, no mortal
 sails us by without feeling our breath
 bringing you honey-sweet song from our lips.
 We know the satisfaction you shall feel
 after us, as you ride to your home’s shores.
 We know of the toil at lofty Troy,
 all that loss at the nod of the highest.
 We know pleasing words that nourish the earth,
 the gods, and those moving without footstep.
 So, loveliest mortal Odysseus,
 why not turn your ship in, and hear our song?”*

Thus came their clear-throated voice into my ears on
 the unencumbered air : a very beautiful
 tenderness. I refused not to listen to them.

*“Come lie with us, Odysseus, and hear our song.
 We lie here sunning our nakedness on the lawn,
 soft and smooth-trimmed and ornamented with flowers.
 Come and lie with us in our sweet-doing-nothing,
 forever and ever and ever and ever.”*

And I listened, and I wrestled where I was pinned,
 and I begged my men to set me loose, using
 furious nods of my head; but my men ignored
 me, and fell to the oars with more vigorous effort.

And Perimedes and Eurylochus came close
and fastened all my shackles tighter, ignoring
all the while my crazed head.

And crazed it was.

Their witchery of melody to lead a man
astray touched me like fingers up under my skin,
and rooted around inside me, like licks of flame,
a melody like madness kindling my heart.
Their melody took more from me than it gave me,
and almost immolated my reason for good :
the inimical melody of the Sirens,
sound of dead calm.

When we had rowed well away
from the island of the Sirens, and heard no longer
their voice and their song, only then did my faithful
men unblock their ears, and free me from confinement.

And just when the island was behind us I saw
ahead of us a great froth of sea-spray blast up
into the air, a terrible surge reaching high
into the stormclouds above it; and closing in
on us was a dreadful sound of deep gurgling.
And though sweat ran down my forehead there was no
time to rest, or even to take a breath. My men,
as they looked on in awe, let the oars slip from their hands :
so, hanging loosely in their fixtures, the oars grazed
the salt water while our ship slowed to a full stop.
My rowers had ceased to move their arms and the oars.

So I walked the length of the ship forward, speaking
to each man in turn with encouraging words, then
addressed the whole crew together at once, and said :

‘O friends, are we not well acquainted with evil?
Remember the Cyclops who sealed us in his cave
by brute force? I got us out of there, with my mind.
Remember the courage you had, as you followed
my plan? So one day you will remember this day,
and how we outran our enemies. Now Come Now!
Do as I command you. Take your handles and strike
the horrible sea, using all of your strength, and hope
that Zeus the kindly one lets us flee death and live.’

This I said. Then I turned to my steersman, and spoke :

‘Hear my order and obey me; and keep my word
close while your hands are on the tiller. Make for those
two cliffs. When we’re between them, keep us well away
from that babbling whirlpool. Steer us alongside
the high cliff facing it. And keep close attention—
if you don’t you’ll find out too late you’re surrounded
by Wandering Rocks, and you’ll bring death to us all.’

Then I stopped speaking, and watched my men obey me.

As for Scylla, in the absence of a defence
I considered her a pointless item of news,
and kept the threat of her six long throats to myself.
Also it was not the moment for long speeches.
And hearing of her evil might have inspired
my men to rush from their oars and crowd together

in terror in the hold. As for me, I ignored
Circe's kind instructions and armed myself. I put
on my blazoned armour, took into my two hands
two giant spears of well-seasoned oak, walked ahead
to the fore-deck, stepped up onto it, and made ready
to strike. From there I had the best view of the cliff
as we approached it. I watched for the appearance
of Scylla from out of the rock, who was to bring
death to my friends. With darting eye I scanned the cliff-
face, its rugged surface of crags and crevasses,
until my eyes went blurry from the strain I put
on them. Meanwhile we moved deeper into a dark mist
of mingled cloud and sea-spray, obscuring all things.
Charybdis' gurgle echoed between the cliffs.
My weary eyes looked, but I could not find Scylla.
But I did not give myself up for lost just yet.

My crewmen, however, let out many sad sighs.
By now we were well inside the narrow channel
between the two cliff-faces, where the seawater
bubbled and boiled as in a great cauldron fired
from beneath. Somewhere out in the mist was Scylla,
and across from her was terrible Charybdis.
She was sucking in the salty seawater then
blowing it out again in a powerful spray
surging high into the sky, where it struck dark cloud,
then sprinkled back down onto the peaks of the cliffs.
Whenever she sucked in the salty seawater
she swirled around horribly bubbling and boiling,
pulling in the sea around her and exposing

the dark sands below, as if the sea had leaked away.
We dropped with the waters and the ship's bottom knocked
upon the sea-floor, then we rode the surge back up.
And the roar between the rock walls was deafening,
yet we heard—terrible moment—a low mewling
cry that cut through all the rest. Now my men were sick
with terror. One lost his reason and dashed from the ship
and threw himself into the sea, where he thought to
swim to wherever. Two crewmen leapt after him
to save him from death—though we all feared that ruin
had come at last, as the ship now lacked some rowers.
I watched my men flailing in the sea as Scylla
snatched six of my crewmen off the ship. When I heard
their cries I turned round towards the deck to see
them already over my head, my six best men
being yanked up with their feet and arms dangling.
They cried out to me, saying my name for the last time
in their anguish of heart. And as a fisher draws
his catch up and away from the water and flings it
onto shore, so my men were pulled away from me
gasping and struggling up to the cliff and dropped
at the opening of her cave. Just there, screaming
in terror, my men were eaten. They reached out to me
from their horrible death, and that was the worst sight
these eyes saw through all my toil on the pathless sea.

So we made our way past Scylla and Charybdis,
and the Wandering Rocks that Jason had conquered.
And after recovering my men from the water,
we rowed on, tired at heart. By then night had come.
We sealed the open seams in the planks with oakum.

All was quiet, finally, but I stayed troubled
in mind. Then the universal peace was broken
by tender animal noises of cattle and sheep :
and we saw an island, lush with dark foliage,
spread out up ahead in the dark. It was the blest
god's island. The sounds we heard were the beautiful
broad-browed cattle and the fat flocks of sheep of bright
Helios Hyperion. And asea in my
black ship, hearing the bellows of the hungry cattle
arriving at the cowhouse, and the bleating sheep,
I brought to mind the vision of the blind prophet
Teiresias, which goddess Circe had repeated
to me. She very sternly agreed that I must
avoid the island of the sun, who brings welcome
light to mortals.

So I told my crew :

'Listen to me, men, and listen well, so you hear
the prophecy of Teiresias. We have been
very sternly told to avoid the island
of Helios, who brings welcome light to mortals.
And Circe agreed. Ahead lies your worst evil.
Thus we shall row the ship away from the island.'

I said this, and my men sighed somberly. At once,
however, Eurylochus responded to me
with abysmal words :

"But toughest of all is Odysseus!
Beyond all others in strength, whose body

never tires! Your every particle
 is of iron. So it doesn't please you
 to allow friends who are dead on their feet
 to eat and sleep. No, we are not allowed
 to put into shore and have a tasty
 meal for once! No! You would rather we roam
 through the night just as we are, tired and hungry,
 and make us row deeper into the dark sea,
 though night breeds evil winds harmful to ships.
 We might row right into our "worst evil".
 What do we do if the South Wind comes blasting
 in, or the stormy West Wind, the unruly
 children of the Stars and the Dawn, wrecking
 our ship in all innocence of god's will?
 No! Be ruled by the hour of the night
 and allow us our supper. We'll stay close
 to our trusty ship. And when the sun rises
 we'll go aboard and raise the anchor-stone
 and put out for the monotonous sea.'

Thus spoke Eurylochus, and my men praised his word.
 Possibly some god was working evil on us.

So I responded to him :

'Eurylochus, you pressure me powerfully,
 alone in this as I am. So Come Now! Promise
 me, swear an unbreakable oath : if we happen
 to find a herd of cattle or a flock of sheep,
 none of us out of evil imbecility
 will kill the cattle or the sheep. Let us enjoy

the food given to us by immortal Circe.'

So I spoke, and they solemnly swore to follow my command. And only after every crewman had sworn an oath in due and solemn form did we bring the well-travelled ship to a quiet harbour and drop anchor. Nearby was a fresh-water spring of exceeding sweetness. So the men left the ship and prepared their supper. Then when their desire for food and drink was satisfied, they thought of friends whom Scylla had snatched from the benches and eaten, and my men fell to weeping; and they wept themselves to sleep.

Meanwhile, as I thought things over to myself, I saw the two nymphs in their sparkling garments, shining Phaëthusa and bright Lampetia, one dancing in the air, the other reclining on the sands of the shore. When they saw me they fled, which gave me no joy. For all I knew, the two white goddesses were already off to Helios Hyperion to report the news of our stay.

Later, at the time of the third watch of the night, when the stars had peaked and were coming down, then Zeus roused stormwinds and buried land and sea in a crush of cloud, and down from heaven dropped a second night. But then rosy Dawn came, and we guided the ship into a broad cave, whose shining air looked perfect for dancing, and had places fine for private rest. Here we dropped anchor. And I assembled my men

and spoke :

‘O friends, let us eat and drink what we have brought
on our sturdy ship. Stay away from the cattle
or we will be punished. These are the cattle and sheep
of mighty god Helios, who sees everything,
and hears everything.’

I said this, and my good-hearted men obeyed me.

Then for a month the South Wind blew nonstop.
No favourable wind came, only the South and the East.

But as long as the grain and the red wine held out,
my men kept away from the cattle. But when they
had eaten everything in the ship, and were forced
to hunt and fish and scurry after birds to feed
their bellies, and day after day were weakening
ever further with hunger, then I went away
up the island, to pray to the gods to show us
a way to get home. I found a secluded spot
sheltered from the wind. I washed my hands, then prayed
to all the gods of Olympus. And in answer
they drew down my eyelids and granted me sweet sleep.

And in my absence Eurylochus spread
more of his abysmal words to my men :

“Listen to *me*, men, and listen well, so you hear
my plans to fix our unlucky situation.

No way to any death is pleasant to imagine,

but to die of hunger is the worst way to die.
So Come On Then! We'll take the best of the cattle
and offer sacrifice to the gods in heaven.
And when we return to the land of our fathers,
our own Ithaca, right away we'll build a fine
temple to Helios and fill it with fine gifts.
On the other hand, if he gets angry at us
for eating his hallowed cattle and destroys us,
while the other gods watch because they couldn't
care less, I'd prefer a quick death of a throat full
of water, rather than wasting away slowly
on this lonely island.'

Thus spoke Eurylochus, and my men praised his word.

So the men led away the best of the cattle
that were grazing close to the ship, the beautiful
broad-browed cattle of Helios. And they stood
in a circle around them and prayed to the gods,
plucking young leaves from an oak tree to use in place
of white barley, because there was no barley left
on the ship. So they prayed, then they cut the throats
of the cattle, and they skinned the bodies. And
they cut the thigh-slices, wrapped them in a double
layer of fat, and laid raw pieces of flesh on top;
then they set their sacrifice to the gods aflame.
They had no offering of wine to pour into
the blaze, so they poured an offering of water,
and roasted all the inward parts over the fire.
Then they spitted the rest and prepared their supper.

Meanwhile I awoke where I was and I smelled
raw meat roasting. So I walked to the ship
and the shore of the sea, and the steam and odour
of roasting meat came over me, and I saw
thick smoke rising. I sighed and cried out to the gods :

'Zeus and all the blest gods who will forever be
put me to sleep pitilessly, to ruin me!
Left on their own my men worked terrible evil!'

So I went down to the ship and the sea
and condemned my men, each and all, stepping
right up into their faces—but there would be no fix
to this problem. It was too late. The cattle were dead.

And then the miraculous made me stop speaking :
the gods began weaving warnings in the air.
Before our astonished eyes the animal skins
began to crawl in our direction, the empty
hides dragging themselves forward on unsteady claws.
So we took a step back. Then the raw flesh hissing
on the spits began letting out high, piercing sounds
of alarm, a mother's cry for her calf;
and then all the cattle of Helios bellowed
across the island in one horrifying noise,
and no longer were my men hungry for roast meat.

But the winds kept blowing, and days passed, and hunger
drove my men to lead away the best of the cattle
they came across. So for six days my valorous
men feasted on the cattle of the sun.

But on the seventh day Zeus confined the furious
winds, and the raging storm ceased, and we saw the sun.
So straightaway we boarded the ship, socketed
the mast upright and raised the white sail, and launched
into the deep sea. But there would be no escape.
There are mistakes too monstrous for remorse,
or forgiveness.

So when we left the island behind us, and saw
no other landfall in sight, only sky and sea,
then it was that Zeus, or Helios, or some god,
covered the sky over our ship in a black cloud
that left the waves dark and dangerous around us.
And that was that. The West Wind came screaming in
and the fury of the storm snapped the forestay,
and the mast fell backwards and struck the steersman
at the back of the ship. I heard his bones shatter
as his head was crushed, and he tumbled off the deck;
and as the sea took his body, his good-hearted
spirit flew up and away. Then Zeus threw his white
lightning at the ship, which rattled from prow to stern
from the strike, and all of my men fell from the ship
and were taken away by the black waves, never
to return. But I rushed through the ship, trying
to get a footing in the fire and smoke left
by Zeus' thunderbolt. Meanwhile the rough water
ripped the keel away from under me, and the planks
of the sides of the ship were crumbling into
the sea. But I was lucky. The mast still held
the backstay of ox-hide, and it lashed in the wind
like a whip; but I grabbed hold of it, and with it

tied mast and keel together; and sitting on this
I was carried along by the catastrophic winds.

Finally the West Wind ceased. Then the South Wind
began to blow, and it was agony to think
I might retrace the way to Charybdis. All night
I was carried along by wave and wind, and as
the sun rose I came to the cliffs of Scylla and Charybdis.
She was sucking in the salty seawater,
then suddenly blew out a powerful
pillar of sea-spray which vaulted me up,
and as my raft dropped under me I reached
out and grabbed the mighty fig-tree, and clung
to a branch like a bat. I was dangling
over Charybdis, and the branch was long,
so I couldn't reach land with my feet. So
I hung there till she blew out her sea-spray
again, bringing my raft back to me high
in the sky. So I released my grip, and I
fell into the waves and swam to my raft.
There, on the spar and keel bound with a rope,
I rowed with my hands away from the cliffs.
For whatever reason, call it kindness
of gods, Scylla did not catch sight of me;
otherwise I would be utterly dead.

So I was carried along for nine days, and on
the tenth night I came to Ogygia, island
of tight-braided Calypso, powerful goddess
of tuneful voice. She welcomed me as guest and took
wondrous care of me. And here I should end my

story. I have already recounted the rest
of it to you and your noble wife yesterday.
It is tiresome to tell a twice-told tale.”

End of Book XII

Book XIII

And so Odysseus completed his tale,
and everyone in the hall had come to silence,
sitting in the torch-light in the dark of night, spell-
bound.

And Alcinous answered him :

“O Odysseus, you have come to walk upon
the bronze floor of our superior home. We shall
not allow you to endure any more suffering.
No more of that, I should think. And now I shall speak
to all the men here, who ever abide in these
halls drinking the sparkling wine and enjoying
the lyrics of my poet. Now I ask that you
follow my word in this that I shall say. Garments
for our guest-friend are now folded in a very
beautiful chest; with beautifully hand-crafted
gold; and all the other many gifts of honour
the Phaeacian leaders and ministers
have brought here. But come now! We shall each of us
give him a three-legged cauldron, of bronze, and as yet
untouched by fire. Each man shall contribute his share,
and the good people of this land shall make return
for the cost; and this shall be a gift from the people.”

Thus spoke Alcinous, and all approved his word.

Then they left, and each man walked towards his home and rest.

When Dawn, the rosy-fingered, delivered first light,

each man brought his valuable bronze, and Alcinous ensured their smart storage beneath the benches, so that the crewmen would have no impediment when rowing rhythmically at the oars. Then all were invited to the palace to enjoy a feast. For them the great-hearted Alcinous sacrificed a bull to Zeus Cloud-Gatherer, the Orderer, the son of Time, and who is master over all. They burned the thigh-slices, then had a wonderful feast. Demodocus, celebrated by the people, sang his god-inspired verses on the lyre. But many times Odysseus turned his gaze to the heaven-filling light of the sun, impatient for sunset. He was now prepossessed with one thought : to return home.

Just as a man who fixes the wine-dark oxen to the plough and toils over the fallows all day long, and gladly welcomes the setting of the sun, then walks on weary legs to his supper : just so did Odysseus feel relief when the sun went under the earth for the night.

Then he addressed the assembled Phaeacians, and King Alcinous in particular, and said :

“Mighty Alcinous, best of men, shall we now pour to the gods? I wish to bid you farewell. I wish you joy and luck and ever-prosperous happiness. You have given me all that my heart has wished for : friendship, and a sending home. And these gifts of bronze

should make me a wealthy man, if the gods permit it.
I shall have great joy to find my most excellent
wife at home. May all you men enjoy such delight.
May the gods bring you and your children well-being
in all possible ways, and allow no evil
to come over the misty sea to your city.”

This he said. And the assembly praised his speech,
and the men agreed that he be sent on at once,
as his words had been very properly spoken.

And Alcinous looked to his ministers and said :

“Pontonous, mix the bowl, and serve the wine to all,
so we may pray to father Zeus, and send our guest-
friend onward to his homeland.”

So Pontonous mixed
the honey-sweet wine, and granted each his cup :
and when all had poured to the gods, who enjoy
endless heaven, Odysseus rose from his chair
of honour, and held out for Arete
the golden cup, and she took it into her hands.

And he spoke :

“O noble queen, I wish you well, all your life through.
I will think of you, and your happiness here
in this fine house with your children, and your
people, and Alcinous the king.”

So Odysseus walked through the shining front gates.
And great-hearted Alcinous sent on an escort
of men to lead the way to the sands of the shore
where the swift ship awaited : and Queen Arete
at the same time sent with him some of her handmaids :
and various articles were carried for him
along the way : a fresh tunic and cloak :
and the beautiful chest that Arete herself
had neatly filled. And with them was another maid
carrying bread and red wine.

When they came down to the ship and the sea,
swiftly the noble escorts stowed all these things
neatly away in the ship, with much food and drink
as well. And they spread out a blanket and linen
sheet on the deck to the stern of the hollow ship,
so they he might sleep soundly there.

And then he stepped

aboard, and lay down in silence; while the crew
sat down and ordered everything at the benches.
And the stern-cable slipped out through the hole
in the centre of the mooring-stone and the ship
was set loose. And they leaned back and began to stir
up the salt water with the blades of their oars,
and sweet sleep drew Odysseus' eyelids down.

As on a quiet plain a team of four robust
stallions abreast at once charge forward at the snap
of the whip, lifting their heels aloft swiftly as
they rush along the way : just so the prow raised up :
and dark-gleaming seawater seethed and roared all round.

The ship ran steadily and sure. The fastest hawk
 with wings fully outstretched could not keep pace with it.
 Thus she cut swiftly through the seawaves, carrying
 a man who in thought and word and deed resembled
 a god : yet he had suffered. In times past his heart
 had taken unendurable pain, as he moved
 through the wars of men and on miserable waves.
 But just now he slept, forgetful of his pains.

When the far-brightest star sparkled in the night sky,
 bringing news to men that Dawn was fast approaching,
 the ship meanwhile raced headlong over the waves
 towards an island in the sea.

Phorcys, long-old seaman, claimed this island as his.
 Phorcys, father of Medusa, whose skin was peeled
 from her face by Athena to gild the goddess'
 shield; whose severed head delivers death through its eyes
 and leaves men stone-dead.

He fathered many foul
 monsters, each requiring elimination
 from the earth with pitiless antagonism,
 either by heroes, or by other horrible things.
 His, also, are the sharp-eyed Harpies, who assist
 the Furies in unimaginable punishments
 to whomever they please.

So in the territory
 round Ithaca Phorcys' island reached out
 with two long and jagged high-peaked promontories

like a crab crouching with open claws at seafarers.
But between them lay a quiet inlet : a shelter
from bad-blowing winds and the high relentless waves.
Inside, a ship may float unmoored, having lowered
its oar-wings to rest, though a stern-cable would reach
land without stretch. So here they rowed the ship in,
while Odysseus slept, and came up to the shore.
At its head stood a slim-leaved olive tree.
Warm mist veiled the nymphs (those faint Naiades)
who occupied a cave close by. Inside its holy
silence were mixing bowls, and jars of honey,
and sea-purple thread woven in elaborate webs
on looms by the nymphs, marvellous designs to see.
And here a spring of water streamed in endless flow.

So, while Odysseus slept,
they rowed the ship in, knowing this place from before,
and ran the ship up onto land halfway along
its length, so powerful a momentum
had wrought with their arms. Then they stepped from the strong-built
ship onto land, and they carried Odysseus
from the ship with linen sheet and silken blanket
just as they were; and down onto the sands of the shore
they lowered him, subdued in sleep. And they carried
from the ship all the treasures that the great-hearted
Phaeacians had sent with him on his journey
home, which came to be through the power of sharp-eyed
Athena, who watches always, she who knows all
the arts, Athena of the eyes, Protectress
Athena. And they lowered the treasures under
the olive tree, in shade, set apart from the way,

so that no other traveller of the earth might
find such things and ruin what was his, before he
opened his eyes. And then they went back home.

Earthshaking Poseidon, meanwhile, remembered
all the threats he had menaced mortal Odysseus
with from long ago : so now he questioned the will
of Zeus, whose glance takes in all of infinity :

“Father Zeus, I will soon lose the respect of all
the thrones of Heaven—I, Poseidon!—when they see
that mortals no longer show me any respect!
Even the Phaeacians, whom you well know are sprung
from me! I promised you that I would not deprive
Odysseus of his ‘glorious’ return, since
you granted this promise with a nod long ago,
but I did declare that I would make him suffer
many evils along the way! And yet I see him
crossing the sea in blissful sleep, in a swift ship;
and I see him lowered gently to his homeland
of Ithaca; and I see the unspeakably
wondrous gifts given to him in abundance,
treasures of bronze and gold, and the finest woven
garments (for mortals)—more, much more, very much more
treasure than Odysseus would have ever brought
home from Troy had he come without a scratch on his
body, with only his rightful share of the spoil.”

And cloud-gathering Zeus responded to him :

“ὦ πόποι ! Earthshaker! Such words you speak!

No god shows you disrespect. Bitter it would be,
 to fling into disgrace our eldest and best.
 If any mortal man, deluded by his wit
 and strength, fails to pay you proper respect,
 then to him render payment, now or hereafter.
 You may take your pleasant vengeance on him.”

And earthshaking Poseidon answered :

“Zeus the Most High, already I would have followed
 your counsel in this, but I ever stand in awe
 of approaching your power. Just now I would like
 the very beautiful Phaeacian ship,
 returning home from Phorcys on the misty sea,
 to shatter. Invigorate the winds : untimber
 their ‘well-benched’ ship and sprinkle their bodies
 on the waves and bring them glistening liquid death :
 and let them all be lost : so they shall no longer
 move to and fro with such casual ease over
 the sea. And I would have their city flattened
 under a mountain of water.”

And cloud-gathering Zeus responded :

“Good god! I see the ship speeding to the people
 of the city turning to stone in the harbour.
 This you may do. You may preserve the shape of the ship
 in rock and stand it as a marvel by the seashore.
 But I will not have the city flattened under
 a mountain of water.

At least not at this point.”

So when Earthshaker Poseidon heard this he went to Scheria, where the Phaeacians live, and bent his eye to the shore, to where the sea-stirring ship was rushing swiftly towards the people of the city. Earthshaker then came close, and turned the ship to stone. And striking with a down-turned hand he fixed her fast right where she was : and then he went away.

And those of the Phaeacians who saw this came close to one another, and each looked to his neighbour, and spoke with winged words :

“ ὦ μοι ! Our ship has been reduced to rock. She stands frozen in the sea, standing by the shore. Did we not all see it? Who has woven such a wonder?”

So they spoke among themselves : but they knew nothing of what had happened before their eyes.

Then Alcinous addressed the assembly by the shore of the sea, and said :

“ ὦ πόποι !

The prophecies spoken in ancient speech return to us now. My father warned me that Poseidon would punish us in anger for using his sea, for conveying men safely, and so easily. He told me that one day a very beautiful Phaeacian ship, returning from an escort over the misty sea, would be wrecked,

and a mountain of water would crush our city.”

So spoke King Alcinous to his people,
 the Phaeacians of the long oar, famed for their ships.
 And the king decreed they would escort men over
 the sea no longer, no matter who came to their city.
 Then they sacrificed twelve prime bulls to Poseidon,
 in the hope that he show them mercy, and not crush
 the city under a mountain of water.

Thus in terror they stood and prayed to Poseidon,
 who holds everlasting dominion over the sea
 and all its ways; and as the Phaeacian leaders
 and ministers prayed at the altar, Odysseus
 woke from sleep, opening his eyes to his homeland.

But after long absence he was yet to recognize
 where he was, as the landscape was veiled in mist,
 a darker night, poured around him by the goddess
 Athena. Not yet did he apprehend the paths
 and harbours and high cliffs and thriving trees :
 just now his home looked different from itself.

So he sprang to his feet and he looked around him,
 and he sighed, and struck his thigh with a down-turned hand,
 and in despair he spoke :

“ὦ μοι ! Now where am I? And who may be out there?
 Savage men, or perhaps god-fearing? Where am I
 with all this wealth on my hands? Which way should I go?
 Why didn’t the Phaeacians leave me
 with another mighty king, who would have welcomed
 me, and sent me on my way home? As things stand
 I have no idea where and when I’ll be able

to traffic this treasure. But I can't just leave it
here as it is, for anyone to come and take it.

ὦ πόποι !

The Phaeacian leaders and minsters are not
who I thought they were. They've left me god knows where.
I asked them to bring me to sunny Ithaca,
and they have not done this. Mighty Zeus, protector
of suppliants, punish them for missing the mark!
But come, I suppose I should count all this treasure."

Thus he spoke. So he counted his very beautiful
bronze three-legged cauldrons, and the gold, and the fine
woven garments. Then, shedding tears for his homeland,
he paced the shore of the loud-roaring sea, sighing
many times. And stepping out of the mist came
a fresh-faced youth, a shepherd of sheep, delicate
in composure, as a king's son might be. He wore
a cloak, well-pleated and pinned at the shoulder
with a brooch; and round his slim waist a leather belt
gathered in the linen of his well-sewn tunic.
Sandals bound his milk-white feet; and in his hands
he held a spear. So he and Odysseus
stood face to face. And Odysseus spoke :

"O friend, since you are the first I've met in this land,
χαῖρέ ! And may you greet *me* with welcome thoughts!
Save this; and save me. I pray to you as to a god,
and come to my knees. Will you speak, so I may know,
and tell me what land this is, what people? What men
live here? Is this an island resting on the sea?
Or a marshy end of a tremendous mainland?"

And the fresh-faced youth , a shepherd of sheep, answered :

“O poor stranger, you’re as simple as an infant
if you know nothing of the land you’re kneeling on.
Surely it’s not a nameless place! In fact it’s known
all over : by those who live in the east, who face
dawn and the sun; and by those who live in the west,
who face evening and the realm of shadows. It’s rugged
country, not fit for horsemanship. And yet it’s not
utterly good for nothing, though it’s but a small
island. Grain grows in abundance, and the grape-vine :
and everything swells under the copious rain
that waters us here. It’s good land to pasture goats,
and to graze cattle on. We have trees of all kinds;
and the watering-places are plentiful and never
run dry. So, good stranger, the name of Ithaca
has reached all the way to the plain of Troy, which, it’s
said, lies far from this country of Achaea.”

So he spoke, and long-suffering Odysseus
sighed in triumph. He rejoiced to be home
on his soil, the land of his fathers,
while he listened to the young man speak.

And he answered with winged words—but no,
he caught his words before they left his lips.
He would keep the truth to himself for now,
ever formulating crafty thoughts in his mind.

And so he said :

“Young man, I’ve heard men tell of Ithaca, even
as far away over the sea as ancient Crete.
There, men learn of the world through a silent speech
of scratchings on papyrus that speak to men
as from a tongue. There may even be inscriptions
marked on the cauldrons among my possessions here.
To protect all these possessions of mine,
I killed a man, and had to flee well-harboured Crete.
There, the fastest man on the island was the king’s
son Orsilochus. His line is venerable,
and reaches back to Minos and the labyrinth.
This man plotted to rob me of my possessions,
because I’d refused to serve under his father
at Troy—as I had men under my own command.
He’d take my share of the spoil of the treasure
of Troy, which I’d paid for with unendurable
misery, and thus have his vengeance on me.
So I struck him with my bronze-tipped spear when he came
from the fields after dark. I and another man
lay in wait along the way. Night was at its blackest,
as heaven and earth were covered in a gloomy mist.
No one saw us, and I took his life unseen.
Then I extracted my bloody bronze, and straightaway
went down to a swift ship, and made prayer
to the wave-taming Phoenicians, who were agreeable
to my rich gifts, and would have brought me to Pylos;
or to Elis, where the powerful Epeans
rule the valleys; but a fierce wind blew us off-course,
and we drifted through the night, and here I am,
who fears no god. You hear the one of Medusa,

when she was still young and a wondrous beauty?
Poseidon seized her in a temple to Athena,
who lowered her gaze behind her shield. But the chaste
daughter of Zeus listened to it all. Anyway,
they rowed into the harbour and laid me here asleep
on the sands, and they took my treasure out of the ship.
Then they left for opulent Sidon, where they make
their blood-coloured dye which brings them fame all over.
And now you see me, a cornered man with troubled heart.”

So spoke subtle-minded Odysseus.

And at all this the young man smiled, and as he
reached out with his hand he radiated bright light :
and by the time Odysseus felt the caress
of that hand, the fresh youth was now the shining-eyed
goddess Athena, supereminent in beauty,
and clothed just now in exquisite hand-work.

And she spoke :

“Crafty as the fox you are. Unrelentingly
cunning. Spinning such tales! You might almost fool
a god. Unwearyingly artful contriver,
insatiate for artifice, not even in your
own land will you rest your sly and clever speech,
which you love to the bottom of your heart. But come!
No more such talk. You and I both know the value
of advantage. Of all men you are far the best
in counsel and in word, and I of all the gods
in wisdom and foxiness. At any time did

you know that Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus,
stands by your side, and watches over your struggles?
It was I who inspired the love and trust
in the hearts of the Phaeacians. You and I
must now weave a plan. For you should know straightaway
of the fate of your well-made house and the troubles
you will have to tolerate : for like it or not
you shall have to be patient. And you must not yet
speak out to any man—or any woman—
of your return from your wanderings. Keep silent,
and endure much brazen effrontery—for now—
and receive silently the violence of men.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered her :

“Goddess, you challenge even the wisest of us
to distinguish your presence, considering you
come to meet a man in whatever shape you like.
And I know well how kind you were to me, so long
as we Achaean sons were fighting on the plain
of Troy. But after Priam’s high-towered city
was pulverized to dust, and we left in our ships,
some god scattered us on the waves, and I never
again felt you in my presence, daughter of Zeus,
while I struggled in hardship on the water,
searching for a remedy to my wanderings.
I struggled to hold my broken heart together
while the time of my wanderings stretched out far.
Now you say it was you who saved me from evil,
and brought me to the prosperous Phaeacian
land. It was you who led me into their city.

So now I kneel before you, and ask in the name
of the father—as I do not believe I’m in
sunny Ithaca; this is yet another land
I’ve come to, and I suspect your words are meant
to mock me, or trick me—tell me truly whether
I have come home.”

Then answered the goddess, shining-eyed Athena :

“You’re ever quick-minded, eloquent about it,
and highly sensible : and yet you’re stuck in a
miserable state. But you’re courteous about it;
so I’d rather not leave you behind just yet.
I think a man on his joyful return from his travels
would rush to his halls to see his children and wife :
but you have not even asked of her, who passes
her days and nights in sorrow for her lost husband.
She you will allow to keep weeping unwitting,
until you have used her well to your advantage.

Never for a moment did I despair of you;
I knew you would see your return. But I also
knew you would come without your men, all of whom you
lost. And I prefer not to quarrel with my uncle
Poseidon if I can help it. He has a taste
for vengeance, and he’s still furious at you
for blinding his fine son. But come now! Let me lift
this mist and show you Ithaca, so you will be sure.
Is this not Phorcys’ harbour? Here, at its head,
is the slim-leaved olive tree. And there is the cave
sacred to the nymphs who are called Naiads. Inside

its holy silence you once brought gifts of sacrifice.
Now see revealed the peak of high wooded Neion.”

Thus spoke goddess Athena, who lifted the mist
and revealed all the land. And the long-suffering
Odysseus rejoiced to be home, and lowered
his lips, and kissed the soil. Then at once he raised
his arms to heaven and prayed to the nymphs, and said :

“O Nymphs, O Naiades, delight of all woodland streams,
whose waters nurse the flowers along the way—
O daughters of Zeus! I never thought I’d see you
again. Yet here I am, rising to my feet to
honour you in kindly prayer. As in the old days
I shall come bearing gifts for you—if Athena
the Protectress allows me to live, and see
my son grow into a man.”

And the goddess answered him, shining-eyed Athena :

“Stay strong in heart and mind and those things shall
be no worry. Come now! We must carry your treasure
into the cave, whose shadows will keep everything
safe for you. And then we must plan a way for you
to bring everything to its best outcome.”

So saying, the goddess entered into the dim cave
and explored its hiding places. Odysseus,
meanwhile, hauled all his treasure inside, the gold,
the bulky bronze, and the finely woven garments,
which the Phaeacians had given him. He placed it

all in the shadows, then shield-bearing Athena
blocked the entrance of the cave with a stone.

Then they sat together under the canopy
of the olive tree, and planned death for those people,
the arrogant mob ruining his house and home.

First to speak was shining-eyed goddess Athena :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus,
consider how you might best place your hands on those
shameless wooers of your wife, who for three years now
have been foolishly playing the masters of the halls—
in *your* house; and for three foolish years have striven
to seduce your godly wife, speaking of ‘bride-prices’
and offering marriage gifts. And while she grieves
for your absence, and awaits your return, she gives
encouragement to all the men, soft words to each,
sending them messages of hope, but her intent
is not what those hateful offenders think it is.”

And Odysseus answered :

“Without your counsel, goddess, I would have entered
my halls to meet the same fate as Agamemnon.
Come now! Let us weave a plan to kill them all.
Stand by me and fill me with titanic courage,
like at Troy, when we kicked its mighty crown aside.
Stand by me as you did then, o shining-eyed one.
With you beside me I’ll fight even three hundred men,
if you, reverend goddess, choose to help me in this.”

And Athena answered :

“I will be there, and keep you close at heart while
we’re busy with our work. I think those wooers,
those vile consumers of your livelihood,
will stain the earth with their blood and brains.

Now come!

I shall disfigure your shape, so that no man knows you :
dry up the fair skin on your face, and make your strong
limbs stiff and ungraceful, and remove all that hair
from your head, and dress you in abominable
garments that men will be disgusted to look at.
And those beautiful eyes of yours I will weaken.
And all the wooers will think you a luckless, ill-
favoured disgrace. As for your wife and son, whom you
left behind in your halls : they, too, will not know you.

As for yourself, first you will go to the swineherd
who tends your beasts. He has a kindly feeling
for you, and loves your son and wise Penelope.
You will find him settled by his pigs, which feed
by the Rock of Corax, by Arethusa’s spring.
There they feed on the acorns they love so well,
and drink the fresh water, and grow fat all the while.
Sit with him, and question him.

And I shall be off

to Sparta, the land of beautiful women where
Helen now rightfully lives, to bring your son back,
your beloved Telemachus. He sailed over

the spacious sea to Lacedaemon, to seek out
news of his father, to hear if you are living.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered her :

“Why did you not tell him yourself, who knows all things?
You wanted *him*, too, to wander in hardship?
To suffer on the restless waves? While others ate
his life away?”

And the goddess answered, shining-eyed Athena :

“Don’t take it too much to heart. I brought him there
so men might respect his efforts, and speak out their
approval; and thereby your son might gain allies.
As it happens he’s in the palace of the son
of Atreus, sitting at ease with Menelaus,
and doing no work of any kind. Awaiting
him, however, is an inexpressible joy.
Yet at the same time there are young men in a black
ship, lying in wait at the island of Asteris,
preparing to kill him before he returns home.
But I do not think that is going to happen.
Those who ate through your life shall be swallowed up
by the ravenous earth.”

Thus spoke goddess Athena. And Odysseus’
skin shrivelled up around his bones, and his fair hair
fell out. And she covered his decayed body in rags,
and weakened the eyes she thought so beautiful :
and gave him a filthy tunic, and a torn cloak

soiled with sooty smoke. And she cast around him
the skin of a swift deer, now bare and sorry-looking.
She gave him a staff, and a leather bag with holes
in it, which hung from his shoulder on a frayed cord.

So they settled their plan, then each went their own way.
And goddess Athena sped to Lacedaemon,
fast in pursuit of the son of Odysseus.

End of Book XIII

Book XIV

So Odysseus left the harbour behind him,
as he followed a dirt track up through woodland
in hill-country, going the way that Athena
had told him, so that he might find the good swineherd,
who of all his servants cared best for his homestead.

And he found him sitting by his hut, on his own,
on the far side of a courtyard. The place was built
on high-lying land visible all round : so all
round this spot was a strip of open space,
to guard the swineherd against surprise. This whole place
the swineherd built himself for the livestock of his master,
who was long gone : and the swineherd hadn't bothered
to inform the lady of the house or old man Laertes
about it. A long wall of squared stones surrounded
the wide and beautiful spot, and was topped all round
with thorn-bushes. Out beyond the courtyard he had
hammered in huge stakes, laid out in close and frequent
order, and made from splitting off from round the oak
wood the softer part, to get to the hard dark heart.
Closer to the court he'd built twelve sties in neat
order, the gaps between them narrow and straight :
these were the beds for the swine, and each sty penned
fifty wallowing pigs, all females for breeding.
But the boars passed the night in the open air beyond :
and these days their numbers were much reduced—because
those vile people kept eating all the fatted hogs,
as the swineherd was obliged to keep sending them :
so these were now eaten down to three hundred and sixty.

At night, four dogs, ferocious as wolves, lay by them, guarding what their master loved so well. Just now he was cutting a rough piece of leather hide into boots for his feet. Three of his men were out tending the herds, while the fourth he had sent into town with a fatted boar he was constrained to yield up to those horrible people, whose constant hunger demanded endless slaughter for fresh meat to eat.

Suddenly the dogs began growling lowly :
seeing Odysseus, they rushed at him, barking,
but he was sly enough to sit right down and let
the staff fall from his hand. Still the dogs were ready
to tear him apart anyway in his own farmstead;
but the swineherd followed behind, and scattered them
away with a shout and a few flung stones. Then he
stood face to face with his master in the gateway,
and said :

“Old man! My dogs were ready to tear you apart,
and that would have brought me trouble. The gods give me
enough sorrow as it is. Day by day I sit
here mourning my master, and tend to his swine
that others eat, while he wanders who knows where,
lost among strange voices in foreign places—
if he even lives and sees the light of the sun.
Now come, old man; come with me to the hut.
After food and drink, you can tell me who you are,
and as many woes as you wish to remember.”

At this the swineherd turned around and led the way

into the hut. Odysseus watched as the man
 spread a soft cover of brushwood over the floor,
 and over that the skin of a wild goat,
 large and hairy, which he slept on at night.
 Odysseus was glad to receive such welcome,
 and he spoke to his host, and said :

“May Zeus fulfil all you wish for, stranger, since you
 welcome me here with such kindness of heart.”

