

HOMER  
ODYSSEY ABRIDGED  
2019 EDITION

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*[Note that this edition is an extensively revised and enlarged version of the *Odyssey Abridged* text first published in 2008. Anyone interested in obtaining this translation in the form of a printed book or textbook should check the online pages of Broadview Press, which published such a book in 2019. For a PDF format of this text please check on the following site [Odyssey Abridged, Table of Contents](#)]*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This abridged version of Homer's *Odyssey* has been prepared by Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, from his translation of the complete poem (available online). This abridged translation is about forty percent of the original poem. Each line is a direct translation from the Greek original (i.e., I have shortened the poem by removing large parts of it, not by rewriting different sections). In many places, I have included a very short prose summary of the missing material placed in square brackets and italics (e.g., *[Summary sentences]*). However, these short summaries do not include all details of the omitted text. And in most places no summary is provided for missing material.

In numbering the lines, the translator has normally included a short, indented line with the short line immediately above it, so that the two partial lines count as a single line in the tally. Note that the numbering of the lines starts again in each book. Footnotes have been provided by the translator.

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

## ABRIDGED ODYSSEY

There is a Glossary (with a guide to pronunciation of names) at the end of the translated text, together with a suggested floor plan of Odysseus's palace.

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BOOK ONE  
ATHENA VISITS ITHACA

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

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

But at that moment,  
 Poseidon was among the Ethiopians,  
 a long way off.<sup>4</sup> The other gods had assembled

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<sup>1</sup>*Hyperion*: Also called Helios, Hyperion treasured his several herds of cattle; the incident with his cattle is related in detail in Book 12.

<sup>2</sup>*daughter of Zeus*: The Muses, divine patrons of the arts, are daughters of Zeus, the most powerful god on Olympus.

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

<sup>4</sup>*Ethiopians*: To the ancient Greeks, the name Ethiopia did not necessarily denote the country of today, but was rather used as a loose term for various peoples imagined as living at the ends of the earth.

in the great hall of Olympian Zeus. Among them all, 30  
 the father of gods and men was the first to speak.  
 In his heart he was recalling royal Aegisthus,  
 whom Orestes, Agamemnon's celebrated son,  
 had slaughtered. With him in mind, Zeus now addressed them:

"It's disgraceful how humans blame the gods.  
 They say their tribulations come from us,  
 when they themselves, through their own foolishness,  
 bring hardships which are not decreed by Fate.  
 Now there's Aegisthus, who took for himself  
 the wife of Agamemnon, son of Atreus, 40  
 and then butchered him, once the man came home.<sup>1</sup>  
 That was not set by Fate. Aegisthus knew  
 his acts would bring about his total ruin.  
 So he has paid for everything in full."

Athena, goddess with gleaming eyes, answered Zeus:

"Son of Cronos and father to us all,  
 you who rule on high, yes indeed, Aegisthus  
 now lies dead, something he well deserved.<sup>2</sup>  
 May any other man who does what he did  
 also be destroyed! But my heart is torn 50  
 for versatile Odysseus, ill-fated man,  
 who has had to suffer such misfortune  
 for so many years, far away from friends.  
 He's on an island, surrounded by the sea,  
 the one that forms the ocean's navel stone.<sup>3</sup>  
 And there, in the forests, lives a goddess,  
 who stops the sad, unlucky man from leaving.  
 Odysseus yearns to see even the smoke  
 rising from Ithaca and longs for death.  
 Yet, despite that, Olympian Zeus, your heart 60  
 does not respond to him. Did not Odysseus  
 offer you delightful sacrifices

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<sup>1</sup>*royal Aegisthus ... in full:* Aegisthus, as part of a scheme to avenge a terrible act of Agamemnon's father against his father, seduced Agamemnon's wife, Clytaemnestra, while Agamemnon was leading the Achaean army at Troy, and when Agamemnon returned victorious, the two lovers killed him and took control of Argos. Orestes, Agamemnon's son, who was away at the time of the murder, returned to Argos in disguise and avenged his father by killing Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. This famous story is referred to a number of times in the *Odyssey*. Agamemnon's shade provides some details of the killing in Book 11.

<sup>2</sup>*Cronos:* Leader of the Titans, he was overthrown by his son Zeus and imprisoned deep in the earth.

<sup>3</sup>The Greek word *omphalos* (navel stone) Homer uses here to describe Calypso's island of Ogygia.

on Troy's far-reaching plain beside the ships?  
If so, why are you so angry with him?"

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

"My child,  
How could I forget godlike Odysseus,  
pre-eminent among all mortal men  
for his intelligence and offerings  
to the immortal gods who hold wide heaven?  
But Earthshaker Poseidon, a stubborn god, 70  
is still furious about that cyclops,  
the one whose eye Odysseus destroyed,  
godlike Polyphemus, the mightiest  
of all the Cyclopes.<sup>1</sup> Thoosa bore him,  
the sea nymph, a daughter of that Phorcys  
who commands the restless deep.<sup>2</sup> Poseidon,  
down in those hollow caves, had sex with her.  
That's the reason Earthshaker Poseidon  
makes Odysseus wander from his country.  
But he has not killed him yet. So come now, 80  
let's all of us consider his return,  
so he can journey back to Ithaca.  
Poseidon's anger will relent. He can't  
fight the immortal gods all by himself,  
not with all of us arrayed against him."

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

"Son of Cronos and father to us all,  
ruling heaven above, let's send Hermes,  
killer of Argus, as our messenger,  
over to the island of Ogygia, 90  
so he can quickly tell that fair haired nymph  
our firm decision—that brave Odysseus  
will now leave and complete his voyage home.<sup>3</sup>  
I'll go to Ithaca and urge his son

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<sup>1</sup>*Earthshaker Poseidon ... the Cyclopes*: Poseidon's son is Polyphemus, one of a race of giant, one-eyed, man-eating monsters referred to as Cyclopes. This incident is further related in Book 9.

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

<sup>3</sup>*Hermes*: divine son of Zeus and messenger of the gods; he killed the monster Argus, whom Zeus's wife and sister, Hera, had told to guard the young girl Io, in order to prevent her getting into sexual mischief with Zeus; *Ogygia*: name of the island where Calypso lives and where she is detaining Odysseus.

to action and put courage in his heart,  
 so he will call those long-haired Achaeans  
 to assembly and address the suitors,  
 who keep on butchering his flocks of sheep  
 and shambling bent-horned cattle.<sup>1</sup> I'll send him  
 on a trip to Sparta and sandy Pylos, 100  
 to learn about his father's journey home—  
 he may hear of it somewhere—and to gain  
 a worthy reputation among men.”

Athena spoke. Then she tied those lovely sandals  
 on her feet, the immortal, golden sandals  
 which carry her as fast as stormy blasts of wind  
 across the ocean seas and endless tracts of land.  
 Athena raced down from the peak of Mount Olympus,  
 sped across to Ithaca, and then just stood there,  
 at Odysseus's outer gate before the palace, 110  
 on the threshold, her hand still gripping a bronze spear,  
 in the form of Mentès, a foreigner, the chief  
 who ruled the Taphians.<sup>2</sup> There she met the suitors,  
 those arrogant men, who were enjoying themselves  
 playing checkers right outside the door, sitting down  
 on hides of cattle.

Godlike Telemachus  
 observed Athena first, well before the others.  
 He moved up near the goddess and then spoke to her—  
 his words had wings:

“Welcome to you, stranger.  
 You must enjoy our hospitality. 120  
 Then, after you have had some food to eat,  
 you can tell us what you need.”

After saying this,

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<sup>1</sup>*Achaeans*: *Achaeans*: Strictly speaking, the term *Achaeans* refers to the inhabitants of Achaea, a region of the Peloponnese in Greece. However, here and in the rest of Homer's text the word designates *residents of Greece generally*, in contrast to those who do not speak Greek (the *barbarians*). Homer does not use the term *Greeks* or *Hellenes*, words which to modern readers might suggest a greater degree of political unity than what, in fact, prevails. Occasionally, instead of the name *Achaeans*, Homer uses the word *Argives* (citizens of Argos) or *Danaans* (descendants of Danaus) as a general name for all the Greeks; *the suitors ... bent-horned cattle*: The suitors are the rich, young aristocratic men of Ithaca and the neighboring islands who are seeking to marry Penelope, Odysseus's wife, in the belief that Odysseus is dead.

<sup>2</sup>*Mentes*: An old friend of Odysseus.

Telemachus led Athena into his home.  
 He brought the goddess in and sat her in a chair,  
 a beautifully constructed work. Beneath it  
 he rolled out a linen mat and then set in place  
 a footstool for her feet. Beside her he drew up  
 a lovely decorated chair for him to sit in.  
 A female servant carried in a fine gold jug  
 and poured water out into a silver basin, 130  
 so they could wash their hands. Beside them she set down  
 a polished table. Then the worthy housekeeper  
 carried in the bread and put it down before them.  
 She laid out a rich selection of fine things to eat,  
 drawing freely on supplies she had in store.  
 A carver sliced up many different cuts of meat  
 and served them. Then he brought out goblets made of gold,  
 as a herald went back and forth serving the wine.

Then, one after another, the proud suitors came.  
 They sat down on reclining seats and high-backed chairs. 140  
 Heralds poured water out for them to wash their hands,  
 and women servants piled wicker baskets full of bread,  
 while young lads filled their bowls up to the brim with drink.  
 The suitors reached out with their hands to help themselves  
 to the fine food prepared and placed in front of them.  
 When each and every man had satisfied his need  
 for food and drink, their hearts demanded something more—  
 dancing and song—the finest joys of dinner feasts.

A herald gave a splendid lyre to Phemius,  
 so he was forced to sing in front of all the suitors.<sup>1</sup> 150  
 On the strings he plucked the prelude to a lovely song.  
 But then Telemachus, leaning his head over,  
 close to Athena, so no one else could listen,  
 murmured to her:

“Dear stranger, my guest,  
 These men here, they spend all their time like this,  
 with songs and music—it’s easy for them,  
 because they gorge themselves on what belongs  
 to someone else, and with impunity—  
 a man whose white bones may well be lying  
 on the mainland somewhere, rotting in the rain, 160

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<sup>1</sup>lyre: Stringed instrument resembling a small harp.

or in the sea, being tossed around by waves.  
 If they saw him return to Ithaca,  
 they'd all be praying they had swifter feet  
 rather than more wealth in gold or clothing.  
 But by now some evil fate has killed him,  
 and for us there is no consolation,  
 not even if some earth-bound mortal man  
 should say that he will come. But tell me this,  
 and speak candidly—Who are your people?  
 What city do you come from?”

Then Athena, 170  
 goddess with the gleaming eyes, answered Telemachus:

“To you I will indeed speak openly.  
 I can tell you that my name is Mentès,  
 a son of the wise Anchialus, and king  
 of Taphians, who love the oar.<sup>1</sup> My ship  
 is in a berth some distance from the town.  
 But come, speak openly and tell me this—  
 What is this feast? Who are these crowds of men?  
 Why do you need this? Is it a wedding?  
 Or a drinking party? It seems clear enough 180  
 this is no meal where each man brings his share,  
 and I can see that people here are acting  
 in an insulting, overbearing way,  
 while dining in your home.”