And in answer the swineherd Eumaeus replied :

“Stranger, should a man more miserable than you
 come here, I still wouldn’t shame him. It was Zeus
 who brought you here, and he watches over strangers
 and the poor. Where you and I stand, even small gifts
 are treasured : and that is how it is. It’s the usual way
 with slaves : like those who live in fear when their masters
 are filthy, such as my youthful overlords. That’s my story.
 The gods have dragged out the return of a kind man
 who loved me; and had promised to give me my own
 piece of land. I would have had a house and a wife :
 a woman many chased, but the woman I won.
 I’d have been given what any kind-hearted master
 gives a slave who labours long to make his wealth grow,
 and prosper; just as my work here prospers.
 If my master were here growing old in his home
 in happiness, he would have blessed me with reward.
 But he’s dead. Yet Helen lives. I’d wipe her entire
 family from the earth if I could, for that woman
 has undone too many good men to count.

It was for the sake of Helen that my master
followed Agamemnon to Troy, to fight the Trojans.”

At that the swineherd Eumaeus rose to his feet,
and gathered in his tunic with a leather belt,
and he walked to the sties, where the companies
of his females were penned. He chose two and cut
their throats, and singed them of their bodily bristles;
then cut them to pieces and stuck it all on spits.
He roasted the flesh, then he sprinkled white barley
over it all and placed the spits, just as they were,
before Odysseus, who felt the hot fumes rising
from the flesh. Then the swineherd took his wooden cup,
mixed honey-sweet wine and set it between them;
then he sat himself down facing Odysseus,
and he began to speak :

“Stranger, eat this that slaves have to offer : sow’s flesh.
The fat hogs go to the hogs—my vile masters,
who have neither thought nor heart in their bodies.
(Those ugly inside, are ugly in every way.)
They continue on without fear of retribution.
But if the gods honour anything, it should be
the good that men and women do; and as for cruel
work, and wickedness, well . . . yet my masters persist.
Even the low-minded pirates who slip ashore
some strange land to steal another’s treasure, and Zeus
allows them to fill their ships and sail home :
even they can’t help but still fear divine judgment.
But my miserable masters act as if some god’s
voice told them that my master is well and truly dead.

Instead of slinking back to their own homes, to try to win the heart of my mistress in the right way from there, they stay here, eating up the wealth of the estate, hoglike and lawless, and they leave nothing uneaten. Not a night or day comes from Zeus but they slaughter not one, not two victims only : and they're drawing all the wine for themselves, thereby wasting it. My master's wealth was once inexpressibly great. No other warrior here in Ithaca or out there on the mainland could boast of so much. Twenty men couldn't put together what my master put together alone. I will tell you of it.

There are twelve herds of cattle on the mainland, and as many sheep, and pigs, and goats. His herdsmen are of his own people, but many strangers, too. Here on the island his goats graze by the shore, eleven well-fed herds watched over by good men. And each day all these good herdsmen are forced to hand over their best-looking animal. As you saw, I watch the pigs. I, too, must hand over the best-looking of the boars each day, to my vile masters."

So spoke the swineherd Eumaeus.

Meanwhile, Odysseus took his food and drink in silence, contemplating terrifying vengeance on those people. And when he had finished eating, and his heart was satisfied with the kindly meal, he accepted into his hands a brimming cup of wine, which was the swineherd's own ivy-wood cup; and in good spirits he spoke to his host, and said :

“O friend, who was this man who bought you with his wealth,
 this man so rich and powerful, as you say? He died
 in the struggle to preserve Agamemnon’s honour?
 Tell me of him; maybe I knew him. Surely Zeus knows
 if I saw him, so I may have good news for you :
 for I have travelled far.”

And in answer the swineherd Eumaeus replied :

“Old man, no one wandering into Ithaca
 with any ‘news’ of him will get his wife and son
 to believe it. The down-and-out say anything
 to get what they want, and all of it is rubbish.
 There’s not a man who comes here that doesn’t visit
 my master’s wife to tell a tale full of lies.
 And she welcomes each, pampers each, and questions each,
 and weeps, as women do when they have lost their men.
 You, too, old man, would fix up an excellent story
 to get a new cloak and tunic to wear. Am I right?”

By this time surely the wolves and swift birds have torn
 every bit of flesh from his bones, and his spirit
 has flown away : or all those fishes in the sea
 have nibbled him down to nothing, and his bones lie
 on some seashore somewhere, covered deep in sand.
 Somewhere out there he died, and his friends will grieve
 all the rest of their days for what happened to him—
 especially me. I’ll never find another master
 so kind, no matter where I go. Not even if
 I went back to the house of my father and mother,

where a long time ago I was born, and where they
 raised me themselves. Not a day goes by but I wish
 to see them again, and be back in my homeland.
 Yet it's Odysseus I mourn for most. Old man,
 you hear me speak his name with reverence, though he's gone.
 My master loved me, and cared for me truly, his slave.
 So I'll keep saying his name with awe, though he's gone."

And Odysseus answered him :

"Friend, you're very sure of yourself, aren't you,
 to say he'll never return, so hopeless at heart?
 But what if I said to you, with a solemn oath,
 that Odysseus will come home? For this good news
 I give you, may I have a reward, when he comes,
 and returns to his home? Dress me in a fine cloak
 and tunic. But not before he comes. Though it's plain
 to see I'm in great need, I will accept nothing
 until then. As hateful as Hades is the man
 who speaks false, even if necessity drives him to it.

Hear me now, mightiest god in Heaven, Zeus :
 to you, to this rightful hospitable table,
 and to the hearth of kind Odysseus, where I
 have come to, I swear these words are true :
 with the sinking of the crescent and the dark moon
 coming, Odysseus shall come. He shall come to take
 vengeance on those vile people dishonouring
 his wife and shining son."

And in answer the swineherd Eumaeus replied :

“Old man, for your ‘good news’ I pay you nothing,
 because Odysseus is not coming back.
 Let us drink in peace and speak of something else.
 And don’t remind me of this again. It makes my
 heart hurt when I think of my excellent master.
 As for your oath, we’ll leave it for now—though, in truth,
 I want him to return, as does Penelope,
 and old man Laertes, and good Telemachus.
 Thinking of Telemachus makes me unhappy.
 The gods helped the son of Odysseus
 grow into a young man beautiful to look at,
 and I expected him to stand among men
 as his mighty father had : but one of the deathless
 blinded his clear sight—or maybe it was someone’s
 evil counsel—and he sailed off to Pylos
 to hear of his father. Now those vile people,
 the ‘honourable suitors’, lie in wait to kill
 him, and end the line of godly Arcesius
 outside of Ithaca—an inglorious death.
 Well, we’ll leave him for now. He will be killed,
 or Zeus will hold his covering hand over him.
 Now come. Tell me of your sorrows, old man,
 and tell it truly. Tell me of your homeland,
 your people, your city, your family.
 What kind of ship did you come on? Which sailors
 brought you to the island? You didn’t come on foot.”

So subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“I’ll tell you my story truly. For we have food

and wine to feast on in peace and quiet inside
this hut, while outside others are bent upon work.
If only we could sit here a year together.
I could easily go on with a tale of sorrow—
all I've suffered at the pleasure of the gods,
who've punished my spirit continuously—
I wouldn't finish that tale in a year.

I come from an ancient family on Crete.
My father was a wealthy man, and raised many
sons in wedlock. But my mother was bought,
a παλλακίς—a concubine. Yet my father,
Castor, son of Corax, who I declare begot me,
honoured me as equal to his legitimate sons.
The people of Crete revered my father as a god,
for his wealth and good fortune and glorious sons.
But the goddess of death led him away to Hades.
And his glorious sons pitched pebbles to divide
the property among them, and to me they gave
an insultingly small share, and a little land.
But I won a great wife from a wealthy family
on account of my pre-eminence. I was no
good-for-nothing coward. I had won distinction
on many fields of battle. Now you see I'm much
reduced; but from the cut trunk you can imagine
what the size of the tree was. And very great
was the trouble that felled me. But back then Ares
and Athena gave me courage enough to carve
my way through armies. Whenever I assembled
my men for a sneak attack, planting seeds of evil
for the enemy, my spirit never feared death,

but I was always the first to spring forward,
and my spear grew large before all those before me,
all those who tried to flee but could not save themselves.

That was the man I was in war. I never found
field-work pleasing to me, nor household-handling,
nor raising children. I preferred the spears of war,
and long death-bringing arrows : miserable things
that make others shudder. Some god put such a pleasure
in my heart; other men have other pursuits they
enjoy. Before the Achaeans went to towered
Troy I'd already led warriors on fast-
going ships to men in foreign places nine times,
and gained very much. I took whatever I liked,
and gained more when I got my share of the spoil.
I grew rich quickly : then was respected and feared,
a man honoured by the people of Crete. But Zeus
put us on that wide-thundering way that slaughtered
many warriors. I and noble Idomeneus
led fighting-ships to Troy, as we couldn't refuse
the voice of the beloved people of Crete.

So for nine years we sons of the Achaeans fought
the Trojans, and in the tenth destroyed the city,
but then some god scattered all of us on the sea,
and merciful Zeus chose miserable evil
for me. I was happy for a month when I got
home, delighting in my wife and children
and all my property. But my pioneering
spirit urged me to lead a voyage to Egypt.

So I gathered good and faithful men, and nine ships
that I prepared with care. Then my army feasted
for six days. I provided the many victims,

so the men might offer holy sacrifices
and enjoy a memorably monumental feast.

On the seventh day we boarded ship and left Crete,
and sailed with a very favourable North Wind
as easily as running down a river.

At no time did my ships meet with injury,
and the men on the benches sat healthy and sound,
and the wind and the steersmen guided us.

On the fifth day we came to beautiful Egypt,
and I anchored our pitch-black ships in the Nile.

Then I commanded my faithful men to stay
with the ships with weapons at the ready,
and I sent scouts out to see what was what.

But my men gave way to lunacy, and following
their own impulses they began devastating
the very beautiful fields of Egypt, killing
the men, carrying off women and small children.

The city quickly heard the far-reaching cries,
and the cries of rescue did not go unheard.

At daybreak the entire plain was full of foot-
soldiers and chariots and sharp bronze gleams :
then Zeus the Orderer threw a panic into
my men, and not one warrior stood his ground
and faced the enemy, who now had completely
surrounded us. So they slaughtered many of us
with the sharp bronze; and the ones who were left were brought
back inland to labour for them as slaves.

Right then Zeus gave me this particular thought :
it were better to die then and there, because worse
awaited as a captive in Egypt. Such was my fate.

So I removed my helmet from my head, and my shield
from my shoulder; and let the spear drop from my hand :
and I stood before the chariot of the king.

I dropped to my knees, and I embraced his legs,
and kissed them, and waited. And the Egyptian king
took pity on me, and let me live. He brought me
into his chariot, and as we rolled through the ranks
of his foot-soldiers, a great many, blind with rage,
were eager to plunge their ashen spears into me;
but the wise king raised his hand, which held his men back,
because he feared God's wrath, which comes to those
who work without restraint, and awe for God's will.
Thus, with tears streaming down I entered the city;
and the Egyptian king brought me to his palace.

Seven years I stayed there, and assembled many
possessions, for the Egyptians gave much to me.
When the eighth year rolled in, a Phoenician man came,
experienced in wickedness, a deceiver
who had already left much evil behind him.
Won over by his words I went with him
to Phoenicia, the place of his house and all
his possessions. There I stayed with him for a year.
So the months and days passed by and the year rolled round
through the seasons. Then he put me on a deep-sea
ship to Libya, having made up a story
that I would haul some freight with him. I went aboard
the ship, because I was forced to. Meanwhile, I
already knew what he actually meant to do :
sell me and get a handsome price. So the ship ran
with a favourable North Wind on a deep-sea

course out of Crete. But Zeus was watching, and when we were out of sight of land, then the sky and sea were plunged into darkness. Zeus of the Thunderbolt put a black cloud over the ship, and the sea-air and roving waves turned full dark beneath it. Then Zeus threw his lightning at the ship, and the planks shuddered all over from the strike, and all the men fell out of the ship. They surrounded the black ship like birds, then were carried away on the waves : and the god took everything from them. But good Zeus still had plans for me : and through the bitter fumes of his lightning blast, just when my heart was drowned in misery, the mast of the dark-prowed ship, apparently invincible, floated near me, and Zeus himself put it into my hands, so that I might escape ruin yet again. I wrapped my arms round it and was carried along by the deadly winds. They pushed me like a plaything for nine days, but on the tenth pitch-black night the great wave carried me to the land of Thesprotia. There, the magnanimous ruler of that ancient land, mighty King Pheidon, cared for me out of kindness. By chance a beloved son of his discovered me by the shore, and carried me, cold and exhausted, back to the palace, and the wise king took my hand and raised me to my feet; and gave me clothes to wear : a cloak and tunic.

There, I heard tales of Odysseus. The king said he welcomed him briefly on his way homeward. Then he unveiled before my eyes the treasure that Odysseus had assembled : bronze and gold

and iron, and everything made with the finest art. I saw enough to feed ten generations of children, so immense was the wealth I saw left in the halls of the king. Odysseus himself, however, was gone : the king said he had travelled to holy Dodona, to hear the song of the doves settled in the branches of Zeus' towering oak, hoping to learn how to get back into fertile Ithaca after so long a time : in plain sight, or secretly. And the king pointed out to me a ship anchored in the water, and said its crew were ready to take him back to his native land. Meanwhile, I was sent away ahead of him : by chance a Thesprotian ship was sailing to fruitful Dulichium, to trade for its wheat. The king commanded the crew to kindly bring me to King Acastus there. But the crew had another idea for me : they planned to leave me in misery instead. When the wave-crossing ship was far from land, the crew prepared me for my day of slavery that had seemingly awaited me since my time in Egypt. They tore my cloak and tunic from me, and forced me into rags, so they might sell me off : these rags you see now with your eyes, on my body. Then at sundown we sailed near the well-tilled fields of Ithaca. They tied me tightly to a bench in the ship with a strong rope, then they went ashore to enjoy their supper on the sands. But the gods themselves easily untied the knots, and the strong rope fell away from me. I covered my head in my cloak, and went down a plank into

the waves of the sea carefully, without making
a splash. I sank into the salt water, drifted
a while in silence, then I reached both arms out
and began to swim. Soon I was away from them,
then rose from the sea. I went up into a dense
wood, and I lay there hidden by the many leaves.
Soon I heard their loud cries and shouts as they went to
and fro in a fury, searching for me. When they
saw no further profit in wandering aimlessly,
they abandoned their search and returned to their ship.
Thus the gods had concealed me well, easily so.
And then they brought me to the hearth of a wise man.
My fortune, it seems, is to stay stubbornly alive.”

And so to all that the swineherd Eumaeus replied :

“Ah, unlucky stranger, that ‘tale of sorrow’
was indeed as you said it was : all your troubles
made my heart hurt—all that lonely wandering.
But don’t expect me to believe what you said
about Odysseus. And why must you tell lies
to a man who has welcomed you? As it is,
I know what’s to know about my master’s return.
The gods hate him very much, all of them, because
he eluded them at Troy, and lived, when many
were killed, and died in the arms of their friends.
Though they obliterated many Achaeans,
the gods couldn’t wind up Odysseus’ fate.
If they *had* caught up with his tricky ways
and ended him forever, then the Achaean
armies would have made him a burial mound,

and his son would have shared in his father's honour.

As it is, the Snatchers of men—the seawinds—
took him wherever; and he left no news behind.

I keep out of it; I stay out here on my own
with my pigs, far away from voices of men.

I never go into town, unless lovely Penelope
asks me to, whenever rumours from whoever
and wherever come wandering into Ithaca.

Then, a 'council is convened to investigate' :
that is, everyone sits around wondering at things.
Some mourn their lost friend; while others delight
in their good fortune and keep eating up his life
without fear of vengeance. I keep out of it :

I ask no questions, and I don't go looking for news.
So I will never again be fooled by some man
with a tale. Not after this Aetolian,
or whoever he was, cheated me cruelly.

He said he'd killed a man and had wandered the earth,
and one day he found himself in front of my hut.

I welcomed him in with a kind heart. Then he said
he'd seen Odysseus in Crete, with Idomeneus,
repairing his ships that were damaged by seawinds.

His story was that Odysseus would return
during summer or by the end of harvest-time,
bringing treasure beyond words, and leading his band
of courageous warriors. I don't require
a seer to tell me that tale I heard was a lie.

Now here you sit, an old man of sorrows brought to me
by some god. You don't need to cheat me with tall tales
to win my kindness. Zeus, whom all rightly fear,
watches over the welfare of the stranger. And

as I told you, all your troubles made my heart hurt.”

And Odysseus of subtleties answered him :

“It’s plain you don’t believe me, though I swore an oath,
and I’m not convinced you ever will believe me.

But I’ll make a deal with you, and let all the gods
of Olympus be witness to my words.

When your master returns home, you will dress me
in a cloak and tunic, and send me in my new
clothing on my way to Dulichium, where I
wish to be. But if your master does not return,
as I tell you, your slaves can toss me off the highest
peak in Ithaca. That’ll give men second thoughts
about deceiving you.”

And the swineherd answered him :

“What a glorious name I should win for myself
among men, now and forever, if I welcome
a stranger with kindness, then toss him off a cliff.
Then I’d truly pray to Zeus for help. Come now;
it’s supper time. My men should be here soon,
and I plan for us a very pleasant meal.”

Thus, in just that way, the two of them spoke.

When the other herdsmen returned, leading the pigs,
they put the sows in the sties to rest for the night,
and a bustle of grunting and snorting arose
from the pigs as they were bolted in.

And godly Eumaeus called out to his men :

“Pick the best of our white-tusked boars, for slaughter.
We shall honour this stranger from afar; and thereby
enjoy ourselves as well, who work and suffer for
the long-toothed pigs, while others eat of our labour
—unpunished.”

So saying, he rose to his feet. And he split wood
with the cold bronze while his men led in a fatted boar
and stood him on the hearth. The swineherd, sensibly
honouring the Deathless Ones first, took the bristles
from the head of the boar and tossed them in the fire,
praying for wise Odysseus to return home.

Then he rose to his feet, and he raised his hand high
and struck the white-tusked boar with a thick piece of oak
he’d left behind, after chopping the firewood.

And he slit its throat; and its life flew away.

Then the others efficiently cut up the body.

The swineherd prepared for the gods some large pieces
of raw flesh and thick fat, sprinkling barley meal
over it all, then tossed the offering into the fire.

The others cut the rest into smaller pieces
and spitted them; then roasted the meat skilfully.

Then they drew off the pieces and piled them
on a platter; and the swineherd stood up to carve,
and his men knew he would do this fairly and well.

He sliced the meat into seven portions. One he
put by with a prayer for the nymphs and Hermes,
son of goddess Maia, shining in the night sky
among her sisters the Pleiades, the ladies

of plenty. Then he passed out the other portions among his men. But to Odysseus he gave the tender back-piece of the white-tusked boar. Honouring him thus, he made his master's heart glad.

And Odysseus spoke to him :

“Eumaeus, may Zeus honour you as you honour me, choosing for me this choice portion, such as I am.”

And swineherd Eumaeus replied :

“Eat, good man; enjoy. The god gives this, and slights that : whatever he likes. Power has all the choice.”

And as he spoke the swineherd saw his offering to heaven charring in the fire; so then he poured to the powers that will forever be, then put the wooden cup into the hands of Odysseus, destroyer of cities; then the swineherd sat down to his own portion. And Mesaulius served out the bread, whom the swineherd had obtained by himself, while his master was long gone; and he hadn't bothered to inform the lady of the house or old man Laertes about it, when he bought him from the Taphians with his own possessions. So they reached for the many gifts set before them; and when they were satisfied with the food and drink, Mesaulius cleared away the leavings; and the men, peaceful now after all the bread and meat, were ready for their night's sleep.

Outside, the night came down strong. Zeus rained all night long,
and the West Wind, lover of storms, roared round the hut.
Out there was utter darkness, for no moon had come.

Odysseus then chose to sound out his mastery
of words and spoke, curious to see if he could
get the swineherd to remove his cloak and offer it
to him, or get him to convince one of his men
to do this, since he'd been shown great care up to now :

"Listen to me now, Eumaeus, and all you men :
I'll tell you a story. The sparkling wine inspires me,
which lures even the wisest into laughter and song,
and makes him dance, and to loosen words better left
hidden. But I've started now so I can't stop now!
If only I were young and strong again, and standing
certain, as I was by the walls of Troy! Leaders
Odysseus and Menelaus had prepared
an ambush, and for this I was third in command :
they themselves chose me. So we came to the city
and the towering wall, having crept through the thick
bushes around it all, and we hid among reeds
in a swamp, lying under our armour, and night
came on strong when the North Wind blew in well-frosty;
then snow fell from above and covered us, cruelly
cold; and the frost on our shields froze to ice.
Now all the others had cloaks and tunics, and slept
peacefully with their shields over their shoulders; but
I'd stupidly left my cloak behind when I left
with my friends, because I'd hadn't thought of the cold
weather, and had come with my shield and glorious

loin-cloth only. So at the third watch of the night,
when the stars had peaked and were descending, I turned
to Odysseus, who was there beside me,
and I nudged him with an elbow, and he instantly
gave me full attention :

‘Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus,
I shall no longer be among the living. The cold
is killing me, and I have no cloak. Some god tricked
me into wearing my loin-cloth only : and now
there is no escape for me.’

I said this to him, then I watched him form a plan
in his mind, for that is who he was : both thoughtful
and dangerous. Then he whispered in a soft voice :

‘Keep quiet,’

he told me, then rested his head on an elbow
and spoke to all the men :

‘Listen to me now, friends. Heaven just granted me
a dream in my sleep. We’ve hiked a long way from our
ships, yes, yet it would be well if one of us brought
back word to Agamemnon, herder of soldiers,
to send us additional men from the ships.’

And by the time he’d finished speaking, Thoas, son
of Andraemon, had already sprung to his feet.

He threw off his purple cloak and went to run back
to the ships. So then nice and warm inside his cloak

I lay asleep until the golden Dawn revealed
herself. If only I were young and strong again,
and standing certain, as I was by the walls of Troy!
Then maybe one of the herdsmen here on this farm
would give me a cloak, both out of friendship
and respect for a brave warrior. Instead, I'm
hardly noticed as I sit here in these foul rags."

And the swineherd Eumaeus answered him :

"Old man, that story you doled out was a good one.
You speak well, and you don't waste words, nor will your words
go to waste : while you're here you won't lack for clothing,
nor anything else that's right for one to receive
who comes in need, and has suffered along the way.
But when golden Dawn reveals herself, you must go
off with your rags waving round you. We have no cloaks
or tunics here to give out. We don't have changes
of clothing; each man has just one cloak and tunic.
But when Odysseus' godly son returns,
he'll give you a cloak and tunic to wear,
and send you wherever your heart and soul points you."

So the swineherd sprung to his feet and made a bed
for Odysseus by the fire, piling skins of sheep
and goats together. There Odysseus lay down,
and the swineherd covered him in a heavy woollen
cloak, a change of clothing he kept on hand
should rainy weather come.

So Odysseus slept, and the young herdsmen slept

by him. But the swineherd prepared to go outside,
as it worried him to sleep apart from the pigs.
So Eumaeus strapped a sword to his strong shoulders,
then wrapped up in his cloak to defend against wind
and rain. Carrying the fleece of a large fat goat,
and also a spear, to handle unwelcome dogs
and men, he left the hut and went to the white-tusked
boars. There, amid the icy North Wind he lay down
to sleep by a hollow rock, which gave him shelter.

End of Book XIV

Book XV

So war-contriving goddess Athena arrived
 in shining Lacedaemon, to get beautiful
 Telemachus, son of Odysseus, to return
 home at once. She found him asleep by Nestor's son,
 in a hallway of columns deep in the palace
 of noble Menelaus, son of Atreus, the man
 who fed his diced-up nephews as horrid supper
 to their own unsuspecting father Tantalus.
 (Arrogance is ever blind to its oncoming
 throwdown.) Now, while Nestor's son lay still in mild sleep,
 Telemachus tossed and turned. Mild sleep kept losing
 its hold on him, as fears for his father kept him
 restless through the hours of the immortal night.
 And in his ear he heard the whisper of the shining-
 eyed goddess, who told him :

"You're mistaken to have wandered far from your home,
 abandoning all of your wealth to those vile
 mediocrities, who feed on you like the hogs they are.
 Those people will carve up and finish off your wealth,
 and this journey you're on will leave you with nothing.
 Now go wake at once Menelaus ἀγαθός,
 good in battle, to help you get home at once;
 so that you won't return to find your dear mother
 gone. Right now her father and brothers would feed her
 to Eurymachus, whose gifts excel whatever
 the other horrible people offer, and his
 bride-price rises ever higher. Perhaps she gives *him*
 a gift? A treasure from your house, against your will?"

I will tell you of the heat in a woman's breast :
she wishes to strengthen the man who marries her.
And should she keep thinking of a husband who's dead?
No, you will never hear her speak of him again,
and god only knows what will happen to his son.

But this is not as it shall be. Hear what I say
and think on it. The best of those horrible people
await you in the strait of dark water between
Ithaca and Samos. There they plan to kill you,
so that you never see your Ithaca again.
But I wouldn't take what I said too much to heart :
because their plans will never be : those hogs'll be
swallowed up by the ravenous earth and digested
in their graves before any 'plans' of theirs turn out.

Sail night and day and keep back from the islands.
One of the immortals who guards and protects you
will fill your sails with a favourable wind.
When you reach home, and step ashore, send your crewmen
into the city, but you step into the hut
of your swineherd, who looks after your valuables,
and moreover looks kindly on you. Pass the night
with him there. Then you will send the swineherd into
the city to bring word to wise Penelope
that you have returned safe and sound from Pylos."

Thus spoke goddess Athena, who then with one stride
stepped to high Olympus. Meanwhile, Telemachus
nudged Nestor's son with the toes of his foot, and woke
him from sleep; then quick-thinking Telemachus spoke :

“Peisistratus, get up and put the horses
to the chariot. We’re getting out of here.”

But Nestor’s son Peisistratus sat up and said :

“Telemachus, now matter how urgent the need,
we can’t press hard through pitch-black night. It’ll be dawn soon.
Can’t you wait until then? We must allow the son
of Atreus, warrior Menelaus, famous
for the war-spear, to give us a proper goodbye :
to put gifts into our chariot, and send us
on our way with encouragement. For then a guest
will remember dearly, all the rest of his days,
the host who showed him kindness.”

So he said; and soon Dawn rose to her golden throne.
And Menelaus rose from bed, where lay the very
beautiful Helen. He slipped a silken tunic
over his skin and draped his heavy-set shoulders
in an elegant cloak, hero Menelaus;
then he went forth to his guests, and stood face to face
with Telemachus, son of godly Odysseus.

And Telemachus spoke to his host :

“Zeus-born son of Atreus, Menelaus, teacher of men,
allow me now to take my leave, for I must go :
my heart longs for me to return to my homeland.”

And Menelaus, good at the war-cry, answered him :

“Telemachus, if you wish to leave, I shall not detain you. A good host neither overburdens nor undervalues a guest, but is moderate in all things. Hurrying off a guest who would stay is as wrong as pampering him longing to go. One should love the guest who enters his house, and speed his departure when he would leave. Well then. I shall honour you with gifts, and place them in your chariot; and while you admire them, the women shall prepare a meal for us from the abundance of refreshment in these halls. The festivity shall be both an honour to you and a relief, for a traveller *should* have a meal before venturing out into the wide-open earth. And if you so wish it, I will come along with you. I will add a third horse to your harness, and show you sights in Hellas and Argos you may not know, and many cities of men. And if I escort you, we won’t be dismissed from anywhere without gifts to carry away, like a three-legged cauldron of fine bronze, or a pitcher for washing the hands, or a pair of mules, or perhaps a golden cup.”

And quick-thinking Telemachus answered him :

“Zeus-born son of Atreus, Menelaus, teacher of men, I prefer to go home at once. I left behind no guardian of my wealth. It would not help me if in searching for my father I myself am lost. Or some valuable treasure in my halls is lost.”

So when Menelaus, good in battle, heard this,
he sent his wife and handmaidens to prepare a meal
from the abundance of refreshment in his halls.
Then Eteoneus (son of Boethous) arrived,
an early riser who lived nearby. So then Men-
elaus, good in battle, had him kindle a fire
to roast all the flesh : and when he heard this he did
not disobey. Meanwhile, Menelaus went
down to his private storeroom. He was not alone :
Helen and Megapenthes came with him.
When they came to the glittering spot where his treasures
were laid out, and piled up, and stored away,
the son of Atreus chose a richly ornamented
drinking cup, and entrusted his son Megapenthes
to carry a pure silver mixing-bowl. Helen,
meanwhile, went to the chests in which she had stored her
beautifully embroidered robes, which she herself
had sewn, and she picked out and lifted up,
this celestially beautiful woman of charm,
the loveliest sample of her needle-work,
her most valuable garment of all : it sparkled
like stars, and she had raised it from under the rest.
Then they walked through the halls of the palace,
and came to Telemachus : and Menelaus spoke :

“Telemachus, may Zeus grant all your heart desires,
and bring you safely home. Let it be so, o loud-resounding
husband of Hera! Now,
among all the beautiful treasures around you,
you shall have my most prized possession in the house :

a mixing bowl of the most delicate handwork,
 solid silver with gold rim, the art of Hephaestus;
 the warrior Phaedimus honoured me with it
 on my return (from Troy—*trans.*) : I give it to you.”

So spoke the warrior son of Atreus, and placed
 the richly ornamented cup in his hands.
 And powerful Megapenthes brought the shining
 mixing-bowl of silver and placed it before him.
 And fresh-faced Helen came near to him with her robe
 in hand, and she spoke to him :

“I give you this gift, dear child; something of my own
 work, to remember me by; for your lovely bride
 to wear on her wedding day. Until that longed-for day,
 your mother shall oversee its care in your halls.
 May you safely, joyfully, return to your homeland,
 and your powerful house, and your dear mother.”

So saying, she put it in his hands, and he took it.
 And admirable Peisistratus took all the gifts
 and placed them in the chariot-box, wondering
 at them all the while. Then noble Menelaus
 led them back into the house; and the two sat down
 in comfortable chairs.

Water from a lovely golden pitcher was poured
 by a maiden into a silver bowl for them
 to wash their hands : and a polished table was set
 down beside them. And the reverent housekeeper
 brought them bread, and filled the extent of the table

with diverse foods, giving freely of what was to hand, including platters of meats of all kinds. Beside them, the son of Boethous carved the meats and dealt out the portions, while the powerful son of Menelaus poured the wine for drinking.

And they reached for the many gifts set before them; and when they were satisfied with the food and drink, then quick-thinking Telemachus and Nestor's patient son yoked the horses to the ornamented chariot, mounted the box, then trotted out through the gateway of the echoing palace. And after them came Menelaus, who stood in front of the horses. He held in his right hand a richly ornamented cup of honey-sweet wine, and he wished to pour to their good fortune. So he raised the cup to them, and said :

“χαίρετον, boys, and bring our regards to Nestor, teacher of men. He was as kind as a father to me, while we sons of the Achaeans fought the Trojans before their towering walls—”

And quick-thinking Telemachus responded :

“Yes, surely, o king, I'll tell him the whole tale, just as you ask. If only I were as sure of returning to find my father in Ithaca! It would be a pleasure to tell Odysseus that we were shown nothing but kindness in your house, and to show him the wondrous gifts you've given me.”

As he spoke an eagle rose into sight with wings
outspread over the right-hand side of the palace :
in its claws dangled a fat grey goose, a tame bird
snatched from the palace grounds : and the men and women
followed the line of its flight with a rising cry.

The eagle swooped downward, sped past the chariot
and horses, then veered off and away to the right
out of sight. And their hearts began to warm with joy
as they came to understand what they had just seen.

And Peisistratus was first to speak :

“Explain for us, father, if that marvel revealed
itself for the two of us, or for your eyes.”

So he asked, and Menelaus, wise warrior,
thought over how to understand the fate revealed
in the sight, and how to put it into words—
but Helen, standing in her long, trailing robe,
anticipated him, and said :

“Hear me as I prophesy : for the gods give me
sight, and I know I shall be brought to see it all.
Just as the goose raised in this house was carried off
by the eagle, who came from the nest of his birth
high on the mountain, so Odysseus, having suffered
long, and wandered long, will come home to taste revenge :
or he’s already home, and already planting
seeds of evil for his enemies.”

So she saw,
and Telemachus looked into her eyes and said :

“May it be just as you say. If you rightly read
the will of Zeus, I shall forever pray to you—
to your strength, and to your insight—as to a god.”

So he spoke; then sparked the two horses with the whip;
and at a gallop they pressed on hotly to the plain,
moving with marvellous power through the city :
all day long they rattled the harness secured round
their necks. Then the sun set, and the open earth grew dark.

At Phaerae they stopped at the house of Diocles,
descended (through Ortilochus) from Alpheus.
There they rested for the night, and were shown due care.

When rosy-fingered Dawn spread her light up the sky,
they yoked the horses to the inlaid chariot,
mounted the box, trotted out through the front gateway;
then Peisistratus snapped the whip at the horses
and the pair galloped eagerly on, and soon brought
them to the lofty stronghold of Pylos.

There, Telemachus spoke to him, saying :

“Peisistratus, our fathers have long been friends; so
shall not you and I fairly call ourselves old friends?
And we’re the same age, aren’t we? And this journey brings
us closer still. So let us make a pact. Do not
take me past my ship on our way back to your home.

Leave me there. If I enter your palace, my friend,
that old man will hold me back with all his kindness,
and I must go on.”

This the quick-thinking Telemachus asked of his friend.
And the son of Nestor considered the request :
he looked in his heart and decided what was right,
and he hit on what he thought best. He turned the horses
onto a new course, and took him to his swift ship
by the sands of the sea. Quickly he brought the gifts
from the chariot-box to the stern of the ship—
the beautiful garments, all the silver and gold,
everything that Menelaus had given him.

Then he spoke to Telemachus with winged words :

“Quickly now! Go ahead and get your crew on board
before I return home with news for the old man.
Because I’m sure your words are right : his powerful
kindness will lead him here to bring you back with him,
and he’ll declare, ‘I will not go back without you!’
and he’ll be very angry, no matter how things
are with you.”

So saying, he sparked his horses; they ran swiftly
with beautiful manes loose-flowing like winds
back to the city of the Pylians, and came
to the palace. And Telemachus brought his men
together and gave them their orders, saying :

“Prepare the ship for departure, my good friends :

we're going home."

And his men heard this and obeyed; and straightaway
boarded the well-benched ship.

And Telemachus busied himself at the stern
of the ship, praying and slaughtering to goddess
Athena. But then a man came near, a stranger
from a far place. He was on the run from Argos
for killing a man. And in time Telemachus
would come to learn this stranger had power of foresight.

The stranger was of the family of Melampus,
ancient seer who'd revealed to Hellas
and Egypt the laws of worship to Dionysus;
and who knew the messages in the songs of birds.
Once upon a time Melampus lived in Pylos, land of sheep,
a fabulously wealthy man with high-roofed house,
an eminent figure among the Pylions.
But then he fled his home, and wandered in exile,
after great-hearted lord Neleus—who some say
was an Argonaut, and who was celebrated
by the Pylions as their king—plundered his wealth
during one long dark year, and had him shackled up
tight in the halls of hero Phylacus, all of this
because of something unmentionable between
Melampus and Neleus' daughter. One long
dark year Melampus suffered terrible agonies
of punishments which the squalid goddess Erinys,
swollen with venom, happily brings to the criminal.
But as it turned out, he outran the goddess of death,

and took Phylacus' loud-bellowing cattle
with him, from the city of Phylace to Pylos;
and exacted revenge on godlike Neleus,
answering his vile work; and even took his
daughter home and gave her over to his brother
as wife, the beautiful daughter of Neleus.
Then Melampus followed his fate to horse-breeding
Argos, where he would live and rule over strangers
to him, the Argives. There, he married a woman,
established a powerful estate, and fathered
two sons : Antiphates, about whom most nothing
is known, and Mantius, also blessed with foresight.
But Antiphates fathered great-hearted Oicles,
killed at Troy; yet Amphiaraus, his son, was loved
of Zeus, who split the ground open for him with his
all-subduing thunderbolt to offer escape
from a spear sent forth to shame his warlike spirit;
and Apollo, too, for many reasons showed him
good will. But he stumbled before reaching old age :
a woman's gifts brought him his death in Thebes.
But his son fathered Alcmaeon and Amphilochus.
And Mantius fathered Polyphoides and Cleitus.
The golden-throned Dawn snatched Cleitus away
on account of his beauty, so that he might live
among the Immortals. And Apollo made
powerful-spirited Polyphoides
far the best seer among mortals, for by then
Amphiaraus was long dead. And Polyphoides
went to Hyperesia after quarrelling
with his father : there he made his home, and for a price
he prophesied all sorts of visions for the people.

And the stranger who now stood by Telemachus was his son, Theoclymenus. He watched the boy pouring to the gods and praying by his swift ship; then Theoclymenus began to speak :

“Friend, I see your sacrifice, and the wine. Therefore, in the name of Zeus, by these your offerings, and by the lives of your friends here with you, and by your own life, I ask you to speak to me truly, and not hide yourself. Who are you among men? What is your city? And where are your parents?”

And Telemachus answered him and said :

“I will tell you truly, stranger. My home is Ithaca. My father is Odysseus, as fine a man who ever was : but now he’s dead. So I sailed here with my friends in this ship to see if any news exists of him, who has been gone a long time.”

And visionary Theoclymenus replied :

“I, too, am far from home, because of death. I killed a man. One of my own people. And his many brothers and friends back there in Argos have great power among the Achaeans. So it was either run into exile, or face death. I chose to run; and so far have outpaced my black fate. But as it is I wander the earth as a beggar, no fine fate of its own. So I ask you in the name of Zeus

to take me aboard your ship. Otherwise I shall die. For I feel them coming for me, to kill me.”

And Telemachus answered :

“I won’t keep you from my sailing ship. Come on; you have found welcome here, such as it is.”

And Telemachus took from Theoclymenus the spear in his hand; then went aboard the black ship and laid it on the deck. He sat down in the stern, and Theoclymenus sat near him. And the men unfastened the stern-cables; and Telemachus ordered his men to take hold of the tackling : and they hastened to obey him.

They raised the mast of pine-wood and socketed it in the mast-box, making it fast with the forestays; then raised sail with the well-twisted leather ropes. And shining-eyed Athena sent them a favourable wind, that blew violently and pushed the ship onward at a quick pace through the salt water of the sea. So they passed by Crouni and Chalcis, beautifully flowing.

Then the sun set, and the open earth grew dark. And the ship, drawn on by the godly seawinds, came near the island of Pheae, then past Elis, where the powerful Epeans rule its valleys. From there he steered for the rugged islands of Dulichium, Same, and wooded Zacynthus;

and he wondered if he was headed to his death,
or if he had the quick-thinking to escape that fate.

Meanwhile, Odysseus, destroyer of cities,
sat with the good swineherd at supper; and the men
of the farmstead sat eating with them. And when they
had finished eating and drinking, Odysseus
once more deployed his mastery of words and spoke,
curious to see if he could get the swineherd
to kindly keep him in the hut, and not send him
off to the city. And so Odysseus began :

“Listen to me now, Eumaeus, and all you men :
at dawn I think I shall go begging in the city.
I would not want to wear out my welcome with you.
My friends, will one of you be so good as to guide
me there? I must go wandering along the paths,
reaching out my hand, hoping for a little cup
of wine to drink, and bread to eat. I have a mind
to go to the house of godly Odysseus,
to bring news of him to his wife—Penelope,
you say? I wouldn’t mind that ‘miserable filth’
as long as they give me some of that food that fills
their bellies. Maybe they’ll let me show them how good
a servant I can be. Listen to these words now,
good men, and believe them all : messenger Hermes,
mighty seer, slayer of hundred-eyed Argus,
has given to me the strength and grace to rival
the best of all the servants that live. No man can
spark a fire so well, or chop dry wood; or carve meat;
or roast on the spit; or pour out the wine so well :

in all sorts of ways the poor man can serve his betters.”

And Eumaeus answered :

“Stranger, if you went among those miserable filth you’d be crushed underfoot on the spot. I’d put that thought out of my mind, if I were you. That hive of wasps would overrun even iron heaven, if there was something in it for them to do so. Why would you willingly go among such sick greed and confusion? They’re brainless filth, who care nothing except for what fills their bottomless bellies. Anyway, they would never take you as a servant. They like youth to fawn over them, boys dressed in fine cloaks and tunics, with oiled hair and faces painted with colour. They like to watch these pretty boys carry in the large tables, and fill them with bread and meat and wine. (Filth pleasures on the slavery of others.) No. You should stay here. You don’t bother us. And when Odysseus’ son comes home, he’ll give you your own cloak and tunic to wear, and send you wherever you want to go.”

And Odysseus replied :

“May Zeus cherish you as I cherish you, dear friend. You have brought my wandering to an end. My sadness, too. Roaming the streets is hard. There is nothing fair in being homeless. But for the stubborn belly inside, a man will suffer much trouble, and keep wandering through misery and pain.

Well then. Tell me,
 since you kindly invite me to remain with you,
 and await the return of your godly master,
 tell me of the mother of Odysseus,
 and all about his father. Did he stumble
 before old age, or does he still live in the light
 of the sun?

Or are they already dead and down in Hades?"

So swineherd Eumaeus, teacher of men, responded :

"If you really care to know, I'll tell you what's what.
 Laertes lives, but he cares little for the privilege.
 On his farm he prays to Zeus to release his life
 from his body. He's one man who can't get over
 what's happened to his son, that he's been gone so long.
 That, and the death of his faithful wife, have brought him
 to old age earlier than one would care for.
 She died of grief at the death of her child.
 That's a painful death. I never wish such a thing
 to happen again to anyone who has shown
 me kindness. I used to go to her to check up
 on things and I would see the sorrow in her eyes.
 Long ago, she raised me along with her daughter
 Ctimene, the sister of Odysseus.
 Ah, that girl! So beautiful in her long, trailing
 robes : her mother's youngest child, yet I was brought
 up as an equal, and was loved little less.
 Then at the most beautiful time of her youth

they sent her to Sáme in marriage, and received
 a wondrous number of gifts. And I was given
 a cloak and tunic to wear—beautiful clothes—
 and a nice pair of sandals for my feet;
 and I was sent on to the fields, to work and live.
 Yet she still loved me with all her heart. As it is,
 I've lost all that. But the gods have let me prosper
 all these years, which allows me to give food and drink
 to strangers. But I do not check up on lovely
 Penelope. There is nothing agreeable
 to hear, or to see. The house is sick. Arrogant
 filth have slipped like a pestilence into everything.
 The other slaves sometimes go to her, and she acts
 reassuring, and gives them food and drink to bring
 back to the fields : all the things other slaves respect.

They see the spreading sickness, too, but are powerless.”

Then subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“ὦ πόποι ! Eumaeus! You must've been a little thing
 when you wandered away from your home and parents.
 Come now, tell me truly. Was your home overrun
 by evil men? Or perhaps you were tending sheep
 or cattle, and evil men snatched you up and away
 on a ship, and sold you in a far-away place—
 this house. Perhaps your master paid an honourable
 price for you.”

And the swineherd answered him :

“Stranger, if you would hear my story, and want to know it all, you must sit quietly, and *hear*, if you would understand. Pleasure yourself with the wine by and by. Just now we have all the time in the world : this night will be a long one. Why sleep when we can tell our tales? So for now, let us tell our tales.”

(καταλέγω—this word, deployed with Homeric perfection, means both “to lie down to rest” and “to recount at length”—*trans.*)

“Any man who wants to sleep should go sleep. At dawn, as it is, come have your meal, then follow your master’s swine. But you and I will sit here; and feast, and drink; and tell each other our sad stories, as we bring them back to mind. I’ve never cared for too much sleep anyway. And the hurtful past, now long gone, can somehow bring a man a satisfaction, to speak of it : all the pain, and all the wandering, was waded through, and we still stand. So I will answer your question and tell you my tale.

You may know of a place
called Syria, past Ortygia—the island
which sailors call ‘the turning of the sun’.
It’s a place too big for people to fill up;
and the soil is marvellous, feeding huge herds
of cattle, and flocks of sheep; and it sends out wheat
with the speed of a wild fire. No one goes hungry
there. And no one falls from miserable illness,
either. When the people of the city grow old,

they fall gently. Apollo comes with Artemis,
and with his silver bow he sends out painless arrows,
and lets fly an easeful death. Island Syria,
out in the west, has two cities, and they carved up
the land between them. My father was Ctesius,
son of Ormenus. Ctesius ruled over both cities.
He was a man comparable to the Immortals.

Some men, a bunch of bastard Phoenicians,
came in their celebrated ships with a heap of
bits and pieces to peddle. And there happened to be
a Phoenician woman in our house. She was a tall
beauty, and she made very beautiful hand-work
with the needle. Those vile Phoenicians seduced her,
fucked her by their black ship, for all I know right up
against it. Even the sweetest girl washing clothes
innocently is susceptible. One asked her
her name, and where she came from; and she told him all,
and that was that, he had her. 'I am the daughter
of Arybas, a rich Phoenician,' she told him.
And then she told him her own sad story.
She came from Sidon, where the blood-coloured dye
comes from. 'I was in the fields,' she said, 'when Taphian
pirates snatched me away, and took me over the sea,
and sold me.' In that way she had entered our house :
my father bought her. We can imagine what the man
said next : 'Would you like me to bring you back home?
Would you like to see your mother and father again?
I know they're still alive. They live in a high-roofed
house and are enormously rich.' And the woman
answered : 'I'll come if you pronounce a solemn oath

to bring me safe and sound to the land of my birth.’

After she said this, all the men swore solemnly,
as she had asked. And then the woman’s words must’ve
gone somewhat like this : ‘You men, keep quiet and stay
away from me for now, if any of you see me
in the street, or at the well, so that no one
will go to the old king and tell him we were seen
together. He might think something and tie me up
in chains, and kill you all. Mind what I say to you,
and hurry with your trading. When you’ve filled your ship
send me a message, and I’ll come quickly right then
with whatever comes into my hand, golden things
for you to have. And I can bring you something else
to pay my way : my master’s son. Sly as a fox
that child is! I’m his nurse, and he loves to run
outside with me. He’ll fetch you a goodly price,
in some foreign place out beyond the sea.’

So she said this and went back to the palace.
And they stayed on the island for a year, trading
their trinkets until their hollow ship was full.
So they made ready for their return and sent word
to the woman to come. A man came to the house,
skilled in trickery. He brought with him a golden
necklace strung with beads of amber. So while
my mother and her handmaids were marvelling over
the necklace and trying it on, and discussing price,
he gave one of the handmaidens a silent nod.
Then he went away back to his ship; while she
took my hand and led me outside. When we had moved
through the main hall she saw all the cups on the tables

left by the guests whom my father had entertained,
and who were now elsewhere, in council at the place
of assembly. So she grabbed three drinking cups
and slipped them under her clothes, and took them away
with her; and I went with her in my innocence.

So the sun set, and the world went dark, and she took
me to the harbour where we boarded the black ship
of those bastard Phoenicians. Their ship was swift
and sailed over the water with a fair wind
from friendly Zeus. We sailed for six days and nights,
and on the seventh day Artemis let an arrow
fly through the woman, who fell down into the hold,
as a sea-swallow dives. She made a loud sound
when she fell. Then the other men threw overboard
to feed the seals and fishes.

And I was left there on my own, terrified.

Zeus' friendly winds rushed us over the waves
to Ithaca, where Laertes bought me.

This is how I came to see this land. And that's my story."

And Odysseus answered :

"Eumaeus, your story put a sorrow in my heart.

It hurt to hear your misfortunes. But the gods
were gentle with you in the end, you might say :

since you came to a kind man's house, who allows you
good food and drink; and are living out your days well.

I wish I could say the same about that last part."

Thus, in just that way, the two of them spoke.

Then they shut their eyes and rested for a short time,

for Dawn was on her way to rise, heading to her golden throne. And the friends of Telemachus, heading with him in their ship towards the seashore, lowered sail and took down the mast quickly, and rowed their ship to a safe place of anchorage. They dropped the stone and secured the stern-line, then went ashore, stepping through the searurf thrashing up the sand. They mixed their sparkling wine, and prepared their supper. Then after food and drink quick-thinking Telemachus was first to speak, and said :

“You men now row on into town. I’m to my fields to see my herdsman. After I’ve looked over things we’ll meet at dawn and I’ll reward your devotion with a great feast of flesh and sweet ruby-red wine.”

Then the stranger Theoclymenus spoke up :

“And I, dear child? Where am I to go?”

And quick-thinking Telemachus answered him :

“If things were different I’d bring you to my house, where my mother and I would show you no lack of welcome. But just now that’s the worst place in the world. I won’t be there and my mother won’t see you. She stays away from those vile filth in her house, and keeps to her upper rooms and weaves on her loom. I know where you can go—to an honourable man named Eurymachus, glorious son of godly, magnificent, justly forgotten Polybus :

the people of Ithaca bow to him as to a god.
He's the strongest of all the worst people here,
and persists in pushing my mother into marriage
and steal for himself all the honour of Odysseus.
God alone knows how this will all turn out."

Right then a bird ascended on the right-hand side,
a hawk, and caught in its claws was a dove,
and the hawk plucked out its eyes. And then feathers
were sent raining down in a scatter over their heads.

Then Theoclymenus rushed to Telemachus
and seized his hand, and said :

"My friend, that was a messenger of Apollo!
I saw it fly up on the right, and I read it
as prophecy! I say you will dominate
in Ithaca as the finest family
among the people. Without question you are
the strongest."

And Telemachus answered him :

"Friend, if you end up in the right I shall bestow
on you many beautiful rewards and kindness,
so that all men who look on you shall call you blest."

And then he spoke to his faithful friend Peiraeus :

"Peiraeus, son of Clytius, you gave me much
encouragement during our passage to Pylos,

and now I ask you to bring this stranger home,
and honour him with kindness till I come for him.”

And warrior Peiraeus, who won fame with the spear, replied :

“Telemachus, he shall remain with me as long
as you desire, and he shall lack for nothing.”

Thus they spoke. Then they reboarded their black ship
and prepared for departure. They raised anchor,
then sat on the benches and took hold of the handles.
But Telemachus bound his feet in shining sandals,
and lifted from the deck the mighty spear
with its piercing bronze tip. Then the ship departed,
sailing to the city as Telemachus had ordered,
while he, the son of powerful Odysseus,
raced along the rugged outlands of the island
until he reached the farmyard where his vast herd
of swine were at rest, with their swineherd sleeping
among them, his kind heart devoted to his master.

End of Book XV

Book XVI

Inside the hut, Odysseus and the honest
swineherd lit a fire, and prepared their breakfast.
It was dawn, and the herdsmen had gone with the swine;
and now Telemachus came into the farmyard.
The much-barking dogs, ferocious as wolves, kept silent
at the sight of him, and wagged their tails. And the sound
of his sandals as he crossed the stony courtyard
reached the ears of Odysseus, who took notice
of the guard dogs' silence : so he said to his friend :

“Eumaeus, someone is coming. Do you hear it?
The dogs aren't barking. Surely it's someone you know.”

As he spoke his own beloved son came to stand
in the doorway. Astonished, the swineherd sprang up
and the cups he was busy with fell from his hands,
and the ruby-red wine spilled out. He went to his
master, and kissed his head, and his shining two eyes,
and his two hands; and a big tear rolled down his cheek.
Like a father taking in the sight of his son,
having come from a far-away place after ten
long years, his only son, for whom he felt much heartbreak—
in just that way the good swineherd embraced and kissed
godly Telemachus, as if honouring one
returned from the dead.

And through his tears he spoke :

“You are here! Dear Telemachus, I see again

the sweet light of your eyes! I never thought I'd see you again after you left for Pylos. But here you are. Dear child, come in so I can look at you. As it is you never used to visit us much. You kept to the city and didn't bother with your farms and herdsmen. You preferred to watch those evil people eat away your house."

And Telemachus answered him :

"Before God, you see it as it is. I am here to see you. To look at you, and to hear from you news of my mother. Does she remain in the house? Or has someone married her, now that my father's bed is covered over in spider webs."

And the swineherd answered :

"Yes, she's in the house—full of sorrow as always. The nights and days pass, and her tears fall."

As he spoke he took the deadly spear from Telemachus' hand, and the boy stepped over the threshold of stone. Odysseus rose to yield his seat to his son, but Telemachus raised a hand to stop him, and said :

"Sit, stranger. I'll find a chair; I'm sure there's one around. Someone will bring it here from elsewhere on the farm."

So Odysseus sat back down, and the swineherd

spread a pile of green brushwood over the floor,
and put over that a fleece; and there the beloved
son of Odysseus sat down. Then the swineherd
placed by each of them a platter of roast meats,
leftovers from the supper of the night before.
Eumaeus then filled a wicker basket with bread;
and mixed the sweet wine in a bowl of ivy-wood;
then he sat down facing mighty Odysseus.
So they reached for the gifts put before them,
and when they were satisfied with the food and drink
Telemachus spoke to the good swineherd, honouring
him with respectful speech :

“Father,” he asked, “who is this stranger? Did sailors
bring him to the island? Whom did they say they were?
Because I’m sure he didn’t come on foot.”

And the swineherd Eumaeus answered him :

“Ah, child. Dear child. His birthplace is Crete,
he says, and that he’s wandered far and long
through many cities of men—this is the fate
the gods spun him. Just now he’s run off from
a Thesprotian ship and come here, and just now
I’ll put him into your hands. Do whatever you think
is right. He says he comes here asking for help.”

Then subtle-minded Telemachus answered him :

“Eumaeus, you speak greatly unsettling words.
How can I welcome a stranger into my house?

I shouldn't even go there myself. How am I
 supposed to protect myself there if someone older
 comes at me? And right now my mother's no help.
 She floats back and forth in her mind between
 living in the house with me and managing it,
 or running off in marriage with the best of that
 vile filth, whichever fool offers the best gifts.
 Will she respect my father's bed, or not? I don't know.
 But this stranger has come to our house. I shall dress him
 in a cloak and tunic—fine garments—and give him
 a two-edged sword to hang over a shoulder,
 and sandals for his feet, and help him get to where
 he wants to go. Unless you want to keep him here?
 I'll send on the clothes, and food for him; and he'll stay
 my responsibility, and not yours or your men.
 Because bringing him home with me is no good idea.
 Those wicked people won't let him be. They'll taunt him,
 if only to shame me. They're insufferable. But—

How can one man, no matter how strong he may be,
 take on the many? On their own each is weak filth,
 but together they're too many to be beaten.
 On his own, the best man would fall before their strength."

Then Odysseus spoke :

"Friend," he said, "surely it's right for me to say something now?
 Just hearing your words pinches my heart tight—I can imagine
 how you must feel, with those miserable people devising
 your destruction, though your excellence in heart is clear to see.
 Tell me, are you allowing those people to ruin your house?

Or is it that the people of the land follow evil words
of a god and attack you? Or are you fighting your family,
who should stand together in battle as allies,
and not quarrel together? I wish I were as young as you,
but with my present mind. And if I were Odysseus'
son, or even Odysseus himself, I would not let them
overrun my house, but I would fight them, even if they cut
my head off. If they were too many for one man to handle,
I'd prefer to be killed defending my halls rather than keep
watching their ugly work there : kicking innocent strangers around,
and dragging handmaidens from room to room, and wasting the wine,
and nibbling like rats through my store of bread. All that bedlam—
aimless, endless, pointless.”

And wise Telemachus answered him :

“Stranger, I'll tell you my story—so you will understand me.

No one here on the island is angry with me.
Nor I am wrestling with brothers, who should protect
each other. Because my family has been a spare one.
Arcesius fathered Laertes, who fathered
Odysseus, my father. He left me behind
in his halls when he went to Troy, and saw nothing
of all my years of growing up. He had no joy
in any of it. Now my house is overrun
with the most horrible people imaginable :
all those royals in possession of the islands,
Sáme and Dulichium and wooded Zakynthos,
and all those who rule over Ithaca.
They're all competing to marry my mother!

Meanwhile they're wearing out the house; but she
refuses to refuse those contemptible people,
and will not make an end of this trouble.

Their appetite consumes the entire house, and
soon I'll be ruined. Well—the gods will decide it.

Good man Eumaeus, go on your way now and bring
news to my mother that I am safe and sound
and back from Pylos. I'll wait here for you to return.
And see my mother in secret : tell no one else.
Those horrible people would love to see me dead."

And Eumaeus answered him :

"I hear you, and will do, child. You had the touch
of your father in that. What about great-hearted
Laertes? Shall I bring news to him as well? He used
to come and keep an eye on things, and eat and drink
with the slaves of the house; but he was always sad
for Odysseus. And now, ever since you went
off to Pylos, he hasn't been seen anywhere.
It's said he sits in sorrow, with the tears falling,
not eating or drinking, but just sitting. Grieving;
not caring that the skin is wasting from his bones."

And Telemachus answered :

"No, we must let him be for now, cruel as it is.
I wish I could go to him and say, 'I have asked
the gods, and they have heard, and Odysseus comes
home!' But we don't get to choose our fate. Yet we must

stay careful regardless. Give her the message, then come right back here. And this is what we'll do : tell my mother to send her most trusted handmaid, at once, to bring word to Laertes; he will learn from her. And all of us must keep all this completely secret."

So Eumaeus put his sandals on and went off to the city. And Athena saw, and watched the swineherd go; and she came near, in the body of a woman, her eyes sweet and kind and shedding brightness around her. She came into view through the door of the hut, and powerful Odysseus saw, off in the distance, beyond the courtyard, a beautiful woman wearing splendid clothes. Telemachus saw nothing : because the gods do not reveal themselves to all. But Odysseus saw her, and as he looked he saw the four dogs lower their heads, and begin to whimper, and creep away, with tail between their legs, fanning out around her, frightened : and then they disappeared away somewhere on the farm. She raised her eyebrows and Odysseus saw, and he went through the door of the hut, and walked across the courtyard, and over the fence of oak, and came to stand face to face with Athena, who spoke:

"Zeus-born son of Laertes, invincible Odysseus!
Conceal yourself no longer. Show yourself to your son.
And when you have arranged for the death and fate of those people, you will go into the city.
And I will be there, for I am ready to fight."

And Athena tapped him with her golden wand.
A beautiful cloak and tunic she threw around his shoulders. She broadened his physique, and gave him

back his youthful vigour. She gave him back himself,
the bronze-skinned warrior Odysseus, then she
left. And Odysseus went into the hut.

And the eyes of his son went wide with fear;
and he lowered them at the sight at the strange man,
and he spoke :

“Stranger, you have not come in the way you went out!
These clothes you wear are not what I saw, and your skin
is darker and not what it was. You must be a
god come down from heaven. Only a god
can know such strange changes; only the hand
of heaven can make such wonder happen.
Be kind, mighty one; I shall honour you
with offerings of victims, and spread before you
golden gifts of marvellous hand-work.
Please show mercy to a faithful, defenceless soul.”

And Odysseus answered him :

“I am no god. I am not immortal. I am
your father. For my sake you have suffered much grief;
and taken much punishment from the cruelty
of men no better than pack-asses. Raise you eyes
to me, my son.
Every day for twenty years you lived in my heart.”

And as he spoke he reached out for his son, and kissed
his son. A tear ran down his cheek before he could
hold it back. Yet Telemachus did not believe

the man, and answered him, saying :

“In no way are you my father Odysseus!
I call you some god who’s come to lead me astray,
to make me sigh and sorrow all the more. No man
on earth could make happen what you have done, this play
of ages. Only a god can leave old, and return young.
You left an old man dressed in rags, and come back
in the shining light of the gods around you.”

And Odysseus answered him :

“Telemachus, you have no reason to doubt me.
There is no other Odysseus who shall come
after me. It is I, who returns home
after twenty years of sorrow, and much wandering.
What amazes you is the work of Athena,
Goddess of War, who made me just as she chose,
for she can do as she pleases. She makes me
a beggar, then she makes me young again,
with these shining garments over my skin. Easily
the gods raise up a man, or bring evil to him.”

And Telemachus said :

“My father lives?”

And the son looked neither right nor left, but into
the eyes of the father. And his heart began pounding.
Telemachus looked into his father’s eyes
and a far-off feeling from long ago came back.

His face coloured rose-red, and then the tears fell.
Telemachus threw his arms around his father
and cried. And in the powerful grip of his son
Odysseus shed tears from his enduring eyes.
And as a sea-eagle cries out when her young ones
are plucked from the nest by the hands of men,
taken just before they were able to fly :
just so father and son let their tears fall to the earth.

They would have cried until the sun set, had not
Telemachus spoken out to his father with a smile
through his tears, and asked him :

“What ship brought you here? Who were the sailors
who brought my dear father to Ithaca? Who did
they say they were? You did not come on foot.”

“Then I’ll tell it truly” : so Odysseus said.

“The Phaeacians brought me here in their fine ships.
They bring whoever asks them to and fro across
the sea. And in my sleep they carried me and set
me down onto the ground of Ithaca, and gave
me many beautiful gifts, more than enough of
bronze and gold and woven garments. All that now lies
hidden in the cave of the nymphs at Phorcys’
harbour. Goddess Athena allowed my return,
so that we may come together and plan out
how to kill off all our enemies.
So come now and tell me the number of those people,
and recount at length the story of their evils,
so I know what we’re up against. I’ll think it

over in my blameless heart and decide if we
 two are strong enough to oppose them
 on our own. Or—we'll gather others for the fight
 and collectively set ourselves against those people."

Then subtle-minded Telemachus answered him :

"O father! All my life I've heard of you,
 the warrior with the brilliant mind! But what you
 say now is too huge : I'm amazed and bewildered,
 both! They are too many in number, and too strong,
 for us two to take on alone. Those people number
 not ten, not twenty, but much more than that.
 I shall tell you. There are fifty-two powerful
 youths from Dulichium (with six servants among
 them). Twenty-four men from Sáme. Twenty more men
 from Zacynthus. And Ithaca itself provided
 twelve men, all nobles (so to speak). And Medon,
 once our house's kind minister, now stands with them;
 and also two servants expert in carving meats.
 If we enter your house and come face to face with
 all of them, dark and grim will be your homecoming.
 And then there will be no revenge. Come now, father,
 you must think of allies to stand with us in force."

And Odysseus answered :

"So we shall. Do you think Athena and father
 Zeus are strong enough allies to stand with us?
 Or shall I keep thinking?"

And Telemachus answered :

“I think the gods above the clouds will do for us.”

And invincible Odysseus returned :

“Once we enter the fight, the gods won’t be long in joining us. For now, you will return home at dawn, and sit together with those miserable people.

Soon, the swineherd will lead me into town concealed in the shape of a piteous old beggar.

If you see them shaming me in the house, hold out and keep silent whenever I’m treated cruelly; even if you see me dragged feet-first through the halls, or smacked around—keep silent and bear it. Of course you should ask them to stop their idiocy, but speak gently. And they will not listen to your reasonable words, because they think themselves smart.

But their day of doom has come. Listen now and keep it in mind. When Athena gives word, I shall give you a nod of my head. When you see it, you will gather up all the weapons and armour lying around in the house and place them one by one in the secret part of the underground storeroom.

And when those pack-asses called men speak out to you with wonder, respond with more of your mild words, something like : ‘I’ve carried them off from the thick smoke, friends, since they no longer look like those Odysseus left behind him when he went to fight the Trojans.

Now they look dull from all the smoke the fires breathe.’

Then say you fear some quarrel might flame up among

them, while they reel around in wine, and that Zeus has warned you of the shame this would bring to the feast and their marriage plans. And you can add these words, too :

'Since all good men are naturally attracted to the bronze.'

But for you and me leave behind two swords, two spears, and two shields, so we can reach for them quickly when Zeus and Athena reorder things around here.

One more word, and keep it in mind : if you and I are father and son, and share the blood in our veins, and you believe this to be as I say, you will let no one know that Odysseus has come back.

Not Laertes; not the swineherd; not anyone in the household. Not even your mother shall know.

You and I must first find out where each servant stands, both women and men : which ones honour us at heart, and which ones would eagerly hasten our destruction."

Then the shining-eyed Telemachus replied :

"Father, you will come to know of the strength inside me.

But I'm not sure about your plan; so I ask you to think again. In the time it takes to test each man on all the farms, those people will have swallowed up all of your wealth, with not a bite left to eat.

I agree we should find out where each handmaid stands.

But I say we deal with the farmhands afterwards— if Zeus is truly on our side."

While father

and son conspired death together, a pitch-black ship put into Ithaca's deep harbour—the very ship

that brought Telemachus and his men back from Pylos.
His courageous, great-hearted friends drew the ship up
onto land, and carried off all their arms and armour;
then carted the abundance of wondrous gifts
to the house of Clytius. One man, meanwhile,
rushed to the house of Odysseus, to bring word
to wise Penelope that her son had come home.
This news, they hoped, might stop her tears from dropping,
at least for now. And on the way the messenger
met with the honest swineherd, who was carrying
the very same message to the woman. When they
came to the shining palace of the godlike king,
the messenger spread the word among the handmaids,
saying :

“O queen, my queen, your beloved son has come home!”

But the swineherd Eumaeus came near to wise Penelope
and whispered in her ear, conveying everything
her son had ordered him to speak. When he was done,
he left the palace grounds and went back to his pigs.

During all this, those shameful people in the halls
of Odysseus seemed troubled and glum at the news.
So they walked outside and gathered at the front gates,
and sat down together.

And powerful Eurymachus was first to speak :

“Friends, a shameful piece of work has been done to us!
Somehow Telemachus has managed his journey

to Pylos. No one here thought he would do it right;
yet here he is. Come now! We must send our fastest
ship, with any rowers we can find, to bring word
to the others to get back here quick as they can.”

During this speech, something caught the eye of one
of the men—Amphinomus, who turned his head to see
a ship coming into harbour. He saw the sail
come down, and the long oars waving in the water.
He laughed out loud and said merrily to his friends :

“We can tell them ourselves—*there they are!* Some god gave
them the news! Or they saw his ship pass by but were
unable to catch him.”

He said this, then those miserable men stood up
and walked to the sands by the sea, and drew the ship
onto land, and carried off all their arms and armour.
Then together they went to the place of assembly,
and no other man was allowed to sit with them,
young or old.

And Antinous spoke first, explaining what happened :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Listen how the gods saved him from death!
Up on the mountain tops we took no rest, but watched
for him to come. And we spent every night in the ship,
in case he might sail by us before the dawn came.
But we never saw him sail by! The gods helped him
home. Well, it’s just as easy to cut his throat here.
We must plan things so there’ll be no second escape.

If he lives he'll ruin everything for us.
He's not completely dumb—he may win the people
over to his side. So come! We must act before
he calls an assembly of the Achaeans.
He's not going to suddenly stop his efforts
against us. He hates us, and red-faced with anger
he'll stand up before them and vomit out a story
about how we planned to cut his throat. And we won't
be rewarded for our plans. I think they'll kick us
off the island, and drive us from our own country.
We'll be forced to live out our days among strangers.
So let us be the first to act. We'll take him
in the fields outside of the city, or on the road.
Then we'll empty out his house and divide it up
fairly among all of us. As for the house itself,
his mother and whoever wins her can have it.
If these plans do not appeal to you—if you wish
for Telemachus to live and keep his father's
wealth—then it would be best to get out of the house
and savour its riches no longer. Instead, let each man
go home, and seek her hand in marriage with bride-gifts,
and let her choose the best man from the best gifts,
as fate shall have it."

So he spoke; then everyone sat in silence.

Finally, Amphinomus rose to address
the assembly. He was the son of warrior
Nisus, son of Aretus, and stood foremost
among all the men here from Dulichium,
island abounding in lush wheat and grass.
And his easy way with words charmed Penelope,

who pleased in his speech, and responded to his sensitive heart. He spoke to the assembly with their best interests in mind, and said :

“Friends, I would prefer not to kill Telemachus. It is a fearful thing to kill a royal son. Should we not first learn how the gods might answer such an act? If the oracles of Zeus allow it, only *then* should we proceed, and I will kill him myself, and invite all of you to stand by me. But if the gods show us discouragement, I say we stop right now.”

This Amphinomus said, and everyone praised his word. So the men rose and returned to the house of Odysseus, where they sat in the polished seats, and relaxed.

And then they saw wise Penelope descending the stairs. She was determined to show herself and confront the men, horrid in their lawlessness; because she knew of their scheme to murder her son. Her good minister Medon, who had sat with them and heard their plans, had told her everything. So she came with her handmaids, and stood by a high pillar of the great hall with a veil over her face, which shone beneath it. And she spoke to Antinous, and condemned him before them all :

“Antinous,” she said, “you are horrid and evil-minded! Yet men call you the best of them in thought and speech! You are nothing of the kind. I see a monster.

Why would you murder my son? and ignore divine law? Zeus watches you. He sees you weaving foul evil against another. Do you not remember when your father ran away in fear of the people of your land? He came to *this* house for safety. They were infuriated with him for helping Taphian pirates raid the Thesprotians, who were our friends and ally. So the people were resolved to punish him: to cut his throat and destroy his wealth and property, everything he'd built for himself and his family. It was Odysseus who held them back, and kept them back. Now you disrespect his house, and pursue his wife, and would kill his son, to bring me sorrow and horror. Stop this now. I command you to stop."

Then powerful Eurymachus answered her :

"Good queen, wise Penelope, let all your fears rest. No one here, or anywhere, now, or not yet born, will ever put his hands on your Telemachus; not while I live and see the light of day— believe it when I say that man's dark blood will spill out round my spear! For me, too, Odysseus, 'destroyer of cities', has lowered himself to his knees, and put roast meat in my hands, and held to my lips the red wine to drink. Surely, then, Telemachus is the best friend I have, and I tell him to fear nothing, at least from us. But who can avoid the will of the gods?"

Thus he spoke his words of comfort treacherously,
because her son's murder was foremost in his mind.

So she ascended to her bedchamber, and in
that glittering space she wept for Odysseus,
her long-loved husband, until shining-eyed Athena
poured sweet sleep onto her eyelids.

That evening, the good swineherd returned to the hut.
Before he entered, Athena came near to Odysseus,
and she tapped him with her golden wand and took his youth away,
and gave him back his ugly rags. Then the swineherd
came through the door and saw father and son standing
close and preparing a supper of a young boar
they'd slaughtered. And Odysseus was an old man
again—to safeguard against Eumaeus looking
him in the face and recognizing him, and not
being able to stop himself from telling Penelope,
revealing a secret better kept hidden in his heart.

Now Telemachus was first to speak :

“Ah, good Eumaeus! What are they saying in town?
Have those heroic men come back from their ambush?
Or are they still waiting for me to pass them by?”

And the swineherd Eumaeus answered him :

“I had no interest in asking anyone about
anything—I got out of the city as fast
as possible. I met a quick-footed friend of yours

on the way to meet your mother : he was the first
to get the message to her. There was one other thing
which I saw with my eyes. At the time I was
above the city, by the hill of Hermes,
as I moved along I saw a ship coming
into harbour. It was heavy with men holding shields
and double-tipped spears. Maybe they were more
of 'those people', but what do I know?"

And Telemachus looked to his father, and smiled.

So the three men had come to the end of the day.
Each man had his equal share of supper;
then after food and drink they thought of rest,
and joined in sleep.

End of Book XVI

Book XVII

O Early-Born, o rosy-fingered Dawn! When you came bearing light, Telemachus, the beloved son of Odysseus, bound his feet in shining sandals, and seized his powerful spear, which fitted his hand to perfection. And then he was ready to go to the city. But first he spoke to his swineherd Eumaeus, saying :

“Father, I’m off to the city, to show myself to my mother. This alone will stop her tears from falling. She will not cease her sad sighs until she sees me. And this is what you must do : take this unlucky stranger into the city. There, he can beg for bread and water in the streets. As it is, I can’t lift up every man who asks; I have my own disasters to remedy. If this upsets the stranger, I can make it even worse for him. Eumaeus, I admit it :
I love to speak the truth!”

Then it was invincible Odysseus who answered him :

“Friend, I prefer not to be left here anyway. It is better for a beggar to walk city streets than empty fields, if he’s looking for food to eat, and someone to give it to him. And I’m too old to sit here and follow orders from a master of a farm. So you go your way and I’ll go mine. This man will guide me out, as you have asked him to;

but not just yet. I'll warm myself by the fire first,
and wait for the sun to grow hot. These rags I wear
won't keep the dawn frost off my bones, as the city,
so you said, is a long walk away."

In reply

to this Telemachus nodded, then left the farm
in a rush, all the while planning death for all
those vile people. When he came to his shining house
he set his spear upright against a high pillar,
then stepped over the threshold of stone, and went in.

First to see him was his kind nurse Eurycleia.
She was spreading fleeces on the seats in the halls.
She looked up, saw him, and burst into tears. She rushed
to him, and all the handmaidens came to crowd around
him, and they kissed his head and shoulders tenderly.

Then from the upper story of the house
came Penelope, resembling Artemis
or golden Aphrodite; and with tears streaming
from her eyes she wrapped her arms around her son.
She kissed his head, and she kissed his beautiful eyes;
then through her tears she spoke to him, saying :

"My son, my light, my life, you come back to me.
You went away to Pylos without a word,
and I never thought I'd see my son again.
Well, then! You went to find your beloved father.
Tell me what your eyes have seen."

And beautiful Telemachus answered her, saying :

“No more tears, mother. You see a man who escaped an evil death. So let your heart rest. Go now and bathe, and dress yourself in shining garments, and go up with your handmaids and pray to all the gods to bring a perfect ending. And may Zeus hear your prayers and bring beautiful vengeance to all our enemies. Now I shall go to the place of assembly, so I may invite a stranger I met along the way to come into our home. Just now he waits at the house of my good friend Peiraeus, where he is honoured as a guest, as is right. Soon I shall bring the stranger here, and show him respectful welcome.”

So spoke the son, and the mother heard his word.

So she stepped into her bath, and bathed herself; then slipped clean clothes onto immaculate skin. And she prayed to all the gods, and promised many gifts of victims that bring Immortals fulfilment, so that someday, somehow, Zeus may bring vengeance to all evil people.

And Telemachus walked through the great hall with spear in hand, and his two sleek hounds followed swift-footed beside him. And he shone with the divinely sweet grace of Athena; and all the pack-asses gazed at him as he walked among them. And those people lounging around him greeted him with friendly words, even though his murder was foremost in their minds.

But in the courtyard Telemachus avoided those people,
and sought out Mentor, and Antiphus, and Halitherses,
all old friends of his father, whom they thought long gone.
And Telemachus found them, and sat down with them;
and they asked him all about his travels. And as
he answered he saw Peiraeus, his faithful friend,
leading the visionary Theoclymenus
into the house. So Telemachus excused himself,
rose to his feet and went to him, and Peiraeus
was first to speak :

“Telemachus, send some handwomen to my house
to bring back the gifts that Menelaus gave you.”

And Telemachus answered him with subtle words :

“Friend, we don’t yet know how things are with us.
If these hoglike people kill me inside my house,
with no eyewitnesses, and uproot the garden
my fathers have grown, and distribute the blossoms
among themselves, well—I’d rather you keep those gifts.
Don’t let these people have them. But if the goddess
of death compels the seeds of Fate to grow, and bring
lush slaughter, then I’ll be happy to receive them here.”

Thus spoke Telemachus.

Then he led the haggard stranger Theoclymenus
into the house, where they laid their cloaks on couches,
then went together into the sparkling baths and bathed.
The handmaidens poured hot water over their skin,

and applied oil to their bodies; then draped them in tunics and fleecy cloaks; then the two sat down on the soft couches.

Water from a lovely golden pitcher was poured by a maiden into a silver bowl for them to wash their hands : and a polished table was set down beside them. And the reverent housekeeper brought them bread, and filled the extent of the table with diverse foods, giving freely of what was to hand. And his mother sat with them, by the fire, spinning fine yarn of sea-purple.

And they reached for the many gifts set before them; then when they were satisfied with the food and drink, wise Penelope addressed her son, saying :

“Telemachus, I will go upstairs and lie down. Though my bed no longer brings me comfort. It has become a bed of sighs, and soaks up my tears, falling ever since Odysseus left for Troy. Yet you have not come to me to say if you have heard any news of your father.”

So subtle-minded Telemachus answered her :

“As you like, mother. I will tell you everything. We went to Pylos, and to the venerable king Nestor. He took me into his fine-looking palace and welcomed me like a son coming back to him after a long time away. He showed the same care

to me as to all his excellent sons. But of
 great-hearted Odysseus he had not a word
 to say if he still lives on earth. He's heard nothing.
 Then he sent me in a marvellous chariot
 with powerful horses to the warrior Menelaus,
 son of Atreus. I saw the face of Helen,
 which led Argives and Trojans to destroy each other,
 while the gods watched.

And Menelaus asked me
 why I'd come to Lacedaemon, and I told him.
 And this is how he answered me :

‘ὦ πόποι ! It is daring of cowards to choose
 to occupy the bed of a stronghearted man.
 Imagine the tender new-born young of a deer
 laid to sleep in a thicket where a destructive
 lion lives. Their mother wanders to gentle hills
 and grassy dells to graze : meanwhile the lion
 enters his den and sets on them a terrible death :
 just so will Odysseus set a terrible death
 on those crude people. O father Zeus! Athena!
 Apollo! If Odysseus shows the strength he had
 when he challenged Philomeleides to wrestle,
 in beautiful Lesbos, and threw him down powerfully,
 and all the Achaeans cheered : then when he faces
those people in battle they will find a quick death.
 They will come into a bitter marriage. As for me,
 I will answer you thoroughly, and not speak false :
 I will neither gild nor conceal from you any word
 the far-seeing old man of the sea told me.

He said he saw Odysseus on an island
crying his eyes out, in the halls of the cruel nymph
Calypso, who charms him powerless and keeps him
there. He has no men there to turn the oars of a ship
to bring him homeward over the sea. Nor does he
have a ship.'

Mother, all that is what Menelaus told me."

So he spoke, and it made her heart beat fast.

Then incantatory Theoclymenus intoned :

"O woman worthy of words, well-born wife of Odysseus!
He doesn't see as I see. I will tell you of what
is real and what is not. Zeus, supreme among gods,
see me, here by this kind hearth where I have come to.
Witness these words I now speak : Odysseus is here.
Even now he sits or stirs, and all the while
plans death for all of 'those people'. So much I saw,
when I sat on the ship and a hawk came to us;
and just so much I revealed to Telemachus."

Then thoughtful Penelope answered him :

"Friend, if your words end up correct I shall bestow
on you many beautiful rewards and kindness,
so that all men who look on you shall call you blest."

Thus they spoke together.

And in the silences they heard sounds coming in
to the palace of hero Odysseus :

Those hoglike people were playing their games
outside, on a lovely level grassy lawn,
throwing the discus, and aiming the javelin,
an ordinary day for them.

Later, at meal-time, when the flocks left the fields
and came in from all round, led by the same men
as always : then Medon, head of the herdsmen,
who of all the house ministers was liked the best,
and who was always there beside them at the feasts,
spoke out to them :

“You youths! As soon as you’re finished with play,
come to the house! We shall prepare for us a feast!
It’s no bad thing to take advantage of the hour,
when it comes.”

This he said, and those people thought they caught the hint.
They walked into the shining house and laid their cloaks
on couches and armchairs; then began slaughtering
fat sheep and fat goats, and fat swine, and a heifer
valuable to the herd, and prepared their banquet.