Noble Telemachus  
 then said to Athena in reply:

“Stranger,  
 since you've questioned me about the matter,  
 I'll tell you. Our house was once well on its way  
 to being rich and famous—at that time  
 Odysseus was alive among his people.  
 But now the gods with their malicious plans 190  
 have changed all that completely. They make sure  
 Odysseus stays where nobody can see him—  
 gods have not dealt with other men this way.  
 But it's not him alone who makes me sad  
 and cry out in distress. For now the gods

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<sup>1</sup>*Taphians*: Sea-faring people of the island of Taphos.

have brought me more intolerable grief.  
 All the best young men who rule the islands,  
 Dulichium and wooded Zacynthus,  
 and Same, as well as those who lord it here  
 in rocky Ithaca—they are all now 200  
 wooing my mother and ravaging my house.<sup>1</sup>  
 She won't turn down a marriage she detests  
 but can't bring herself to make the final choice.  
 Meanwhile, these men are feasting on my home  
 and soon will be the death of me as well."

This made Pallas Athena angry—she said to him:

"It's bad Odysseus is still wandering  
 when you need him here so much! He could lay  
 his hands on these disrespectful suitors!  
 Listen now to what I'm going to tell you. 210  
 Tomorrow you must summon the Achaeans  
 to an assembly and address them all,  
 appealing to the gods as witnesses.  
 Tell the suitors to go back to their homes.  
 As for your mother, if her heart is set  
 on getting married, then let her return  
 to where her father lives, for he's a man  
 of great capabilities and power.  
 He'll organize the marriage and arrange  
 the wedding gifts, as many as befit 220  
 a well-loved daughter. Now, as for yourself,  
 if you'll listen, I have some wise advice.  
 Set off in search of news about your father,  
 who's been gone so long. Some living mortal  
 perhaps can tell you something, or you may hear  
 a voice from Zeus, which often brings men news.  
 Sail first to Pylos—speak to noble Nestor.<sup>2</sup>  
 After you've been there, proceed to Sparta  
 and fair-haired Menelaus, the last one  
 of all bronze-clad Achaeans to get home.<sup>3</sup> 230  
 You must not keep on acting like a child—  
 the time has come when you're too old for that."

<sup>1</sup>*Dulichium, and ... and Same*: Islands near Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.

<sup>2</sup>*Nestor*: King of Pylos, whose army had fought alongside other Achaeans during the Trojan War and who had returned home safely afterwards.

<sup>3</sup>*Menelaus*: King of Sparta and husband of Helen, whose abduction had ostensibly incited the Trojan War.

Prudent Telemachus then answered her:

“Stranger,  
 you have been speaking to me as a friend,  
 just like a father would for his own son—  
 and what you’ve said I never will forget.  
 But come now, though you’re eager to be off,  
 stay here a while. Once you’ve enjoyed a bath  
 and your fond heart is fully satisfied,  
 go back with joyful spirits to your ship 240  
 carrying with you an expensive gift,  
 something truly beautiful, which will be  
 my gift to you, an heirloom of the sort  
 dear guest-friends give to those who are their friends.”<sup>1</sup>

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes then said:

“Since I’m eager to depart, don’t keep me  
 a moment longer. And whatever gift  
 your heart suggests you give me as a friend,  
 present it to me when I come back here.  
 Pick me out something truly beautiful 250  
 It will earn you something worthy in return.”

This said, Athena with the gleaming eyes departed,  
 flying off like some wild sea bird. In his heart she put  
 courage and strength. She made him recall his father  
 more keenly than before. In his mind, Telemachus  
 could picture her—a sense of wonder filled his heart.  
 In his mind she was a god. So he moved away.  
 And then the noble youth mingled with the suitors.  
 The famous minstrel Phemius was performing,  
 as they sat in silence, listening. He was singing 260  
 of the return of the Achaeans, that bitter trip  
 Athena forced on them when they sailed home from Troy.<sup>2</sup>

In her upstairs room, the daughter of Icarius,

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<sup>1</sup>*guest friend*: guest friendship is an important and complex set of rituals governing hospitality towards strangers visiting one’s own home; the notion places great emphasis on a courteous welcome, food, entertainment, and an appropriate exchange of gifts.

<sup>2</sup>Athena, though a supporter of the Achaeans during the war, was outraged at the way their army behaved during the sack of Troy, especially at their savage treatment of Troy’s holy places. So she punished the army by making the voyage home very difficult or even fatal for some of its leaders.

wise Penelope, heard the man's inspired song.  
 She came down the towering staircase from her room,  
 but not alone—two female servants followed her.  
 When beautiful Penelope reached the suitors,  
 she stayed beside the doorpost in the well-built room,  
 a small bright veil across her face. On either side  
 her two attendants waited. With tears streaming down, 270  
 Penelope addressed the singer:

“Phemius,  
 you know all sorts of other ways to charm  
 an audience, actions of gods and men  
 which singers celebrate. As you sit here,  
 sing one of those, while these men drink their wine  
 in silence. Don't keep up that painful song,  
 which always breaks the heart here in my chest,  
 for, more than anyone, I am weighed down  
 with ceaseless grief which I cannot forget.  
 I remember, always with such yearning, 280  
 my husband's face, a man whose fame has spread  
 far and wide through Greece and central Argos.”

Sensible Telemachus answered her and said:

“Mother, why begrudge the faithful singer  
 delighting us in any way his mind  
 may prompt him to? One can't blame the singers.  
 It seems to me it's Zeus's fault. He hands  
 to toiling men, to each and every one,  
 whatever he desires. There's nothing wrong  
 with this man's singing of the evil fate 290  
 of the Danaans, for men praise the most  
 the song which they have heard most recently.<sup>1</sup>  
 Your heart and spirit should accept his song.  
 Go up to your rooms and keep busy there  
 with your own work, the spindle and the loom.  
 Tell your servants to perform their duties.  
 Talking is men's concern, yes, every man's,  
 but especially mine, since in this house  
 I'm the one in charge.”

Astonished at his speech,

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<sup>1</sup>*Danaans*: Another name for the Greeks.

Penelope went back up to her own chambers, 300  
 keeping her son's prudent words lodged in her heart.  
 With her attendant women she climbed up the stairs,  
 went to her rooms, and there wept for Odysseus,  
 her dear husband, until gleaming-eyed Athena  
 cast sleep upon her eyelids.

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

“You suitors of my mother, who display 310  
 such shameless arrogance, let us for now  
 enjoy our banquet, but no more shouting,  
 for it's grand to listen to a singer  
 as fine as this—his voice is like a god's.  
 But in the morning let us all assemble,  
 sit down for a meeting, so I can speak  
 and tell you firmly to depart my home.  
 Prepare your feasts elsewhere, ones that eat up  
 your own possessions, moving house to house.  
 If you think it's better and would prefer 320  
 that one man's livelihood should be consumed  
 without paying anything, I'll call on  
 the immortal gods to see if mighty Zeus  
 will bring about an act of retribution.  
 And if you are destroyed inside my home,  
 you will not be avenged.”

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

“Telemachus, the gods themselves,  
 it seems, are teaching you to be a braggart 330  
 and give rash speeches. I do hope that Zeus,  
 the son of Cronos, does not make you king  
 of this island Ithaca, even though  
 it is your father's legacy to you.”

The suitors  
 then switched to dancing and to singing lovely songs.

They entertained themselves until dark evening fell.  
Then each of them retired to his own house to sleep.

Telemachus moved up to where his room was built  
high in the splendid courtyard, with a spacious view,  
his mind much preoccupied on his way to bed.  
Accompanying him, quick-minded Eurycleia 340  
held two flaming torches. She was Ops's daughter.  
Of all the female household slaves she was the one  
who loved him most, for she had nursed him as a child.  
He opened the doors of the well-constructed room,  
sat down on the bed, and pulled off his soft tunic,  
gave it to the wise old woman, who smoothed it out,  
and folded it, then hung the tunic on a peg  
beside the corded bedstead. Then she left the room,  
closing the door by pulling its silver handle.  
Telemachus lay there all night long, warmly wrapped 350  
with sheep's wool, his mind reflecting on the journey  
which Athena had earlier proposed to him.

BOOK TWO  
TELEMACHUS PREPARES FOR HIS VOYAGE

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
Odysseus' dear son jumped out of bed and dressed.  
He laced up lovely sandals on his shining feet  
and carried a sharp sword hanging from his shoulders.

At once he asked the loud-voiced heralds to summon  
all the long-haired Achaeans to an assembly.  
They issued the call, and the Achaeans answered,  
gathering quickly. When the assembly had convened,  
Telemachus joined the meeting. Among the men,  
heroic Aegyptius was the first to speak, 10  
an old man stooped with age.

“You men of Ithaca,  
pay attention to what I have to say.  
We have not held a general meeting  
or assembly since the day Odysseus  
sailed from here in his hollow ships. What man  
has made us gather now? What's his reason?  
Has he heard some news about the army

and will give us details of its journey home,  
 or is it some other public business  
 he will bring up and talk to us about?" 20

Odysseus's dear son Telemachus then spoke,  
 talking to Aegyptius first of all:

"Old man,  
 the one who called the people to this meeting  
 is not far off, as you will quickly learn.  
 I did. For I'm a man who suffers more  
 than other men. But I have no reports  
 of our returning army, no details  
 I've just heard myself to pass on to you,  
 nor is there any other public business  
 I will mention or discuss. The issue now 30  
 is my own need, for on my household here  
 troubles have fallen in a double sense.  
 First, my noble father's perished, the man  
 who was once your king and my kind father.  
 And then there's an even greater problem,  
 which will quickly and completely shatter  
 this entire house, and my whole livelihood  
 will be destroyed. These suitors, the dear sons  
 of those men here with most nobility,  
 are pestering my mother against her will. 40  
 They don't want to journey to her father,  
 Icarius, in his home, where he himself  
 could arrange a bride price for his daughter  
 and give her to the man he feels he likes,  
 the one who pleases him the most. Instead,  
 they hang around our house, day after day,  
 slaughtering oxen, well fed goats, and sheep.  
 They keep on feasting, drinking gleaming wine  
 without restraint, and they consume so much.  
 My home is being demolished in a way 50  
 that is not right. You men should be ashamed."

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

“Telemachus you boaster, your spirit  
 is too unrestrained. How you carry on,  
 trying to shame us, since you so desire  
 the blame should rest on us. But in your case, 60  
 Achaean suitors aren’t the guilty ones.  
 Your own dear mother is, who understands  
 how to use deceit. It’s been three years now—  
 and soon it will be four—since she began  
 to deceive the hearts in our Achaean chests.  
 She gives hope to each of us, makes promises  
 to everyone, and sends out messages.  
 But her intent is different. In her mind  
 she has thought up another stratagem.  
 She had a large loom set up in her rooms 70  
 and started weaving something very big,  
 with thread that was quite thin. She said to us:

‘Young men, those of you who are my suitors,  
 since Odysseus is now dead, you must wait,  
 although you are all keen for me to marry,  
 till I complete this cloak—for if I don’t,  
 my weaving would be wasted and in vain.  
 It is a shroud for warrior Laertes,  
 for the day a lethal Fate will strike him.<sup>1</sup>  
 Then none of the Achaean women here 80  
 will be annoyed with me because a man  
 who acquired so many rich possessions  
 would lie without a shroud.’