During all this, Odysseus and Eumaeus
prepared for their walk through the fields to the city.

And the honest swineherd spoke out :

“Stranger, since you’re keen to get to town today,
as my master wishes—though if it were up to me
you’d stay on the farm and help us—but I’m not
about to get a quarrel going—a master’s
hard words are taken hard. So come now! Let’s start out
while the sun is high in the sky. It’ll be cold
by the time the evening star comes.”

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him :

“I hear; I understand. I think so, too. Let’s start;
lead us there. And if you have a stick cut anywhere,
may I have it to walk with? Because you say
the way will be a rough one.”

As he said this he took in hand his leather bag,
dirty, miserable-looking, and full of holes,
and hung it on his shoulder with its frayed cord.
And Eumaeus gave him a staff, which brought a smile.

So the two of them started out, leaving the dogs
and herdsmen to keep an eye on things at the farm.

And the slave led his master into the city.

Odysseus resembled a miserable old beggar,
supporting his weight on the staff in his hands;
and miserable were the rags on his skin.

And as they walked, step by step, along the rough road,
they came to a fresh-water spring overlooking

the city. This lovely spot was where the people of the city came to draw their drinking water from the beautifully flowing spring. This calm spot was a legacy of the founders of Ithaca : heroes Ithacus, Neritus, and Polyctor.

The cool water flowed with a restful murmur, and was so crystal-clear that each pebble on the stream-bed could be numbered with ease. The water spilled down from under a rock on high, on which an altar had been built, where passers-by left offerings to the nymphs who haunt all places in nature. There, the two men met Melantheus, son of Dolius, as he was leading his goats, the best she-goats on Odysseus' estate, to feed the bottomless bellies of those people in the house. When he saw the two rambling men he stopped, and the two herdsmen following with him waited in silence as he eyed the men harshly, and began to speak in heated and ugly words. Odysseus heard, and it made his heart beat fast :

"Look at you two," said the goatherd. "As always, the gods bring two of the same together. What's that they say? 'Birds of a feather flock together.' Hey, filthy swineherd, where do you think you're taking this greedy misery? Another insufferable beggar, a plate-licker, who'll hold out his hand and darken the joy of our feasts! This creature has never earned anything in his life, not rightfully, no sword, no cauldron. Instead, he rubs his dirty shoulders on our doorposts, begging for bits to load his belly.

Give him to me; I'll find him work to earn his keep :
 he can clean my pens and stables, and feed the lambs.
 Then that work might put some muscle in his legs.
 But why would he want to work when he can creep through
 Ithaca holding his hand out to feed himself?
 He is a bad man who has learned only bad ways.
 Hear my words, because they're certain to come true :
 if you bring him to the house of Odysseus,
 the real men there will throw footstools at him,
 and break every bone in his miserable body;
 then brush him aside."

This he pronounced. Then, as he passed by, he kicked out
 stupidly and struck Odysseus in the hip.

But Odysseus stood his ground. He did not step
 from the path, but considered bashing the goatherd's
 head to bits with his stick.—Or seizing him round
 the waist and smashing him to bits against the earth.
 Yet he held himself back : he would check his impulse
 and stay patient. But Eumaeus looked the goatherd
 in the eyes, then turned away in disgust, and raised
 his hands and prayed :

"Nymphs of the spring! Daughters of Zeus!
 Remember Odysseus and the gifts
 he gave you, the thigh-bones burning on your altars,
 for you! And make these words I speak happen :
bring him home!

Then he would scatter your arrogance
 to the winds! And all your silly roaming through the city
 while your skillless herdsmen are ruining your flocks."

And the goatherd Melanthius answered him :

“ὦ πόποι ! What large barks from such a little dog!
 I’ll grab you from behind someday and before you
 know it you’ll be chained on a sea-ship. You’ll bring me
 a nice price. Taking your life will sweeten my own.
 And as for that cowardly boy Telemachus!
 I invite Apollo to aim his silver bow
 and shoot his arrow right through him, in his own halls!
 Well—*those fine people* there will have their way with him,
 and kill him—so the god need not reveal himself.
 They’ll get him, as sure as Odysseus lies dead
 somewhere—*he* won’t be coming here any time soon.”

So he spoke, then left them behind. And they walked on,
 step by step. But the goatherd moved faster, and came
 to the palace of King Odysseus.

He went in and walked among the hoglike people,
 and sat by Eurymachus, who abided his presence.
 Of the servants busy about them, one brought him
 a serving of roast meat; while the housekeeper,
 with a frown, placed bread beside him to eat.

Outside the house, Odysseus and the honest swineherd came
 to a standstill. They listened to the subtle sound of fingers
 picking the vibrating strings of a lyre, for Phemius
 was beginning to sing to those people. And Odysseus
 took the swineherd’s hand in his own and spoke :

“Eumaeus, so this is the house of Odysseus?”

Once you see it you won't soon forget it.
It's beautiful! This magnificently-made wall
around all these beautiful buildings is a place
I'd never thought I'd see! Look at this workmanship.
And these strong front gates! No man could see anything
finer. Those people inside there are enjoying
a feast—do you smell the steam of sacrifice rising?
And hear the delicate song of the lyre, which the gods
have furnished to keep company with feasts.”

And the swineherd Eumaeus answered him :

“You've hit the mark as usual. This is his house.
So now we must decide what we're going to do.
You can go in and join with those people in comfort,
if that appeals to you, and I'll stay out here and wait.
Or, I'll go first, and see what's what, and you wait here.
But don't stand around here in plain sight in the front.
Someone might see you and throw stones, which will hurt.”

And invincible Odysseus replied :

“I hear; I understand. Why don't you go in first?
I'll stay here; I'm not unused to fists and assaults.
Many things have been thrown at me over the years;
I'd add what comes to everything else I've suffered.
But a man can't ignore a ravenous belly.
Hunger makes men do what they may not want to do.
It makes men sit side by side on the benches and row;
it makes kings war with enemies across the sea.”

While the two men spoke to one another, a dog lying nearby raised its head, and pricked up its ears: this was Argos, Odysseus' great-hearted dog, whom his owner had bred before leaving for Troy all those years ago, and so had taken no joy in him. In the old days he had run through the wilds, going off with the house servants on hunts for goats and deer and rabbits. These days, though, he was left alone, his master long gone, his fur matted by the filth of the farmyards and infested with fleas; for he sometimes followed the slaves when they went off to manure the fields. So there lay Argos, smelling of mule and cattle filth; and just now, coming aware of his old master Odysseus standing near, his eyes widened, and his tail began to wag. But he was no longer able to go to his master, for he'd lost the strength to walk. Odysseus, however, had seen the movement of his head, and looked : then he looked away, and wiped the tear that fell from his eye.

And to Eumaeus, who had not seen that tear, he said :

“Eumaeus, it's very curious, this dog lying in the dirt of the farmyard. That's a fine-sized dog. I wonder how fast he moves. With that shape he should be a fast runner. Or maybe he's a house dog, kept to ornament a room, a young man's pet.”

And the swineherd Eumaeus answered him :

“That dog belonged to a man who died far away

from here. If you'd seen him before Odysseus
left him behind for Troy, you'd have marvelled at his
speed and strength. No creature leaping through the tangles
of the forests could escape his quick pursuit.
And no beast could track a scent better than him.
But now that's all gone, and you can see his misery.
His master lies dead who knows where, and the women
of the house aren't bothered to show him any care.
You know how it is. When their master is away,
or has lost his power, slaves no longer do what is right.
And why should they? When kind Zeus leads them to their day
of slavery, he takes half their kindness from their heart."

Thus he answered him, then went on into the house,
and joined the crowd of horrible people in the halls.

And Argos, now that he had seen Odysseus
his master one more time, in the twentieth year,
let black death take hold of him, and his spirit ran away.

Now when the swineherd entered in, Telemachus
saw him and summoned him over to his side
with a nod. So Eumaeus looked here and there
for something to sit on, and took a stool that
the carvers sat on when dividing up the meats
to fill the bottomless bellies of the hoglike
people feasting in the halls of the house.
The swineherd brought the stool to Telemachus'
polished table and sat down face to face with him.
And a servant set a portion of meat before him,
and also some bread from the bread basket.

And then a mournful old beggar made his slow way
into the house, supporting his weight on his staff;
and miserable were the rags over his skin.

He sat down on the ashen threshold in the doorway
and leaned himself against a post of cypress wood,
which, a great many years ago, a builder smoothed
clean and well, fitting it straight to the line.

So Telemachus reached for a whole loaf of bread
from the basket, and as much meat as his two hands
could carry; then spoke to the swineherd Eumaeus :

“Good man, take all this and bring it to the stranger.
Then encourage him to go one by one among
these people with his hand out in need. A beggar
desperate for help must give up all thought of shame.”

So Eumaeus brought refreshment to the beggar,
and said to him :

“Stranger, this gift for you is from Telemachus.
He asks you to go one by one among these people
with your hand out. A man in need, he says, must give
up all thought of shame.”

And Odysseus of subtleties answered him :

“May the good god Zeus bring Telemachus everything
his heart desires, and make him the happiest of men.”

And as he spoke he took the meal into his hands
 and placed it on his grimy leather bag by his feet.
 Then he ate his meal while the holy poet sang his songs.

Then when he finished his meal, and the poet rested
 from song, then all those horrible people began
 to speak and laugh, raising a clamour in the halls.
 And then Athena came near to Odysseus,
 and encouraged him to circulate through the herd
 of people and beg for bits of bread, and attempt
 to learn which among them were righteous deep in heart,
 and which of them were criminals beyond redemption.
And yet she was ready to destroy every last one of them,
righteous in heart or not. So he got to his feet
 and started out, and held out his hand to each man.
 Through the halls he went back and forth, this way and that,
 as if he'd truly been a beggar his whole life long.
 And some of them actually felt pity for him,
 and bowed their head in courtesy as he passed by;
 and questions of who he was and where he came from
 circulated among the men throughout the halls.

Then the goatherd Melanthius spoke out to all :

“Hear me, my good men, friends of our glorious queen!
 I know somewhat of this stranger, whom I've seen before.
 The swineherd led him here. That, actually, is all
 I know. The homeland he left is anyone's guess.”

This he announced to all. So Antinous approached
 Eumaeus, and spoke to him with mounting anger :

“You rotten, miserable slave! Why did you bring this man here? Doesn’t our city have more than enough loafers and beggars as it is? Do you respect your master so lightly that you invite anyone with hands out to eat up his wealth without earning it?”

And the swineherd Eumaeus responded :

“Antinous, your words capture your nobility well. As it happens I didn’t sent him any invitation. Who invites others from elsewhere unless they’re skilled in one thing or another : a prophet, or a physician, or a joiner, or a god-inspired poet who sings of heroes to cheer up the miserable. Such men are welcome everywhere; but no one invites a beggar to come and eat him out of house and home. If you would hear the truth, you’re the one not welcome here : you’re harsher on the servants than all the others are, and especially to me. But you don’t trouble me in the slightest. Though I worry for my fine mistress Penelope, and good Telemachus, who are forced to watch you eating up their halls.”

Then Telemachus spoke out before all the men :

“Don’t bother answering him. The wise keep silent. Words only make him worse, and loosen his evil tongue to let out the worst words of all. And his talk only stirs up the others, who share his slim wit.”

And then he turned his shining eyes to Antinous and spoke :

“Antinous, I appreciate your kind concern for my welfare. As a father cares for his son, so you counsel me to run this man out of town. But may no god allow this to happen. Won’t you give a little of what you take? I won’t refuse; in fact, I urge you to do this. But you’d rather stuff all my food into your own big mouth than give even the littlest bit of it to another.”

And Antinous responded in kind :

“Telemachus, are you still speaking? Is anyone listening? If my good friends here were to give him everything I’m going to, three full moons would come and go before his belly brought him back here.”

Then he grabbed for the footstool under the table, on which he kept his naked feet comfortable while he feasted, and he showed the beggar this gift he raised high in his hand. The others, however, gave him bread and meat, and filled up his grimy bag. Therefore Odysseus decided to return to the doorway, rather than give them a taste of a special gift all his own; but on the way he stopped beside Antinous, and spoke out to him :

“Friend, why not give me even a little morsel? You seem to me, in word and eminence, of noble

birth. Indeed, very like a king. Should you not then act the part, and give better gifts than the others? If you do this, I will speak your name all over the earth. I, too, was once a wealthy man, and lived in a high-roofed house; and many times I gave those who came knocking, whoever and whatever he was, many kind gifts to cheer and encourage the soul. I had a vast number of slaves, and all the things that men consider valuable and lucky to have.

But Zeus drained me dry for unknown reasons of his own. He sent me off with far-wandering pirates down to the land of Egypt, a long way off across the sea, so that I might lose myself for all time. There, I anchored our pitch-black ships in the Nile. Then I commanded my faithful men to stay with the ships with weapons at the ready, and I sent scouts out to see what was what. But my men gave way to lunacy, and following their own impulses they began devastating the very beautiful fields of Egypt, killing the men, carrying off women and small children. The city quickly heard the far-reaching cries, and the cries of rescue did not go unheard. At daybreak the entire plain was full of foot-soldiers and chariots and sharp bronze gleams : then Zeus the Orderer threw a panic into my men, and not one warrior stood his ground and faced the enemy, who now had completely surrounded us. So they slaughtered many of us with the sharp bronze; and the ones who were left were brought

back inland to labour for them as slaves.

As for me, they gave me to someone who took me
by force to Cyprus. There I laboured for the king,
the mighty Dmetor, son of Iasus.

Now I am here, having suffered much, and am still suffering.”

Then to all of that Antinous looked into his eyes and said :

“Such a sad story you tell to entertain us at the feast!

Which god brought your pointless misery to us?

Step back from me. Go stand somewhere else in the house;

I don’t care where. Just don’t stand near me, or come near

me. Get back from my table or you’ll soon end up

in a far worse Egypt and Cyprus. Understand?

You’re nothing but a shameless beggar with only

large talk to offer. One at a time you plague us,

slinking up to each good citizen with your hand out,

and each gives gifts out of the kindness of his heart.

That said, there’s more than enough here to go around.

You should thank the master of the house, and us, too.”

So subtle-minded Odysseus stepped back, and said :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Such ugly words spoil all your beauty!

Is giving a needy man even a single grain

of salt from your own house too painful for you?

You lack the simple grace to give a suppliant

even a bit of someone else’s bread!—though this

table you stand by (which is not your own) is heavy

with abundance.”

Thus he answered the hoglike filth,
and Antinous felt his heart swell up with fury.
He glared at the beggar, and harsh words rushed from his mouth :

“Now,” he hissed, “you’ve gone too far. You won’t be leaving
this house gently—I’ll give you that much. We’ll find out
for how much longer you can keep up your big talk.”

And as he spoke he grabbed the footstool and flung it
hard at Odysseus. It struck his right shoulder
at the painful spot where the bony tip projects out
—the ἀκρώμιον. But he stood solid as a rock.
And standing firm in place he glared at Antinous
hard in the eyes, and shook his head without a word,
while deep inside he pondered images of death.
Then he turned away. And slowly, step by slow step,
he went back to the doorway, and sat himself down,
and put his woeful leather bag down beside him.
And then with quiet voice he spoke out to them all :

“Listen now, you lap-dogs of the noble queen :
the spirit of a man fighting for his life
cannot be broken. He feels no pain, nor grief.
Eat all his cattle, eat his sheep : eat it all :
but he will not stumble on the way to vengeance.
This Antinous has struck a man for nothing more
than being hungry. Soon you will come to learn
that hunger is a curse : it brings evil to men.
If the gods indeed watch over those in need,
soon the Furies will come to take your hand in marriage.”

And Antinous shot back :

“Don’t make me laugh, old man. Sit there and eat your food,
or get out of here. But don’t say one more word.
Or we’ll drag you through the house by hand or foot
till all your skin is torn off from your bones.”

So he said. The others, meanwhile, were feeling
uneasy with all this, and one of the bold youths
spoke out :

“Antinous! Surely that was no good thing you did,
hurting that unhappy man. You may have just met
your doom. How will you respond if he is a god
come down from heaven? Everybody knows that gods
can show themselves as strangers from foreign places.
The gods come to us in any shape they please,
and walk among our city, to see who is just,
and who is sorely mistaken in his actions.”

This he said, and in reply Antinous merely laughed.

But Telemachus felt a great pain rising out
of his heart, to see his father struck so meanly :
but no tear fell, because he was too smart for that.
He stood in place and shook his head without a word,
while deep inside he pondered images of death.

And soon word of what happened came to Penelope,
how a guest of the house had been struck in her halls;
and she made a prayer, and her handmaids heard her :

“May that evil man himself feel the arrow of Apollo!”

And Eurynome her housekeeper responded :

“If our prayers are answered, all these men will be dead by dawn.”

And Penelope answered her:

“O friend, how I despise them all! For they’re evil
at heart. That Antinous is like black death himself!
A gentle stranger comes to our house, unhappy
and in need, asking for nothing but bits of bread.
Fate has given him the choice of begging for food,
or death. Some of the men were kind and filled his bag
with gifts; but Antinous struck him on his shoulder.
Did he really throw a footstool at him? It shames me.”

Thus she spoke among her handmaids, and stayed away
from those vile people, keeping to her bedchamber,
while Odysseus sat downstairs and quietly
ate his meal. Then she summoned the swineherd upstairs,
and said to him :

“My good Eumaeus, go and bring the stranger here,
so that I may make amends, and greet him warmly.
And perhaps, since it seems that he has travelled far,
he may have news of Odysseus, or even,
somewhere, sometime, saw him with his own eyes.”

And to his mistress Eumaeus responded :

“O queen, I wish those vile people would shut their mouths and listen. The man certainly has a way with words, I’ll say that much for him. He’s been with me in my hut for three days and three nights, and for all that time he’s spoken out, but has yet to bring to an end his long tale of misery. I remember once looking on a poet as he sang his sad songs that gods teach to men, and for some reason I wanted to listen to more of those songs : in just that way I was charmed by his words. He says he snuck away from a ship in the harbour; that he comes from Crete; and that he’s wandered from place to place suffering innumerable miseries for too long a time to count. He also says Odysseus is an old friend. If we’re to believe him, he swears that your husband is alive, and not far from here, living in the land of the Thesprotians. And that Odysseus has a lot of treasure to carry around.”

To all this thoughtful Penelope answered him :

“Bring him here, so he can tell me this to my face. For now we’ll let those people sit in our doorways and halls, amusing themselves, since their hearts are so cheerful and carefree. Because they know their wealth is safe in their houses. Their bread and sweet wine lay untouched, while they sit here and eat up my home. They slaughter our cattle, our sheep, our goats, and keep their feast going non-stop—something truly unholy.

They're drink up our wine and act as drunken fools!
They're trying to take everything of worth from me.
But there is no man in the land as Odysseus was,
to protect me and keep this house from collapsing.
Yet if that old man is right. . . . and if my husband
should return, then the two dear men in my life
will have their revenge."

So the queen spoke, and Telemachus sneezed.

The great sound, loud enough to be deemed heroic,
filled up the great hall, and rose up the staircase,
and made his mother laugh.

And she spoke to Eumaeus with winged words :

"Go now and bring the stranger before me! My son
sneezed at my words. Did you hear it? I take it
as a signal : a happy signal. All those men
are going to die. Not a single one is safe
from the goddess of death. She and their fate
will not be escaped. And I'll say this to you :
if it turns out the man downstairs speaks true,
I'll give him the finest cloak and tunic he ever saw."

So she spoke, and the swineherd obeyed his queen.

He walked up to Odysseus and said to him :

"Good man, the lady of the house will speak to you :
lovely Penelope, mother of Telemachus.
For a long time now she's suffered many troubles,

and her heart aches for news of her husband.
 She says if what you say is true, you'll get a fine
 cloak and tunic out of it—the very things you need.
 But you won't want to stay here; so to feed yourself
 you'll have to hold out your hand in the streets,
 and hope that the kind ones of Ithaca pass by."

And great-hearted Odysseus answered him :

"Eumaeus, I will tell all I know to lovely
 Penelope, mother of Telemachus.
 And it's all true, because I know all about him.
 And in our sorrow we are one and the same,
 she and I. But I fear for her amid this herd
 of menace, whose arrogance and idiocy
 echo all the way to heaven. Just now
 I was walking through the halls, keeping to myself,
 and some vile person smacked me across my face!
 And Telemachus did nothing,—nor did any
 other man. So let me stay down here awhile
 and see what's what. Please tell lovely Penelope
 to keep patient for a little while longer—
 till sunset. Then I will show myself to her
 and answer what she asks of her husband,
 and tell her of the day of his return.
 Perhaps she'll sit me in a chair by a fire?
 These rags are worthless, and the day is getting cold."

So the swineherd went back upstairs to speak to Penelope.

And when he entered her chambers she spoke to him :

“You have not brought him to me, Eumaeus.

What does the man mean by this? Does he fear coming upstairs, thinking it’s a trap? Or is it shame that keeps him from looking me in the face?”

And the swineherd Eumaeus replied :

“He keeps proving himself smarter than I think he is. It’s a bad idea for the others to see him come up the stairs. They might punish him hard for it, and that would be that. He asks you kindly to wait until sunset, when he can move about in shadow. Then he’ll be all yours.”

And Penelope said :

“Smart man. He looks ahead before he acts. And he’s right : there are no men living so vile as those monsters downstairs.”

This she said; then Eumaeus went back downstairs into the crowd of the monsters. When he found Telemachus, he sat down close to him and spoke softly, so that no one around them might hear him :

“Friend, I’m heading back to the herds now, to make sure everything that’s yours and mine there is well. Keep your eyes wide open here. Keep yourself alive, if you can. We all know these people are planning evil for you. But maybe Zeus will cut them down before that happens.”

And shining-eyed Telemachus replied to his friend :

“I hope you’re right,” he said. “But you should have supper here before you go home. We’ll meet in the morning, when you come with the victims these people will claim. Meanwhile, I’ll keep my mind sharp, heaven help me.”

He said this, and the swineherd sat down beside him on a shining chair. Then when he was satisfied at heart with food and drink, he went on the long walk back to his swine, leaving behind the halls and courts swarming with those miserables. They were pouring the wine and were very merry, for night had come.

End of Book XVII

Book XVIII

Now there was a beggar famous in the city
 as a beggar-man with a bottomless belly :
 unending was his hand held out for food and drink
 to fill his greed, as he wandered through Ithaca.
 He had no strength to speak of, but he was hefty
 of frame to look on, and people remarked his size
 wedded to such weakness. The name his dear mother
 gave him at birth was Arnaeus : but everyone
 addressed him with the curious name of Irus—
 which, in point of grammar, was the masculine form
 of ἶρις, the very word for “rainbow”. Now that word
 was believed to derive from the meaning “to weave”,
 seeing that colours combine as a marvellous arc
 in the sky; and as Irus made a point to go
 back and forth for people, bringing messages here
 and there, thereby weaving tattle-tale gossip
 throughout the city, so the people called him Irus.

Just now Irus had in mind to hustle the new
 beggar out of the way, and kick Odysseus
 off his own doorstep. He let loose a colourful
 flood of hideous language, drenching the stranger
 with his words, saying :

“Get out of the doorway, old man, before I drag
 you out of the way. Do you not see those people
 pointing at us, making signs for me to do this?
 Looks like they’re *begging* me to do it—but I won’t :

it'd be beneath me to do such a thing to you.
But you best move on before my words become fists."

And the eyes of Odysseus turned dark and grim
under his brows, and the many-minded man spoke :

"Friend, I have not said one word of evil to you,
nor insulted you in any other way. And
I have no issue with all the gifts that people
kindly give you. I have made no trouble for you,
though you take for yourself the largest share of all.
This doorway is wide enough for two, and you have
no need to envy any little bit I might get.
You look to me a beggar like myself: and if
riches come our way, it is the will of the gods,
and we call that "destiny". And one other thing
I shall say to you : you don't want to feel my anger.
So do not challenge me in word or fist, or you
may provoke me, old man that I am, to bloody
your face, and make your body black and blue. Then peace
and quiet will return to this doorstep, and I'm sure
you won't come back to the house of Odysseus.
And tomorrow I'll sit here nice and comfortable,
and think of you."

And these words put Irus the beggar in a rage,
and he shot back to his opposition, saying :

"ὦ πόποι ! How well this rotten deadbeat speaks!
—very like a dusty, doddering old washwoman!
If you're not careful I'll smack you every which way

and knock all your teeth out! Then you can pick 'em up
 out of the dirt like a pig picking corn—but they
 won't fit back in those loose jaws of yours, I'll tell you
 that! I'll hit you so hard you won't know left from right!
 Prepare, beggar! Hear those young men cheering me on?
 Why you'd fight a younger man is your own business,
 but I'm not waiting to hear your explanation."

And just inside the house's threshold of high doors,
 that crowd of noble filth watched this, and snickered,
 and elbowed one another, and worked themselves up
 into a frenzy. And powerful Antinous
 burst into laughter and stepped before the others;
 and with amusement in his voice he said to them :

"Friends! This is a new one to see! The stranger
 and Irus are facing off and ready to raise
 their fists! Let's get out there and make it happen!
 It'll be something to watch—but probably not
 to remember."

So spoke the noble Achaean. Then the men sprung
 out of their seats, and rushed out of the house like pigs
 let loose, and gathered round the raggedy beggars.

And noble Antinous had more to deliver :

"Hear me," he said, "my honourable friends! I have
 a fine thought in mind. For our supper we put those
 pig bellies stuffed with fat and blood by the fire.
 Whichever man still standing by the end can come

and pick for himself whichever one he pleases.
He who proves the better man may feast with us!
And I'll go further : let him henceforth *always* share
the feast with us! He'll be the very last beggar
we let in here with a hand out to annoy us.
That's my fine idea."

So he spoke, and his word was pleasing to them all.
Then wise, sly-minded Odysseus raised his voice,
and said :

"O friends, what sense is there for an old man, worn down
and sunk in misery, to fight a younger man?
It's my belly, that evil-worker, that prods me
to be broken by his fists. But come now! Let's all
of us swear a solemn oath that no man here
will help Irus in the fight, and strike me unfairly,
and deceitfully leave me tamed before this man."

This he said, and everyone there swore solemnly,
as he had asked. Then Telemachus, full of power,
spoke out :

"Stranger, if your heart and heroic spirit encourage you
to defend yourself against this man's fists, you need not concern
yourself with any of the Achaeans. I show you welcome;
and these men, Antinous and Eurymachus, are noblemen,
and therefore men of the finest understanding in all things."

So he spoke, and everyone there commended his fine speech.

Meanwhile, Odysseus gathered up his rags
and tied them round his waist, exposing his massive
thighs, a sight of beautiful masculine power.
And his massive shoulders were likewise apparent
to all, and his strong chest, and his muscular arms.
(All this, because Athena had come, to fill out
the body of the herdsman of the people.)

And those people, the noble filth, looked on with awe :
the sight was a marvellous surprise in their eyes.
Then each man gave his neighbour a look, and began
to laugh, and spoke out in wonder :

“Look at those thighs! Solid muscle!—hidden under
those filthy rags! Am I wrong or is Irus
about to get the colour knocked out of him?”

In just that way the raucous nobles spoke among
themselves.

And judging from the uneasy look on his face,
Irus seemed to have received the message as well.
And though he would rather step away and give peace
a chance, it was too late : the servants of the house
came up and tied his clothes round his waist,
and he saw the worry on their faces as they
did this; and their fear did not encourage Irus,
whose skin turned to goose-flesh as his whole body shook.

Then Antinous hurled harsh words at Irus, saying :

“Perhaps just now you wish you had never been born?
 But if I were you I wouldn’t worry too much
 about *that*, because you may not be living much
 longer—big mouth! Look at you. Shaking like a bird.
 It’s shameful to see you so afraid of that man.
 Though maybe his misery may make the old man
 fight harder! And now I have an idea; and if
 I were you—and thank god I am not—I would
 believe what I say. If this Ancient knocks you out,
 and shows himself the better man, I will send you
 to the mainland chained up in a fine black ship
 and drop you in the fine hands of King Echetus,
 who crushes men underfoot simply ’cause he can.
 But first he may cut your nose and ears off, simply
 ’cause he can, and the heartless bronze will cut your balls
 off. He’ll toss ’em red and raw for his dogs to eat
 —simply ’cause they can. I’m sure Echetus’ll divide
 up your meat fairly among the dogs, ’cause he’s fair
 that way.”

So he spoke; and under Irus’ wide eyes his body shook
 all the more, very like two birds shaking in fear.
 Then someone pushed him forward into the centre
 of the circle of nobles; and both men raised their fists.
 And Odysseus thought it over : should he put
 his fist through him so hard he’d punch his soul out
 through a hole in the back of his body, and there
 his lifeless bones would fall? Or should he be kind, and
 tap him lightly, and drop him to the ground in pain?
 Considering this, he decided what to do :
 to tap him lightly—to keep the crowd around him

from asking any questions regarding the strength
of old men. So the fighters had their fists upraised,
and wise Odysseus waited for the other
to strike first. Then, when Irus jabbed at his right
shoulder, Odysseus struck him in the throat,
lightly, yet still shattered his bones. And the earth rushed
up to him as he dropped with a thud, with red blood
gushing from his gasping mouth. Irus writhed in the dust
with a crushed skull, and squealed, and ground his teeth, and writhed
some more, kicking out all round him with his feet.
And the noble spectators raised their hands and cheered,
and they all looked content to die laughing.

They watched as old man Odysseus dragged Irus
away, his quaking body cutting a long track
through the dust as Odysseus removed the big mouth
from the doorstep and pulled him along the courtyard,
then flung his body at the front gates of the house.
Odysseus considered a moment, then sat
Irus up; and slowly he slumped sidewise and his
shoulder came to rest against a wall. And as if
from afar he felt his staff come gently to rest
into his hand, put there by invincible Odysseus,
who spoke to him :

“Ah, how miserable for you. Rest there awhile,
and scare off the other dogs and pigs. You are king
of beggars no longer. Now shut your mouth, or you
may feel the benefit of another light touch.”

And as he spoke he took his grimy leather bag,

full of holes, and hung it on his shoulder
 with its frayed cord. And he walked back to the doorway
 and sat down. And those nobles, laughing with delight,
 went back inside and raised a cheer for the winner,
 and said :

“Stranger! May Zeus allow you whatever you wish!
 And all those other fine Immortals! Whatever
 your deepest desire in heart may be, maybe
 we can help you, too! You’ve earned yourself a great prize!
 —because you’ve killed off that horrible beggar,
 who pestered the city day after day without end.
 We’ll take him now with his crushed head and outstretched hand
 to King Echetus, whose hobby is tormenting men!
 Maybe he’ll chop his hand off, then hand it back to him,
 as charity!”

So one and another of the noble young men
 spoke in merriment. But Odysseus merely
 smiled. The omen in their utterance pleased him.

And Antinous placed the best of the pig bellies
 stuffed with fat and blood before him. Amphinomus,
 meanwhile, took two loaves of bread from the basket
 and put them before him, and raised a gold cup high,
 and honoured him with the following words :

“Cheers to you, guest-friend! May you have all the good luck
 you’ve yet to see, now that you’re with your friends here!
 I predict happy times for you, and for us all!”

And all the nobles raised their cups to that and drank.

Then Odysseus of subtleties spoke his mind :

“Amphinomus,” he said, “you seem to be a sensitive man at heart. As your father was, whose nobility won him great fame far and wide—Nisus of Dulichium, good and brave, and noble. It’s said you’re his son, and you seem a man of great courtesy. For this reason I shall tell you something; turn your ears to me. Of all the creatures that breathe and crawl in the light of the sun, the earth raises nothing weaker than people. For day by day they think and act as if suffering evil doesn’t await up ahead. Up to now they thrive and prosper, and their senses are sharp, just as the gods allow : but tomorrow is coming, when the gods bring misery, and weaken the knees of even the quickest : and there is no way around it. Yet even then we endure, and with dogged hearts we bear it, like it or not, as the father of gods and men decides the nature of our days.

I was once destined for wealth and happiness and contentment, but I made mistakes along the way, trusting in what I thought was insight and strength; and trusting in others, in my father, and in my family. So people should be careful, and keep to following what’s Right; and take all of god’s gifts in silence : not with pride : but with sure aim.

I see all the people here trusting in their strength, which just now I call a mistake. Wearing away a wealth, and dishonouring a woman, the wise wife of a man who people say isn’t coming back any time soon. No : he’s here already. Nearer than you think. So shouldn’t you follow the advice of some god

and go home? Shouldn't you leave this house, before he shows himself to you? I'm no good storyteller, but I think when he comes to the moment to strike, it won't be without a torrent of blood. From floor to ceiling this palace will be one body of blood."

So he spoke; then poured, and drank the honey-sweet wine.

Then he handed the cup back to Amphinomus.

And that man retreated with a trouble at heart :

he walked through the halls with eyes lowered to his feet,
and he felt a growing sense of something bad.

(For him there would be no escape from his fate :

Athena entangling him, to give him the
feeling of a spear thrust clean through his body,
sent by the hands of Telemachus.) But just now
he went back to his chair and sat down.

Then the shining-eyed goddess Athena inspired the heart
of the daughter of Icarius, thoughtful Penelope,
to step down the staircase, and show herself to the hateful ones
wallowing on the bottom floor. There, standing before them,
she would wield the power of her beauty. And the hearts
of the men would flutter at the sight of her face,
and thereby she might weaken them all the more;
so her son and husband might benefit from this.

So Penelope rose up from her bed, and laughed,
and it was a strikingly cold sound she made.

Then she spoke to her good housekeeper, saying :

"Eurynome, we shall go downstairs, and show
ourselves to those horrible men. I must speak

to my son. I must warn him to keep away
from those evil people—even if it means
he has to leave the house. Their friendly faces
hide the evil in their heart, and they will hurt him.”

And Eurynome answered her :

“Yes, mistress, this is right. Telemachus must hear
what you speak. But first you must wash yourself spotless,
and oil your face to a shine. You can’t go to them
with your face wet with tears. And it’s awful to persist
in such sorrow, my mistress. Have you not often
prayed for Telemachus to grow to maturity?
Look now! The beard is growing on his face.”

And Penelope responded :

“Eurynome, I shall not now hear of all this.
Speak no more of washing spotless, and oiling
faces. The feeling of beauty I had was lost
when those ships went away with my husband.
Go to Autonoë and Hippodameia.
Say I want them to stand beside me in the hall.
I am ashamed to stand there on my own, because
those people disgust me.”

So she said. Then old Eurycleia slowly walked
out of the bedchamber, and brought her lady’s message
to the others, and urged them to prepare themselves.

Then the goddess, shining-eyed Athena, had an idea

of her own. She poured sweet sleep over the daughter
of Icarius, wise Penelope, who sank
back onto her bed; and all her joints became loose;
and she relaxed in body. And while she slept,
the goddess Athena gave her marvellous gifts.
She cleansed her face of all her worry, and made it fair,
using the same ambrosia that Cytherea uses,
when she prepares to go forth, crowned with flowers,
into the charming dance of the Graces. And so
all the men downstairs would drop their jaws to see
the fair face of Penelope. And before she
was done, the goddess made her taller, and as smooth
as ivory. And then the goddess stepped away,
and was gone. Then the handmaidens drew near the chamber,
whispering together : and sweet sleep let her up
from her bed. She touched her cheeks with her fingertips,
and said :

“Ah, sad one, your sorrow sent you to sleep, and then
it brought you back. If only in this quiet moment
Artemis might come, and take me softly away
in gentle death. No more a life of slow decay,
yearning for him who may never return to me :
Odysseus, by far the best of all of them.”

And so she stepped down the glittering stairs
from the bright upper floors; and she was not alone,
for two delicate handmaidens walked with her.
She came to stand in the doorway of the vast hall;
and showed herself to the men, who beheld her tall
and regal before them, a most shapely beauty;

and her dignified face glowed unearthly behind her veil; and her noble handmaids stood silent at her sides. And at the sight of her, those people there went loose at the knees, and their hearts beat with love beyond imagination; and each man prayed that he might be led into her bed, and lie by her side; and kiss that unearthly face behind the veil.

And she saw her dear son Telemachus, and said :

“Telemachus,
I see you grown into the fullness of manhood,
yet your mind and thoughts have not grown with you.
As a child you were very clever, promising much :
and in figure and beauty you stand distinguished
now, and any stranger’s eyes would see in you
a rich man’s son, a strong man’s son : but in you
I see a mind no longer so seemly as before.
What sort of evil work has come into this house?
How is it you allowed this stranger to be
insulted? How would it be if this man suffers
injury from these nobles? All this dragging around;
and flinging things so disgracefully—at a man
who came to us for help! This cannot continue.
If it does you will suffer—suffer the disgrace
of the people of Ithaca, who will lower
their eyes in disgust at your wrongdoing,
and at your thoughtlessness.”

So this she said in front of them all. And her son answered her carefully, saying :

“Mother, I have no words to allay your anger
 with me—but believe that I *do* know what is right.
 I know the difference between good and evil;
 while before this I was only a child,
 and knew only what a child knows. But right now
 if I had the power I would act as I should—
 if only I had the chance! But these people crowd
 round me like pigs, and wound me with dirty tricks,
 and move in a herd and protect each other,
 and I have no allies who can move against them.
 But *this* stranger took on Irus and the outcome
 crossed the expectations of these noble people :
 the stranger showed himself to be the better man.
 Why won’t Zeus come, or Athena, or Apollo,
 to tame these people crowding our halls, and leave them
 lifeless, with their heads hanging down, out in the court,
 or here inside the house?—just as Irus now sits
 by the front gates, his head bent like a drunken fool.
 He’s unable to gather the power to stand up,
 unable to go away—to here, or to there,
 or to anywhere—as his legs have lost their strength.”

And while Telemachus spoke with his mother,
 Eurymachus interrupted them, and spoke out
 to Penelope, saying :

“Daughter of Icarius, beautiful Penelope,
 if all in Achaean Argos could see you now,
 many more men would be feasting here by
 the dawn of tomorrow. You stand superior

to all women in splendour and beauty;
and wise is the beating heart in your breast.”

And to that Penelope answered him :

“Whatever I am in face and shape, all the light
that would have come from me was lost, long ago,
when the gods took the ships away to Ilium
with my husband. If Odysseus would come
and stand with me, my name would be better among
the people of Ithaca. Instead, I stand here
before your eyes in sorrow. Some god has given me
so much evil for reasons I do not understand.
On the day he left his house and homeland, he held
my right hand by the wrist, and said to me :
‘Fair woman, I do not think all the strong-armoured
Achaean will come back from Troy. It is said that
the Trojans are men—great warriors. They will throw
the sharp spear far, and draw back the long-reaching arrow,
and ride swift horses well. At Troy, two well-balanced
armies will fight for victory. And God only knows
if I will return, or be cut down then and there.
So for now on, all things here are in your hands.
Bring to mind, when you will, my father and mother,
whom you care for in our home : perhaps think of them
more often while I am gone and far from here.
But when the day comes that you see our son bearded,
then you may take your hand from mine and marry whom
you please, and leave your house.’ And everything he said
to me is now about to be. I know what you plan :
I know that this night someone will force me into

an unholy marriage. A sad fate of the miserable and unlucky! But no one knows why Zeus takes our happiness away. A terrible sense of dread comes over me now, in my heart.

All of you people call yourselves noble, yet seek my hand in this unrighteous way, and everyone in Ithaca can see this.

All good men who would win a wife for himself, all those seeking the daughter of a wealthy man, a woman of excellence to bless him at his side, should be willing to compete among rivals in the proper way : leading cattle and fat flocks to the father of the daughter they say they love, and give her splendid gifts—and not eat her out of house and home.”

This she said, and the godly, many-minded Odysseus was happy to hear it. His wife may take the gifts they give, and in answer she may charm them with words, but she hated them. And in her heart she was planning something of her own.