That’s what she said.  
 And our proud hearts agreed. And so each day  
 she wove at her great loom, but every night  
 she set up torches and pulled the work apart.  
 Three years she fooled Achaeans with this trick.  
 They trusted her. But as the seasons passed,  
 the fourth year came. Then one of her women  
 who knew all the details spoke about them, 90  
 and we caught her undoing her lovely work.  
 So then we forced her to complete the shroud  
 against her will. The suitors now say this,

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<sup>1</sup>*Laertes*: Odysseus’s aging father, who lives alone on his farm grieving his son’s presumed death; *lethal Fate*: The life of a mortal was often depicted as a thread, woven by the three Fates: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Atropos was responsible for cutting the thread, thus determining the length and end of one’s life.

so you, deep in your heart, will understand  
 and all Achaeans know—send your mother back.  
 Tell her she must marry whichever man  
 her father tells her and who pleases her.  
 But we are not returning to our lands,  
 or someplace else, not until she marries  
 an Achaean man of her own choosing.” 100

Prudent Telemachus then said in reply:

“Antinous, there’s no way I will dismiss  
 out of this house against her will the one  
 who bore and nursed me. As for my father,  
 he’s in a distant land, alive or dead.  
 It would be hard for me to compensate  
 Icarius with a suitable amount,  
 as I would have to do, if I sent her back.  
 If I did not pay him, then her father  
 would treat me badly, and some deity 110  
 would send other troubles, since my mother,  
 as she went from this house, would call upon  
 the dreaded Furies.<sup>1</sup> Men would blame me, too.  
 That’s why I’ll never issue such an order.  
 Just give me a swift ship and twenty men,  
 so I can make a journey and return  
 to various places, to sandy Pylos,  
 then to Sparta, to see if I can find  
 some news about my father’s voyage home.  
 If I hear my father is still living 120  
 and returning home, I could hold out here  
 for one more year, although it’s hard for me.  
 If I learn he’s dead and gone, I’ll come back  
 to my dear native land, build him a tomb,  
 and there perform as many funeral rites  
 as are appropriate. And after that,  
 I will agree—she must choose a husband.”

Telemachus said this and soon dissolved the meeting.  
 The men dispersed, each one going to his own house.  
 Telemachus walked away, along the ocean shore. 130  
 There, once he had washed his hands in gray salt water,

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<sup>1</sup>*Furies*: Three vengeful goddesses of Greek mythology who pursue and punish those who break natural laws or commit unavenged crimes, especially those within the family.

to Athena he addressed this prayer:

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

As he said this prayer, Athena appeared to him, 140  
looking and sounding just like Mentor.<sup>1</sup> She spoke out—  
her words had wings:

“You must not delay  
that trip you wish to make. I am a friend  
of your father’s house, so much so that I  
will furnish a fast ship for you and come  
in person with you. Now you must go home.  
Mingle with the suitors. I’ll go through the town  
and quickly round up a group of comrades,  
all volunteers. In sea-girt Ithaca,  
I’ll choose from the many ships, new and old, 150  
the finest one for you, and when that ship  
has been made ready and is fit to sail,  
we’ll launch it out into the wine-dark sea.”

*[Telemachus goes down into the storage rooms of the palace and instructs Euryycleia to get some supplies ready for his voyage. He swears her to secrecy.]*

Telemachus went up into the dining hall,  
once more mingling in the company of suitors.

Then goddess Athena with the glittering eyes  
thought of something else. Looking like Telemachus,  
she roamed throughout the city. To every man  
Athena met she issued the same instructions,  
telling them to meet by the fast ship that evening. 160  
Next, she asked Noemon, fine son of Phronius,  
for a swift ship, and he was happy to oblige.  
Then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.

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<sup>1</sup>*Mentor*: Steward of Odysseus’s household, an old companion of Odysseus.

Athena dragged the fast ship down into the sea  
and stocked it with supplies, all the materials  
well-decked boats have stowed on board, and moved the ship  
to the harbour's outer edge. There they assembled,  
that group of brave companions. Goddess Athena  
filled them with new spirit, renewing each man's heart.

Then bright-eyed Athena ordered Telemachus 170  
to come outside, by the entrance to the spacious hall.  
In her voice and form she resembled Mentor:

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

With these words, Pallas Athena  
quickly led the way, and Telemachus followed.  
Then, with Athena going on board ahead of him,  
Telemachus climbed in, too. She sat in the stern. 180  
Telemachus sat right beside her, as the men  
untied the stern ropes, then clambered on board the ship,  
each of them moving to a place beside an oar.  
Bright-eyed Athena arranged a fair breeze for them,  
a strong West Wind blowing across the wine-dark sea.  
As the ship sliced through the swell on its way forward,  
around the bow began the great song of the waves.  
Then all night long and well beyond the sunrise,  
their ship continued sailing on its journey.

BOOK THREE  
TELEMACHUS VISITS NESTOR IN PYLOS

*[Telemachus and his crew reach Pylos and are welcomed and entertained by Nestor, king of Pylos; Nestor provides a chariot for Telemachus to journey to Sparta and sends his son with him on the trip.]*

BOOK FOUR  
THE SUITORS PLAN TO KILL TELEMACHUS

*[Telemachus and Peisistratus, Nestor's son, arrive at Menelaus's home in Sparta, where a feast is prepared for them by Menelaus and Helen. During the dinner, Menelaus and Helen talk about Odysseus at Troy.]*

Then one of the men attending Menelaus,  
faithful Asphaltion, poured water on their hands,  
and they reached for the rich food spread out before them.

Then Helen, Zeus's daughter, thought of something else.<sup>1</sup>  
She quickly dropped into the wine they were enjoying  
a drug that relieved men's pains and irritations,  
making them forget their troubles. A drink of this,  
once mixed in with wine, would guarantee that no man  
would let a tear fall on his cheek for one whole day,  
not even if his mother and his father died, 10  
or if, in his own presence, men brandishing swords  
hacked down his brother or his son, as he looked on.  
Zeus's daughter had effective healing potions,  
like that drug, which she'd obtained from Polydamna,  
wife of Thon, who came from Egypt, where the country,  
so rich in grain, produces the greatest crop of drugs,  
many of which, once dissolved, are beneficial,  
and many poisonous. Each person living there  
is a physician whose knowledge of these potions  
surpasses that of every other human group, 20  
for through their ancestry they stem from Paeon.<sup>2</sup>  
When Helen had stirred in the drug and ordered them  
to serve the wine, she rejoined the conversation  
and spoke up once again:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
whom gods cherish, you sons of noble men—  
since both good and bad are given by Zeus,  
sometimes to one man and, at other times,  
to someone else, for he is capable  
of all things, you should now sit in the hall  
and dine. After that, enjoy your stories. 30  
I'll tell you one I think is suitable.  
I will not speak of, nor could I recite,  
everything about steadfast Odysseus,

<sup>1</sup>*Zeus's daughter*: Helen was the daughter of Zeus and Leda (wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta). She was also Clytaemnestra's twin sister, but Clytaemnestra's father was Tyndareus, not Zeus.

<sup>2</sup>*Paeon*: god of healing, who knows all the medicinal remedies available for human ills.

all hardships he went through. But there's that time  
 when you Achaeans were in such distress  
 and that strong man endured and did so much—  
 right in homeland of those Trojans, too!  
 With savage blows he battered his own body,  
 threw a ragged garment on his shoulders, 40  
 so he looked like a slave, and then snuck in,  
 along the broad streets of that hostile town.  
 He hid his own identity, pretending  
 he was someone else, a beggar—something  
 he'd never been among Achaean ships—  
 and then went in the city. No Trojan there  
 suspected him. I was the only one  
 who recognized him, in spite of his disguise  
 I questioned him, but his skill in deception  
 made him elusive. Still, when I'd bathed him,  
 rubbed him with oil, and helped him to get dressed— 50  
 once I'd sworn a solemn oath not to reveal  
 to any Trojans that he was Odysseus  
 until he reached the swift ships and the huts—  
 he told me all about the Achaean plans.  
 Then his long sword slaughtered many Trojans,  
 and he returned, bringing the Achaeans,  
 a full report on Troy. Trojan women  
 began to cry aloud, but I was glad.  
 My heart by then had changed—it now desired  
 to go back. I was sorry for that blindness 60  
 Aphrodite brought, when she led me there,  
 far from my own land, abandoning my child,  
 my bridal room, and my own husband, too,  
 who lacked nothing in good looks or wisdom.”<sup>1</sup>

In reply to Helen, fair-haired Menelaus said:

“Yes, indeed, dear wife, everything you say  
 is true. Before now, I've come to understand  
 the minds and plans of many warriors.  
 I've roamed many lands, but these eyes of mine  
 have never seen a man to match Odysseus. 70  
 How I loved his steadfast heart! What about  
 the things that forceful man endured and did

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<sup>1</sup>*Aphrodite*: daughter of Zeus, goddess of sexual desire and beauty.

in the wooden horse?<sup>1</sup> Achaea's finest men—  
 all of us—were crouching in it, carrying  
 a lethal fate to Trojans. Then you came,  
 perhaps instructed by some god who wished  
 to give a glorious triumph to the Trojans.  
 And, where you walked, noble Deiphobus  
 followed, too.<sup>2</sup> You circled around three times,  
 feeling that hollow trap. Your voice called out, 80  
 naming the best men among Danaans,  
 and you spoke up exactly like the voice  
 of each man's Achaeian wife. I was there,  
 sitting with Odysseus in the middle,  
 and with Tydeus's son. We heard you call.  
 Two of us—Diomedes and myself—  
 were eager to get up and charge outside  
 or else to answer back from where we sat,  
 inside the horse.<sup>3</sup> But Odysseus stopped us—  
 we wished to speak, but he held us in check. 90  
 All the other sons of the Achaeians  
 kept their mouths shut, except for Anticlus,  
 the only one about to raise his voice  
 and answer you. Odysseus clapped his hand  
 firmly on Anticlus's mouth and held him,  
 thus rescuing all Achaeians. He kept  
 his grip on Anticlus until Athena  
 escorted you away.”

Then shrewd Telemachus replied:

“Menelaus, son of Atreus, loved by Zeus,  
 leader of your people, that incident 100  
 is more painful still—it could not save him  
 from bitter death, not even if the heart

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<sup>1</sup>*wooden horse*: This is the earliest surviving mention of the famous story of the Trojan Horse. The Greek army, having failed to capture Troy after ten years of fighting, finally resorted to a trick. They constructed a huge, hollow wooden horse and left it with warriors hidden inside near the gates of the city. Then the main army boarded ship and apparently sailed away. The Trojans debated what to do with the horse and finally dragged it inside the city. At night, the Greek warriors climbed down from the horse and opened the city gates, so that the main Greek army, which had returned, could ransack the city. The story is referred to in more detail in Book 8.