Then Antinous spoke to her :

“Daughter of Icarius, beautiful Penelope, if any man comes to the house bearing gifts, take them; no one thinks it wise to refuse a gift. But we’re not leaving here. We are not going back to our homes and land, until you marry the man you decide is the best of us.”

Thus spoke Antinous, and the nobles applauded his word.

So these good men each sent a servant to fetch a gift
for Penelope. And Antinous' man brought
a splendid robe embroidered with many colours,
complete with twelve golden brooches with well-curved pins.

And Eurymachus' man brought an exquisite
necklace, a chain of pure gold strung with amber beads
glowing like miniature suns. And Eurydamas'
man brought a beautiful pair of black pearl earrings
that glowed in the firelight as if from within.

And the slave of Pisander brought his master back
a carcanet, a very beautiful trifle.

So each heroic man of the herd brought a gift;
but Penelope went back up the staircase,
and let her handmaidens collect them all for her.

Then the nobles turned to dance and song, a riot
of loud delight, and waited for the evening star to come.

And as they made merry the black night came.

So they arranged to stand three lanterns in the hall,
which gave them light; and dry kindling was brought in, fire-
wood seasoned long ago, and only lately split by the bronze.

And pinewood torches were hung up throughout the halls,
and one by one the handmaidens of patient Odysseus
set each torch aflame.

Then patient Odysseus himself spoke :

“Maidens, go up to the chambers of your honourable queen.

When you sit by her you lighten her while she weaves the threads.

Let me bring light to these people. I have no fear that they will surpass me in anything worth knowing : ‘long-enduring’ is how you may know me.”

So he spoke, and they looked at each other and laughed.
 And the beautiful-cheeked Melantho rebuked him
 with shameful words. Daughter of Delikata,
 she was raised by a loving Penelope,
 who gave her toys to play with to make her heart high.
 But she cared nothing for Penelope.
 She often lay with Eurymachus, and loved him.
 Now she rebuked Odysseus venomously :

“Ancient stranger, what nonsense you speak! Why don’t you go sleep somewhere else? Go curl up in a cauldron for all I care! But no, you would rather sit here and babble bold words among men of distinction—yet you feel no fear. Either your mind’s full of wine, or this is your normal way, to go on and on, with no one listening. Did beating that beggar delight you? Beware the coming of a stronger Irus to put you down with youthful fists! Then kick you out of the house, covered in blood!”

And the eyes of Odysseus turned dark and grim
 under his brows, and the many-minded man spoke :

“I will get up soon enough. I shall go to Telemachus
 and repeat what you’ve just said. Perhaps he’ll tear you limb from limb.”

And his words struck the women numb with terror :

they broke into a run down the length of the hall,
 shrieking in a fury : for they believed what he said.
 Meanwhile, Odysseus rose, as he had said
 he would do, but he did not leave the house. He went
 to stand by one of the lanterns blazing with light,
 and his eyes roved over the people before him.
 And he contemplated the ease with which a pig
 gets his throat cut—and from these plans of his
 there would be no escape.

Yet at no time would Athena let the heroic nobles
 ever finish from insulting him. She wanted
 that pain to sink ever deeper into the heart
 of Odysseus, son of Laertes.

So Eurymachus raised his voice to all present,
 taunting and teasing Odysseus, and making
 his friends laugh :

“Hear this, friends, suitors of our ἀγα-κλειτός queen
 (our *very* famous queen), that I may disburden
 my heart of the following wise observation :
 I think the gods have brought this wretched man to us
 to brighten up the palace of Odysseus!
 See the firelight that shines off him from the torches :
 off his head—since there’s not one strand of hair on it!”

Then he called out to Odysseus, destroyer of cities :

“Stranger, how about a job for some honest pay?
 I’ll send you to work my fields on our fine borders,

to gather stones for walls, and plant tall trees. Your pay is assured; trust me. I'll feed you year round, and keep you in clothing, and give you fine sandals for your feet. But you've never worked an honest day in your life, have you? No, you've gone scrapping along through our land with no will to work, learning evil in a catch-as-catch-can way. You go cringing through our streets, yet do not mind it. Anything to fill that bottomless belly of yours."

And Odysseus of the subtle mind responded to him :

"Eurymachus, if only the long days of early summer were here.—I would take you on in whatever contest you say. I'd take up a curved blade in my hand and cut the grass, and you could take a like blade, and the grass would be long and full so we might have a 'fine' competition, working far into the night without taking any food during all the time that we cut. You would discover me the one man still standing by the end. Or we could yoke oxen fierce in spirit, equal in age and strength, and drive them, their bellies glutted with grass, through the four acres of a field, and the soil would yield beneath our ploughs, and we would discover who made the straighter cut. Or might Zeus bring war this very day so I could lift the shield, and two spears, and wear the dog's-skin helmet, with everything shining of bronze; then you would see me leading the fight at the head of the warriors. And you would babble about my empty belly no longer. You, man, are a sorry thing, cruel at heart. Your arrogance is founded on your friendship with like-minded weak little men. And yet you believe yourself mighty—even invincible. But when Odysseus returns to his homeland and enters

this house, though the front doors be open wide, they will prove themselves far too narrow for you to get out.”

He said this, and Eurymachus boiled with fury.

Looking darkly at him he spoke with winged words :

“You filthy fool! You dare to babble such bold rubbish in the presence of your betters? And without fear?

I say you’ve gone dumb with wine, unless this is your normal way, to babble on like an imbecile.

You think you’re someone special because you beat down Irus, who’s nothing but a worthless beggar!”

And as he spoke he grabbed a footstool, but Odysseus sat by the knees of Amphinomus of Dulichium, in seeming fear of Eurymachus. So Eurymachus lashed out in anger, and struck a wine-pourer in the face, and the pitcher fell from his hand and shattered on the marble floor, as the man cried out and fell to his knees; then slumped backwards and went silent. Then uproar rushed through the people in the shadowy halls, as each man protested to his neighbour, saying :

“If only this stanger had met his death while wandering elsewhere, and never stepped foot in here— then we’d have some peace and quiet in the house! Instead, beggars are quarrelling, and all the fun of the feast has left us, for many unpleasant things are happening here!”

Then Telemachus, full of power, spoke out to all the men :

“Have all you noble worthies lost your minds? All you’ve eaten and drunk has gone to your heads! And some god is stirring this mess in your hearts and making it all the worse for you here. Now you’ve had your feast— why not get out of here and go rest in your own homes? I shall not push you out, but wait for you to leave —as soon as you see sense.”

When they heard this, all the horrible people there ground their teeth and bit their lips, and looked on amazed at Telemachus, who had spoken so boldly to them. Then Amphinomus spoke up, saying :

“Friends, this boy has spoken well. Our merriment has indeed deteriorated to aggression in word and fist, and pointlessly so. Let us hear what he says. We must stop abusing this stranger, and any of the slaves in the house of Odysseus. Come now! Have us a wine-pourer to pour the first drops into the cups, so we may make an offering. Then we’ll go home and have a well-earned rest in bed. The stranger can have the house for now. Let the boy look after him, since it’s to him this man has come.”

He said this, and all the nobles agreed with him.

And so Mulus, Amphinomus’ man, mixed a bowl of wine and water, then served each in turn; and all the nobles honoured the gods with libations; then drank the honey-sweet wine. And when they had poured,

and drained the wine until their hearts were full of it,
they went their separate ways, each man to his own home;
and all lay down to rest.

End of Book XVIII

Book XIX

The great hall was emptied out; and Odysseus
sat there in deep silence, thinking over
how to kill each and every one of those people :
easily done, with the support of Athena.

At one point he spoke to Telemachus, saying :

“Now you and I will take all the weapons away
and put them down in the store-room. When those people
miss them, and question you, answer them with
polite respect, with something like :
‘I have removed them from the thick smoke,
friends, since they are no longer as they were when Odysseus
left them behind when he sailed to Troy.
Now they’re dirty from all the smoke the fires breathe.
And I fear some god might throw you all into a
drunken quarrel while you enjoy the wine,
wounding one another, and dishonouring
the feast and your marriage-plans. For of itself
iron attracts the man.’”

So spoke Odysseus, and the son obeyed his father.

At once he summoned old nurse Eurycleia.

When she finally came, he spoke to her, saying :

“Good nurse, come and hear what I tell you. Have all the woman stay
in their rooms while I take these weapons down into the store-room.
I think of my father, who left long ago when I was a young child, and of
all this beautiful power—now lustreless from the careless smoke!

I have decided to put them all downstairs, and away from the fire's dark breath."

And Eurycleia answered the beloved child :

"It is sweet to see you taking direction
of your house, finally concerned enough
to safeguard what this house has treasured up.
But come! Who will go with you with these things,
since you won't let the maids carry the light?"

And Telemachus answered :

"This stranger. For whoever eats at my table
must contribute, and not answer with idleness,
no matter how far he has come."

And as she walked away she kept her thoughts
to herself. Then behind her she closed the great doors
of the hall and locked them.

Then father and shining-eyed son sprang to their feet.
They carried out the curved shields and helmets and sharp-
tipped spears : and leading the way, goddess Athena
raised a lamp high, spreading very beautiful light.

And Telemachus spoke to Odysseus :

"Father," he said, "do you see this wonder before
your eyes? As it is, all the wood-beams above us,
and the high pillars around us, all shine as if with
a blazing fire. As if a god is inside

the house, one come down from Heaven, and is here with us now.”

And Odysseus answered him :

“Keep quiet, stop thinking, and ask no more questions.

This is a sign of the gods who hold Olympus.

Now you lie down and rest; while I will stay behind, and prepare the minds of your mother and the maids for the fight : and this will take some time : for she will question me of every little thing, through her tears.”

After his father spoke, the son walked through the halls and lay down in his inner rooms by the pale light of the pine torches, in the bedchamber he’s slept in since early childhood : and sweet sleep came to him. There he lay and waited till the coming of Dawn.

While Odysseus, left behind in the great hall, thought over how with Athena’s help he might kill every last one of those evil people.

Then, descending the staircase from her bedchamber, came sensitive Penelope, resembling Artemis, or golden Aphrodite.

And a chair for her was placed down by the fire : it shone around her with ivory and silver spirals, delicate craftsmanship hand-made by Icmalius; and there was a footstool attached, for her to lay her feet on, to rest them : and a thick fleece, just now put there for her, was very soft for her body

to rest on. So ever-thinking Penelope
 sat there while her graceful-armed handmaidens
 came in from the outer chamber to clear away
 the abundance of food, and the cups, and the tables,
 everything those heroic nobles had touched with
 their vile hands. Then the handmaidens straightened
 the lantern stands; and brought in fresh firewood,
 to bring light and heat.

Meanwhile, the unpleasant Melanthe returned
 to Odysseus to renew her disapproval,
 saying loudly :

“Stranger, do you plan to stay awake to trouble us
 all night long, going round and round through the halls,
 eyeing us women up and down? No! Go away!
 You know where the front door is, old man. Go; and be
 satisfied with your supper. Or very quickly
 I will chase you out with a torch at your backside!
 So go away.”

And Odysseus gave her a hard look, and said :

“Young lady, you seem possessed of some terrible god.
 Why do you pour out your anger over my heart?
 Are these rags on my skin not clean enough for you?
 Beggars don’t appeal to you? But it can’t be helped :
 a man has to eat. I’m what wanderers look like :
 you’ve seen many before.

But I once lived in a wealthy house, among men

who respected me from their own houses : and I
 had many possessions : and many times I gave
 gifts to wanderers who came to me with head down
 in need : and I gave to whatever need that came
 to me. I had many slaves, too many to count,
 who respected my kindness. I had everything
 that people on the outside consider lucky
 to have, all the wealth that people consider
 essential for a man to live his life well.

But Zeus in time emptied me out : he willed for this
 to be. So don't think that this can't be your fate, too.
 Woman, your favour in the eyes of all can end,
 though now you show excellence among the handmaids.
 Perhaps you'll make your mistress angry, and she'll deal
 harshly with you. Or Odysseus comes back.
 There is room for hope, that through destiny or luck,
 he will come back. But even if he's gone for good,
 have you not come to see the father in the son?
 And that may be so by the will of Apollo.
 So no woman stalking the halls of this house
 will work evil not seen by the eye of Telemachus.
 He is no longer a child."

So he spoke, and sensitive Penelope heard :
 so she called to the handmaid by name, and rebuked
 her with sharp words :

"I know all that you are doing, as I would a
 shameless dog in my keeping. You haven't the strength
 to wipe clean the stain all over you. And well you know
 I meant to see the stranger and question him

of my man, for whom I am greatly sick at heart.”

And Penelope turned to her housekeeper Euronyme
and spoke :

“Euronyme, prepare a chair and fleece for this man,
so he may sit and tell me his story; and listen.
I will speak with him now.”

So she spoke, and a shining chair was brought beside
the fire, and a fleece was flung onto it :
then long-enduring Odysseus sat down facing his wife :
the lovely, beautiful, wise Penelope.

And it was she who spoke first :

“Stranger, I will speak first and ask you : who are you?
Where is your city? And tell me of your parents.”

And Odysseus answered :

“O good lady, honest lady, generous lady,
with whom on all the earth no one would willingly
quarrel, and your good name reaches up to Heaven;
as does a blameless king, a god-faring man,
a gentle master good and honest at heart,
and an example to the people : for whom
the wheat and barley grow in abundance,
and the trees grow heavy with fruit, and the flocks
constantly renew, and the sea supplies fish :
and all this ever grows in goodness under his

leadership, and the people, too, grow in goodness.

But as I sit here in this house, ask me no more
of my family and homeland. As it is, I'd
drop many tears if I thought on all of what's what.
I am a man of many sighs. Yet tears falling
down my face are no fit way to thank my hostess;
and it's no good to grieve endlessly and forever.
And anyway one of the handmaidens would show
displeasure with me and as I sail away
in tears will say it's on a depth of wine."

And Penelope answered :

"Stranger, whatever charm I had in smile
and body was taken away by the gods,
when they sent off the Argives to Ilium,
and with them went my husband Odysseus.
If he would come to me, and stand by me,
and care for me, my own story would be
so much the better. Now I feel a sadness
I cannot escape. Heavy are the evils
some god has brought me.
All those royals in possession of the islands,
Same and Dulichium and wooded Zakynthos,
and those with homes on sunny Ithaca itself—
all these silly men say they love me and come here
without invitation, and devastate the house.
So I stay by myself, and evade even men
who come on official business : the ministers;
and the house's handicraftsmen bearing questions.

I stay away from the public.

So I am unable to show care to those who come
in need. I find myself always thinking of Odysseus,
and don't do much else, except feel my heart wasting
away. Those horrid people want me to marry them;
but I'm smarter, and I weave sweet-talk to deceive them.

When all this started, a god breathed an idea
into me : to weave a robe. So I brought a loom
into my bedchamber, and began weaving,
with the thinnest and most delicate thread,
a wondrously elaborate web.

And I spoke to those people, and said :
'Warriors, my sweethearts'—such words were trickery,
to keep them away from me—'good Odysseus
is dead, and you are impatient for marriage.
You must wait until I have completed my work,
for I will not leave undone the spinning of a
burial robe for warrior Laertes,
when fate chooses to takes him away. Otherwise
the Achaean women would be displeased,
were he who won so much to lie without a shroud.'

This was my tale, and their heroic hearts obeyed me.
So day by day I wove my web, but at night I
would unravel it, in the light of the torches
placed down around me. So I misled those people
for three years, for they're not very sharp in thought;
but as the seasons came and went, and the fourth year
came : as the moons one after another waned away :
as each day came slowly to its close : then through the

treachery of my good-for-nothing handmaids,
 no better than bitches, my trickery was exposed
 to those people, who were not happy to hear it.
 They remonstrated with me and even, I think,
 threatened me. So I've been forced to finish
 my weaving, and my own self is given no thought
 at all. Just now I see no way out. A dark wedding
 awaits me, unless I think up a new misdirection.
 My parents favour the marriage. But my son rages
 at them, and rightly, for they're eating away his life,
 and he sees all as it is. He has grown into
 a man who should manage the house, but Zeus
 honours him with abuse. And that is how it is.
 Now tell me of your family. And don't tell me
 you're born of the oak of ancient myth, and brother
 to the nymphs who haunt the wild-growing forest;
 and don't tell me a rock."

So Odysseus answered :

"Ah, beautiful wife of Odysseus!
 You won't leave off from asking of my family?
 Well, I'll tell you.—though it will hurt me to tell you—
 but I'll just add that to the rest of it.
 For by now pain's an old story to me.
 I'm a man who's been away from his homeland
 for a long time. I've wandered through many cities,
 and seen many men, and each and all had troubles
 of their own to suffer. As you ask me,
 so I will tell you. There is an ancient land
 of Crete, birthplace of our alphabet, far out

in the wine-dark sea, a beautiful place, fruitful,
and sea-surrounded. People too many to count
live there; and there are ninety shining cities.

Tongue upon tongue mingle there : there are Achaeans;
and the holy Cydonians;, and Dorians, who wear plumes that
wiggle in the wind; and peace-loving Pelasgians.

The mightiest city of all there is Knossos,
where the boy-king Minos reigned at Zeus' command.

He was the father of my father, great-hearted
Deucalion. I had an older brother, warrior
Idomeneus, who went away in his curved
ships to Ilium, and my name—"

(And Odysseus gave her the word for 'blazing';
for 'shining'; for 'burning heat'; for 'red-brown' horses;
for 'fiery' eagles, lions, foxes;
as he slowly, gently, revealed himself to her.)

"—is Aethon, a name known all over. It was in Crete
that I saw your Odysseus with these two eyes,
and I gave him kind gifts. The wild winds had brought
him to me, when his ships went wide of their mark
past the tip of Malea, and were made to wander.
He anchored at Amnisos, a dangerous harbour,
and stood by the cave of goddess Eleuthyia,
she who brings mortals to birth. It was at that place,
long ago, that iron blossomed, and now flows from
there like honey. And he stayed there; and with many
pains he would outlast the storms.

First, he walked up to the city, and asked to see

Idomeneus. He called himself his good friend,
his honest and loving friend. Idomeneus,
however, was gone. Some ten dawns earlier he'd
sailed off in his curved ships for Troy. So I brought
him to my own house and received him as a guest,
and gave him gifts with a generous love. Then I
brought to assembly all the men who'd followed
Odysseus on his travels, and from out of
the public storehouse we welcomed them with barley
meal, and sparkling wine; and brought cattle as gifts
to the gods. We gave enough to make their hearts full.
The Achaeans stayed with us for twelve days, shut in
by the North Wind, that freezes everything in the air;
the wind blew so strong we were barely able
to stand upright. Some god, we thought, was dangerously
angry at us. But on day thirteen the wind fell,
and your husband sailed off into the sea."

So he spoke, his many fictions yet close to truth,
as he slowly, gently, revealed himself to her.
And hearing of her husband brought tears that ran down
her cheeks. And all peacefulness melted from her face;
just as melting snow runs down the mountains, when winds
pour down a warmer breath, and overfills the streams
that gush with water :
so her loveliness melted, and the tears poured down.
She cried for her man, who was sitting beside her.
And Odysseus felt a grim sorrow for his wife,
whom he watched weep and wail; but his eyes
were hard as iron, though he required cunning
to conceal his own tears. Then when she'd had her fill

of all those many tears, she disciplined her voice,
and spoke :

“Kind stranger, I think I must now attempt a test,
to see if you in truth did welcome my husband
and his good-hearted men to your halls, as you say.
Tell me : what sort of men *were* those who followed him?
And speak of how my husband held himself among
the people. And this you must say : what was my husband wearing?”

And Odysseus answered her :

“Woman, lovely woman, it’s hard to speak of this.
The time he’s been away is long. It’s now twenty
years since he went away, and left my country.
But I shall speak while I see him in my mind.
He wore a cloak of heavy purple wool;
well-doubled; and was pinned at the shoulder
with a brooch. Yes, it’s this brooch I remember most.
Daedalus himself might have shaped it with his art-
ful fingers. A golden brooch with a double clasp :
with two eyes to fasten the pins. And on the front
was a very cunningly made scene : a dog gripped
a dappled fawn in his forepaws : and everyone
who saw this scene admired it, for they could see
the young deer panting, and gasping.
And everyone wondered how something of gold
so well expressed the dog struggling to hold the fawn
writhing in his grip, and kicking out with her feet.
And I remember his shirt was as thin as a layer
of dry onion. It was soft to the touch, and glistened

in the sun. Yes, many women gazed long at him.
I'll say one more thing; and keep it in heart :
I don't know if Odysseus dressed that way at home,
or if a friend on the swift ship gave it to him;
or possibly a stranger : since Odysseus knew
many men who revered him—for there was only
one of him among the Achaeans.

And I gave him a bronze sword, and a beautiful
sea-purple cloak, to be laid double on the skin,
and a tunic that reached to his feet; then with due
honour sent him away on his wave-taming ship.
I remember he had a servant with him,
a little man, a bit older than himself,
who always kept his shoulders hunched over,
and was dark-skinned, and had thick curls of hair.
Eurybates was his name; and Odysseus
rated him higher than all the others with him,
because they thought very much alike. As it's said,
'They were suited for one another.'

And as he spoke he saw his wife break when he
spoke the truth of her husband Odysseus.
Then when she'd had her fill of many tears,
she disciplined her voice, and spoke :

"You will no longer be pitied, stranger. Now you
will be honoured in this house. I myself dressed him
in the garments you remembered. I took that cloak
from the store-room, and doubled it up, and folded
it away for him, and inside it I placed that brooch

for him to find, a shining treasure for him to hold.
But surely I shall never see my husband again.
I shall not receive him in this house, when he comes
back to everything he loves. No. Those hollow ships
took Odysseus away to a terrible fate,
to look at an evil city not to be named.”

And Odysseus answered her :

“O lovely woman, o kind wife to Odysseus,
no more tears. Bring back the beauty to your face;
let your heart no longer melt away in weeping
for your husband. There is no shame in this,
for a woman to grieve the death of her man,
the husband she birthed children with in her love.
Surely there was no man like Odysseus.
They say he resembled the gods. But cease your tears.
For now I will tell you true. Odysseus is
very near. From the fertile Thesprotian land
he is coming, and he’ll be bringing a great deal
of treasure with him. But of all his faithful friends,
all were lost, swallowed by the wine-dark sea,
as he sailed away from the island of Thrinacia.
Zeus and Helios took his men and ship away.
They were very angry, because his men had eaten
of the cattle of the sun.

So they swelled the sea’s belly that little bit more.
But he floated on the ship’s keel, and came to shore,
to the land of the Phaeacians, who are as kind
as gods, and honoured Odysseus in their hearts

as a god. They gave him many gifts, and were willing to bring him to his homeland on their own sailing ships, safe and sound. Odysseus would have come back long ago, but his spirit urged him to wander the wide earth, and collect valuables beyond reach of other men. He knew what to do to get them, because there was no man like Odysseus.

All this the king of the Thesprotians told me, the mighty Pheidon, kind and magnanimous king. Before my eyes he swore to me a ship was launched in the sea to take mighty Odysseus home.

Then he unveiled before my eyes the treasure that Odysseus had assembled : bronze and gold and iron, and everything made with the finest art. I saw enough to feed ten generations of children, so immense was the wealth I saw left in the halls of the king. Odysseus himself, however, was gone : the king said he had travelled to holy Dodona, to hear the song of the doves settled in the branches of Zeus' towering oak, hoping to learn how to get back into fertile Ithaca after so long a time : in plain sight, or secretly. But he is safe, and very near, and he will be here, and he will see his loved ones.

If you don't believe me I'll swear a solemn oath!— Hear me now, mightiest god in Heaven, Zeus! To you, from this hearth of blameless Odysseus where I have come to, I swear these words are true : with the sinking of the crescent and the new moon coming, Odysseus shall come."

And Penelope answered him :

“Stranger, I hope what you say is true. I’d reward you so well that people would call you blest. But my heart sees things as they are : he is gone, and will never return. This house cannot help you return to where you want to be, either. No one in the house has my husband’s power to escort you off the island. There is no man here who was Odysseus. *He* would have received you rightly, and sent you to wherever in the world you wished.”

Then Penelope turned her head; and said :

“Handmaids, come. Wash this man’s feet, and lay down his bed. Use cloaks and silken blankets, to give him comfortable warmth until golden Dawn comes. And at sunrise, bathe him, and oil his body, so he may sit by Telemachus when he eats his meals in the hall. And so much the worse it shall be for any of those people attempting soul-destroying torments. Who tries this, shall pass out of the house forever, however horrible his angry bluster. Stranger, you shall see how superior a woman may be in imagination and ingenuity. Would you think that I might allow you to keep those terrible rags on your sunburnt skin, while you sit at table in my halls?

We are small things, and last but a short time.

And if we’re hard at heart, and prove ourselves to be

so, we'll bring down curses on our name, and people will make us suffer many pains for all the rest of our days; and when we die, our death will only make them mock us all the more. But if we're blameless in thought and deed, and cherish excellence at heart, then one's name is celebrated as a blessing among men and women everywhere in the world; and even strangers will bear it in mind, and call that person good."

And Odysseus answered her :

"Lovely woman, your cloaks and blankets are hateful to me, and have been ever since I turned away in my long-oared ship from the snowy mountains of Crete. No, I am used to many sleepless nights on vile beds, lying awake and waiting for the golden Dawn. And I'm not one for feet-washing. It will not please me to have any woman touch my foot—not any of those women in the halls. But perhaps you have an older woman, well old in years, who is knowing and trusted, and who has suffered all the trouble I've had. Her I will allow to wash my feet."

And Penelope answered him :

"Dear guest, I have met no wandering stranger so refined as yourself, though many have come, from many far places, to find a welcome sanctuary here. So wise and well-spoken are all of your words!

There is indeed an old lady, shrewd and understanding,
 who lives in this house. She nursed and raised my husband,
 and received him into her hands when his mother
 birthed him. But by now most of her strength has been
 taken from her. But she will wash your feet.

Come now! Dearest Eurycleia! Arise, and wash
 the feet of a man similar to your master.
 Just now, just maybe, Odysseus has feet such
 as these, and hands like these. Time ages us quickly;
 but I'll take my husband even stumbling downwards
 into old age."

Thus spoke Penelope. Then the old woman raised
 her hands up to her face, to conceal the downpour
 of hot tears there; and she spoke out in sorrow :

"Ah, child! What I see is hopeless for us all!
 Why does Zeus hate you above all others, when you
 have a god-fearing heart inside? Zeus, who delights
 in thunder, and the lightning strike, does what he wants!
 Surely no one living has offered him so many
 excellent thigh-pieces, or so much splendid
 cattle. And what you prayed for was as all others
 wish : simply to come to old age with gratitude
 for a glorious son. But now we wonder why
 he will not let you return to the happiness
 you once had.

And you too, stranger : I expect Odysseus
 is suffering womanly mocking in some strange place,

as he stands in somebody's glittering palace,
just as all the bitches here mock you in a pack,
like dogs.

I too would avoid their insults and ugliness,
just as you do; and wouldn't let them touch my feet
either. But allow me to wash your feet, for I
am content to do this, and wise Penelope
has asked me to do this. I will wash your feet
because my mistress asks me to, but also
because my heart is heavy with sorrow.
Stranger, you bring my master back to me.
Come now! and hear what I am saying to you :
many long-suffering wanderers have come here,
but in all my years no one so reminds me
of Odysseus : in size, and shape, and in feet."

And Odysseus answered her :

"Good lady, there are many who have seen us two
together, and think us similar. You yourself
now speak as shrewdly as they."

And as he spoke the old woman took a brightly
shining basin in her hands; and poured in cold water
first, then poured in the warm, until she thought it
ready. Meanwhile, Odysseus had turned his chair
from the fireplace, and sat himself in shadow,
so that she might see his body only dimly.
Because he knew she might quickly notice a scar,
and begin to think on it, and wonder on it,

and everything hidden would rapidly come to light.

So she came close, and began to wash her master,
and quickly she noticed the scar. A wild boar
had run its white tusk into him when he'd gone off
to Parnassus, to Autolycus and his sons.

Autolycus! A prize-winning thief and liar!
Who just happened to be the good father
of Odysseus' mother. It's said Hermes
himself gave the man these skills, in recognition
of all the thigh-pieces burnt for his pleasure.
All those parts of lambs and kids laid on the altar
urged Hermes to give him great kindness of his own,
and made him a prize-winning thief and liar.
Now one day Autoclyus, the grandfather
of Odysseus, came to sunny Ithaca
and saw his daughter's newborn baby son;
and when he was finishing up his supper,
Eurycleia laid the beloved baby down
upon his knees; and the grandfather looked
into the little eyes as the good lady spoke :

"You see the dear son your daughter has borne,
the much-prayed-for. And now you must name this child."

And Autolycus answered :

"My daughter, and her honoured husband, I shall name
this child. I have suffered the earth overgrown
with hateful men and women who've put their hate

in my heart. So the name shall be Odysseus.”

(And he coined the name from ὀδύσσομαι, “to hate”.

But also “to be hated”—by both gods and men.

And ὀδύσσομαι echoes with ὀδύνη : “pain”.

Pain of body, and pain of mind. Distress. Birth

pain. And one other meaning : “to trouble oneself”.)

And Autolycus continued :

“And when he has grown to strength, he shall come here to Parnassus, where he shall find our many treasures, and we shall send him off a happy man.”

So it was to receive these gifts that Odysseus had come to Parnassus. Autolycus embraced him, and welcomed him with affectionate words. Then all his sons embraced him. And Amphithea, his grandmother, put her arms round him and clung there, and kissed his head, and his shining two eyes.

Then Autolycus spoke, and his excellent sons heard, and obeyed. They brought a mighty bull, five years in age; then set upon it; and flayed it; and quartered it; then skilfully cut it into pieces, which they ran onto spits and carefully roasted; then equally divided out the parts.

So all day long till the sun went down they feasted; and no heart went unfulfilled at the feast.

Then when the sun went down and darkness came, they lay themselves down, each to their resting place,

and joined in sleep.

Then when the Dawn's rosy fingers roused earth awake,
they left for the hunt : Autolycus and his sons,
and all their dogs : and with them went Odysseus.
They stepped on the sacred mountain of Parnassus,
covered all the way up and down in dense forest.
Up they went, no easy climb, high and steep; and came
to cliffs, and caves, and ravines, as the strong winds blew.
Just then the sun rose up from the mild stream
of deep-flowing Oceanus, and early light
spread over the fields, and the huntsmen followed
their avid dogs scenting the trace of something close.
Autolycus and his sons were eager to find
their prey : and with them Odysseus' long spear
cast a long shadow on the leaves up ahead.
Just then, ahead of the huntsmen, a tremendous
wild boar was lying down in a deep thicket.
All the mighty winds and rains that pass through here :
all the brightest, heaviest beams that Helios
throws down; all storms of all kinds that come and go :
from all of this the wild boar was protected
by his densely joined thicket : and the leaves ever
dropping from above bolstered his comfortable spot.
He heard the quiet sounds of men and dogs closing
in; and the growling dogs quickening their pace :
and out from his spot the boar came running at them
with his bristly back and fiery eyes :
and Odysseus was the first to rush at it,
lifting up his long spear in his certain grip,
eager to run it through him and kill him :

but the boar, a quicker thinker, struck first :
he tore through his flesh with his sharp white tusk,
a gash just above the knee : terrible looking,
yet not deep enough to show his frail bones.
Yet Odysseus still launched his spear with sure aim
and thrust it clean through the beast's right shoulder,
and the sharp tip stuck out the other side and sparkled
in the light. Then he fell down in the dust
with a cry : and his life flew away.

Then the sons of Autolycus saw to the boar.
Then the wound of godly, excellent Odysseus
they bandaged skilfully, holding back his dark blood.
Then they all quickly returned to their father's house.
And when Autolycus and his sons nursed him back
to health, and had given him the splendid gifts,
they swiftly sent him back to his homeland
with a happy farewell. Back home in Ithaca,
his father and mother were happy to see him
return, and asked him about his terrible wound.
So he told them everything that had happened :
a wild boar had run his white tusk into him
on Parnassus, where the sons of Autolycus
had taken him.

Now old Euryclea reached out with her fingers
and touched the scar, and her thoughts hit the mark of it.
So she gasped; and from her other hand slipped his foot
down hard on the basin, which rang out with the sound
of bronze and clattered down onto the floor,
and all the water poured out of it. And the old

woman wavered between a shriek and a laugh,
a feeling both grief and bliss; and her eyes filled up,
and overflowed. Then she found her voice to speak.
She reached out with her fingers and touched the man's face,
and said :

"Dear child Odysseus, I knew it was you.
But I could not see you rightly until I touched
the body of my master."

And as she spoke she sought to catch Penelope's
eyes, to shout out to her that her husband has come
home. But Penelope did not gaze upon her,
for Athena had turned her thoughts in another
direction. And Odysseus reached out and seized
the woman's throat with one hand, and with the other
he drew her close to him, and whispered in her ear :

"Good mother, would you ruin me with a single word?
It was me you nursed with this very breast; and now,
after twenty long and terrible years, I come,
and with one word you will have me killed. Since some god
has opened your eyes to me, keep quiet about it!
No one else must hear you, or know what you now know.
Hear what I say to you, for this is truth : obey me,
or when I obliterate the noble suitors,
and kill all the shameful women in my halls,
no one shall keep me from tossing one old nurse
onto the pile of the dead."

And Eurycleia answered him :

“My child!

What a word has winged through your lovely row of teeth!

Well you know where my heart lies, and how sure it is.

To protect your family I’ll be as hard and cruel

as stone or iron! So you can kindly take your hand

off my throat. And I’ll say something else, and keep it

in mind. When you kill all the horrible suitors,

I’ll tell you which of the women dishonoured you,

and which are innocent of blame.”

And Odysseus answered her :

“Good mother, keep everything you know to yourself;

you have no need to tell me anything. I will

see, and hear, and learn of each of them for myself.

Just keep silent, and watch on which way fate takes us.”

So he spoke; and the woman held herself silent

as she walked out through the hall, to fetch more water

to wash his feet, since the first measure had poured out.

Then when she had washed and oiled him, he brought

his chair closer to the fire, to warm himself

some more, and this time he concealed the scar under

his rags. Then lovely Penelope spoke to him :

“Stranger, I have one last little thing to ask you;

for soon it shall be time for bed, when even

the worst sorrow may be lifted for awhile.

But my sorrow is too large to fit in sweet sleep,

which some god gave me for a reason I might

never understand. And it spills out into daytime :
tears I cannot stop, a grief I find no end to.
Every day I have my fill of fathomless grief.
Through tears I see to my household, and the women
in the halls. And when night comes, and all people
find peace in resting-places, and sleep; then, I find
no comfort in my own bed, but terrible thoughts
crowd round my heart, and my body all over is
stung with torments, and there and then I know that
everything I know is in disquiet.”

Here she paused, and Odysseus spoke quietly :

“Your sadness has the sound of the nightingale,
when she sings at the coming of the spring,
sitting in a restful place of many green leaves;
and as she mourns the death of her beloved son,
the song she pours is musical and beautiful.”

And Penelope answered him :

“And as the nightingale’s song is many-toned,
so my heart, too, moves this way and that, uncertain
what to do. Shall I stay here with fidelity
and sure eye and watch over my son, and my wealth,
here in this broad magnificent palace?
And in doing so, I will honour my husband,
who is long gone from here; and also the people,
the good people of Ithaca who expect
propriety. Or shall I attach myself to the best
of the Achaeans, who come courting in my halls,

and bring gifts, and promise high bride-prices
to satisfy my parents? And there is my son.
When he was a child and naïve, he forbade
me to marry again and leave my husband's house.
Now that he's grown strong, he prays to the gods
for me to go away. While I stay, the noble-
men are here and eating up all his wealth."

And Penelope went silent, staring into
the fire. And when she spoke again, she said :

"But come now! Hear of this dream, and reveal it
to me. Here in the house I keep a store of wheat
in a large trencher, and geese come from the water
to eat of the wheat, and it melts my heart to watch
the twenty geese eat. But from a mountaintop
a huge eagle came with a crooked beak and took
them by the neck and snapped them. I saw them dead
everywhere in the halls. But *he* rose up into
the shining sky. I cried out; then shrieked aloud,
though it were only a dream, and the house-women
came, and covered me while I cried miserably
that the eagle had killed my geese.

Then he came back. He landed on the tip
of the beam that pokes from the side of the house.
He spoke with a man's voice, and ended my tears :

'Courage,' he told me, 'daughter of well-known Icarius.
This dream is real, and shows that good will come to be.
The geese are those silly suitors. But this eagle

is already come back as your husband,
who is bringing all those shameful people a cruel
fate.'

And as his words left me, so sweet sleep released me;
and when I looked all round the halls I saw the geese
at their trencher, eating of their wheat."

And Odysseus answered her :

"Good lady, I give this dream one meaning only,
and no one has the power to turn it otherwise :
because Odysseus himself shows you how things
are. Those people, as you have seen, face ruin
and death : to the very last man. Not one of them
shall escape his death and fate."

And Penelope answered him :

"Good man, dreams are confused and bewildered.
They do not all mean the same thing to all who hear them.
Some dreams cheat us with empty hopes. They lead us on
with false things; and talking of these dreams are pointless.
You might say that false dreams rise up from gates of carved
ivory. But those that come into us through gates
of smooth horn come to be, when afterwards we think
on them. I do not think my horrid dream came through
the smooth gates. But if it were to be true, my son
and I would find it a grateful thing. And one more
word I shall say, and keep it in mind. From now on,
every dawn I see will have an evil name. For this day

I shall take myself away from the house of Odysseus.

I will tell you how I am going to do it.

The handle of the axe my husband used to hold has a hole in it. And in the house he left many axes on display. I shall place a contest on the heads of those people. Twelve axes shall be lined up one after another in a row so straight that an arrow might be shot to pass through all twelve holes. My husband used to do this, to sharpen his skill in death. He would stand far off, and shoot an arrow through the straight axes out, and away.

Now I shall offer this test to those people, and I shall call it a competition.

Whichever man strings his arrow and slips it through the twelve axes shall win me. And I shall win him as my husband, and leave this house full of memories, which I expect will forever come back to me in dreams.”

And Odysseus answered her :

“Good lady, this fine idea of yours must take place immediately. I tell you that very soon Odysseus πολύμητις will reveal himself in these halls, before they’ll ever string their shining bows, and shoot any arrows through the iron.”

And Penelope answered him :

“Stranger, as long as you wish to speak to me,

and gladden me here in my halls, I would stay up
with you, and keep sleep from pouring onto my eyes.
But it's not prudent to go without too much sleep.
And the gods have set a time for us to lay our
heads to the grain-giving earth. So now I shall go
upstairs to my chambers, and lie down on my bed
of sighs, forever bathed with tears for my husband,
ever since he went to that horrible place
that is not to be named. And you lie in the hall :
the women will spread blankets on the floor for you;
or allow the maids to prepare a bed for you.”

So when Penelope had said all she would say,
she went upstairs into her glittering chambers,
and her handmaidens went up the staircase with her.
And when the women had entered with her
into the bedchamber, then Penelope
dropped on the bed, and wept for her husband,
until sweet sleep was poured over her eyelids
from the hand of Athena.

End of Book XIX

Book XX

Odysseus lay down to sleep, by tall pillars
reaching out in a colonnade into darkness.

On the floor under him was a raw hide, covered
with fleeces of many rams, those the noblemen
had gifted to the gods, to stuff their own bellies,
as luck would have it. Eurycleia had pulled tight
a cloak over him when he had laid himself down.

So there Odysseus lay awake, thinking
things over, weighing up how to kill those people.

And the women came by, all those happy to lie
with the noble fools and rut. They spoke cheerfully,
and their carefree laughter echoed down through the halls.

All this made his heart beat fast. So he thought things through.

Should he charge at them, and bring death to each right there?