<sup>2</sup>*Deiphobus*: a prince of Troy, son of king Priam. After Paris was killed in the war, Helen became the wife of Deiphobus. He was killed in the sack of Troy by Menelaus or, in some accounts, by Helen herself.

<sup>3</sup>*Tydeus's son*: Diomedes, one of the younger warrior leaders in the Achaean army (and an important character in the *Iliad*), with Menelaus and others inside the wooden horse.

inside his chest had been made of iron.  
 But come, send us off to bed, so sweet Sleep  
 can bring us joy, once we lie down to rest.”<sup>1</sup>

Once Telemachus spoke, Helen told her servants  
 to set up mattresses within the corridor  
 and spread out lovely purple blankets over them,  
 with rugs on top, and over these some woollen cloaks.  
 The women left the hall with torches in their hands 110  
 and arranged the beds. A herald led the guests away.  
 And so they slept there in the palace vestibule,  
 prince Telemachus and Nestor’s noble son.  
 The son of Atreus slept in an inner room,  
 inside the high-roofed home, with long-robed Helen,  
 goddess among women, lying there beside him.

*[The next day, Menelaus gives a long account of his travels in Egypt, especially his adventures with the Old Man of the Sea, the death of the lesser Ajax, and the death of Agamemnon; Menelaus invites Telemachus to stay for longer, but Telemachus declines.]*

Meanwhile, back in Telemachus’s Ithaca,  
 the suitors gathered outside Odysseus’s home,  
 enjoying themselves by throwing spears and discus  
 on level ground in front—with all the arrogance 120  
 they usually displayed. The two men who led them,  
 Antinous and Eurymachus, a handsome man,  
 were sitting there—by far the noblest of the suitors.  
 Noemon, Phronius’s son, came up to them  
 to question Antinous. He said:

“Antinous,  
 in our hearts do we truly know or not  
 the day Telemachus is coming back  
 from sandy Pylos? He left Ithaca,  
 taking a ship of mine which I now need  
 to make the trip across to spacious Elis.” 130

He finished. In their hearts the suitors were amazed.  
 They had no inkling that Telemachus had gone  
 to Pylos, land of Neleus, and still believed  
 he was visiting the flocks on his estates.

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<sup>1</sup>The word *sleep* is capitalized when it refers to the god of sleep and is not capitalized when it refers to the state of sleeping.

Antinous, son of Eupheithes, then spoke to them.  
He was extremely angry, black heart filled with rage,  
his flashing eyes a fiery blaze:

“Here’s trouble.

In his overbearing way Telemachus,  
with this voyage of his, has now achieved  
significant success. And we believed 140  
he would never see it through. So come now,  
give me a swift ship and twenty comrades,  
so I can watch for him and set an ambush,  
as he navigates his passage through the strait  
dividing Ithaca from rugged Samos,  
and bring this trip searching for his father  
to a dismal end.”

Antinous picked out his men,  
twenty of the best. They went down to the shore  
and dragged a swift black ship out into deep water.  
The suitors climbed aboard the ship and sailed away, 150  
on their voyage across the sea, minds fully bent  
on slaughtering Telemachus. Well out to sea,  
half way between Ithaca and rugged Samos,  
lies rocky Asteris.<sup>1</sup> The island is not large,  
but ships can moor there in a place with openings  
in both directions. The Achaeans waited there  
and organized their ambush for Telemachus.

BOOK FIVE  
ODYSSEUS LEAVES CALYPSO’S ISLAND

As Dawn stirred from her bed beside lord Tithonus,  
bringing light to eternal gods and mortal men,  
the gods were sitting in assembly, among them  
high-thundering Zeus, whose power is supreme.<sup>2</sup>  
Athena was reminding them of all the stories  
of Odysseus’s troubles—she was concerned for him  
as he passed his days in nymph Calypso’s home.

“Father Zeus and you other blessed gods  
who live forever, let no sceptred king

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<sup>1</sup>*Samos*: Another name for Same.

<sup>2</sup>*Tithonus*: Husband or lover of the goddess of dawn.

be prudent, kind, or gentle from now on, 10  
 or think about his fate. Let him instead  
 always be cruel and treat men viciously,  
 since no one now has any memory  
 of lord Odysseus, who ruled his people  
 and was a gentle father. Now he lies  
 suffering extreme distress on that island  
 where nymph Calypso lives. She keeps him there  
 by force, and he's unable to sail off.  
 And now some men are setting out to kill  
 the son he loves, as he sails home. The boy 20  
 has gone to gather news about his father,  
 off to sacred Pylos and holy Sparta."

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

"My child,  
 did you not come up with this plan yourself,  
 so that Odysseus, once he made it home,  
 could take out his revenge against those men?  
 As for Telemachus, you should use your skill  
 to get him to his native land unharmed—  
 that's well within your power. The suitors  
 will sail back in their ship without success." 30

Zeus spoke and then instructed Hermes, his dear son:

"Hermes, tell the fair-haired nymph Calypso  
 my firm decision—the brave Odysseus  
 is to get back home. He'll get no guidance  
 from the gods or mortal men, but sail off  
 on a raft of wood well lashed together."

Once Zeus finished speaking, the killer of Argus,  
 his messenger, obeyed him. At once he laced up  
 on his feet those lovely golden ageless sandals  
 which carry him as fast as stormy blasts of wind. 40  
 When he reached the distant island, Hermes rose up,  
 above the violet sea, and moved in onshore,  
 until he came to an enormous cave, the home  
 of the fair-haired nymph Calypso. He found her there,  
 a huge fire blazing in her hearth—from far away  
 the smell of split cedar and burning sandal wood  
 spread across the island. With her enchanting voice

Calypso sang inside the cave, as she moved round,  
 back and forth, before her loom—she was weaving  
 with a golden shuttle.<sup>1</sup> All around her in the cave 50  
 trees were in bloom, alder and sweet-smelling cypress,  
 and poplar, too, with long-winged birds nesting in them—  
 owls, hawks, and chattering sea crows, who spend their time  
 out on the water. A garden vine, fully ripe  
 and loaded with rich grapes, trailed through the hollow cave.  
 From four fountains, close to each other in a row,  
 clear water streamed out in various directions,  
 and all around soft meadows spread out in full bloom  
 with fresh violets and parsley. Even a god,  
 who lives forever, coming there, would be amazed 60  
 to gaze at it, and his heart would fill with pleasure.  
 The killer of Argus, god’s messenger, stood there,  
 marvelling at the sight. But after his spirit  
 had contemplated all these things with wonder,  
 he went inside the spacious cave. And Calypso,  
 that lovely goddess, when she saw him face to face,  
 was not ignorant of who he was, for the gods  
 are not unknown to one another, even though  
 the home of some immortal might be far away.

But Hermes did not find Odysseus in the cave— 70  
 that great-hearted man sat lamenting on the shore,  
 just as before, breaking his heart with tears and groans,  
 full of sorrow, as he looked out on the restless sea  
 and wept. Calypso invited Hermes to sit down  
 on a lustrous shining chair. Then the lovely goddess  
 questioned him:

“Hermes, honored and welcome guest,  
 why have you come here with your golden wand?<sup>2</sup>  
 You have not been a visitor before.  
 Tell me what’s on your mind. My heart desires  
 to perform what you request, if I can, 80  
 and if it’s something fated to be done.”

After this speech, Calypso set out a table

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<sup>1</sup>*Shuttle*: Instrument used in weaving (carrying the weft thread back and forth between the strands of warp thread).

<sup>2</sup>*golden wand*: Hermes is often depicted carrying his staff, the caduceus.

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

“You’re a goddess.  
 Since you’ve questioned me, I’ll tell you the truth.  
 Zeus told me to come here against my will.  
 He says that you have here with you a man 90  
 more unfortunate than all the others  
 who fought nine years around king Priam’s city,  
 which in the tenth year they destroyed and left  
 to get back home.<sup>2</sup> Now Zeus is telling you  
 to send him off as soon as possible.”

The killer of Argus, the gods’ great messenger,  
 said these words and left. The regal nymph Calypso,  
 once she heard Zeus’s message, went away to find  
 great-hearted Odysseus. She met him on the shore,  
 sitting by the sea, his eyes always full of tears, 100  
 because he was squandering his sweet life, mourning  
 for his return. The nymph no longer gave him joy.  
 At night he slept beside her in the hollow cave,  
 as he was forced to do—not of his own free will,  
 though she herself was keen enough. Moving up  
 close beside him, the lovely goddess spoke:

“Poor man,  
 spend no more time grieving on this island,  
 wasting your life away. My heart agrees—  
 the time has come for me to send you off.  
 So come now, cut long timbers with an axe, 110  
 and make a raft, a large one. Build a deck  
 high up on it, so it can carry you  
 across the misty sea. I’ll provision it  
 with all the food and water and red wine  
 you’ll need to satisfy your wants.”

The lovely nymph  
 finished speaking, then quickly led him from the place.

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<sup>1</sup>*ambrosia, then ... red nectar*: Foods of the gods, who do not consume the same foods as mortals.

<sup>2</sup>*Priam’s city*: Troy; Priam, the king of Troy, was killed upon the city’s capture.

Odysseus followed in her footsteps. Man and goddess entered the hollow cave. He sat down in the chair Hermes had just risen from, and the nymph set out all kinds of food to eat and drink, the sort of things mortal human beings consume. She took a seat opposite godlike Odysseus, and her servants placed ambrosia and nectar right beside her. The two of them reached out to take the tasty food spread out in front of them. When they had had their fill of food and drink, beautiful divine Calypso was the first to speak:

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

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

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

through waves and warfare. Let what's yet to come  
be added in with those."

Odysseus finished.

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

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared, 160  
Odysseus quickly put on a cloak and tunic,  
and the nymph dressed in a long white shining robe,  
a lovely lightly woven dress. She gathered tools  
that brave Odysseus would need for his departure,  
handing him a huge axe, well suited to his grip,  
made of two-edged bronze, with a finely crafted shaft  
of handsome olive wood. Next, she provided him  
a polished adze.<sup>1</sup> Then she led him along a path  
down to the edges of the island, where tall trees grew,  
alder, poplar, and pine that reached the upper sky, 170  
well-seasoned, dried-out wood, which could keep him afloat.  
Once she had shown him the location of these trees,  
Calypso, the lovely goddess, returned back home.  
Odysseus then began to cut the wood. He worked  
as quickly as he could and chopped down twenty trees,  
Using his bronze axe, he trimmed and deftly smoothed them,  
then lined them up. Calypso, that lovely goddess,  
brought him an auger, so he could bore the timbers,  
fasten them to one another, and tighten them  
with pins and rope.<sup>2</sup> After that, he set up a mast 180  
with a yardarm fastened to it and then carved out  
a long steering oar to guide the raft. Calypso,  
the enchanting goddess, brought him woven linen  
to make a sail—which he did very skillfully.  
On it he tied bracing ropes and sheets and halyards.<sup>3</sup>  
Then he levered the raft down to the shining sea.