Or allow them to whore themselves out to those viles
for one last time? Within him his heart growled : just as
a dog stands over its puppies to protect them
from a person it doesn't know, bearing its teeth
for a fight : so his heart growled : furious inside
at the evil those nobles had brought, and still bring :
but he conquered his anger, and thought to himself :

“Patience. Just as awful was the time you swallowed
the rot of the shameless Cyclops, when he took
your men. But you stayed patient. Expecting to die,
instead we used my thought and got out of there.”

So he thought to himself, and restrained his heart,
and his heart obeyed, but he tossed this way and that.

Just as the hand of a man turns round his food
in the fire, stuffed with fat and blood, turning it
this way and that, wanting it roasted and ready
to eat, so Odysseus tossed this way and that
as he wondered how to kill those shameless worthies.
How can one man put his hands on the many?

Athena then stepped down from high in woman's shape
and face. And Odysseus saw her standing in the darkness.
And he heard her speak :

"Why," she asked him, "are you awake? Fate is spinning
itself out, as it will. You have prevailed, you have
come home. Here in this house are your wife and child,
and no man would find unwelcome such a strong son."

So half inside sleep Odysseus answered her :

"Yes, goddess, you speak well. But our work isn't over.
I think of how to put my hands on all of those
vile people, who move together in a herd,
while I stand alone in my house. And something
else, even greater, I wonder on. When I kill them all,
with the aid of you, and with the aid of Zeus,
what happens next? How do I manage an onslaught
of avengers coming for a hundred dead people?
I ask you to think on this and bring answer to me."

Then shining-eyed Athena answered him :

“Ah, impatient one! Most men follow the folly
that friends offer as ‘wisdom’ and ‘vision’, but hear
from those amiable helpmates nothing at all
resembling the wisdom and vision I give you :
I am a god, and shall watch over you rightly
all the way through to the end of our work.

Hear this vision, Odysseus :

If an entire army of warriors should charge at us,
deafening the air with the battle-cry, and gather round us
with arms at the ready and try their very best to kill us :
when we lift our hands in response, not even a single cow
or lamb of theirs will be left standing in the light of the sun.
So go to sleep. Thinking through the night wearies a man. And hear :
soon you’ll answer your troubles, and you’ll settle them, safe and sound.
So sleep.”

So she spoke. Then poured sweet sleep over his eyelids;
and sleep stole over him, and loosened the unease
of his heart, and relaxed all the cares from his body.
Then beautiful goddess Athena stepped back to Olympus.

And half inside sleep Penelope felt tears drop
from under her lids, as she wept on her soft bed.
Then when she was tired at heart with tears,
she prayed to Artemis, soother and light-bringer
and leader of the dance, kind orderer of things :

“Artemis,” she prayed, “powerful goddess, daughter
of Zeus! Let fly into me. Take me away, now
when all is silent. Or may a storm-wind blow!
Snatch me away down the dark path, and drop me by
the ever back-and-forth-flowing Oceanus,
never to be seen again by anyone alive.

Just as the storm-winds snatched up the daughters
of Pandareus and carried them away.

The gods murdered their parents and the girls were left
without guide in their halls, till Aphrodite came
with warm milk and cheese, and fresh honey, and sweet wine.

Then Hera gave them beauty and understanding
beyond all other women. And the excellent
Artemis gave them poise; and Athena taught them
to weave the finest, most exquisite needlework.

But when Aphrodite went up to Olympus
to arrange for the girls to be married—meeting
with Zeus the Orderer, who knows all that will be
and all that will never be—just then the storm-winds
came, and snatched up the girls, and carried them away
to work as serving-women for the horrid Furies,
a despicable fate.

So come then! you who live on Olympus, come blot
me out, too. Or let the arrow of Artemis
come into me, and with my husband close to me
in my mind bring me down to the terrible place
beneath, so I never need suffer the embrace
of a weaker man.

Yet a woman can weep all day and bear the worst.
When her eyelids fall they hide the evil round her,
and the sleeper ceases to care, and then the sleep
that comes, gives her the strength to wake and bear the worst
all over again.

But in my sleep some god gives me dreams that show me
my misery, so I know no forgetting. Just now
I thought I saw my husband lying beside me,
who sailed away with the battle-ships. My heart
rejoiced, for in the dream I thought myself awake.”

And as she spoke the golden Dawn ascended
to her throne. And Odysseus heard the sound
of weeping from down the halls, and opened his eyes
with imaginings at heart : for at first he'd thought
his wife saw him truly, and was standing by him :
but that closeness was part of a dream that had fled.

So he took the cloak and fleeces that he'd slept on
and placed them down on a chair in the hall, then took
the raw ox-hide outside and placed it down in sun-
light. And then he raised his hands to heaven, and prayed :

“Zeus! You've sent me across interminable dust,
and over brutal water, only to bring me
home to an unanswerable question? For me
to kill all those people, your help is essential.
In a dream my hand obliterated all men
in battle : not a single cow or lamb of theirs

still stood living in the light of the sun.

I know goddess Athena is close; she's eager
to kill them all. But you, father Zeus : show yourself
to me, so I'll be sure you're here, to bring vengeance
alongside me."

This was his prayer. And in answer, powerful
thunder charged down from high over the clouds
and rattled the earth, and Odysseus smiled.

Now at this time twelve maidservants were cross-legged
in a circle, each sitting on a cloak, and with
a mill between their legs; and they were grinding down
the barley and the wheat into meal, to make the bread
that brings people life. But the sound of the handmills
had ceased, for the handmaidens had filled their basins
full with meal; so they'd closed their eyes in sleep. But one
woman was still awake, and working the handle,
and grinding the wheat; for she was the weakest
and slowest of all of the women at this painful work.
When she heard the sky's thunder she let her handle
go, and she spoke out to her god :

"Father Zeus Supreme, both merciful and brutal,
you sent loud thunder out across the starry sky,
yet I see no cloud. Are you revealing yourself
to someone? Why not hear me, the lowliest-born
house slave of them all, who grinds the wheat and barley
that bring people life? 'cause I have something to say!
It's not enough that I'm the lowliest-born slave,
who grinds the wheat and barley for the house,

but now I must turn this handle for *those people*?
 May today be their last feast in my master's halls!
 —Yes, their last feast, on their last day on earth!
 Turning this handle for them over and over
 has worn me down, and my body aches all over.
 But let this be the last time! Let this I have ground
 down be their last meal on earth!”

So Odysseus heard the thunder, and he heard
 the woman's words, and both, he thought, were auspicious
 omens, so he smiled, and he knew that vengeance
 was his. He knew the guilty were fated to pay.

And elsewhere in the palace housemaids were adding
 dry wood to the unresting fire on the hearth.
 And upstairs Telemachus rose to his feet.
 He fixed his clothing; then he slipped his sharpened sword
 into his shoulder-sheathe, and put his sandals on.
 He took his deadly spear with its sharp point of bronze,
 and came to stand in the doorway. And in the eyes
 of good Eurycleia he shed a light equal
 to the gods.

“Good mother,” he said, “did the stranger find a bed
 and food in our halls, or does he lie neglected?
 This is how it is with my mother : she honours
 this one and that one, though none hardly deserve it,
 and doesn't even see the better man, before
 he's sent away.”

And to this Eurycleia answered him :

“Child, in no way should you reprimand your mother; she is blameless. He sat and drank wine for as long as he wanted, and said he was no longer starved for bread—when your mother asked him this. Then he thought to find a place to sleep, and she asked the handmaids to make a bed. But this man was so unhappy he chose to sleep on the floor in a corridor, with only an ox-hide and some fleeces for warmth. Before I left him I threw a cloak over him.”

At all this Telemachus nodded, then went out through the hall with the spear in his grip and his two hounds following swift-footed with him. He left for the place of assembly, where the powerful Achaeans gathered to reason public matters out. Eurycleia, meanwhile, called to her handmaids, saying :

“Come now, girls! Move yourself! and sweep the house! and wash the floor, too! And put purple blankets onto each soft chair; while others sponge the tables sparkling clean, and wash the mixing-bowls and cups, the best cups, the two-handled ones. Some go to the mountain spring and bring back water. Quickly now! Those noblemen will be here very soon! It is a feast day—the day of the new moon. There will be poetry and singing among the people on the island.”

Thus she spoke, and the women obeyed her. Twenty went to the mountain spring of fresh water.

And of all the others, each settled to her duties
and worked skilfully.

And the manservants split logs of firewood ably
with the bronze : and the women returned from the spring.
And the swineherd came in, leading three fatted boars
onto the lawns of the palace, his three best of all
the herds. He left them standing there and feeding on
the trim grass : and gave an amiable greeting
to Odysseus :

“Stranger! Are you loved yet? Or are the nobles
disrespecting you as always in these halls?”

And Odysseus answered him :

“As it is, Eumaeus, may the gods make them pay
for their running riot in insult and outrage.
And in another’s house : and without any shame.”

Thus, in just that way, the two of them spoke.
And the goatherd Melanthius came through the gates
leading all the best she-goats of his herds, to add
to the feast of the nobles; and his two herdsmen
came with him. They tied down the goats in the echoing
courtyard while Melanthius greeted Odysseus :

“Again with you plagues?” he hissed. “Birds of a feather
flock together! Stranger! Even today you trouble
the house and bother honourable men with your begging?
There’s the door—use it! I fear your farewell will be

a taste of my fists in your face! For you are not a decent man. And why *this* house? Why not find some other feast on the island?"

And in answer to this question Odysseus looked deep into the other's eyes, and said nothing. He simply shook his head from side to side; while weaving evil deep inside his heart, and mind.

Now a third man came up to them, leading a young, well-groomed heifer for the pleasure of the nobles, and also fat she-goats. All these the ferrymen had carried over from the mainland, who convey all people who come and ask to be on their way. This man was Philoetius, a teacher of men. He tied down his animals in the echoing courtyard, then went over to Eumaeus to ask :

"Swineherd, who is this stranger that comes to our house? Who does he say he is? Where is his family; where are his fields? Unlucky man! And yet he stands with the poise of one of royal blood, a master of men. But gods plunge into misery even the greatest—if destiny's threads spin out that way."

And so to Odysseus he raised his right hand in welcome, and began to speak with winged words :

"χαῖρέ ! o father stranger, may you find happiness in time to come! For just now, I see, you're gripped by many evils you have not yet defeated.

Zeus, no other god is as destructive as you!
Father Zeus, why do you not pity the oppressed?
You bring us to birth, only to drive us to death
with misery and pain! Look at this sweat you've wrung
from me, and the tears filling my eyes! For I am
reminded of Odysseus. He, too, I think,
must wear rags such as these, as he wanders among
men—if he's still alive. If he has lost the sun-
light and is down in the gloomy house of Hades :
but that is a loss too great for contemplation!
Many years ago excellent Odysseus
gave me work, and entrusted me with his cattle.
That was back in the land of the Cephalenians.
And not even a god could count all the cattle
on his fields now! No one anywhere could have swelled
their numbers as I have. But *those people* force me
to lead them here all the way into their bellies.
They take no thought of the son who lives in the halls;
and the vengeance of the gods doesn't cross their minds
—because they're too busy eating through all the wealth
of the house, and dividing up the rest among
themselves, now that my excellent master is gone.
I go back and forth in my mind over what to do.
As evil as this sounds, I'd rather drive the cattle
off to some other land, though the son lives, than stay
and suffer the injustice of handing over
everything to *those people*. Long ago I would
have fled, and found a strange land with a mighty king,
since it's been intolerable here for years;
but I still dream of the day my master will come
back to scatter those people all over the floor

of the house.”

And many-minded Odysseus answered him :

“Herdsman, you are no thoughtless man, no evil man.
I’ve come to know you have an understanding heart.
Thus I shall tell you something with a solemn oath.

Hear me, Zeus, first of gods, and see me at this hearth :
and know that Odysseus shall come home. And you,
herdsman, if you are so inclined, may watch him kill
every last one of those people playing master
of the house.”

And herdsman Philoetius answered him :

“Stranger, if Zeus has no problem with that, then you
shall see what my strength allows these hands to do.”

So likewise Eumaeus, who prayed to see the day
his many-minded master Odysseus come home.

Meanwhile, the noble suitors were on the road,
walking to Odysseus’ house. Discreetly
they spoke among themselves of how they might bring death
to Telemachus.

And rising high on the left
an eagle carried a tiny, trembling dove
off and away into the wide-open sky.

Then Amphinomus spoke out to them all :

“Friends, did you see that? Surely our plan will not go well. Let’s stop this talk of killing Telemachus, and think of some new plan while feasting in his house.”

So spoke Amphinomus, and all agreed with him.

Then when they came to the house of Odysseus they flung their cloaks down on many couches and chairs, and slaughtered the sheep and fat goats, and cut the throats of the swine, and the well-groomed heifer of the herd. Then they roasted the inward parts and dealt them out.

They mixed the wine and water in the mixing-bowls, and the swineherd placed a cup down before each man, while cattleman Philoetius distributed the bread from a beautiful red wicker basket, and into each cup Melanthius poured the wine. So they reached for the many gifts set before them.

And for the moment no one paid attention to Telemachus. He, meanwhile, set Odysseus down onto the stone threshold in the doorway, and set down beside him an unremarkable stool, and small table. And Telemachus gave him a serving of the inward parts, and poured him wine in a golden cup. Then he loudly said, for all to hear :

“Sit here and drink your wine beside these fine people. There shall be no need for me to hold off the fists

or loud mockery, since this is no public place,
but a private home, the house of Odysseus;
and he built it up to its mighty strength for me.
So sit without fear of the noblemen reduced
to quarrel and brawling. For it is wiser not
to start such things.”

So he spoke, and all bit their lips, astonished at
Telemachus’ daring speech. Then Antinous
spoke out, for all to hear :

“Difficult, I agree, Achaeans, but we shall
overlook these strong words of young Telemachus,
though if I hear correctly, he’s threatening us.
It can only be Zeus who keeps us from stopping
his tongue permanently, however well he speaks.”

And Telemachus heard all this from Antinous,
but ignored him.

Meanwhile the people of the city had come
to assemble in the streets, to watch the ministers
leading a long line of oxen, a holy offering
for the gods, to the grove of far-shooting Apollo,
where more Achaeans awaited their arrival,
in the cool shade of the trees.

And the noblemen roasted the flesh, and drew it
off the spits, and divided the portions, and served
them out; and their feast was an exceptional affair.

Yet at no time would Athena let those people
ever finish from their insults. She wanted
that pain to sink ever deeper into the heart
of Odysseus, son of Laertes. So among
those people stood Ctesippus, a lawless noble,
whose palace stood among the others on Sáme.
He was here, trusting in his vast fortune to win
the hand of the wife of Odysseus, who was
long gone. So he spoke up over the crowd, his wine-
cup in hand, and said :

“Hear me!” he bellowed, “that I may say a word, or
two. The stranger, we see, has a portion equal
to our own, which is right. It is not right
to deprive a guest of his due! No one is cheated here!
No one who comes to the house of Telemachus!
Come now! I shall present the stranger with my own
gift, so he may slip it to the slave girl who poured
his bath, or to one or another of the women
who serve in the house of Odysseus.”

So as he spoke he reached into a basket,
knocking it over, then flung a heifer’s foot
at Odysseus, who leaned smoothly aside
with a hard smile in his eyes, and the heifer’s
foot struck the wall behind him.

And Telemachus responded with fighting words :

“Ctesippus, good for you—you missed. Otherwise my
spear would have run through your belly. Your father

would then be preparing for a burial feast.

Now there shall be no further insult or injury
in this house. I see and know the good and the bad,
while before this I was just a child.

As it is, I must look upon you noblemen
with patience; and watch you slaughter the sheep, and drink
the wine, and eat the bread. You all know that one man
can't take on the many. So come now! Let us all
be friends. But if you would kill me, do it. I take
the bronze over watching you people endlessly
keep up your evils : treating people shamefully,
strangers knocked about and beaten, and handmaidens
manhandled in the palace halls, a shameful sight."

So he spoke. And in answer all sat in silence,
until Agelaus, son of Damastor, spoke
out for all to hear :

"Men, how does it serve us to oppose violence
with violence, when peace for all is possible,
if we reasonably leave the stranger alone,
and act kindly to the slaves in the house
of warrior Odysseus; why should this not
be acceptable? And I would speak a mild word
to Telemachus and his mother, if their hearts
are pleased to listen. While you had cause
to hope for the return of Odysseus,
to see him return to Ithaca and enter
his house, you were right to wait for him—certainly

your delay in marrying one of these nobles
is above reproach; there was no finer way to act.
*Had, that is, Odysseus returned, and entered
his house.* But it's clear to us all that there will be
no happy homecoming. So come! sit down
by your mother, and lay down the law to her :
she must marry the best man, who gives the best gifts;
and then you shall live in your father's house in peace
and all happiness, eating and drinking, while
your mother is keeping the house of another."

To all this Telemachus answered :

"By Zeus, Agelaus, and by all the miseries
of my father, who met his death far from Ithaca,
or wanders who knows where, I am not stopping
my mother from marriage. In truth I urge her to wed
whichever man she chooses, and offer her gifts
beyond words. But I'll never send her from the house
against her wishes. May no god see that happen."

So spoke Telemachus, and in answer arose
uproarious laughter from the men in the hall.
And goddess Athena took hold of their laughter,
and drew it out to monstrous length. It was as if
the men had lost their wits. All their jaws rattling
became a strange sight. And when they looked down, the flesh
on their plates floated in blood. Their laughter had brought
tears, which filled their eyes, and were ready to spill down
with outcries and wailing. Then their troubled hearts
were set free from their harrowing feeling;

and the deep-seeing Theoclymenus spoke out :

“O beggars, what are these evils you do? I see
night covering you : heads and faces buried
in darkness. Obscure in the dark a wailing
has been kindled, and falling tears. I see up to
the ceiling everything covered in blood : the walls
running with blood. And I see spirits drifting,
over the courtyard and out through the gates,
sinking down into Erebus under the earth :
sinking down into darkness immeasurable.
And the sun has fallen from the sky, and the grey
time hesitates between the night and the day.”

So spoke deep-seeing Theoclymenus, and all
laughed at him.

Then Eurymachus spoke :

“This stranger is senseless. Wherever he comes from,
here he is—but quickly now, men! Let’s send him out
through the door of the house! Let him find some resting-
place somewhere, since he speaks so much of darkness.”

And Theoclymenus spoke, sharply pronouncing
the name :

“Eurymachus, I need no guide to lead me away.
My eyes, ears, feet, mind, and heart, are no shameful things.
And all these will come with me through the gates.

There is evil here. You shall grind yourselves up in it.
 All the insult and outrage, the abuse and recklessness;
 the ungovernable folly you've made of yourselves!
 And don't look for escape from the house of godlike
 Odysseus."

So he spoke, then he walked through the door, then the gates;
 and Theoclymenus put the house behind him.

And the fine noblemen looked to one another,
 content to challenge Telemachus with laughter
 and mutterings. So one would speak to another :

"Telemachus! You are unfortunate in guests!
 You find the worst people to bring into your home!
 Give them bread and wine and they'll give you an omen.
 First you bring in a wanderer experienced
 in nothing, except being deadweight on the earth.
 And now we have the 'deep-seeing'—his name escapes!

Anyway, if you listen to me, the better
 it will be for you : let us put down both strangers
 on benches on a ship, and have them row themselves
 to Sicilian slave dealers, who'll give you fair price."

Just in this way the noble suitors spoke, but Telemachus
 ignored them. Instead, he looked to his father for
 a sign, ready to lay hands on the shameless filth.

Then, descending the staircase from her bedchamber,
 came sensitive Penelope, resembling

Artemis, or golden Aphrodite.

And then a chair was placed before them all : it shone
with ivory and silver spirals. And Penelope,
daughter of Icarius, wise and ever-thinking,
sat down before them all, and heard the words of all.

So during all their mad laughter the noblemen
had prepared their feast for the next course. No one there
could remember such a pleasant feast, for they had
slaughtered many victims for their crowded tables.
But a goddess and a powerful man were soon
to put before them an unpleasant addition
to the feast : a doom the men were too late to escape.

End of Book XX

Book XXI

As Penelope watched the noble worthies eat,
Athena the shining-eyed goddess placed a thought
inside her mind. So wise Penelope arose;
and her shining chair of ivory and silver
spirals stood empty before them. She ascended
the grand staircase, slow and steady, and entered her
inner chambers. There, she took into her brave hand
an ornamental bronze key with ivory handle.
Then, room by room she moved through the private chambers
to the remotest spot of the palace, where a door
had stood locked for years. Penelope, with her maids
behind her, removed the strap from the door-handle,
and inserted the key, and heard the bolts fly back;
and the shining door creaked open, as loudly
as a bull bellows in a meadow. Then, one by one
the women stepped into a room made of oak planks,
which a builder had well built many years past,
fitting every last piece straight to the line.
They'd entered a secret store-room of her husband's.
Here his treasures lay glistening under light dust,
elaborate hand-work of gold and bronze and iron
fabricated over many laborious hours.
Penelope moved by a stack of chests holding
garments folded away and packed with scented leaves;
till finally she found a shining leather case;
and she removed it from its peg, and looked inside :

She saw a long bow with two graceful curves to it,
tensed with a string of woven sinew. And beside

this she found a quiver of death-bringing arrows.

This bow was the memory of a friend long gone.
When Odysseus was young and still unbearded,
he sailed a far journey to Lacedaemon,
sent by Laertes and the Ithacan elders
as an ambassador representing the people.
Some Messenians had loaded three hundred sheep
onto their ships, and herdsmen too, and sailed away;
and the Ithacans wanted their property back.

At this time, glorious Iphitus was also
travelling through the land of Lacedaemon,
searching for twelve stolen brood mares and their younglings.
So Iphitus and Odysseus met by chance
in the palace of warrior Ortilochus;
and at the feast became fast friends; then at parting
gave each other gifts, and promised to visit one
another's homes. But they would never meet again.

The father of Iphitus was King Eurytus,
master of the archer's art, who had once taught young
Heracles how to shoot. So, searching for his horses,
Iphitus came to the palace of Heracles,
who killed him off unflinchingly over the table
of hospitality, without fear of the gods—
for Heracles, son of Zeus, was full of daring.
And he kept the beautiful horses for himself.

But on the night the two men gave their farewell gifts,
Odysseus gave his friend a sharp sword and spear,

while Iphitus gave Odysseus the bow,
the very bow that godly Eurytus had hit
many a mark with, and entrusted to his son
at death. And Odysseus left it behind when
he went to Troy, for he cherished it as a relic
of Iphitus, a friend who died a lonely death.

And after Penelope had let her many tears
fall, she and her handmaidens withdrew from the room.
She locked the door, and took the ivory key away.

So wise Penelope's plan was germinating :
to set the straight axes in place in the soil
of the courtyard of the house of Odysseus,
as the beginning of a miserable contest—
as the beginning of blood.

So, descending from the upper chambers
came sensitive Penelope, holding in
her hands the long bow with two graceful curves to it,
and its quiver of death-bringing arrows.

And her many maids together carried a chest
skilfully downstairs behind her, in which was held
an abundance of her husband's weapons of war.
She came to stand in the doorway of the vast hall,
and faced the men, her eyes shining behind her veil;
and her most trusted handmaidens stood beside her.

And Penelope spoke out to the nobles, and said :

“Hear me, all courageous men! You've preoccupied

yourselves in eating and drinking the property
of this house for ages now. You face no master
in these halls, so you continue to come, and use
the excuse of competing for my hand in marriage.
So come now! I shall arrange a contest for all
honourable men. Twelve axes shall be lined up
one after another in a row so straight
that an arrow might be shot to pass through all twelve.
He among you who is strong enough and skilful
enough to string the bow and hit the mark, shall win
me. And I shall recognize him as my husband,
and leave this house. Which I shall never see again,
except, I know, in my dreams.”

So spoke Penelope.

Then she asked of swineherd Eumaeus to arrange
the grey iron in place on the courtyard’s grass-plot.

And tears began to fall from Eumaeus’ eyes
while he set out the twelve iron axes
one behind another, in a well-placed straight line.

And as the cattleman watched as his master’s bow
was carried by a manservant to the doorway,
he felt his own tears drop.

When Eumaeus returned, his face still wet with weeping,
then Antinous attacked the pair of them, saying :

“You beef-witted infants! Puny field slaves! Why this

weeping before the eyes of your lady, to trouble
 her heart? As it is she suffers all the woes of
 the loss of a husband! So sit and eat in silence,
 or get out, and cry your eyes out wherever else!
 And leave the bow behind you, as your lady wishes.

Has the lady not offered us a curious
 contest, my friends? I don't think it'll be easy
 to string an arrow on that bow! Odysseus
 was one of a kind. I remember seeing him
 once, but I was just a little child."

This Antinous said. In his heart he hoped to stretch
 the sinew and shoot an arrow through the iron.
 But he was destined to taste the first arrow
 from the hands of Odysseus. Yet just now
 he was insulting invincible Odysseus
 in his house, and encouraging his noble friends
 to follow his lead.

Then Telemachus spoke out powerfully among them all :

" ὦ πόποι ! Zeus, you've stolen all sense from my head!
 My reasonable mother, whom all call thoughtful
 and wise, is to give herself over to another,
 and abandon this house? Yet you hear my laughter?
 Watch me laugh myself to madness! Come then, nobles!
 This is to be your prize, a woman like none other
 in the Achaean land. Neither in holy Pylos,
 nor Argos, nor Mycene; nor in Ithaca;
 nor anywhere on the wide, dark mainland!

But you know well of her many charms and beauties.
Come now, nobles! Let there be no hesitation!
String the bow, and we shall see what we shall see!
And if I stretch the sinew tight, and pass
the arrow through the iron, then *my* prize shall be :
to allow my mother to leave with another!
Then I'll sit in my comfortable halls by myself,
with the weapons that my father won before me."

So saying, Telemachus pulled his scarlet cloak
from his body and sprang to his feet. All watched him
while he strapped his sharp sword to his shoulders. Then he
went to the door and looked out at what Eumaeus
had arranged for them in the courtyard : twelve axes
standing one behind another in perfect order
along a shallow trench in the dirt. Eumaeus
had stamped the soil tight around each upright axe.
So Telemachus stood at the door, and he took
the bow into his hands; and everyone looked on
with astonishment. Three times he struggled to draw
back the sinew, and the bow wobbled in his hands,
and three times he gave up. In his heart he hoped
to shoot an arrow through the iron, so now he
strained to stretch the bow-string back for a fourth time,
and he would have set an arrow on; but he saw
Odysseus draw his head back, a sign to stop :
and so the son stopped his eager efforts. He set
the bow down on the ground. He leaned it against
the brightly shining door; and beside it he placed
the fast-flying arrow.

Then he spoke out powerfully to them all :

“ ὦ πόποι ! I reckon I'll always be a weakling!
 Unless I'm just too young, and my hands won't obey
 me yet, if any man comes at me. But come now!
 All you superior in strength to my own,
 try this bow, and bring this contest to its end.”

And with a hard smile glittering in his eyes
 Telemachus went back to his chair and sat down.

Then Antinous spoke out, for all to hear :

“Friends, we'll go from left to right, starting at the spot
 where the cup-bearer pours. You now, rise to your feet!”

And so Antinous addressed Leiodes. He was
 their prophet, who read omens in the rising shape
 of smoke; and whose usual spot was a chair by
 the beautiful mixing-bowl in a far corner
 of the hall. One secret he kept unrevealed
 was the hatred he felt for the wicked nobles :
 it was disgusting to see their presumptuousness :
 all their arrogance, all their mediocrity.

So now he was forced to go to the door, and take
 the bow in his hands, and the fast-flying arrow.
 He tried to stretch the sinew back, and set the arrow,
 but he wearied of the effort, and at last gave up.
 His hands were soft and weak and unused to labour.

So he spoke to the assembly of nobles :

“Friends, I can’t do this. Someone else take this and try.
This bow shall bring many of the best into woe,
and take their heart and spirit. Perhaps you think it
 better to die than to fail in your purpose,
 which has brought you to these halls for so many days?
 Now all your hearts hope to marry Penelope,
 Odysseus’ wife. But after you’ve held the bow,
 and seen; then, everyone go away from here. Go give
 bride-gifts to other well-robed Achaean women!
 Let Penelope marry the best that comes, as fate wills it.”

So he spoke; and set the bow down by his feet,
 and leaned it against the brightly shining door;
 and beside it he placed the fast-flying arrow.
 Then he returned to his chair and sat down.

And Antinous scolded him, loudly saying :

“Leiodes, what a word has spilled out of your mouth!
 Words full of fear and trouble for all my friends here!
 Hearing it fills me with a powerful anger!
 If this bow is sure to ‘take our heart and spirit’
 —which sounds like *death* to me—then oh how I wish that
 you were strong enough to string it! I say to you
 that if your honoured mother had wanted to birth
 an archer, she would have had infant Apollo
 sucking at her breast! For you lack all strength to shoot
 an arrow! Or to do anything but raise wine
 to your lips! But the best men here will soon string it.”

So he spoke, then called out to the goatherd :

“Get up, Melanthius, and go light a fire
in the courtyard! Set a footstool by it, and bring
out a cake of fat from within. We men will heat
up the bow, and grease it with the animal fat;
then we’ll try it, and bring this contest to its end.”

So he spoke. Immediately Melanthius
kindled unresting fire, and brought out a stool
and set it by the flames, and put a fleece on it;
then he brought out a great wheel of fat from within.
And so the men warmed up the bow by the fire.
Then one by one they tried it : but not one man was
strong enough to pull the sinew back to full draw.
To do that, a far greater strength was required.

But the best of them all had yet to lift the bow :
Antinous, and powerful Eurymachus.
These two men all the others followed, and were far
the most skilled in all manner of accomplishments.

So as the men were trying the bow one by one,
the cattleman and swineherd of godly Odysseus
walked away from the competition together;
and they were standing on the lawn by the palace
wall when they saw godly Odysseus himself
walk up to them. He asked them to follow him out
through the front gates. Then, standing in front of his house,
he spoke to his two friends calmly :

“Cowherd, swineherd, there’s something you might want to know.

But would you hear me? (Yet my heart drives me to speak.)

If Odysseus should come home, from wherever,
just now, led here by some god, would you stand with him?

Or would you defend those people against him?

Speak out the truth as your heart and spirit tell you.”

And the cattleman answered his master :

“Father Zeus! if you wish this to be, that the man
comes home, led by a god, then all
shall see what my strength allows these hands to do!”

So likewise Eumaeus, who prayed to see the day
his many-minded master Odysseus come home.

And when they had spoken together in this way,
Odysseus looked into the eyes of his men,
and he knew to a certainty that they spoke truth.
And so he answered them, and this is what he said :

“Odysseus is home. I stand here before you.
After twenty years of pain I have come back
to the land of my fathers. But only you alone,
of most everyone here, have wished to hear these words—
because I’ve heard no other house servant praying
aloud for my return. So you two shall know the truth :
I will tell you everything. And if heaven hands
those honourable people to me, in time to come
you’ll both have wives, and wealth, and houses built near here;

and I shall ever look on you as friends and brothers
of Telemachus. Come closer, and see something
you may recognize. Long ago a boar ran his
white tusk into me, when I went to Parnassus
with the sons of Autolycus.”

And as he spoke he drew back his rags to reveal
the scar. And as the two men looked, their eyes dropped tears,
and they wrapped their arms around warrior Odysseus.
In kind welcome they kissed his head, and shoulders, and arms.
And in this same way Odysseus kissed their heads
and hands. They might have wept together till sunset,
but Odysseus put a stop to it, and spoke :

“Wipe your faces. Someone might come from the house, and see,
then speak of what was seen. We shall go back inside,
but one at a time, and not together. I first,
then you two come, one by one. And let us agree
on a signal. Surely those nobles won’t allow me
to hold the bow and quiver : so you, Eumaeus,
as you carry it through the halls, ensure that it’s
put into my hands. Then, you will tell the women
to stay in their chambers, and lock their doors.
And if they hear ghastly sounds, and screams of men,
they must stay put, and not come outside to see.
They must sit inside in silence and let us do
our work. And you, Philoetius : when I receive
the bow into my hands, you will shut all the doors
of the hall, and lock them; and then you will tie cords
around the locks, to secure them further.”

And Odysseus spoke no more, but turned away,
and walked back through the shining gates, and went into
the house; and he returned to his seat, and sat down.

Soon, the two slaves of godly Odysseus went
back inside, one by one, to raise no suspicion.

And Eurymachus now had the bow in his hands.
He was turning it round, warming all parts of it
by the flickering flames. But he, too, was unable
to string it. So he let out a furious sigh
from his illustrious heart, and spoke out to all :

“ ὦ πόποι ! This is a catastrophe for me,
and for us all! Not so much the marriage I mourn,
for there are women everywhere on the island,
and Achaean women in cities all over!
The catastrophe is the downturn in our name!
We prove inferior in strength to Odysseus?
None of us can string the bow? The catastrophe?
Someday the yet-to-be-born will hear of all this!”

Then Antinous answered him :

“Eurymachus! That will not be, and well you know it!
Today is the feast of Apollo—a sacred
holiday. Who among us would draw back the bow
during the festival to Archer Apollo?
So put it down and let it lie. We’ll leave the axes
standing as they are.—For what man is bold enough
to steal anything from the house of Odysseus?”

So come now! Wine-bearer! Pour the first drops into
the cups; we will make an offering to the god.

—And let us leave that devious bow where it is!

At dawn the goatherd Melanthius will bring us
the best of all his herds. We'll place the thigh-slices
onto the altar, in honour of Apollo,
glorious Bowman. Only then we'll raise the bow,
and bring this contest to its end."

So spoke Antinous, and his judgment pleased them all.

Then the maidservants poured water over the hands
of the men, and youths filled the wine bowls to the brim
with drink, then poured a few wine drops into each cup.
And every man there received a cup. And when they
had poured to the far-shooting archer Apollo,
they drank the red wine until they were satisfied.

Then Odysseus spoke :

"Hear me," he said, "all suitors of the peerless queen,
so that I may say a word, to Eurymachus
principally, and also to godlike Antinous,
whose word just now was rightly spoken. He told us
that at this time one should not lift the bow.
Just now we should yield to the gods; and at sunrise
the gods will give victory to whomever they please.
But come! Hand me the bow. Before your eyes I shall
test my hands and strength. Perhaps all my wanderings
have taken away all the strength in my body;
or maybe I still have the power I used to have."

So he spoke, and all showed a prodigious concern :
they feared he might string the bow.

Then Antinous spoke :

“Intolerable stranger! You haven’t a thought
in your head, not the littlest bit! You can’t sit
content with a full share of the feast, undisturbed?
No! You listen to our speech, and follow our words!
But no other stranger or beggar hears our words!
Wine wounds you, the honey-sweet wine that befuddles
the man who takes in greedily with open mouth
and drinks indecently! We all know what wine worked
on wild Eurytion! That glorious centaur,
who walked the halls of warrior Pirithoüs
when he went among the tribe of the Lapithae!
Wine befooled his mind, and his ravings worked evil
in the halls of Pirithoüs : and horror came to
the nobles. We remember what happened, don’t we?
Eurytion suffered a little bit of trouble.
They cut off his nose and both ears and dragged him through
the doorway and threw him out the front gates!
Imagine what he thought when his mind cleared of wine!
He had to go all the rest of his days with defeat
in his silly heart. And the tale continues,
my friends!—the long-enduring centauromachy
(which brings sculptors much inspiration for their art),
the long war between centaurs and mankind,
well-invented by one man’s drunkenness!

In just that way, stranger, I promise you
 terrible suffering if you string that bow.
 No one in this land will receive you with kindness.
 In fact you'll be thrown on a ship and sent
 to King Echetus, tormenter of men!
 And from him there will be no escape. So drink up!
 And enjoy. And don't interrupt men younger
 than yourself."

Then wise Penelope spoke out before them all :

"Antinous, it is not proper, nor just, for my son
 to have a guest of this house be disappointed.
 Do you fear that if this stranger strings the bow
 with his hands and strength, I will go away with him
 to his house and be his wife? I do not think
 he hopes for that. Don't trouble yourselves on account
 of *that* : you know that would not be correct."

And Eurymachus answered her :

"Daughter of Icarius, wise Penelope,
 no one here thinks this man will take you anywhere :
 indeed, that would not be correct. What we fear
 is some low-born man's humiliating gabble
 among men and women knowing nothing of our
 excellence, saying : 'Remember the time no one
 could string the bow, and win the wife, and then
 some know-nothing beggarman come on his wanderings
 easily strung it, and let fly through the iron?'
 So they will say—an everlasting shame to us!"

And Penelope answered him :

“You speak of having a good name in this land,
while you dishonour the house of a great man?
You don’t think all your eating is worthy of disgrace?”

This stranger looks strong and well-built, and calls himself
the son of a good father. So come! Give him the bow,
and we shall see. And if he strings an arrow on the bow,
and Apollo grants him victory, I shall give him
a cloak and tunic, the most wonderful garments;
and a sharp spear, to ward off dogs and men;
and a two-edged sword; and sandals for his feet;
and I shall send him wherever his heart desires.”

Then Telemachus spoke out :

“Mother,” he said, “I alone decide who shall hold
the bow, and who shall not. No one playing the lord
in Ithaca or on any of the islands
will force me otherwise, even if I hand the bow
to the stranger for him to hold and take away!
So go upstairs and attend to your weaving.
Busy yourself with the spinning of the loom.
And encourage your handmaids to get to their work.
This bow is the concern of men, and is here exclusively mine,
as I have authority as head of the house.”

Penelope looked respectfully at her son,
and marvelled at his confidence and strength.

Then up she went to her bedchamber with her maids.
 There, goddess Athena poured sleep into her tears,
 and wise Penelope lay still upon her bed.

And then a cry rushed through the downstairs halls
 when the honest swineherd took hold of the bow :
 and the nobles looked at one another, then spoke :

“You! Why are you holding that bow? Sorry creature!
 Worthless swineherd! You’re as crazy as the others!
 One day soon your own dogs will eat you up alive,
 a lonely death away from the eyes of men.
 —If Apollo’s kind to us, and the other immortal gods.”

So Eumaeus, fearing the voices around him,
 put the bow back down, by the brightly shining door.

And from across the room Telemachus shouted out :

“Eumaeus! Take that bow and bring it where you will!
 (Soon it’ll annoy you that you listened to them!)
 You wouldn’t want me to throw stones at you, would you?
 We’d all watch you running back to your fields! ’cause I’m
 stronger than you! And if the gods made me stronger
 than all of these illustrious men put together?
 I would send many of them on their hateful way,
 limping and all doubled up, since all they do is evil!”

Thus spoke Telemachus. And while the nobles
 laughed in the hall, showing a good feeling
 for Telemachus for once, the swineherd carried

the bow to warrior Odysseus, and put it
in his hands.

Then Eumaeus went to Eurycleia and spoke :

“Telemachus would have you, wise Eurycleia,
lock all the doors of the hall. And if the women
upstairs hear ghastly sounds, and screams of men,
they must stay put, and not come outside to see.
They must sit inside in silence and let us do
our work.”

When he said this she went away without a word;
and began to lock all the doors of the hall.

And no one saw Philoetius dart from his chair
and leave the hall. He walked to the front of the house,
and swung the large iron gates shut. On his way back
along one side of the courtyard he found some ship's
cable, just curled up and lying there, woven of
papyrus threads. So he returned to the front gates
and tied them tight. And when he returned to the hall,
he went to his seat and sat down.

And he looked to Odysseus. He was handling
the bow, turning it round in his hands, and looking
it over here and there, ensuring that no worm
had eaten into it while its master was far away.

And each man gave his neighbour a look, and spoke :

“Either this gazer is cunning in archery;
or he has one like it back wherever’s he from;
or maybe he wants to make one;—whichever it is,
he spins the thing well in his hands, the wastrel.”