By the fourth day he had completed all this work.  
So on the fifth beautiful Calypso bathed him,  
dressed him in sweet-smelling clothes, and ordered him  
to leave her island. She had stowed on board the raft 190

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<sup>1</sup>adze: Tool used for shaping pieces of wood.

<sup>2</sup>augers: Tools used for making holes in wood.

<sup>3</sup>halyards: Ropes used to raise and lower sails.

a sack full of dark wine and another large one,  
 filled with water, and a sack of food, containing  
 many tasty things for him to eat. She sent him  
 a warm and favouring wind, and lord Odysseus  
 was happy as he set his sails to catch the breeze.  
 He sat beside the steering oar and used his skill  
 to guide the raft. Sleep did not fall across his eyelids,  
 as he watched the constellations—the Pleiades,  
 the late-setting Bootes, as well as the Great Bear,  
 which men call the Wain, always turning in one place, 200  
 keeping watch over Orion—the only star  
 that never takes a bath in Ocean.<sup>1</sup> Calypso,  
 the lovely goddess, had told him to keep this star  
 to his left as he moved across the sea. He sailed  
 for ten days on the water, then for seven more,  
 and on the eighteenth day shadowy hills appeared,  
 where the land of the Phaeacians, like a large shield  
 riding on the misty sea, lay very close to him.

Poseidon watched Odysseus sailing on the sea,  
 and his spirit grew enraged. So he shook his head 210  
 and spoke to his own heart:

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

Poseidon spoke.

Then he drove the clouds together, seized his trident, 220  
 and stirred up the sea. He brought on blasting tempests  
 from every kind of wind, concealing land and sea  
 with gloomy clouds, so darkness fell from heaven.  
 East Wind clashed with South Wind, while West Wind, in a rage,

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<sup>1</sup>*the Great Bear*: a cluster of stars (*Ursa major*) in the night sky (in modern times often called the Plough or the Big Dipper), turning more or less around the same spot in the night sky and, at latitudes of the eastern Mediterranean, never disappearing below the horizon (i.e., never bathing in the ocean); *the Bootes* (Herdsman): the constellation Arcturus.

smashed straight into North Wind, born in the upper sky,  
 pushing a massive wave. Odysseus' knees gave way,  
 his spirit fell, and in great distress he cried out,  
 addressing his great heart:

“I’m facing a disaster!  
 How is all this going to end up for me?  
 I’m afraid everything the goddess said  
 was true, when she told me that out at sea,  
 before I got back to my native land,  
 I’d have my fill of troubles.”

230

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

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

240

So for two days and nights  
 he floated on the ocean waves—his heart was filled  
 with countless thoughts of death. But when the fair-haired Dawn  
 gave rise at last to the third day, the wind died down,  
 the sea grew calm and still. Odysseus was raised up  
 by a large swell, and as he quickly looked ahead,  
 he could see the land close by. He kept swimming on  
 until he reached the mouth of a fair-flowing river,  
 which seemed to him the finest place to go ashore.  
 There were no rocks, and it was sheltered from the wind.  
 Odysseus recognized the river as it flowed  
 and prayed to it deep in his heart. With both knees bent,  
 he let his strong hands fall—the sea had crushed his heart.  
 All his skin was swollen, and water flowed in streams  
 up in his mouth and nose. He lay there out of breath,  
 without a word, hardly moving. Close by the water  
 he found a place with a wide view. So he crept in,

250  
260

beneath two bushes growing from a single stem—  
 one was an olive tree, the other a wild thorn.  
 Athena then poured out sleep across the eyelids  
 covering both his eyes, so he could find relief,  
 a quick respite from his exhausting troubles.

BOOK SIX  
 ODYSSEUS AND NAUSICAA

While much-enduring lord Odysseus rested there,  
 overcome with weariness and sleep, Athena  
 went to the land of the Phaeacians, to their city,  
 into the palace of the king, lord Alcinous,  
 to arrange a journey home for brave Odysseus.  
 She moved into a wonderfully furnished room  
 where a young girl slept, like an immortal goddess  
 in form and loveliness. She was Nausicaa,  
 child of great-hearted Alcinous. Like a wind gust,  
 Athena slipped over to the young girl's bedside, 10  
 stood there beside her head, and then spoke to her.  
 Her appearance changed to look like Dymas's daughter—  
 a young girl of the same age as Nausicaa,  
 whose heart was well disposed to her. In that disguise,  
 bright-eyed Athena spoke out and said:

“Nausicaa,  
 how did your mother bear a girl so careless?  
 Your fine clothes are lying here untended,  
 and soon enough you'll have your wedding day,  
 when you must dress up in expensive robes  
 and give them to your wedding escort, too. 20  
 You know it's things like these that help to make  
 a worthy reputation with our people  
 and please your honoured mother and your father.  
 Come, at daybreak let's wash out the clothing.  
 Ask your noble father to provide you,  
 this morning early, a wagon and mules,  
 so you can carry the bright coverlets,  
 the robes and sashes. That would be better  
 than going on foot, because the washing tubs  
 are located some distance from the town.” 30

When rose-coloured Dawn arrived on her golden throne

and woke fair-robed Nausicaa, she was curious  
to learn about her dream. So she sped through the house.  
Nausicaa went and stood beside her father  
and spoke to him:

“Dear father, can you prepare  
a high wagon with sturdy wheels for me,  
so I can carry my fine clothing out  
and wash it in the river? It’s lying here  
all dirty. And it’s appropriate for you  
to wear fresh-washed garments on your person  
when you’re with our leading men in council. 40  
You have five dear sons living in your home—  
two are married, but three are now young men  
still unattached, and they always require  
fresh-washed clothing when they go out dancing.  
All these are matters I must think about.”

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

“I have no objection, 50  
my dear child, to providing mules for you,  
or any other things. Go on your way.  
Slaves will get a four-wheeled wagon ready  
with a high box framed on top.”

Once he said this,  
he called out to his slaves, and they did what he asked.  
They prepared a smooth-running wagon made for mules,  
led up the animals, and then yoked them to it.  
Nausicaa brought her fine clothing from her room.  
She placed it in the polished wagon. Her mother  
loaded on a box with all sorts of tempting food. 60  
She put in delicacies, too, and poured some wine  
into a goat skin. The girl climbed on the wagon.  
With a clatter of hooves, the mules moved quickly off,  
carrying clothing and the girl, not by herself,  
for she took her attendant girls with her, as well.

When they reached the stream of the fair-flowing river,  
the girls gathered up the clothing from the wagon,

carried it in their arms down to the murky stream,  
 and then trampled it inside the washing trenches,  
 each trying to work more quickly than the others. 70  
 Once they had washed the clothes and scrubbed off all the stains,  
 they laid the laundry out in rows along the shore,  
 in a place where waves which beat upon the coastline  
 had washed the pebbles clean. When they had bathed themselves  
 and rubbed their bodies well with oil, they ate a meal  
 beside the river mouth, waiting for clothes to dry  
 in the sun's warm rays. Once they had finished eating,  
 the girl and her attendants took their head scarves off  
 to play catch with a ball, and white-armed Nausicaa  
 led them in song. But when the princess threw the ball 80  
 to one of those attendants with her, she missed the girl,  
 and it landed in the deep and swirling river.  
 They gave a sharp cry, rousing Odysseus from sleep.  
 So he sat upright, thinking in his heart and mind:

“Here's trouble! In this country I have reached,  
 what are the people like? Are they violent  
 and untamed, without a sense of justice?  
 Or are they kind to strangers? In their minds  
 do they fear the gods? Some young women's shouts  
 rang out around me—nymphs who live along 90  
 steep mountain peaks and by the river springs  
 and grassy meadows. Could I somehow be  
 near men with human speech? Well, come on then,  
 I'm going to have to find out for myself.”

With these words, Odysseus crept out of the thicket.  
 In his strong hands, he snapped off from the bushes  
 a leafy branch to hold across him and conceal  
 his naked groin. Then he emerged, moving just like  
 a mountain lion which relies on its own strength—  
 though hammered by the rain and wind, it creeps ahead, 100  
 its two eyes burning, coming in among the herd  
 of sheep or cattle, or else stalking a wild deer—  
 his belly tells him to move in against the flocks,  
 even within a well-built farm. That's how Odysseus  
 was making his way out to face those fair-haired girls,  
 although he was stark naked. He was in distress,  
 but, caked with brine, he was a fearful sight to them,  
 and they ran off in fear and crouched down here and there  
 among the jutting dunes of sand. The only one

who did not rush away was Alcinous's daughter. 110  
 So he quickly used his cunning and spoke to her  
 with soothing language:

“O you divine queen,  
 I come here as a suppliant to you.  
 Are you a goddess or a mortal being?  
 If you're one of the gods who hold wide heaven,  
 I think you most resemble Artemis,  
 daughter of great Zeus, in your loveliness,  
 your stature, and your shape. If you're human,  
 one of those mortals living on the earth,  
 your father and your mother are thrice-blessed, 120  
 and thrice-blessed your brothers, too. In their hearts  
 they must glow with pleasure for you always,  
 when they see a child like you moving up  
 into the dance. But the happiest heart,  
 more so than all the rest, belongs to him  
 who with his wedding gifts will lead you home.  
 These eyes of mine have never gazed upon  
 anyone like you—either man or woman.  
 As I look at you, I am gripped with wonder.  
 In Delos once I saw something like this— 130  
 a youthful palm-tree sapling growing up  
 beside Apollo's altar. I'd gone there,  
 with many others in my company,  
 on a journey where Fate had planned for me  
 so many troubles. But when I saw that,  
 my heart looked on a long time quite astonished—  
 I'd never noticed such a lovely tree  
 springing from the earth. And, lady, that's how  
 I am amazed at you, lost in wonder,  
 and very much afraid to clasp your knee.<sup>1</sup> 140  
 But great distress has overtaken me.  
 Yesterday, my twentieth day afloat,  
 I escaped the wine-dark sea. Before that,  
 waves and swift-driving storm winds carried me  
 from Ogygia island. And now a god  
 has tossed me on shore here, so that somehow  
 I'll suffer hardships in this place as well.  
 For I don't think my problems will end now.  
 Before that day, there are still many more

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<sup>1</sup>*your knee*: Grasping someone's knee was a formal gesture made when requesting a great favour.

the gods will bring about. But, divine queen, 150  
 have pity. You're the first one I've approached,  
 after so much grief—and I do not know  
 any people here, none of those who hold  
 the city and its land. Show me the town.  
 Give me some rag to throw around myself,  
 perhaps some wrapping you brought for the clothes  
 when you came here. As for you, may gods grant  
 everything your heart desires—may they give  
 a husband, home, and mutual harmony,  
 a noble gift—there is nothing better 160  
 or a stronger bond than when man and wife  
 live in a home sharing each other's thoughts.  
 That brings such pain upon their enemies  
 and such delight to those who wish them well.”