And two youths turned to each other to say :

“I hope all this concentration of his pays off!”

And the other answered :

“Perhaps he will put an arrow on the string.”

Meanwhile Odysseus πολύμητις had bow in hand,
and just as a poet experienced in lyre and song
casually tightens a peg around a string, just so did he
casually tighten the sinew at both ends of the bow.
Then, with the bow in his right hand, Odysseus tried the string,
and at his touch the string sang with the sweet voice of a songbird.

And as the nobles looked on, all colour drained from their faces,
and Zeus revealed himself with a monumental thunderstrike
that rattled through the hall and brought a hard smile to the eyes
of much-enduring Odysseus. At that heaven-sent sign
he took the fast-flying arrow left for him on a nearby
table and saw the others gathered in the hollow quiver,
all those bronze-tipped arrows the Achaeans were about to feel;
and he drew back the string with the notched arrow in his fingers,
and with sure aim he let the arrow fly from right where he was :
sitting on his little stool. The arrow shot through the twelve axe-
handles one after another cleanly, then flew out and away.

Then he said :

“Telemachus, son, *this* stranger brings no disgrace
to your halls! I hit the mark. And it was no hardship
to draw the string. I suppose this means my strength is sure.
So let us make a feast, while the light holds out!
And we’ll provide amusement of song and lyre,
for these are delightful adornments to a feast.”

And he raised his eyebrows; and Telemachus saw.
So, with his sharp sword strapped to his shoulders he walked
to his father, and took up a spear into his hands
along the way; and he came to stand by Odysseus,
armed with sparkling bronze.

End of Book XXI

Book XXII

Odysseus sprang out of his rags, and landed
by the brightly shining door. Then, in one movement
he grabbed the quiver and spilled out the arrows
before him at his feet; and said to the nobles :

“This contest is at its end. Let us now see if
I hit another mark, which no man has yet done,
and take the victory destined me by Apollo.”

And as he spoke he strung the bow and aimed it tight
at Antinous, who was raising a glittering
two-handled cup of wine in his hands, so he might
drink; and his own death was the last thing on his mind.
But who there would have expected that one man might,
no matter his strength, bring death and fate to the many?
The arrow of Odysseus ripped through the throat
of Antinous, and its bloody bronze tip stuck out
through the back of his neck. His eyes flared as he dropped
his cup, and his spurting blood sprayed over the fine
food and drink on the table. He kicked out wildly,
overturning the table, spilling to the floor
all the bread and roast meats that the house-servants
had brought him. And with a wondrous groan he fell
onto the food while his life-blood spilled from his
nose and mouth. And a cry filled the air as the men
saw him fall; and they sprang from their couches and chairs,
and in a panic looked this way and that along
the walls, but they saw no shields or spears anywhere
to grab hold of. And enraged at Odysseus

they shouted terrible words at him, saying :

“Stranger! What is this evil that you do? Shooting
at men? You cut down the best of us in cold blood!
Ithaca knew no better man! Now we shall leave
you for the vultures to eat!”

This they said, thinking the old stranger had cut down
the man in idiotic error : but it was
their own error they did not yet understand :
they had no thought that destruction had come for them;
and there would be no escape.

Thus with grave eyes Odysseus glared at them
and spoke :

“Rotten dogs! Didn’t cross your mind I might return
from Troy? You’ve eaten away my house. You’ve forced
my maids to lie with you. You tried to take my wife
away from me. You fear no god, no man, nor justice.
Now death has come—and you won’t be coming back.”

So he spoke, and the nobles turned pale with fear.
Each man looked sharply round, seeking escape.

And Eurymachus alone spoke :

“You say you’re Ithacan Odysseus come home.
If what you say is true, then this other word of yours
is true, too. The Achaeans have done terrible
things in your halls and fields. But *there* lies the cause

of it all! Antinous. He brought us to where we stand.
 He didn't want to marry your wife;—he had something
 else in mind, which the god of Time didn't allow.
 He came to Ithaca to be king, to take
 the goodly land for himself, from your goodly son.
 He planned to ambush and murder Telemachus!

But now he's dead. Now will you drop your hand
 from your countrymen? and be merciful?
 We will make good everything we owe. We'll go
 and gather what wealth we have and pay you
 all that's been drunk and eaten in your house.
 Each man here will bring you twenty oxen.
 And bronze : and gold : until your heart is warmed.
 But till then no one would wonder at your upset."

And with grave eyes Odysseus glared at him
 and spoke :

"Eurymachus, go gather what wealth you have,
 and add to that whatever from wherever :
 but these hands you see are going to kill you.
 Then you will have made good your debt. Now decide :
 to fight, or to run. But there is nowhere to run."

He said this and their knees weakened. And each man's heart
 whirled in euphoric fear and terror, at the sight
 of Odysseus standing in the brightly shining doorway.

And Eurymachus spoke out a second time :

“Friends! This man will not hold back! He will stand there
and string the arrows until all of us are dead!
So come! We fight! Draw your swords! Lift up the tables
and hold them against the arrows! We’ll rush him
together!”

And Eurymachus drew his sword. It caught the light,
his two-edged bronze with sharp tip. And shrieking
with a battle-cry he sprang at Odysseus,
who let fly, and the arrow slit through to his liver.
Eurymachus dropped his sword and fell sprawling
among tables, all doubled up and screaming.
He thrashed in the food and spilled cups, his head
hammering the floor; and his wild-kicking feet
knocked away chairs as he suffered agony
at heart. And then his eyes went down into darkness.

And Amphinomus rushed at Odysseus
with drawn sword, ready to cut him away
from the brightly shining threshold, so he
might run to the city with a cry of alarm
before the killer had shot his last arrow.
But Telemachus caught him from behind,
driving a bronze-pointed spear through his shoulder-
blades and out through his chest. The dead man fell
hard on the floor : his head hit the marble and cracked.
And quick-thinking Telemachus had to decide
whether to yank out the bloody spear or leave it
where it stuck : and so he sprung away from the dead
Amphinomus. The quick-thinker knew if he lowered
his eyes to the spear someone might run

a sword through him, or tackle him down to the corpse.

So he ran to his father in the brightly shining light,
and came to stand by him, and spoke with winged words :

“Father! I’ll go get the bronze for the four of us!
Isn’t it better for us to be in armour?”

And Odysseus answered :

“Bring it all while I still have arrows.”

And said no more. So Telemachus obeyed him.
He left his father’s side, ran down to the store-room,
and uncovered the glittering armour, everything
of bronze : four shields, eight spears, and four helmets
plumed with horse-hair. Swiftly he carried it all back
to his father, and bound himself up in the bronze.

And the two slaves put on their bright armour as well,
Eumaeus and Philoetius, who came to stand
by warrior Odysseus, the brilliant one.

Now Odysseus kept stringing arrows as long
as the arrows held out, aiming sure and picking
off the filth one by one, piling the nobles
into a bloody heap of dead stares and limp limbs.

When his last arrow left him, he set down the bow,
leaning it upright on the brightly shining door.
Then he lifted up his heavy shield and buckled it
around his shoulders, to keep his hands and arms free,

a shield reinforced by four layers of ox-hide :
and he put his helmet on, with its horsetail plume
of colours shimmering menacingly over
his piercing glare. And he took up two bronze-tipped spears.

And Telemachus looked on in wonder while
the palm of his father's hand slipped along a wall
and found a hidden seam, and pressed it, and a door
swung open, revealing a passage into darkness.
Odysseus sent his son and his two warriors
through, then sealed and secured the door behind him.

And in the sudden lull, the nobles left alive
looked breathless at the mutilation around them.

Then Agelaus spoke out for all to hear :

"Friends, does anyone have any idea
where that door leads to? Someone has to get out-
side and cry for help! Then we'll be done with that man!"

And the goatherd Melanthius answered him :

"Agelaus, Zeus-born, I say that passage may lead
into a corridor, giving them a way to some
other building of the palace. But I have a thought,
and if I'm right I'll bring you to the very place
where we'll find armour and weapons that Odysseus
and his suddenly powerful son have hidden."

So the goatherd Melanthius went his way

down to the store-rooms of Odysseus.

There he found the glittering bronze, and he eagerly brought back many shields and spears and helmets for the noble worthies; and then went back for more.

And Odysseus was in no other building of the palace, but looking down on the nobles from a hidden vantage : and he didn't like the sight of all of them arming themselves for battle, and lifting their razor-sharp bronze-tipped spears. All this was going to be harder than he thought.

And Odysseus said to his son :

“Telemachus, someone in the house has betrayed us; they found the armour. Now we face heavier work.”

So Telemachus spoke out :

“Eumaeus, go now to the underground store-room and bolt the door shut. And maybe you'll see which house-servant is giving them the bronze. But I think I know who it is : Melanthius.”

Meanwhile, Melanthius was moving between the store-room and the vast hall with armour in hand, and the swineherd saw. So he bolted the door shut, then returned to them, and spoke to Odysseus :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, invincible Odysseus! I saw the goatherd with the armour in his hands,

coming from the store-room. Tell me, master, may I
kill him? And teach him my superiority?
Or shall I drag him here for you? So he can pay
for the many crimes he conspired in your house.”

And Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

“Telemachus and I will hold the noble scum
within the hall. They’ll learn how strong they really are.
Now you two hear what to do with Melanthius :
You bend his hands and feet behind his back
and tie the four of them together with a cord.
Then you throw him in the store-room and bolt the door
behind you. Inside, you’ll see a hook fitted high up
in one of the rafters. You two will find a rope
and hoist that miserable bundle up
to the ceiling. There let him stay, nice and alive,
to suffer agony for a long time to come.”

And the two men heard and obeyed. Slow and quiet,
they stepped to the store-room door, one man on either
side, and, unnoticed where they stood, they listened
to the sounds from within. Meanwhile, inside the room,
goatherd Melanthius uncovered more armour
in a dim, dusty corner. It was a shield worn
down from age, eroded by rust, and the stitching
of its leather straps had long ago come undone.
In his faraway youth, warrior Laertes
had lifted this shield, many a time in practice
and in battle. So Melanthius happily
took up the shield, and grabbed a helmet from nearby,

and with them walked through the store-room to the doorway.

There the two men grabbed him, tackled him to the ground,
and dragged him by the hair back into the store-room.

All the while Melanthius could barely breathe
from terror. Sprawled out on the floor he screamed
out as his hands and feet were bent behind his back
and tied together tightly with a cord. The two
men had bundled up Melanthius, just as the son
of Laertes had ordered : the much-enduring,
godlike Odysseus. Then they tied a strong rope
round his body and hoisted him up alongside
a tall pillar until he hung from the ceiling
of the room.

And looking up over his head amused,
swineherd Eumaeus spoke out aloud :

“Now all night long, Melanthius, lie there
on the soft bed you deserve! No early-born,
rosy-fingered Dawn for you! You won’t see her coming
to her golden throne, when you should be leading
your she-goats to prepare for feasting at the house.”

They left him there dangling painfully, all tied up.
The two men put their armour back on; then they closed
the door and took all the light of the room with them.

And they returned to warrior Odysseus,
the ever-calculating, ever-foxy one.

So then Odysseus threw open a window,

revealing themselves and their hidden vantage.
Together the four men, breathing vengeance,
looked down on the men in the hall, who were many
in number, and armed with weapons, and looking up
at them with wonder and fear and anger and rage.

And then from around the corner came Athena,
in the shape and voice of an old friend to father
and son : Mentor. The old man had agreed
to keep watch over the house while Odysseus
was away with the ships, and keep things firmly footed.

But the father smiled. He knew who it really was,
and he said :

“Mentor, help us obliterate them. Remember
your old friend, who has done so much in your honour.
And of the same age we’ve grown in time together.”

Thus he spoke to Athena the Encourager.

Meanwhile, the nobles down below in the hall
were shouting and pointing up at Odysseus.

And noble worthy Agelaus called up to them :

“Mentor!” he cried, “don’t let his sly words fool you
to his side! Why fight us for his sake? Why help him?
I’m sure there’s only one outcome left to us here :
after we kill father and son, we’re killing you!
For what you plan to do, you will pay with your head!

After we have taken your life with the bronze blade,
we will take everything you own, inside and out,
and toss it all in with Odysseus' wealth!
We'll deny your sons and daughters to live in your halls!
And your fine wife will be kicked out of the city!"

So spoke Agelaus to shining-eyed Athena.

Now the goddess both smiled and raged at heart.
And no effort was needed to fool the filth below :
she simply spoke out angrily at Odysseus,
for all to hear :

"Odysseus! I don't see any more of that strength
you had when you fought the Trojans for nine years,
for the sake of beautiful Helen, daughter of
nobility! Your days of brutally killing men
in relentless combat are over! Yes, it was
your bright idea that finally gave us Priam's
lofty city, which we pulverized to dust :
but perhaps that was your last! Why are you standing
up here, now that you are home, and among your own?
Do you sigh when you take in the sight of those men,
a number requiring the effort of the old days?"

Then the goddess whispered to Odysseus :

"Come now, friend! Stand by me and watch what I shall do.
Mentor shall thank you for your service to the people.
And your enemies will feel this kindness repaid."

And she stepped away into a swallow and flew
up to the rafters and looked down on them
from the shadows. She didn't yet end the battle,
so that she might show off the strength and courage
of Odysseus and his honourable son.

Meanwhile, Agelaus looked over the nobles
in the hall. The best of them were Eurynomus
and Amphimedon and Demoptolemus
and Peisander and Polybus. These were the best
men left; the greatest of all of them now lay dead
at their feet, brought down by a shower of arrows.

Then Agelaus spoke out for all to hear :

“Friends! Now we must cut his hands dead! Now that Mentor's
done with his big joke and gone off! There are only
four of them! They stand there in plain view, mocking us!
Raise up your long spears—but not everyone throw
at once! Six will throw. Let us hope the gods give us
victory. All you six aim at Odysseus.
The others will be no worry once he lies dead.”

So he spoke, and all six sent their spears flying up
to invincible Odysseus as ordered,
but Athena let all six fly to no purpose.
One bronze tip hit a pillar of the well-built hall,
another fragmented the open window pane,
another ashen spear hit the wall and fell away.

After all the heroic spears went awry,

much-enduring Odysseus said to his men :

“Friends, it’s time to spike that herd of pigs. They’re eager to kill us all. Stripping my house bare wasn’t enough for them.”

He said this, and the four of them lifted their bronze-tipped spears, aimed, and let fly : Odysseus’ fixed Demoptolemus to the floor, where he bled out and died. Telemachus’ pierced Euryades’ heart. Eumaeus’ sent Elatus to the underworld; and cattleman Philoetius killed Peisander.

So those nobles ground their teeth into death, but the others still living retreated in terror to a far corner of the hall. Odysseus and his men, meanwhile, jumped down from above and plucked out the spears from the bodies of the dead.

Again the noblemen sent the bronze spears flying, again Athena sent the shower of them awry. One man hit that same pillar of the well-built hall : one spear shattered against a well-bolted door : another ashen spear hit the wall and fell away.

But, as Zeus told us way back at the origin, there are “irregularities not foreseen by destiny”—so a spear hit Telemachus. The bronze tip sliced his hand open at the wrist and flew on and away, leaving a bloody wound.

And Ctesippus’ spear flew at swineherd Eumaeus :

As its point pierced his shoulder he knocked it away
with his shield, and glanced at his bleeding wound :
and behind him the bloody-tipped spear hit the floor.

Again Odysseus and his men aimed their spears
and let fly into the crowd of Evil :
hapless Eurydamas felt Odysseus' enter
his brain, a gift from the destroyer of cities.

Unconquerable Telemachus eliminated
Amphimedon : and Eumaeus executed
Polybus : and cowherd Philoetius replied
to Ctesippus with a spear through his chest,
then stood over him, putting his feet by his head,
and :

“Son of someone-or-other,” he said, exultant,
“You love big talk—here’s some large enough for you.
How does it sound? Do you hear the word of the gods?
You invited your own everlasting punishment.
How smart is that?”

And as he spoke, he pushed the spear deeper into
the dying one’s chest, and spoke one more word :

“This repays the hoof you threw at Odysseus.
How about that? The last word you hear : Odysseus.”

So said the herdsman of the twist-horned cattle.
And Ctesippus closed his eyes, and died. And his spirit
went underground to the growing world of the dead,

where Odysseus, matched in close combat with clashing spears, sent Agelaus, when the sharp bronze tip sank into the heart of the son of Damastor :

while Telemachus speared Leiocritus under the ribs, its bloody tip driving into soft flesh and breaking out the back of his body. The dead man fell face-first towards the marble floor, and the long spear's handle propped the victim up, so his body slid down the upright ashen spear and slowly came to rest at the bottom, the tip of his cold nose touching the marble.

And now from high above, the goddess Athena revealed her αἰγίς, her shining shield that caught the light and sent back beams like solid columns down in all directions round the heads of the men beneath her, as if a bright sun had just broken through a cloud. The many-coloured figure carved on the face of it is too terrible to put into words, and the men looking up were terrified to see it. They fled away through the hall like a herd of cattle flustered by the lively gadfly that comes to sting them in the springtime when the long days come. And just as vultures swoop down from the mountains with sharp beaks and jagged claws, and break through cloud to pounce on baby birds shivering in their nests, who have no defence or hope of flight, and tear them apart, and men who see this cheer at the fever of the chase : just so our heroes rushed at the men,

and struck them down every which way they ran.
This way and that the sorry nobles fell to the floor;
and one after another got his head bashed in.
And a gloomy moaning rose up to fill the hall,
the groans of the dying mingling in the air:
and the floor ran with blood.

Then : Leiodes' bare feet splashed through the blood
as he scrambled up in terror to Odysseus.
He dropped to the floor; and in a puddle of blood
he embraced the knees of the invincible man,
and said :

“Please, Odysseus, have pity for me! Please let me
live! Hear me as I say, with Zeus as my witness :
I put no hand to any woman in this house
at any time, nor did I ever speak out shamefully
to them. Odysseus, over and over again
I implored those people to stop, to hear me
and stay their hands from evil. But they did not
listen to me; and their wickedness has brought them
to this end. Odysseus, I was their prophet!
I have done you no wrong.—I need not lie with them!
That would be no fit reward you give me for meaning well.”

And with grave eyes Odysseus glared at him
and spoke :

“If you call yourself the prophet of these dead men,
many times your prayers in this house took away,
until now, this sweet return. In between your visions,

were you hoping to marry my wife, and have her
bear your children? Now let Zeus be my witness, too.”

And Odysseus all the while held a sword
in his strong grip. It was Agelaus', fallen
from his hand when he died. Now Odysseus raised
the sword and swiped it through his victim's neck :
and the head of Leiodes rolled away, still mouthing words.

At the same time, standing on the far side
of the red desolation of bodies and blood,
the son of Terpes (whose name derives from “delight”
and “good cheer”), looking this way and that for escape,
was the poet Phemius himself. He might meet
a bleak death, all because those people had forced him
to stand and strum his lyre that sings as birds do.

So Phemius contemplated the wall
with the hidden passage, and was in doubt
between two resolves. Should he try to get
out into the courtyard, and sit by the altar
of Zeus, where both Laertes and Odysseus
had burned many thigh-pieces of oxen?
Or should he go to Odysseus, and grab
his knees in prayer? He wondered :
and the following seemed better to him :

He restored a table to its standing position
and gently placed his shining lyre on it.
Then he went to Odysseus and grasped
his knees in prayer. And he said :

“I embrace you, Odysseus! Hear me,
and show mercy! You’ll regret it later
if you kill me—I’m a poet!
I’m self-taught, and I sing tales of gods and men.
God has planted all kinds of songs in my spirit!
And I will sing before you as before a god!
So do not be so quick to cut my throat.
Your own beloved Telemachus will say
I was forced to come to your house, and only
reluctantly did I sing to those people
during their feasts. They were many, and strong,
and they forced me here protestingly!”

So he spoke, and the brilliant, powerful
Telemachus called out :

“Father, hold back! Do not strike that innocent man!”

And Odysseus lowered his sharp sword.

And his son continued, saying :

“And Medon, too, our minister of the house!
He has cared for me since I was a boy;—
unless Philoetius or Eumaeus killed him
already—or he met you as you ravaged the hall.”

“Here I am!” came a voice from under an ox-hide
hidden beneath a chair. Medon came out from under,
and flung away the freshly peeled-off skin,

and stood up. Then he slid along the bloody floor
down to Telemachus, and grasped his knees,
and spoke with winged words :

“Dear, dear friend! Tell your father to hold his hand from
cutting my head off! He might not notice while
exulting in his power, and chop me up with the bronze!
Tell him I’m not one of those people who showed you
no honour!”

And Odysseus πολύμητις smiled, and said :

“My son has saved your life. Be happy. Now go tell
others of this, so they’ll know kindness is far
stronger than evil. But for the moment just sit
out in the courtyard with the poet of many songs
until I have finished my work here in the house.”

Thus spoke Odysseus. And the two men cleaved
through the blood and found a way to the court,
and sat by the altar to Zeus μέγας .

The two men sat uneasy, looking all round them,
waiting for death to leap out at any moment.

Inside the house Odysseus prowled quietly,
looking for any men still breathing, or hiding
out in useless hope of avoiding a bleak fate.
But everyone was dead.

It brought to mind a school of fish netted up
out of the dark-teeming sea and spilled out

onto the shore : there on the sands they yearn
for the salt water waves,
but fiery Helios burns their life away.

Just like that the mnesteressin were heaped up.

And Odysseus spoke to his son :

“Telemachus, summon the nurse Eurycleia.
There’s a question I would have her answer.”

And Telemachus heard and obeyed. He pounded
on a door with his fist, calling for the old woman
who watched over all the women in the household :

“Come out,” he said. “Old woman, my father wants you!”

So he spoke, and she kept her reply to herself
as she unbolted the doors of the vast
and opulent hall. And Telemachus smiled
at her kindly, and moved aside, and she came in
to see Odysseus standing in a bloody sea
of corpses, his body sodden with blood and gore,
like a lion returning from tearing an ox
apart in the fields, and his breast and jaws are soaked
in blood : just so did Odysseus stand covered
in blood, his feet and hands and all else : and she saw
the unspeakable sight of the dead : and she cried out
in relief and came forward : but Odysseus
raised a hand to stop her, and said :

“Come now! Tell me which women dishonoured the house.”

And honest nurse Eurycleia answered him :

“Here’s the truth, child. We have fifty women here,
whom we’ve taught to card the wool and all kinds of work,
and most get on with their work. I say there are twelve
in all who have gone the way of unforgiveness.
They listen neither to me nor to Penelope.
They don’t listen to Telemachus. (His mother
thought him too young to supervise them anyway.)
But come now! Let me go up to the bedchambers
and bring word to your wife, who’s in god-given sleep.”

And Odysseus answered her :

“Don’t wake her just yet. Bring me the guilty women.”

So Eurycleia walked through the halls with the news :
the twelve women were to gather themselves and come.

And Odysseus spoke : to Telemachus : to Eumaeus
the swineherd : to Philoetius the cattleman : and he said :

“Carry the bodies out and order the women
to help. Then sponge clean the chairs and tables.
When all is back in order, lead the maidservants
out and away from our comfortable hall,
to the place between the θόλος and the wall
of the courtyard, and kill them. Use your fine-edged swords.
Make it a slow death for all those who conspire

against this house.”

Thus spoke Odysseus.

And then the women came in, weeping and wailing.

First they carried the heavy dead out of the hall,
and heaped up the bodies on a colonnaded
lawn to one side of the courtyard. Odysseus
ordered them round and urged them to hurry it up;
and they were forced to carry the heavy bodies
of the dead. When this tiresome task was done,
Odysseus gave them another one :

they cleaned to a sparkle the fine chairs and tables
and floor, using water and thick sponges.

And when the vast hall glittered again, and all stood
in its proper place, then the women were led outside.

Now there was a narrow lawn between the *θήλοσ*
and the wall of the courtyard : so Philoetius
and Eumaeus guarded one end : at the other
Telemachus stood with drawn sword : and huddled between
the furious men were the twelve teary-eyed women.

And Telemachus deliberated, then considered
the *θήλοσ* : a round, squat building with pillars all
round supporting its dome. Then he lowered his sword,
and spoke to the men :

“These women shall die no easy death. They poured down
onto my head evil words ever since I was a child.

And all these years my mother suffered identical abuse

from them. And then they went and slept with those people.”

So said Telemachus, who went for some cable,
the kind used as stern-cable for a dark-prowed ship,
and roped it up and around the domed building,
just high enough so that the dangling women’s feet
would not touch ground. And just as wide-winged thrushes,
or doves, seeking rest in thicket or bush, fly into
a net, and hateful is the bed that welcomes them :
so each woman, one by one, felt the noose tighten
round her neck, and felt the most miserable death.
They struggled and gasped for a bit, but not too long.

Then they led Melanthius out the door and
past the courtyard. And cut off his nose and two ears
with the cold bronze, and sliced off his testicles
to feed them raw to Eumaeus’ dogs,
who would divide the wealth among themselves :
just so overcome with fury were the four men.

Then they washed their hands and feet with water.
Then went back inside the palace of Odysseus.
And their work was done.

Meanwhile, during all that, Odysseus scoured
clean with powdered sulphur all trace of the evil
in hall and house and courtyard. And he was now dressed
in cloak and tunic, for Eurycleia had said :

“Come now! You can’t go around here like that!
Cover yourself! As it is, you might cause a stir.”

So Odysseus in cloak and tunic removed
the pollution of those pests for all time.
Then he asked of Eurycleia to tell his wife
to come from her bedchamber with her maids,
and requested that all the house women come too.

And he said :

“But first let a fire be lit in the hall.”

And Eurycleia heard and obeyed. She went through
the house with the news and asked all to come :
and many women came from the chambers
with fiery torches in their hands, and entered
the hall, and saw their master. They crowded round him
and received him with great joy, kissing and caressing
his head and shoulders. And a sweet feeling calmed him,
and he came close to sighs and tears : for in his heart
he remembered them all.

End of Book XXII

Book XXIII

So old nurse Eurycleia stepped up the staircase
to the inner part of the palace, laughing aloud
exultingly as she went up. She was eager
to face the lady of the house and say : “your husband
is here.” The spring in her step made her seem younger
than her years. Then she came to stand by beautiful
Penelope, and she spoke out to her mistress :

“Wake up, dear child. Come see with your own eyes
what you have desired all of your days.
Odysseus is here, he has come home, after
all this time he is here. And all those horrible
people are gone from the house forever.
All those who dishonoured you, and ate up the house,
and bullied Telemachus—your husband killed them all.”

And as she said this Penelope opened her eyes :
and :

“Dear lady,” she said, “you must be mad to wake me
with such words! The gods can lead the idle to wisdom,
but they can also make the wisest of us silly.
The gods have hurt your mind. And you were always right-
minded. Now you wake a mournful heart in this way.
In sweet sleep I had forgotten myself.
Actually—never have I slept so well.
Or at least not since Odysseus left.

Come now, dear lady, go back to your bedchamber,

and I won't think of this again."

And kind nurse Eurycleia answered her :

"Dear child, I'm still as reasonable as Athena!

Odysseus is here, and that's the truth.

He's the stranger those people have been challenging.

Telemachus has known it all the whole time;

but kept it quiet, wisely, so his father

could bring vengeance on those awful people."

So she spoke, and her mistress knew that it was true.

Penelope happily rose up and embraced

the old woman; and tears filled their eyes and rolled down

their faces. Meanwhile, Penelope spoke :

"Come now, dear mother, tell me truly if he is really here.

Tell me how one man could bring down so many, as you say he did."

And kind Eurycleia answered her :

"I didn't see, I don't know, and I didn't ask.

But I heard horrible sounds for a long time,

while all those horrible people were being killed.

I and the women stayed quiet in our chambers,

and our bolted doors kept us safe, and we all

sat terrified at what we were hearing.

Then Telemachus called out for me to come down.

He said his father had summoned me. So I went.

And I saw Odysseus standing in a sea

of death. There was blood and dead bodies everywhere,
spread out on the floor of the hall, lying one on
another : but the sight would have made you happy.

All those people are outside now piled up dead,
on the lawn past the courtyard. And the hall's been cleaned,
and it shines very beautifully again;
and a fire's burning bright and warm at the hearth,
and he has sent me to bring you down to him.
Your wish has come true : he sits by his fireside,
he has come back to see his wife and son at home.

Let us go now, let me bring you to happiness.
And after everything you two have suffered!
But those people paid dearly for their evil work."

Then thoughtful Penelope spoke :

"Stop laughing, dear lady," she said. "You know what it
means for me to see him again. And for my son,
and for all of us. But is all this really as you say?
No. The Immortals came to murder those horrible people,
to answer their arrogance and evil work.
They had no proper respect for anyone on earth.
Whoever came among them, good or bad, they hurt.
So they summoned their own destruction from the gods.
No. Odysseus is dead. He lost himself
far away. He will never return to me."

And Eurycleia answered her :

“My child! How can beautiful lips be so wrong?
You say your husband is not sitting by the fire.
You say he will never come back home;—ah! your heart
stubbornly believes this! I’ll tell you something else :
A wild boar stuck him with its white tusk long ago,
and left a scar on his thigh. When I washed his feet
I saw it where it was with my own eyes.
I was ready to tell you, but he took my throat,
and would have snapped my neck, though I was kindly
washing his feet. In his great wisdom he wouldn’t
allow me to speak. So come, let us go now.
If I’ve been false, throw me on the pile of dead.”

And Penelope answered her :

“Dear lady, there is no knowing why the gods do
what we see. As it is, I’ll get up and go
to my son, to hear of what’s happened in the house.”

So Penelope advanced from the inner chambers,
descended the staircase, and came to the ground floor
of the house. And when she came to the doorway
of the hall, she saw Odysseus in the warm light
of the fire. He sat by one of the pillars
supporting the integrity of the well-built house,
his eyes lowered to the floor. He was present there
before her, but as she looked across the hall at him
she wondered what to do. To stay standing apart,
wondering? or to go to him and take his hands
into her own, and kiss his head and hands, and ask
him all about it?

She came and sat by the fire
at a distance from Odysseus. He looked up
to the flames and stared into the movement, waiting
for his beautiful wife to speak to him,
as she looked him up and down, while the fire
threw flickering shadows on husband and wife.

Penelope sat face to face with the man in
silence, and astonishment made her heart beat fast :
she looked deep into his face, and fixed on his eyes,
and she did not know this man at all. She wondered
at him sitting there in foul garments, and staring
at the fire.

Then Telemachus surprised her by speaking out :

“Mother!” he said, “why sit yourself so far away?
Has your heart become as cruel as the rest?
Here is your husband to sit with and speak to.
What other woman would hesitate like this,
could bear to do it? After twenty years he comes,
enduring much suffering to reach his homeland—
and you sit there stubborn with a heart of stone.”

And Penelope answered him:

“Child, my heart is beating fast in wonder. I’ve lost
power to speak. And to ask. Not when I look
into those eyes. But I find it hard to look.

If this be Odysseus, if he has come home,
then we will know each other through private signs—
looks and words—known only between ourselves.”

And Odysseus smiled : long-enduring godlike Odysseus;
and he straightaway spoke to his shining son Telemachus :

“I think your mother sees these filthy garments I wear,
and finds it hard to believe that I can be her
husband. In her own time let her come to know
my superiority : let her test me
as she will, in our house.

While she thinks on this,
you and I must think on securing everything
well here in Ithaca. We have killed many men.
I don't foresee any so-called friends of theirs
coming to us for vengeance. But a family
for each dead man exists, and a place where he lived,
even if he went into exile, or at least
left his homeland behind. And all those we've killed
are sons of the best. We must think about this.”

And Telemachus answered him :

“Dear father, all that is for you to think about.
Everyone knows you're the wisest in counsel.
In thinking you have no rival among mortals.
But we're with you; and we'll stand strong beside you.
I'm sure in strength and courage you'll find us true.”

Then Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

“Then I’ll tell you what I think is best. First,
 wash yourself and put on a tunic. Have the maids
 take your clothes away—tell them to burn everything.
 Then we’ll bring the poet here, with his lyre
 as clear as the air is fresh, and he’ll lead us
 in merriment, so that anyone who goes past
 us outside will think they hear a wedding.
 Let the whole neighbourhood and city think the same,
 so no news of our slaughter will circulate
 until after we get away to our fields.
 There, within the trees, I’ll think on what god hands me.”

So he spoke, and they all heard and obeyed.
 First they washed themselves and put on tunics.
 And the poet lifted the sweet-sounding lyre
 and excited a desire to dance.
 The hall resounded with the tread of lively feet,
 men and smartly-dressed women dancing joyously,
 as children do.

And one would speak to another outside the house :

“Ah, it sounds as if our much-loved queen has taken
 a husband in marriage at last! That’s a perverse one;
 she couldn’t hold out and keep the palace all the way
 to the end. Didn’t wait for her wedded husband
 to come back.”

So one spoke to another, yet neither

knew what was really happening in there.

Meanwhile, inside the palace, great-hearted Odysseus was bathed by housekeeper Eurynome, who then anointed his skin with oil. And down onto him goddess Athena poured unearthly beauty : and so he stepped out of the bathtub looking sharp and powerful, his physique equal to Immortals. Eurynome fitted him with elegant cloak and tunic, and let his long hair stay fallen in thick curls, like Hyacinth.

As a man lays a precious layer of gold onto silver, an experienced artist knowledgeable in all sorts of arts taught by Hephaestus and goddess Athena, and exquisite is the hand-work he creates; so Athena the Unwearying poured a rare grace and refinement to his air and eminence.

Then he returned to his chair by the fire.
He sat down facing his wife by the shadowy warmth of the fireplace; and he spoke to her :

“Marvellous lady! The Olympian gods have given you a heart that will not be softened. No other woman alive would hold out in this way for so long a time from her husband, who comes home after twenty years of monumental labour!

So come then! Nurse! Prepare me a bed! I’ll sleep alone tonight, for the heart in the breast of this woman is made of iron.”

And wise Penelope answered him :

“No,” she said. “Handsome one, strange one, I am neither

lofty nor indifferent; I simply wonder.

I well remember the face of my husband.

The man who has sailed back home to Ithaca
hasn't that face. But come! let us prepare a bed.

Eurycleia will make for you a comfortable spot,
outside the bedchamber Odysseus himself built,
for husband and wife. You shall have soft bedding,
fleeces and cloaks and blankets, to keep you warm."

Thus spoke Penelope, to provoke her husband,
and her husband was provoked. So Odysseus
spoke out in anger to his careful-minded wife :

"Woman, those were very heart-wringing words you spoke!

Has someone upset my bed? Must be a very
experienced man to have easily set it
in some other place! No man living has the strength
to move my bed from its spot, no matter how young
and strong—because this bed provides the 'private sign'
you require. I built that bed, and no one else.

Long ago a slim-leaved olive tree grew in our
courtyard, full-grown and thriving, stable as a pillar.
I built our bedchamber around this, until it
was done, with well-fitted stones, and I roofed it over,
and fitted solid doors. Then I sliced off the slim-
leaved branches of the olive tree, and left a wealth
of trunk standing : and everything was done cleanly
and smooth, trimmed with the bronze straight to the line.
The trunk would be the bedstand, and I drilled it through
with the auger. From this beginning I pieced my bed

together until it was done, inlaying gold and silver
and ivory into olivewood. And at last
I stretched out a leather hide of shining Phoenician purple.

Now, Penelope, I have made known to you a 'private sign',
have I not? But whether my bed still stands as it was before
I left, or whether some time ago some other man moved it
out of the way by uprooting the time-honoured olive tree,
that I do not know."

So he spoke.

And Penelope weakened throughout her body,
and her heart pounded with passionate love—
because the private sign he'd specified was true.
And the tears of Penelope once more began
to fall. Then she rushed to him and threw her arms
round his neck. She kissed the head of Odysseus,
and she spoke to him, saying :

"My husband, please don't be angry with me.
The wisest of all men would give his wife no hurt.
You and I have both suffered all this time. The gods
gave us sorrow, they denied us the enjoyment
of our years of youth, and only now give us back
to each other, at the doorway of old age.

So please don't me angry at me, please don't resent
that I did not recognize you at first, and welcome you
with the affection you deserve, and that I want
to give. All this time my heart feared the day

when some man might come, and lead me wrong with false words.

All around us are people of refined evil.

Sometimes I think of Zeus' daughter Helen.

What if she had known that love would lead all to war,
and to all that long grief? Would she have stopped herself,
and stepped back from Paris, and not indulged to lie
in love with that stranger from another land?

Or could she not help it because his word was so
seductive that reason itself yielded to the lure,
however clear-eyed the reason? This makes me think,
and wonder, and even worry. They say Heaven
led Helen to disgraceful betrayal and foolish
lust : but what if it was something else that happened?
Something less understandable to thought.

But, good sir, since no one but one maid of mine
has ever seen that bed, it must be you with whom
I lay together all those years ago, when we
were young. I smile, because even that one maid,
daughter of Actor, kept our marriage doors bolted.
Careful as you say I am, my heart feels it now :
Odysseus is home."

And as she said this he was again overcome
with a desire for tears. He sighed in sadness
for what the two of them had lost, and he embraced
his wife, the woman who suited him best of all.
And she put her arms round the only man she wanted
in the world.

As welcome as the sight of land to the swimmer
buoyant on the swells of the grey sea waves,
after Poseidon has shattered his ship,
after first thrashing it with wind and wave
for awhile; and leaves the salt water surface
sustaining a rabble of floating dead bodies,
and only few swimmers rise up as survivors
out of the ancient grey sea, and step upon shore,
and overcome their evil situation;

just so was the welcome relief shared by husband
and wife. As her slender arms clung to his neck
she looked into his eyes and would not let go.

Now Dawn would have set their tears glimmering with gold,
if not goddess Athena had another idea.
She held down the seams of vast night along the edges
of the earth, and she likewise held back the Dawn,
by interlacing her rosy fingers with her own,
beside the stream of Oceanus; nor did Athena
let the horses of Helios burst from the water,
Lampus and Phaethon, eager to gallop up the sky;
their necks would yet be free of the collar of iron.

And Odysseus said to his wife :

“Penelope,
we haven’t yet come to the limit of our tests.
What if I told you I went down to Hades and saw
what is there? I found the prophet Teiresias,
who told me tomorrow is going to be a

difficult day for me. But come! For now, let us
find our way into sweet sleep, and delight in rest.”

And Penelope answered him:

“Surely you have earned your rest when your heart wishes,
now that you have returned home to your own palace.
But come! you speak of a ‘difficult day tomorrow’.
I would much rather know now of this test,
which you say a god has put in your heart,
than learn of it tomorrow. Tell me now the worst.”

And in that long ago time the phrase “tomorrow”
meant “in times to come” to Odysseus, who yet,
though weary of speech, answered his honoured wife, and said :

“Marvellous lady! Why would you rather listen
to me speak? But you ask; and I will tell you true,
though neither of us will rejoice at the insight.
If you will hear this (and no one else has heard this) :
the prophet encouraged me to hold an oar
and wander through cities, until I came to men
who know nothing of the sea, and never tasted
food seasoned with sea-salt. They know nothing of ships,
or of the oars that wing the ships across the waves.

And after all this prophesying, there was more
to come. He told me something as clear as the air
is clear, and you shall hear it. One day I will be
winnowed down to the final essentials;
yet still I will sacrifice to the gods,

to Poseidon—rams and bulls, and boars that mount sows;
and one day I will fix my well-carved oar upright
in the earth; and everything will still be done rightly,
or not at all. And he told me of my death,
prophet Teiresias. He said I'll breathe my last
far from the salt air of the sea, a far gentle
passing, he said, when I am exceedingly old,
and worn out : but my people all round shall be wealthy.
He said this is to be. Whether it is or not—
and the prophet is not to be trusted—
all will be as it will be. I've no say in it."

And wise Penelope answered him:

"But if the gods indeed gift you a happy old age,
there's hope you'll answer all oncoming evil."