White-armed Nausicaa then answered him and said:

“Stranger, you don't seem to be a wicked man,  
 or foolish. Olympian Zeus himself  
 gives happiness to bad and worthy men,  
 each one receiving just what Zeus desires.  
 But now you have reached our land and city, 170  
 you'll not lack clothes or any other thing  
 we owe a hard-pressed suppliant we meet.  
 I'll show the town to you, and I'll tell you  
 the name our country bears—the Phaeacians  
 own this city and this land.<sup>1</sup> As for me,  
 I am the daughter of brave Alcinous—  
 Phaeacian power and strength depend on him.”

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

“Stand up, you girls,  
 Have you run off because you've seen a man? 180  
 Surely you don't think he is our enemy?  
 So, my girls, give this stranger food and drink.  
 Then bathe him in the river, in a place  
 which offers him some shelter from the wind.”  
 Nausicaa finished. They stood up and called out

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

to one another. They took Odysseus aside,  
 to a sheltered spot, following what Nausicaa,  
 daughter of great-hearted Alcinous, had ordered.  
 They set out clothing for him, a cloak and tunic,  
 and gave him a gold flask full of smooth olive oil. 190  
 They told him to bathe there in the flowing river.  
 When he'd washed himself all over and rubbed on oil,  
 he put on clothes the unmarried girl had given.  
 Then Odysseus went to sit down some distance off,  
 beside the sea shore, glowing with charm and beauty.  
 The young girls gazed at him in wonder. They set out  
 food and drink before resourceful lord Odysseus.  
 He ate and drank voraciously—much time had passed  
 since he last tasted food. Then white-armed Nausicaa  
 thought of something else. She folded up the clothing, 200  
 stowed it in the handsome wagon, and harnessed up  
 the team of strong-hooved mules. She climbed up by herself.  
 and called out to Odysseus, saying these words to him:

“Get up now, stranger, and go to the town.  
 I'll show you the way to my wise father's house,  
 where, I assure you, you will get to meet  
 all the finest of Phaeacians. You seem  
 to me to have good sense, so act as follows—  
 while we are moving through the countryside,  
 past men's farms, walk fast with my attendants 210  
 behind the mules and wagon. I'll lead the way.  
 You'll walk past a fine grove to Athena—  
 it's near the road, a clump of poplar trees.  
 There's a fountain, with meadows all around.  
 My father has a fertile vineyard there  
 and some land, too, within shouting distance  
 of the town. Sit down there, and wait a while,  
 as we move into the city and reach  
 my father's house. When we've had time enough  
 to get back home, go into the city 220  
 of the Phaeacians and inquire about  
 my father's house, great-hearted Alcinous.  
 Once past the courtyard and inside the house,  
 move through the great hall quickly till you reach  
 my mother, Arete, seated by the fire,  
 against a pillar, spinning purple yarn—  
 a marvellous sight. Servants sit behind her.  
 If her heart and mind are well-disposed to you,

then there is hope you'll see your friends and reach  
your well-built house and your own native land." 230

Saying this, Nausicaa cracked the shining whip,  
struck the mules, and quickly left the flowing river.  
The wagon moved briskly forward at a rapid pace.  
Using her judgment with the whip, she drove ahead,  
so Odysseus and her servants could keep up on foot.  
Just at sunset, they reached the celebrated grove,  
sacred to Athena. Odysseus sat down there  
and quickly made a prayer to great Zeus's daughter.

BOOK SEVEN  
ODYSSEUS AT THE COURT OF ALCINOUS IN PHAEACIA

Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, prayed there,  
while two strong mules took Nausicaa to her home.  
Then Odysseus got up and set off for the town,  
making his way to Alcinous's splendid house.  
The Phaeacians, men celebrated for their ships,  
did not see him in their midst as he made his way  
into the city. Athena, a fearful goddess,  
would not permit that. In her heart she cared for him,  
so she cast around him a mysterious mist.

Above the high-vaulted home of brave Alcinous 10  
there was a radiance, as if from sun or moon.  
Bronze walls extended out well beyond the threshold  
in various directions to the inner rooms.  
They had a blue enamel cornice. Golden doors  
blocked the way into the well-constructed palace.  
The bronze threshold had silver doorposts set inside  
and a silver lintel. The handles were of gold.  
On both sides of the door stood gold and silver dogs,  
ageless, immortal creatures who would not grow old,  
created by Hephaestus's matchless artistry, 20  
to guard the palace of great-hearted Alcinous.<sup>1</sup>  
Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, stood there  
and gazed around. When his heart had marvelled at it,  
he moved quickly past the threshold into the house.  
Long-suffering Odysseus, still enclosed in mist,

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

the thick covering poured round him by Athena,  
 went through the hall until he came to Arete  
 and king Alcinous. With both his arms Odysseus  
 embraced the knees of Arete—at that moment  
 the miraculous mist dissolved away from him. 30  
 All the Phaeacians in the palace were struck dumb,  
 as they gazed upon the man, overcome with wonder  
 at the sight. Odysseus then made this entreaty:

“Arete, daughter of godlike Rhexenor,  
 I’ve come to you and to your husband here,  
 to your knees, in supplication to you—  
 a man who has undergone much hardship—  
 and to those feasting here. May gods grant them  
 happiness in life. May they each pass on  
 riches in their homes to all their children, 40  
 and noble honours given by the people.  
 Please rouse yourself to help me travel home,  
 to get back quickly to my native soil.  
 For a long time I have been in great distress  
 and far away from friends.”

When he heard these words,  
 courageous, kingly Alcinous stretched out his hand,  
 reaching for Odysseus, that wise and crafty man,  
 raised him from the hearth, and invited him to sit.  
 Then royal Alcinous called out to his herald:

“Pontonous, prepare wine in the mixing bowl, 50  
 then serve it to all people in the hall,  
 so we may pour libations out to Zeus,  
 who loves lightning, for he accompanies  
 all pious suppliants.”<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>*prepare wine ... mixing bowl*: I.e., mix it with water. In ancient Greece wine was almost always watered down;  
*libations*: Liquid offerings to the gods.

“You Phaeacian counsellors and leaders,  
 pay attention to me, so I can say 60  
 the things the heart here in my chest commands.  
 Now that all of you have finished eating,  
 return back to your homes and get some rest.  
 In the morning we’ll summon an assembly  
 with more elders, entertain this stranger  
 here in our home, and also sacrifice  
 choice offerings to the gods. After that,  
 we’ll think about how we can send him off,  
 so that this stranger, with us escorting him,  
 without further pain or effort, may reach 70  
 his native home, no matter how far distant.  
 Meanwhile, he’ll not suffer harm or trouble,  
 not before he sets foot on his own land.  
 After that, he’ll undergo all those things  
 Destiny and the dreaded spinning Fates  
 spun in the thread for him when he was born,  
 when his mother gave him birth. However,  
 if he’s a deathless one come down from heaven,  
 then gods are planning something different.  
 So far they’ve always shown themselves to us 80  
 in their true form, when we offer up to them  
 a splendid sacrifice. They dine with us,  
 sitting in the very chairs we use.  
 If someone travelling all by himself  
 meets them, they don’t hide their true identity,  
 because we are close relatives of theirs,  
 like Cyclopes and wild tribes of Giants.”<sup>1</sup>

Resourceful Odysseus then answered Alcinous:

“Alcinous, you should not concern yourself  
 about what you’ve just said—for I’m not like 90  
 the immortal gods who hold wide heaven,  
 not in form or shape. I’m like mortal men.  
 Indeed, I could recount a longer story—  
 all those hardships I have had to suffer  
 from the gods. But let me eat my dinner,

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<sup>1</sup>*Cyclopes*: divinely born creatures of ambiguous origin, who supported Zeus in his struggle against his father, Cronos; they are famous for having only one eye in their foreheads and for being gigantic, aggressive, and uncivilized; *wild tribes of Giants*: divine, often monstrous, creatures created from the castration of Uranus, the first ruling god. They fought against Zeus and were imprisoned deep in Tartarus (the lowest part of the Underworld).

though I'm in great distress. For there's nothing  
 more shameless than an unhappy stomach,  
 which bids a man to think about its needs,  
 even if he's sad or many troubles  
 sit heavy on his heart, the way my spirit 100  
 is now full of sorrow, yet my belly  
 is always telling me to eat and drink,  
 forgetting everything I've had to bear,  
 and forcing me to gorge myself with food.  
 But when Dawn appears, you can stir yourselves  
 to set me in my miserable state  
 back on my own soil, for all I've suffered.  
 If I can see my goods again, my slaves,  
 my large and high-roofed home, then let life end."

Once Odysseus finished, they all approved his words, 110  
 and, because he'd spoken well and to the point,  
 agreed their guest should be escorted on his way.

*[Odysseus tells Alcinous and Arete the story of his voyage from Calypso's island to Phaeacia  
 and of his treatment by Nausicaa.]*

BOOK EIGHT  
 ODYSSEUS IS ENTERTAINED IN PHAEACIA

The following day king Alcinous addressed them all  
 and said to the Phaeacians:

"Listen to me,  
 you Phaeacian counsellors and leaders.  
 I'll tell you what the heart in my chest says.  
 This stranger here, a man I do not know,  
 a wanderer, has travelled to my house.  
 He's asking to be sent away back home  
 and wishes us to grant him his request.  
 So let us act as we have done before  
 and assist him with his journey. No man 10  
 arriving at my palace stays there long  
 grieving because he cannot get back home."

Alcinous spoke and led them out. The sceptred kings  
 came after him. Meanwhile, a herald went to find  
 the godlike singer. Fifty-two hand-picked young men

went off, as Alcinous had ordered, to the shore,  
 beside the restless sea. Once they reached their boat,  
 they dragged the black ship out to deeper water,  
 set the mast and sails in place inside the vessel,  
 lashed the rowing oars onto their leather pivots, 20  
 then hoisted the white sail. That done, they moored the ship  
 well out to sea and then returned to the great home  
 of their wise king. Hallways, corridors, and courtyards  
 were full of people gathering—a massive crowd,  
 young and old. On their behalf Alcinous slaughtered  
 eight white-tusked boars, two shambling oxen, and twelve sheep.  
 These carcasses they skinned and dressed and then prepared  
 a splendid banquet. Meanwhile, the herald entered  
 with the loyal singer, a man loved by the Muse  
 above all others—she gave him both bad and good, 30  
 for she destroyed his eyes, but then bestowed on him  
 the gift of pleasing song. The herald, Pontonous,  
 brought in a silver-studded chair where he could sit.

After they enjoyed their heart's fill of food and drink,  
 the minstrel Demodocus, inspired by the Muse,  
 sang about the glorious deeds of warriors,  
 that story whose fame had climbed to spacious heaven,  
 about Odysseus and Achilles, son of Peleus,  
 when, at a lavish feast in honour of the gods,  
 they fought each other in ferocious argument.<sup>1</sup> 40

*[The group of noble Phaeacians goes outside, and the young men take part in a number of athletic competitions. Odysseus amazes them all with his skill in throwing the discus. After the games, Alcinous calls for a large gathering where the Phaeacians can demonstrate their dancing and music.]*

Nine officials chosen from among the people,  
 men who organized each detail of their meetings,  
 stood up, smoothed off a dancing space, and then marked out  
 a fair and spacious circle. The herald came up,  
 carrying the clear-toned lyre for Demodocus,  
 who then moved to the centre. Around the singer  
 stood boys in the first bloom of youth, skillful dancers,  
 whose feet then struck the consecrated dancing ground.

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<sup>1</sup>*in ferocious argument*: These lines refer to a famous argument between Odysseus and Achilles, the finest of the Achaean warriors, about the best tactics to use against the Trojans. That Demodocus sings about the Trojan War reinforces the claim that this image of the blind singer is a self-portrait of Homer.

In his heart, Odysseus was amazed. He marvelled  
 how rapidly those young boys could move their dancing feet. 50

The minstrel struck the opening chords to his sweet song—  
 how war god Ares loved the fair-crowned Aphrodite,  
 how in Hephaestus’s own home house they first had sex  
 in secret, and how Ares gave her many gifts,  
 while he disgraced the marriage bed of lord Hephaestus.<sup>1</sup>  
 But sun god Helios observed them making love  
 and came at once to tell Hephaestus. When he heard  
 the unwelcome news, the lame god went to his forge,  
 turning over deep in his heart a devious scheme.  
 He set up his enormous anvil on its block 60  
 and forged a net no one could ever break or loosen,  
 so they would have to stay immobile where they were.  
 When, in his rage, he had made that snare for Ares,  
 he went into the room which housed his marriage bed,  
 anchored the metal netting around the bed posts,  
 and then hung loops of it from roof beams high above,  
 as fine as spiders’ webs, impossible to see,  
 even for a blessed god—that’s how skillfully  
 he made that net. Once he had set the snare in place  
 around the bed, he announced a trip to Lemnos, 70  
 that well-built citadel, his favourite place by far  
 of all the lands on earth. Ares of the Golden Reins,  
 who maintained a constant lookout, saw Hephaestus,  
 the celebrated master artisan, leave home,  
 and went running over to Hephaestus’s house,  
 eager to have sex with fair-crowned Aphrodite.  
 She had just left the presence of her father Zeus,  
 the mighty son of Cronos, and was sitting down.  
 Ares charged inside the house, grabbed her by the hand,  
 then spoke, saying these words to her:

“Come, my dear, 80  
 let’s go to bed and make love together.  
 Hephaestus is not home. No doubt he’s gone  
 to visit Lemnos and the Sintians,  
 those men who speak like such barbarians.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Aphrodite*: goddess of sexual love and beauty, is the wife of *Hephaestus*, the divine master artisan, the crippled god of the forge (hence he is often called the lame god); *Ares*, lover of Aphrodite and god of war (especially of the brutality of war). All three are children of Zeus.

<sup>2</sup>*Sintians*: a non-Greek-speaking people living on Lemnos who had helped Hephaestus when Zeus hurled him out of heaven. The ancient Greeks used the term ‘barbarian’ to refer to people who did not speak Greek.

Ares spoke. To Aphrodite having sex with him  
 seemed quite delightful. So the two raced off to bed  
 and lay down together. But then the crafty net  
 made by Hephaestus's great skill fell down around them,  
 so they could not move their limbs or shift their bodies.  
 After a while, they realized they could not get out. 90  
 Then the famous crippled god came back to them—  
 turning round before he reached the land of Lemnos.  
 Helios had stayed on watch and gave him a report.  
 With a grieving heart, Hephaestus went into his home  
 and stood inside the doorway, gripped by cruel rage.  
 He made a dreadful cry, calling to all the gods:

“Father Zeus and you other sacred gods  
 who live forever, come here, so you can see  
 something disgusting and ridiculous—  
 Aphrodite, Zeus's daughter, scorns me 100  
 and lusts after Ares, the destroyer,  
 because he's beautiful, with healthy limbs,  
 while I was born deformed. I'm not to blame.  
 My parents are! I wish they'd never had me!  
 See how these two have gone to my own bed  
 and are lying there, having sex together,  
 while I look on in pain. But I don't think  
 they wish to lie like this for very long,  
 no matter how much they may be in love.  
 They'll both soon lose the urge to stay in bed. 110  
 But this binding snare will confine them here,  
 until her father gives back all those presents,  
 courting gifts I gave him for that shameless bitch—  
 a lovely daughter but a sex-crazed wife.”

Hephaestus finished. Gods gathered at the bronze-floored house.  
 Earthshaker Poseidon came, and lord Hermes, too,  
 the god of luck, as well as archer god Apollo.  
 But female goddesses were all far too ashamed  
 and stayed at home. So the gods, givers of good things,  
 stood in the doorway, looking at the artful work 120  
 of ingenious Hephaestus. They started chortling—  
 and an irrepressible laughter then pealed out  
 among the blessed gods. Glancing at his neighbour,  
 one of them would say:

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

130

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

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

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

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

140

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

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

150

The famous lame god then replied:

“Lord Poseidon,  
Shaker of the Earth, do not ask me this.  
It’s a risky thing to accept a pledge  
made for a nasty rogue. What if Ares  
escapes his chains, avoids the debt, and leaves—

how then among all these immortal gods  
do I hold you in chains?"

Earthshaker Poseidon  
then answered him and said:

“Hephaestus,  
if indeed Ares does not discharge his debt  
and runs away, I’ll pay you in person.” 160

Then the celebrated crippled god replied:

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

After saying this,  
powerful Hephaestus then untied the netting.  
Both gods, once they had been released from their strong chains,  
jumped up immediately—Ares went off to Thrace,  
and laughter-loving Aphrodite left for Paphos,  
in Cyprus, for her sanctuary, her sacred altar.  
Once there, the Graces bathed and then anointed her  
with heavenly oil, the sort that gleams upon the gods, 170  
who live forever. Next, they took some gorgeous clothes  
and dressed her—the sight was marvellous to behold.

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

Alcinous then asked Laodamas and Halius  
to dance alone. No man could match their dancing skill.  
First, the two men picked up a lovely purple ball,  
then, leaning back, one of the two would throw it high,  
towards the shadowy clouds, and the other one, 180  
before his feet touched ground, would catch it easily.  
Once they had shown their skill in tossing it straight up,  
they threw it back and forth, as they continued dancing  
on the life-sustaining earth, while many younger men  
stood at the edge of the arena, beating time.  
The percussive rhythms made a powerful sound.

Then lord Odysseus spoke:

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

190

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

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

200

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

As the sun went down, the splendid gifts were carried in  
 and taken to Alcinous’s home by worthy heralds.  
 The sons of noble Alcinous took these lovely things  
 and set the presents down before their honoured mother.

210

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

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

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

220

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

Odysseus finished speaking.

Then he sat down on a chair beside king Alcinous,  
 as Demodocus, who was inspired by the god,  
 began to sing to them, taking up the story  
 at the point where the Argives, having burned their huts 230  
 and gone on board their well oared ships, were sailing off,  
 while those warriors led by glorious Odysseus  
 were at Troy’s assembly ground, hidden in the horse.  
 Trojans had hauled the wooden horse all by themselves  
 inside their citadel. It stood there, while Trojans  
 sat and talked around it, confused what they should do.  
 There were three quite different options people favoured—  
 to split the hollow wood apart with pitiless bronze,  
 or drag it to the heights and throw it from the rocks,  
 or let it stay there as an offering to the gods, 240  
 something to assuage their anger. And that, indeed,  
 is what they finally did, for it was their fate  
 to be wiped out once they had within their city walls  
 a gigantic wooden horse in which lay hidden  
 all the finest of the Argives, bringing into Troy  
 death and devastation. Then Demodocus sang  
 how Achaea’s sons left their hollow hiding place,  
 poured from the horse, and overpowered the city.  
 He sang about the various ways those warriors  
 laid waste that lofty city and how Odysseus, 250  
 like Ares, god of war, and noble Menelaus  
 went to the home of Deiphobus, where, he said,  
 Odysseus battled in the most horrendous fight,  
 from which he then emerged at last victorious,  
 thanks to assistance from Athena’s mighty heart.  
 This was the song the celebrated minstrel sang.

Odysseus was moved to weep—underneath his eyes  
 his face grew wet. But he kept his tears well hidden  
 from the Phaeacians, all except Alcinous, who,  
 as he sat there beside him, was the only one 260

who noticed how he wept and heard his heavy sighs.  
So he spoke out at once, addressing his Phaeacians,  
lovers of the sea:

“Listen to me speak,  
you Phaeacian counsellors and leaders.  
Let Demodocus now cease from playing  
his clear-toned lyre, for the song he’s singing  
does not please all his listeners alike.  
Since our godlike minstrel was first moved to sing,  
as we were dining, our guest has been in pain,  
his mournful sighs have never stopped. His heart,                     270  
I think, must surely overflow with grief.  
Let our singer end his song, so all of us  
both hosts and guest, can enjoy our feasting.  
Things will be much better. We’ve done all this—  
the farewell dinner and the friendship gifts,  
offered up with love—to honour our guest.  
In any man with some intelligence,  
a stranger coming as a suppliant  
evokes the same delight a brother does.  
And you, our guest-friend, should no longer hide                     280  
behind those cunning thoughts of yours and skirt  
the things I ask. It’s better to be frank.  
Tell me your name, what they call you at home—  
your mother, your father, and the others,  
those in the town and in the countryside.  
Tell me of your country and your people,  
your city, too, so ships can take you there,  
using what they know to chart their passage.  
And now come, tell me this, and speak the truth—  
Where have you travelled in your wandering?                     290  
What other countries have you visited?  
Tell me of people and their well-built towns,  
whether they are cruel, unjust, and wild,  
or welcome strangers and fear god in their hearts.”

BOOK NINE  
ISMARUS, THE LOTUS EATERS, AND THE CYCLOPS

Resourceful Odysseus then replied to Alcinous:

“Lord Alcinous, most renowned of men, I say  
there’s nothing that provides one more delight

than when joy seizes entire groups of men  
 who sit in proper order in a hall  
 feasting and attending to a singer,  
 with fine tables standing there beside them  
 laden with bread and meat, as the steward  
 draws wine out of the mixing bowl, moves round,  
 and pours it in the cups. To me this seems 10  
 the finest thing there is. But now your heart  
 wants to ask about my grievous sorrows,  
 so I can weep and groan more than before.  
 What shall I tell you first? Where do I stop?  
 For the heavenly gods have given me  
 so much distress. Well, I will make a start  
 by telling you my name. Once you know that,  
 if I escape the painful day of death,  
 then later I can welcome you as guests,  
 though I live in a palace far away. 20

I am Odysseus, son of Laertes,  
 well known to all for my deceptive skills—  
 my fame stretches all the way to heaven.  
 I live in Ithaca, land of sunshine.  
 From far away one sees a mountain there,  
 thick with whispering trees, Mount Neriton,  
 and many islands lying around it  
 close together. It's a rugged island  
 and nurtures fine young men. But now I'll speak  
 of the unhappy journey back which Zeus 30  
 arranged for me when I returned from war.