In this way they spoke together, husband and wife.

Meanwhile, housekeeper Eurynome and kind
nurse Eurycleia prepared the bed, while pale
pinewood torches snapped and crackled round them.
They spread the thick-fleecy layers in the dim light
in haste, then the old nurse made her slow way
back to rest; while Eurynome, the keeper
of the upper chamber, led the way to bed, with torch
flaming in hand. She brought them to the bridal bed,
then went away, taking the bright fire with her.
And husband and wife lay together on the bed,
that brought back to them the old order of things.

Meanwhile, Telemachus, and Philoetius,
and Eumaeus, rested from the dance; to let their
feet rest, so they said, as did the women; so then
the people lay down to rest throughout the halls,
where torches flickered down along colonnades.

And when husband and wife lay charmed in love,
they spoke cheerfully to each other, and told
each other stories. All that trouble they suffered
didn't matter at the moment. For example,
the women hanging outside the window
had spoken many killing words down through the years.
And those people, now heaped up limp in a pile,
were a pestilent destructive crowd in the house
for years. Many cattle and fat sheep were slaughtered
'in honour of Penelope', so they said, in between the
never-ending draining away of the wine.

And Zeus-born Odysseus spoke of the suffering
and misery he'd both received and given,
and Penelope was content to lie beside him
and listen. And she stayed awake until
he had laid it all down.

He started with outwitting the Ciconians,
then spoke of the hypnotizing Lotus-Eaters.
He told her what the Cyclops did, who had eaten
his men cruelly, and the vengeance he delivered
on him. He told her of Aeolus, who welcomed
him with open heart into his house, and then sent
him on his way, towards everything he loved.

But it was not to be, not then. Storm-winds bandied him
along the deep-teeming sea, bringing many groans.
And he spoke of coming to Telepylus
and the Laestrygonians, who obliterated
his ships and well-armoured men in one blast,
and the one survivor was the black ship of Odysseus.
Then he referred to Circe's tricks and inventive
seductions, and how he sailed down in his oar-
waving ship to the mouldy house of Hades,
to see the spirit of the Theban Teiresias,
prophet who is not to be completely trusted,
and had seen there old friends, and his mother,
who had brought him into the world, and raised him
from a little thing. And he remembered the clear-
throated song of the Sirens, and the Wandering
Rocks, and terrible Charybdis, and Scylla,
whom no sailors have yet slipped past unharmed.
And then his men slaughtered Helios' cattle,
and far-thundering Zeus shattered his fast-moving
ship with a bolt of white lighting and all his friends
perished. He alone escaped their horrible fate.
And he spoke of reaching island Ogygia,
home of Calypso, who held him back for too long
a time in her deep caves, and took good care of him,
and spoke of placing him at the table of the Immortals
on Olympus, and making him ageless for all
days to come. But he couldn't get interested
in her. And then after many irritations
he arrived at the Phaeacians, who drew round
him as if honouring a god, and sent him back
on a ship to Ithaca, to everything he loves,

with hands heavy with gifts of bronze and gold
and clothes. This was the last story he told her;
then sweet sleep that relaxes sprang onto him,
setting him free from the cares of his heart.

Then goddess Athena had another bright idea :
when she saw man and wife together satisfied
in heart with cheerful love, and then with sleep,
straightaway she roused the early-born Dawn
to arise from the waters of Oceanus
and regain her golden throne, and bring light
to the people of earth. And Odysseus rose
from the soft fleece of his bed, and said to his wife :

“Lovely lady, we’ve reached the end of old troubles,
you and I. You—despairing in the house, with eyes
dropping constant sorrow for my absence. And I—
entangled in pains and miseries from Zeus
and the other gods, keeping me from everything
I love. Our punishment went on and on, but now
it’s over; yet our lives continue, so we must
continue to think, and reckon, and solve.
Yet what’s a problem to two lovers lying in bed
together, the marriage bed they’ve greatly desired?
Still, at some point we must get to our feet.

You will still manage this house as your own,
though I have returned to its halls. The wealth
is mine, all the possessions and property,
yet the simple having of it brings the least joy
of all. But what’s mine is mine. And those horrible

people sheared down all my flocks with their teeth?
I shall carry away my compensation
from the fields of many other Achaeans
on the island. They will give me from their cattle
stalls, and from their stables, and from their fields,
until I am satisfied.

Just now I must go
out to our fields—the most well-wooded one.
I must see my father, and end the grief he feels
for me (so it's said). Penelope, I ask you
to stay wise and careful, for both our sakes.
The sun is rising; soon the news will be
racing all over town that a slaughter
took place in our hall. So for now I think
you should go with your handmaids up into
your bedchamber. Look on no one. Wait there,
and ask no questions.”

And Penelope said :

“May the gods give us a happy old age,
and the strength to answer all oncoming evil.”

And Penelope went away to her chamber;
and she stepped out of the Odyssey of Homer.

So Odysseus put on his glimmering armour;
then woke Telemachus, and the cowherd,
and the swineherd. He told them to take their weapons,
and they did not disobey him. They armed themselves

with bronze for battle. Then Odysseus opened
the gates and advanced from the house, and the three men
followed him. Light was now spread all over the land;
yet they went hidden in darkness, thanks to goddess Athena.

End of Book XXIII

Book XXIV

Hermes Deliverer summoned forth the μνηστήρεςσιν,
 now reduced to insubstantial shadows. In his hands he held
 the golden magic wand that lowers eyelids of whomever
 he wills; and others out of sleep he wakens. So with this wand
 he called them forth, and set them going, and led them behind him,
 and they followed babbling, babbling animal noises.

As bats in the inmost air of a vast, rounded cave flutter
 everywhere screeching, when one drops from the mob clutching the rock;
 just so they squeaked and babbled all together as he led them,
 Hermes Deliverer, down dark and mouldy paths. Past the water
 of Oceanus and Λευκάδα πέτρην , past the gates of
 ἥλιος and the place of dreams : quickly, then, to the meadow
 of asphodel, multitudinous white petals spiking out
 all round : there spirits drift, shadows of all those finished with work.

There, a sea of shadows wavered around Achilles : Patroclus,
 and excellent Antilochus, and Ajax, peerless in build
 and beauty beyond all Danaans, after great Achilles,
 son of Peleus. And the flitting spirit of Agamemnon,
 son of Atreus, came close, in sorrow. All around him drifted
 the spirits of those who met death and fate in Aegisthus' halls.

And the spirit of Achilles :

“Son of Atreus! Thunder-Delighted Zeus loved you all your days
 most of all, so we thought, because you stood as lord over all
 the Achaeans who suffered at Troy. Yet now here you are, too.
 Too soon have death and fate brought you down here. Not even the most

respected of us can outwit what awaits for us at birth.

If only in all your honour you met death and fate at Troy,
as our lord and master, we and all Achaeans would have raised
a tomb to cushion your ashes, and your son would have rightly
taken your glory thereafter. But fate ordained a pitiful
conquering for you, by the miserable hands of woman.”

And the spirit of the son of Atreus :

“Happy Achilles, a man yet so like a god,
you died in Troy far from Argos, and around you
many good men died, the best sons both Trojan and Achaean,
fighting for your body. You lay in whirling dust, spread massive
on the earth : and all that was yours had now fallen from your grip.
We fought all day long; and we were ready to keep on fighting;
but Zeus twisted up a whirlwind of dust, and stopped all of us.
When we finally got you from battle and down to the ships,
we put you down on a funeral bed. Your body was bathed
with fresh water, and oils were rubbed into your gentle skin
until you glistened. Around you the Danaans wept hot tears
and pulled their hair out. Then everything went quiet. Your mother
came out of the sea with tender ἀθάνατος ἄλιος ,
and a god-uttered whine rippled the sea, and all Achaeans
quivered, too, and were ready to spring to their sea-going ships;
but a man well old in years, and therefore well knowledgeable,
Nestor, who had many times before proposed the best counsel,
then addressed the assembly in all earnesty, and said :

‘Hold, Argives! Achaean youths, do not run! This is his mother
who comes out of the water, with the shapely nymphs of the sea,
to look into the face of her dead son.’

So he spoke, and held back the spirited Achaeans from flight.
 The daughters of the old man of the sea came to stand by you,
 wailing most miserably, and all the while putting around you
 shining, godly garments. Μοῦσαι δ', the nine Muses, chanting,
 now this one, now that one, sang, in sweetest voice, the saddest song.
 You would not have seen an Argive without tears : for the Muses
 are as clear as the air is clear and reaches deepest in heart.
 For seventeen days and seventeen nights, both undying gods
 and mortal men mourned you. On the eighteenth we gave you fire.
 And cut the throats of many fatted sheep and twist-horned cattle.
 Your glistening body burned in its shining, godly garments;
 and sweet honey was given to the flames. Many Achaean
 warriors moved past the fire that reduced your bones to ash,
 both foot-forces and charioteers—a deep, thunderous sound.
 When you were burned down to ancient grey ash, Achilles, we mixed
 you with pure wine. Now you lie inside a golden amphora :
 a gift, so your mother said, from Dionysius, and the hand-
 work of Hephaestus himself. And in with your ashes, brilliant
 Achilles, we poured those of Patroclus. And we lay by you
 the dead Antilocus, whom you honoured above all others,
 after Patroclus died. Around you we raised a mighty tomb,
 we, the warrior army of the venerable Argives,
 on a headland that reaches out by the Hellespont into
 the sea, and is seen far and wide by men all over the waves,
 by those who now live, and those who will come to be.

Your mother called up to Heaven, asking for beautiful prizes
 to contest. She set them in the midst of an assembly
 of all the best men of the Achaeans. Once upon a time
 you took part in funeral games for many a fallen king

and warrior, when youths strip down in preparation to fight for the glittering prizes on offer; but had you seen these, you would have stood amazed; because all the prizes your mother set down were inexpressibly beautiful. And they were prizes touched by silver Thetis, who herself could barely be believed by human eye—her beauty, and her power, and her majesty. Yes, Achilles, the gods loved you well, all things considering. Your name did not die along with you, but stays with the living, and will be an inspiration to men for all days to come. As for me, when the war was wound up, what pleasure did I see? On my return home Olympus planned for me a sorry death. My blood stained the hands of Aegithus, and my dark-hearted wife.”

Thus the two spirits encountered in this way.

So into Hades

came the shadows of those people slaughtered by Odysseus. Hermes Deliverer led the conquered dead to the flowers of asphodel. And the two spirits in wonder went onward to encounter them; and the shadow of the son of Atreus came to the phantom of the celebrated Amphimedon, beloved son of brother Menelaus. Once long ago Agamemnon rested in the glorious son’s house, which stood in Ithaca.

And the spirit of Agamemnon :

“Amphimedon, what woe brought you to this dark and rotting place, with all of your distinguished friends? One could make no better choice than you, even if all the best men of a glorious city were tested and considered. Did Poseidon shatter your ships,

after exciting the winds to push lofty-curling wave-water
 over you? Or did enemies work your ruin on land, while
 you pruned down their fair flocks of cattle and sheep?
 Or cut you down while fighting for their city and women?
 Reveal this to me; for I solemnly say I am a friend
 of your house. Do you recall when I came down to your island
 with godly Menelaus, to encourage Odysseus
 to follow us in the black ships to Troy? Ah, it required
 one full round of the moon, and all the patience of heaven,
 to wear down his obduracy, but we won him to our cause
 in the end, and finally crossed the broad sea to Ilium.”

And the spirit of Amphimedon :

“Son of Atreus, the most honoured king of men, Agamemnon,
 I remember all of what you say. Now, Zeus-born, hear me speak
 of what happened to me : of the terrible death that was worked
 to its end. Odysseus was away for a long while,
 so I and others sought to win the hand of his wife; and she
 neither cut us off nor married any of us, but devised
 a dark death and fate for every last one of us. While she
 pretended to debate anxiously in heart which man to marry,
 she executed to perfection a tricky plan. She stood
 an elaborate loom in her inner chambers, and wove with it
 fine threads as slim and delicate as spider webs, into some-
 thing of dimensions beyond measure, for no one had yet seen
 the work. And often she would come down to us, and address us
 in assembly, and say :

‘Warriors, my sweethearts,
 good Odysseus is dead, and you are impatient

for marriage. You must wait until I have completed
my work, for I will not leave undone the spinning
of a burial robe for warrior Laertes,
to take with him when fate brings him long-lying death,
so that there shall be no Achaean women displeased,
were he who won so much to lie without a shroud.'

So she said this, and we believed her. So day by day she wove
her web. But at night, in torch-light, she unravelled it. Three years
she misled us with this trick. But as the seasons came and went,
and year four came; as moons one after another waned away,
and each day slowly came to a close : then her trickery came
to us through the mouth of a handmaid, and we were not happy
to hear it. So we broke into her room and caught her unworking
her work. So she was forced to get busy and finish her weaving.

Finally she showed us the robe, the great web she had woven,
after washing it spotlessly clean, and it shone like the sun
and moon. I've never known a woman so lovely nor so wise,
nor so lucky either, and I shall never know another.

For some evil god brought Odysseus back from wherever
he had been, and concealed him at the most isolated part
of our island—the farm where the swineherd lives.
Then appeared Odysseus' suddenly powerful son,
sailing back from sandy Pylos in his black ship. So those two,
father and son, had already prepared death for my fine friends
when they came into the city, Odysseus afterward,
but Telemachus first—to get the plan going. The swineherd
brought along to us a mournful and miserable old beggar,
who wore filthy garments on his skin. How could any of us

know that this sorry person, leaning on a staff, could be he himself, Odysseus, suddenly there before us? No, not even the older men had such a thought. So what happened was, we provoked the man. We taunted him, and pelted him with food, all in play. For just so long he sat there in his house, enduring all our taunting and peltings with the most patient heart; but then Zeus awakened his mind, and with Telemachus he removed all the weapons from the halls and put them down in the store-room, bolting its doors. Then his great gifts of mind instructed his wife to set before us some old grey iron axes for a contest, and she brought us a bow.

What began idly ended with catastrophic slaughter.

But how could we know this sorry person leaning on a staff was Odysseus himself, and suddenly there before us?

So none of my good friends there were strong enough to string the bow.

In fact we failed miserably. Then when the bow fell in Odysseus' hands, we all shouted out, and said, 'Don't give him the bow!' 'Don't give him the bow!' we said, and 'ignore what he says!'

But Telemachus encouraged the trickery to continue, and the many-minded godlike Odysseus strung the bow and shot through the iron, all with ease, while sitting. Slowly then he crossed the hall, and came to stand by the brightly shining door. He poured the arrows out at his feet, and looked all round him fearfully. And he killed the noble Antinous. Then a shower of arrows came at us. One by one he faced a man, this way and that, aiming fast and sure, and sent out stertorous arrows flying into many bodies, and the men fell one by one. Then it was known, then it was obvious, that a god protected him. But then it was also too late. He rushed us,

and struck us down every which way we ran. This way and that we
dropped to the floor; and one after another got his head bashed in.
A gloomy moaning filled the hall; and the floor ran with our blood.

It's this, Agamemnon—we're ruined, for all of time to come!
And even now our bodies lie unburied in a pile
at the palace of Odysseus! And no one in any
of our houses knows yet of any of this. Maybe they'll never
know what happened, and our wounded bodies will never be washed
of its dark blood. Though it's only right for the dead to be placed
down in mourning, honoured with weeping and wailing."

And the spirit of Agamemnon :

"Hear me, men! If your bride passes you by, who's the lucky one?

Odysseus πολυμήχανος ! Happy son
of Laertes! You won a wife of exceeding
excellence—Penelope, the careful daughter
of Icarius. Well mindful of her husband,
she'll win respect for her excellence in the world
to come. She will be honoured in song : sensible,
prudent, careful, constant, wise Penelope.

But none of that for the vile daughter of Tyndareus!
—who worked up evil ideas of her own, and killed
her husband. Severe shall be the suspicion cast
on *all* women on earth ever since! Even those
doing *right!*"

Just in this way they encountered one another,

drifting in the hollow under the earth, the House of Hades.

But up above under sunlight, meanwhile, the four
crafty warriors, though in glimmering armour,
escaped unseen through the city, and went down
to the handsome, well-ordered farm of Laertes.

He had built up all these fields by himself through tireless work.

There was a house, and outbuildings all around it,
where the farmhands had their meals, and sat and rested
awhile, and slept through the night; these men were here
under indenture to Laertes, to learn their trades,
and kindly they got on with their work day by day.

Inside the house, an old Sicilian woman
took good care of the old man as the years had passed,
here on his farm standing far from everyone else
in Ithaca.

And Odysseus came through the trees to the house
of Laertes; with Telemachus and his two
honest servants behind him. And as they surveyed
the well-built house, Odysseus spoke to his men :

“You three go to the house, and sacrifice three swine
for supper, those you think best. I’ll go see what’s what.
I’ll let my father look me over with his own eyes,
and we’ll see if he knows his son. Perhaps he won’t,
since I’ve been gone so long a time.”

So he spoke. He removed his armour and gave it
to his men. They turned away and went to the house,
quickly getting inside and out of sight.

Odysseus advanced toward the vineyard.
He didn't see his father's servant Dolius along the way,
nor any of his faithful farmhands, nor their sons,
as he went down into the fruitful orchard,
the rows of vines of many leafy bunches of grapes.

No one saw him, for they were all off gathering
stones for the vineyard wall, and old man Dolius
was leader for that work.

He saw his father alone in the well-plotted
vineyard, digging around a plant. The clothes he wore
were threadbare and filthy, with split stitching
and haphazard patching. And buckled to his shins
were well-stitched pieces of leather to protect
him from scratches; likewise he wore gloves to avoid
the thorns; and on his head he wore a goatskin cap.
Just now the son saw sorrow in the father's frail face.

And as he looked on the old man worn down
and defeated, bearing in heart and mind great grief,
he let fall down under a tall pear tree great tears;
and in this shower he stood unsure of what to do.
Neither his heart nor mind knew best what next to do.

Should he go kiss and embrace his father? and say
'the son is home, the son has returned to the land

of the fathers'? and tell him of his experience?

But such words might strike the father too hard,
without preparation. The truth must come gently,
as the breath of a wife is gentle on the husband.
Twenty years of hope requires subtle fulfilment.

So he wondered : and this seemed better to him :

First, he would insinuate himself with light-
hearted words. So with this intention the godlike
Odysseus went straight to his father,
who had his head lowered, digging around a plant.

The shining son came to stand beside the father;
and he began to speak his wiles :

“Old man! you lack no skill in gardening all right!
Just look at how you take care of that plant!
And look around : no plant, no fig tree, no grapevine,
no olive tree, no pear tree, and no garden-bed
without thorough care throughout all your fields.

Now I'll say something else. Mind you, don't get angry
with me if I say you show more care for these plants
than for yourself. You look sunk in a hard old age;
your whole person squalid and dirty and shameful
to look on. Obviously it's not your idleness
that turns your master's gaze away, since your garden
is a beautiful one. Indeed, to look on your poise
and stature one would not think you a slave.

A kingly man, more like. Such as one who will bathe
and eat and sleep gently all through the night :
for this should be the benefit of all old men.

But come now! You speak now, and tell me true.
Whose slave are you? Whose gardens do you tend?
And tell me this, to make it sure, if Ithaca
this truly is where I now stand, as some man
I passed by told me on my way here to you.
If you want to hear the god's honest truth,
I think the man was out of his senses!
He didn't say much; nor listen when I asked him
about a friend of mine, if he still lives;
or is by this time down in the House of Hades.

Let me tell you now : so hear and understand me.

Back in my homeland I once entertained a guest
who called himself a man of Ithaca. And no
other man, of all strangers come from far places,
became a more welcome guest. He said Ithaca
was the home of his family, and asserted
himself to be the son of Laertes,
son of Arceisius. I led him to my house
and received him with gentle welcome,
and gave him of what the house held in store,
and showered him with many gifts of friendship,
many fine pieces. I gave him seven talents
of beautiful gold hand-work; and a silver mixing
bowl carved wondrously with flowers;
and twelve outer cloaks, and as many tunics;

and above and beyond all this I gave him
excellent women, well-skilled in hand-work :
four seductive women for him to choose between,
and lead one away as his own.”

And through his tears his father spoke to him :

“Stranger, where you stand is as you say, Ithaca,
but in name only : for now a reckless, greedy
rabble of filth keeps its grip on our house,
and keeps us strangled in mediocrity.
Now I’ll tell *you* ‘something else’, so hear now
and understand me, stranger :
all those gifts you gave were wrongly given.

Ha! If only you’d known that man here in this land!
He would have sent you off with gifts of equal answer,
and good and friendly memories to think on;
for that man knew the old ways of doing things.

But come now! You speak now, and tell me true.
How many years has it been since you say you saw
that man, that unhappy stranger, my son—a man
as no man ever was! But an unexpected fate
left him far from his friends, in some unknown spot
of the sea, where the fishes have nibbled him down
to nothing in the dark; or on land he lay a spoil
for ravening birds, or other opportunistic beasts.

His loving mother was denied the right to mourn
and dress her child properly. Nor was his father

able to bow his head, nor his wife, either :
wise Penelope (showered with many gifts
herself). None wailed over his funeral bed.
He lost just as much as anyone would hope for :
someone to draw down his eyelids.
Gentleness is a privilege of the dead.

Well!

Now tell me true, so I will know :
Who and what are you among men?
Where is your city, and parents?
Where is your sharp-pointed ship anchored?
Were you brought here as a loyal shipmate?
Or as a passenger on another's ship,
that set out as you stepped off?"

And subtle-minded Odysseus answered him,
speaking at length and in order with precision.

"I'll tell you everything," said Odysseus.
I come from Alybas, where I live in a shining
palace. I am the son of Apheida,
the son of King Polypemonides."

And we in the present day stop, and root around
in the vitals of ancient Greek, to hear his word;
to make a quick look in the immeasurable,
and attempt to recapture an obsolete vibe.
So let us put silence in the mouths of these men
and pause the immortal voice of the poet

for a mild number of contemporary lines,
 to note mellow songbirds piping in the trees,
 and the coming of the breeze that runs its gentle
 fingers through the grassy outlying fields,
 as through the hair; and the close sun clinging
 round the bodies of men; and the fresh air coming
 into the throat to bring healthful breath;
 and all this peace and quiet of Laertes' farm
 was a treasure lost two thousand years ago.

Tradition hands down to us untranslatable
 humanity that throws the would-be storyteller,
 who means to convey characterological soul.
 At this monumental moment Homer slows down
 to a still point : so transition into a brisk
 look at the language fits here. And how surprising
 for the translator, who with satisfaction spies
 the goal close ahead, yet is halted by a note
 that cannot be got around, or surmounted.
 Here the poetry conveys news unconsciously
 to the father, intentionally so by Odysseus;
 so the allusive language isn't academic
 but essential to the living, breathing story.
 Odysseus is wary of saying straight out,
 "I am home", for fear of striking the father dead
 with shock. So his words, melodious and various,
 employ the lyrical power of poetry
 to prepare the old man gently for coming revelation.

Godlike Odysseus shall begin his story,
 standing in the peace of Laertes' farm,

aiming to charm his father, digging at a plant :

“I’ll tell you everything. I come from Alybas.”

Now one must reach into the depth of beginnings.

Ἀλύβαντος is the word he uses, from ἄλς :

(hals) : the sea : and βαίνω : (‘bay-no) : to go,

yet to endure : to stay balanced : (also, “to die”) :

so : “Alybas” : to go ably and ever in waves.

I endure, father.

Godlike Odysseus begins his story :

“I come from Alybas, where I live in a shining
palace. I am the son of Apeida.”

Hear now the second of three words to atomize :

Ἀφείδαντος is the word he uses, from ἀφ' :

from ἀπό : prefixal for “off” and “away” :

and joined with δαντος , fanciful suffix to supply

an Odyssean invocatory rhyme :

Ἀλύ-βαντος : Ἀφεί-δαντος.

Clearly evoked is ἀφείδας : “not sparing of”,

“lavishly bestowed”, “sparing no pains”, “with all zeal”,

“without mercy” . *Father, I flower with fighting.*

But Ἀφείδαντος has inside it further signs,

as αντος is prefixal for “to” and “towards”,

and αντος conjures αίνω, as in φαίνω :

light : to bring to light : to appear, as Dawn appears :

to shine. And so the son speaks out :

I stand apart in struggle; there I will shine always, father.

And as the story approaches its conclusion,

and the translator pauses in calm reflection

at the life-changing experience of the work

(and who can jeer at such a surplus of energy
that with eyes shut he beholds white brightness?),
still and all, godlike Odysseus must get on with his tale :

“I come from Alybas, where I live in a shining
palace. I am the son of Apheida,
the son of King Polypemonides.”

This, the last of the three ancient Greek words.

Πολυπημονίδης ἄναξ : King Polypemonides :
the son of the king, in fact; and he, a much-suffering
son of a much-suffering king. πολυ-πήμων :
poly-remon : Odysseus thinks of πῆμα : “misery” :
and Odysseus thinks of poly-ramonos :
πολυπάμονος (Iliad 4.433) : “exceeding wealthy (in)”.

So Odysseus says to his father :

“I’m the man who moves like an arrow through the light
that blinds. Exceedingly wealthy; yet rich
in misery. Laertes, I am the son.”

Now let us restart for the final time
this epic tale, whose ending looms close,
this text transmitted by innumerable hands
down through the years, and tweaked, and embellished
along the way, so that by no means is the text
a purity; so this own translator’s touches
are consonant with the transmission
of the spirit of immortal Homer
down through the ages. The Odyssey is ever
revelant to a world requiring heroes.

So, Muse, sing for the final time,
and lead us to the end of the story.

“I’ll tell you everything,” said Odysseus.

“I come from Alybas, where I live in a shining
palace. I am the son of Apheida,
the son of King Polypemonides,
and my name is Eperitus.”

Well! Just as we have recommenced our tale,
the subtle-minded Odysseus would have us
pause again. No ending arrives without surprise.

This name is a kaleidoscope of character :

Eperitus : Ἐπήριτος : of ἔρις : battle-strife :

ἴρις : rainbow : ἥρωες : hero. Odysseus,

we know you now : *many-sided invincible warrior*.

“I’ll tell you everything,” said Odysseus.

“I come from Alybas, where I live in a shining
palace. I am the son of Apheida,
the son of King Polypemonides,
and my name is Eperitus. Some god

baffled my progress, and led me astray
against all of my power to straighten my way
back. As for my ship, it sailed away elsewhere.

It’s been many years since I’ve seen Odysseus.

Most unlucky man! Yet birds sang with good omen,
when he and I gave our loving farewells,
and he went away; and both our hearts hoped to see
each other again someday, and give each other

splendid gifts.”

And as he said this, a dark cloud of sorrow
confused the thoughts of Laertes. Kneeling
on the earth he took his hands and lifted the dust
up and over him; and the dust rained down onto
his grey hair and grizzled head like burning stars,
and he let out a violent moan that made
Odysseus’ heart hurt. And a bitter breath rushed
out through the son’s nose, and he rushed to the father
and threw his arms around him, and kissed him, and spoke :

“It is I, it is your son who holds you, your son
here before you, whom you now feel around you.
I come in the twentieth year to the land of my fathers.
Now hear me wipe away your tears with a kind word :
I’ve avenged our heart-squeezing insult and outrage.
I’ve obliterated those people from the house.”

And Laertes answered him :

“All this you say may be true; I feel it is so.
But show me a sign, so I know to a certainty.”

And Odysseus answered him :

“See this scar. A wild boar drove its tusk into me
when I went to Parnassus. You and my dear
mother sent me to her much-loved brother
Autolycus; so that I might receive the gifts
he’d promised me with a kind nod, as sign

of assurance, when he visited our house.”

And Odysseus let his gaze pass over
the branches around them, and the air sighed
on the leaves and made them quiver, and he said :

“Come, father, hear of the well-tended trees
in your garden. Long ago, hand in hand,
you and I walked through this garden, and I asked
you all the names of all the trees, and you told me
each one. And you gave me thirteen pear trees.
Ten apple trees. Forty fig trees. I remember
and mention these numbers. And you gave me
fifty rows of vines, which we harvested, now these,
now those, as Zeus turned the seasons, and all year long
we picked bunches of grapes.”

Thus spoke the son. And the father’s heart pounded
in his chest, for he knew all of what Odysseus had said;
and when his knees weakened under him, he flung
his arms round his beloved son, who caught him
from fainting dead away. And in the arms
of godly Odysseus his father breathed easy again,
and his heart and mind were restored; and he spoke out :

“There *is* Zeus in endless Olympus, if truly
those horrible people paid for their crimes in full!
Ah, a dread comes over me. An unpleasant fear
in my heart, that the Ithacans might come here
and overtake us; and that the news you say
may reach even the cities of the mainland.”

And long-experienced Odysseus answered :

“Never mind all that; don’t let anything trouble your heart. Still, we must be quick about things. Let’s get out of the garden and into the house. Telemachus, and the swineherd and cattleman, are already there, and preparing supper for us.”

So he spoke, and the two walked together quickly through the neat fields, to the farmhouse. And when they entered the comfortable house, they saw Telemachus with sharpened knife in hand, carving meat, alongside the cattleman, also slicing flesh, with the swineherd working beside him, mixing the sparkling wine.

Then, for a short time, great-hearted Laertes, in his house, was bathed, and anointed with oil, by the old Sicilian housekeeper, who then gently set an elegant cloak around him. And goddess Athena, the shining-eyed, came near. She filled out the limbs of this leader of men, and made his presence broader, and jewellike, and when he came from his bath his beloved son admired him as if he were a god shining before him.

And Odysseus spoke :

“Father! In shape and every way you look immortal!”

And Laertes answered him :

“Ah, gods! Zeus! Athena! Apollo! If I still knew the strength I had when I was lord of all who called themselves Cephalenians, and flattened the well-fortified stronghold of Nericus . . . ! If that man had been with you yesterday, with his armor on his shoulders, he would have unstrung the knees of many of those people, hardly men; and the heart inside you would have rejoiced to see it.”

So they spoke with one another. When the others had prepared the meal, everyone sat down in chairs in proper order around the table; and they were just about to put their hands on the food, when old man Dolius came, with his sons, and all of them exhausted from a day's work. They were coming over because old mother Sicilian had been told to go wave them over, and bring Dolius before them. They knew her as the woman who cared for old man Laertes, now that time had slimmed him down to old age. So they came to the table, and stood astonished when they saw the jewellike strength of Odysseus.

And as they stood astonished, Odysseus gently mocked them :

“Old man, sit and have your supper. While you eat, you can remove all care from your memory.

So stop this standing so stock-still in surprise.
The time of dreaming myself reaching for my bread
has been long, and we've been waiting here in the halls
for you, eagerly awaiting your arrival."

So he spoke, and Dolius spread his arms out wide
and came to Odysseus. And Odysseus allowed
the man to take his hand, and he received the kiss
the man pressed on his wrist. And he listened :

"Good health to you!" said old man Dolius.
"You return! We have wished for this. Very much.
I never thought. . . . But the gods have brought you back!
Master! Everlasting χαῖρέ ! May the gods ever
bring you everything you wish for!"

And Dolius went silent, and Odysseus
said nothing, nor did anyone else at table.
And Odysseus could see Dolius thinking,
so he began to smile as Dolius spoke :

"And tell me this, friend, plain and true, so I may know :
does wise Penelope know you're home? Or shall we
send a message to her?"

And Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

"Old man, she knows. So I wouldn't worry.
Come, sit."

And Dolius heard the words of Odysseus,

and, after a time, nodded; then sat down.

Then his sons sat down in proper order,
lowering like lilted plants to their seats;
but one by one they found words of kind welcome
for their host, and embraced him; then sat back
down by their father, in the peaceful gaze
of Odysseus. And they ate their supper.

And all the while Dolius wondered where two
of his children were. His beautiful-cheeked daughter
Melanthe was hanging crook-necked by the θόλος,
while his son Melanthius' testicles
had been chewed raw by the swineherd's dogs.

So while they were enjoying their supper
at the farmhouse, stub-winged Rumour sent the news
swiftly through the city of the story
of the abominable death of good and noble people
in the halls of Odysseus. The story went to and fro,
from one place to another, till the whole city
heard : and a great moaning and a groaning
and then a wailing arose, and the people
of the city gathered at the front gates
of Odysseus. Then, one by one, each body
was removed from the interior and taken
to its due funeral rites. Bodies belonging
to families from elsewhere were given to ships
for seamen to care for and bring to wherever.

Then the crowd, alive with loud lament, assembled
at the gathering place : and Eupheides stood up
to speak, but grief for his son lay so

unspeakably hard on his heart that he
began to weep : for Antinous, his son, was dead.
In fact he was the first one killed by Odysseus.
So he stood before the people, and spoke through his tears :

“Friends, a tremendous work has been contrived against
the Achaeans! Many of our good men he carried away
in his hollow ships to Troy—and every ship lost,
and every last one dead! Now he comes to stretch out
a number of murders shocking to calculate!
Many of the best of our people have fallen!
So come now! Before this man is off to Pylos
or Elis, we must get him!—Because he must feel
our vengeance! Otherwise for centuries to come
we’ll be humiliated in song when people
come to hear of it! He must feel our answer
to the murder of our sons and brothers.
If he lives, what content is left for me?
Far better to die quickly and join the dead.
So come! before they cross over!”

And he shed many tears, and the crowd pitied him.

Then, to the astonishment of all, minister
Medon and the godlike poet entered into
the crowd, having come from the way
of the palace of Odysseus. They had surfaced
from sleep and now stood among the people;
and amazement seized each man who saw them.

And Medon, wise in the ways, spoke to the crowd :

“Hear me now, all good Ithacans! and consider
what I shall now say to you! Not alone
did Odysseus devise this tremendous
hand-work. Only immortals could do this.

Ithacans! I saw a goddess appear
to Odysseus, who seemed as Mentor.
At times, now and then, this immortal came
to shine by Odysseus, to encourage
and embolden him as he went charging
through the halls, cutting down all my good friends,
who one upon another fell down in a heap.”

After these words, all faces turned a sickly green
from fear, and the crowd had no idea where to turn.

Then stood the aged warrior Halitherses,
son of Mastor : of all the living he alone
saw everything at once, in prophetic sight.
He addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

“Hear me now, Ithacans, what I shall say to you.
Through your evil, my friends, this work has come to be!
You would not hear me, nor Mentor, teacher of men,
when we roundly said, ‘cease your sons’ folly!’
Terrible wickedness and inhuman corruption :
this is the poisonous truth we must swallow!
Shearing down his private property by the day,
and dishonouring his wife, the wife of Odysseus,
the best man among us! They said he would never

return. And now in this way it has come to be
 as it is. So hear now what I say to you!
 If you go to that palace you will find nothing
 good for you. You may as well secure your own noose.”

He said this, and the crowd rose up with much shouting
 of assent : a little more than half : and the rest
 of the men stayed where they sat, for the babble
 of the ancient so-called seer revolted them.

These were the men who would put their blind trust
 in Eupeithes. So they went away to arm themselves.
 And when they were fitted in glimmering bronze,
 they gathered in a spacious field outside the city,
 and in idiocy Eupeithes led the way.

He meant to take revenge for the death of his son :
 but he would never return. He died in the attempt.

And Athena looked into the face of Time : and she spoke out :

“Zeus,” she said. “Sole parent of duration,
 parent of every appearance between ‘will be’
 and ‘was’, uppermost master, tell me, who asks you,
 what purpose do I not yet see in the design?
 Is more evil war and its horrible battle-noise
 to come? Or will there be set among them
 peace and friendship?”

And Zeus who moves the clouds spoke out :

“My daughter, why question? Why inquire? and investigate?
 Ah, only the children ask questions in earnest! The wrong one

can bring down gods. But your question perplexes me.
Was it not you yourself who brought all this to be?
That Odysseus would come and answer those people?
In this do as you will. But hear this I say as Right :
Those ignoble dead have paid the price of their crime
with their lives. Odysseus should be satisfied,
at least. So those others should sustain no further
quarrel. They must swear a solemn oath—
attested to with sweet-smelling sacrifices
which I love so well. And he shall be king
all his days (if such things interest him);
and Olympus will devise the forgetting
of the slaughter of the sons and brothers
of those whom the mortals called 'best'.

May kindness compel action and thought
down there
as it used to be, in that far past time.
Let there be abundance of wealth and peace.”

And he finished speaking. And the goddess,
eager to assist, required only one step
to descend the heights of Olympus.

And when their desire for the delicious food
had flown, godly Odysseus was first to speak
among them :

“Go and see if they’ve come.”

So he spoke, and one of Dolius’ sons went,

as he was told to do. He stood in the doorway
and looked out, and saw the people coming.

Straightaway he winged words to Odysseus :

“They’ve come. Gather arms!”

And as he spoke they sprang up and got into armour.
With Odysseus were four : and with Dolius :
six : and Laertes and Dolius wore armour,
though they’d gone totally grey : for the last time,
most likely, they would be warriors. Every body
was needed at the moment. So when all had dressed
their skin in shining bronze, the door opened,
and out they went, first Odysseus.

And Athena was there before them,
in the shape and voice of an old friend to father
and son : Mentor. The old man had agreed
to keep watch over the house while Odysseus
was away with the ships, and keep things firmly footed—
an Odyssean goof that took twenty years to fix,
as it turned out. But just now Odysseus
smiled, the many-sided godly one smiled,
and he looked to his son and said :

“Telemachus, you stand at the doorway
of testing and manhood : there, in the fight
ahead of us, the best are measured. I wouldn’t
worry in your case. Since the first of our line,
we’ve surpassed in prowess all the men of the earth.”

And Telemachus answered him :

“Watch me, father, for my furious heart
shall bring the house new honourable achievements
for those to hear in years to come, just as you say.”

Just so Telemachus spoke, and Laertes laughed,
and said :

“Beloved gods! What a day this has become!
I haven’t felt this excited since. . . . But now
my son and grandson mean to compete in courage!”

Then Athena the shining-eyed approached him,
and spoke from his heart outward :

“Son of Arceisius, dearest friend, when you draw
back your spear and throw its long shadow on the earth,
pray to the shining-eyed daughter and father Zeus,
then let fly.”

Thus spoke goddess Athena, who breathed strength
into him as he drew back the spear and prayed
to the shining-eyed daughter—but with no time
to make prayer to father Zeus, he let fly,
and its sharp bronze tip struck Eupheithes
through the hard side-piece of his helmet,
and went clean through his cheeks and out again;
and when he fell his armour clattered around him.

At the front of the fight Odysseus and Telemachus,
the shining son, struck down the best of their attackers,
with sword, double-tipped spear, knives, hands, whatever else;
and the pair of them would have eliminated
them all, and put them in a place without return,
but Athena, daughter of Zeus the Orderer,
sent a shriek out that expanded to fill the sky
entire, a call from afar that threatened
to deafen every man there : so every man stopped :
and all heard the same words sounding in their heads :

“Stop war! It’s madness! Without bloodshed, separate!”

And at these words from Athena all men went sick
with fear. They dropped to the earth, and their weapons
fell from their hands as they went to the dust,
but there was nowhere to run from the voice of the goddess.

Yet still they sought safety, and looked toward the city,
calculating if they might run for it, hoping
to outrun death.

Sprung to charge, crouched there, bronze in hands,
Odysseus came shrieking onto them
like a wild-soaring eagle, and Zeus let fly
a sulphurous thunderbolt, and its tip
cracked the earth by his shining-eyed daughter :

who said :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, invincible Odysseus!

That's enough. End this contention,
or anger far-seeing Zeus."

Thus spoke Athena. And he obeyed,
happy in heart. A mutual pledge
of friendship was aftertime put in place,
through the efforts of goddess Athena,
daughter of Zeus Orderer, who came to us,
voice and body, in the appearance of Mentor.

The end of
The Odyssey of Homer

translator

Jeffrey Scott Bernstein

: rough draft :

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