From Troy my ships were carried by the wind  
 to Ismarus, land of the Cicones.<sup>1</sup>  
 I destroyed the city there, killed the men,  
 seized their wives, and captured lots of treasure,  
 which we divided up. I took great pains  
 to see that each man got an equal share.  
 Then I gave orders we should leave on foot—  
 and with all speed. But the men were foolish.  
 They did not listen. They drank too much wine 40  
 and on the shoreline slaughtered many sheep,  
 as well as shambling cows with twisted horns.

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

The Cicones set off and gathered up  
 their neighbours, tribes living further inland.  
 There are more of them, and they are braver men.  
 They reached us in the morning, thick as leaves,  
 then set their ranks and fought by our swift ships.  
 We threw our bronze-tipped spears at one another.  
 While morning lasted and that sacred day  
 gained strength, we held our ground and beat them back, 50  
 for all their greater number. But as the sun  
 moved to the hour when oxen are unyoked,  
 the Cicones broke through, overpowering  
 Achaeans.<sup>1</sup> Of my well-armed companions,  
 six men from every ship were killed. The rest  
 made our escape, avoiding Death and Fate.

We sailed away from there, hearts full of grief  
 at losing loyal comrades, though happy  
 we'd eluded death ourselves. Cloud-gatherer Zeus  
 then stirred North Wind to rage against our ships— 60  
 a howling storm concealing land and sea,  
 as darkness swept from heaven down on us.

Nine days fierce winds drove me away from there,  
 across the fish-filled seas, and on the tenth  
 we landed where the Lotus-eaters live,  
 people who feed upon its flowering fruit.<sup>2</sup>  
 We went ashore and carried water back.  
 Then my companions quickly had a meal  
 by our swift ships. We had our food and drink,  
 and then I sent some of my comrades out 70  
 to learn about the men who ate the food  
 the land grew there. I chose two of my men  
 and with them sent a third as messenger.  
 They left at once and met the Lotus-eaters,  
 who had no thought of killing my companions,  
 but gave them lotus plants to eat, whose fruit,  
 sweet as honey, made any man who ate  
 lose his desire to ever journey home  
 or bring back word to us—they wished to stay,  
 to linger there among the Lotus-eaters, 80  
 feeding on the plant, eager to forget

<sup>1</sup>*the hour ... are unyoked*: Presumably the end of the day.

<sup>2</sup>*where the Lotus-eaters live*: The land of the Lotus-eaters is commonly placed in North Africa.

about their homeward voyage. I forced them,  
 eyes full of tears, into our hollow ships,  
 dragged them underneath the rowing benches,  
 and tied them up. Then I issued orders  
 for my other trusty comrades to embark  
 and sail away with speed in our fast ships,  
 in case another man might eat a lotus  
 and lose all thoughts about his journey back.

We sailed away from there with heavy hearts 90  
 and reached the country of the Cyclopes,  
 a crude and lawless people. They don't grow  
 any plants by hand or plough the earth,  
 but put their trust in the immortal gods,  
 and though they never sow or work the land,  
 still every kind of crop springs up for them—  
 wheat and barley and rich grape-bearing vines,  
 and Zeus provides the rain to make them grow.  
 They live without a council or assembly  
 or any rule of law, in hollow caves 100  
 among the mountain tops. Each one of them  
 sets out laws for his own wives and children,  
 and they shun all dealings with each other.

Now, near the country of the Cyclopes,  
 outside the harbour, there's a fertile island,  
 covered in trees, some distance from the shore,  
 but not too far away. Wild goats live there  
 in countless numbers, without the slightest need  
 to stay away from any human trails.  
 At the harbour head there is a water spring— 110  
 a bright stream flows out underneath a cave.  
 Around it poplars grow. We sailed in there.  
 Some god guided us through the murky night—  
 we could not see a thing, and all our ships  
 were swallowed up in fog. Clouds hid the moon,  
 and the sky above contained no hint of light.  
 Our eyes could not catch any glimpse of land  
 or of the long waves rolling in onshore,  
 until our well-decked ships had reached the beach.  
 We dragged up our ships, took down all the sails, 120  
 then went along the shore, and fell asleep,  
 remaining there until the light of Dawn.

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

'My loyal comrades, stay here where you are.  
I'll take my ship and my own company  
and try to find out who those people are  
and learn if they are rough and violent,  
with no sense of law, or kind to strangers,  
with hearts that fear the gods.'<sup>1</sup>

I said these words, 130  
then went down to my ship and told my crew  
to loose the cables lashed onto the stern  
and climb onboard. The men embarked with speed,  
and, seated on the benches in their rows,  
they struck the gray sea surface with their oars.  
As we made the short trip to the island,  
from the shoreline, right at the water's edge,  
we saw a high cave overhung with laurel.  
There were many flocks, sheep as well as goats,  
penned in there at night. All around the cave 140  
there was a high front courtyard made of stones  
set deep into the ground—with tall pine trees  
and lofty oaks. At night a giant slept there,  
a brute that grazed his flocks all by himself,  
somewhere far off. He avoided others  
and lived alone, away from all the rest,  
a law unto himself, a monster, made  
to be a thing of wonder, not like man,  
who survives by eating bread, no, more like  
a soaring wooded mountain, standing there 150  
to view in isolation from the rest.

I told the rest of my trustworthy crew  
to stay there beside the ship and guard it,  
while I selected twelve of my best men  
and went off to explore. I took with me  
a goatskin full of dark sweet wine. Maron,  
Euanthes's son, one of Apollo's priests,  
the god who kept guard over Ismarus,

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<sup>1</sup>*I'll take ... the gods*: Odysseus, one assumes, either doesn't know about the Cyclopes before this adventure or is not aware he is about to meet one, since he assumes he's moving into a place where the laws of hospitality might apply. Most geographical interpretations place the incident with the cyclops in Sicily.

gave it to me because, to show respect,  
 we had protected him, his wife, and child. 160  
 Each time they drank that honey-sweet red wine,  
 he'd fill one cup with it and pour that out  
 in twenty cups of water, and the smell  
 arising from the mixing bowl was sweet,  
 astonishingly so—to tell the truth,  
 no one's heart could then refuse to drink it.

We reached the cyclops's cave but didn't find him.  
 He was pasturing his rich flocks in the fields.  
 We went inside the cave and looked around.  
 It was incredible—crates full of cheese, 170  
 pens crammed full of livestock—with lambs and kids  
 sorted into separate groups, with yearlings,  
 older lambs, newborns, each in their own pen.  
 The sturdy buckets, pails, and milking bowls  
 were awash with whey. At first, my comrades  
 urged me to grab some cheeses and return,  
 then drive the lambs and kids out of their pens  
 back to our swift ship and cross the water.  
 But I did not agree, though if I had,  
 things would have turned out better. I was keen 180  
 to see the man in person and find out  
 if he would show me hospitality.

We lit a fire and offered sacrifice.  
 Then we helped ourselves to cheese and ate it,  
 staying inside the cave and waiting there,  
 until he led his flocks back home. He came,  
 with an enormous pile of dried-out wood  
 to prepare his dinner. He hurled his load  
 inside the cave with a huge crash. In our fear,  
 we moved to the remote end of the cave, 190  
 into the deepest corner. He then drove  
 his fat flock inside the spacious cavern,  
 just the ones he milked. Rams and billy goats  
 he left outside, in the open courtyard.  
 Then he raised up high a massive boulder  
 and fixed it in position as a door.  
 It was huge—twenty-two four-wheeled wagons,  
 even good ones, could not have shifted it  
 along the ground—that's how immense it was,  
 the rock he set in place to seal his cave. 200

He sat down with his bleating goats and ewes  
and milked them all, each one in turn, setting  
the young beside their mothers. He curdled  
half the white milk and set aside the whey  
in wicker baskets, then put the other half  
in bowls for him to drink up with his meal.  
When he had finished working at these tasks,  
he lit a fire. Then he noticed us and said:

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

210

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

‘We are Achaeans  
returning home from Troy and blown off course  
by different winds across vast tracts of sea.  
And so, good sir, respect the gods. We’re here  
as suppliants to you, and Zeus protects  
all suppliants and strangers—as god of guests,  
he cares for all respected visitors.’<sup>1</sup>

220

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

‘What fools you strangers are,  
or else you come from some land far away—  
telling me to fear the gods, to shun their rage.  
The Cyclopes care nothing about Zeus,  
who bears the aegis, or the blessed gods.<sup>2</sup>  
We are much more powerful than they are.  
I would not spare you or your companions  
to escape the wrath of Zeus, not unless  
my own heart encouraged me to do it.  
But now, tell me this—when you landed here,

230

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<sup>1</sup>*god of guests*: One of Zeus’s epithets is *Xenios*, referring to his role as the god of hospitality and avenger of wronged guests.

<sup>2</sup>*Aegis*: Shield of Zeus.

where did you moor your ship, a spot close by  
or further off? I'd like to find that out.'

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

'Earthshaker Poseidon broke my ship apart,  
driving it against the border of your land,  
on the rocks there. He brought us close to shore 240  
hard by the headland, then the strong winds pushed  
our ship towards the beach. But we escaped—  
me and these men here. We were not destroyed.'

That's what I told him. But his ruthless heart  
gave me no reply. Instead, he jumped up,  
seized two of my companions in his fist,  
and smashed them on the ground like puppy dogs.  
Their brains oozed out and soaked the ground below.  
He tore their limbs apart to make a meal  
and chewed them up just like a mountain lion— 250  
innards, flesh, and marrow—leaving nothing.  
We raised our hands to Zeus and cried aloud,  
to witness the horrific things he did,  
our hearts unable to do anything.  
Once Cyclops had stuffed his massive stomach  
with human flesh and washed it down with milk,  
he lay down in the cave and stretched out there,  
among his flocks. In my courageous heart  
I formed a plan to move up close beside him,  
draw the sharp sword I carried on my thigh, 260  
and run my hand along his chest, to find  
exactly where his midriff held his liver,  
then stick him there. But I had second thoughts.  
We, too, would have been utterly destroyed,  
there in the cave—we didn't have the strength  
with our own hands to roll from the high door  
the massive rock he'd set there. So we groaned,  
and stayed there, waiting for a bright new Dawn.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
he made fire and milked his flock, one by one, 270  
with a new-born placed beside each mother.  
When this work was over, he once again

snatched up two of my men and gorged himself.  
 After his meal, he easily rolled back  
 the huge rock door, drove his rich flock outside,  
 and set the stone in place, as one might put  
 a cap back on a quiver.<sup>1</sup> Then Cyclops,  
 whistling loudly, drove his fat flocks away  
 towards the mountains. He left me in the cave,  
 plotting a nasty scheme deep in my heart, 280  
 some way of gaining my revenge on him,  
 if Athena would grant that glory to me.  
 My heart came up with what appeared to me  
 the best thing I could do. An immense club  
 belonging to the cyclops was lying there,  
 beside a stall, made of green olive wood—  
 he'd cut it to carry with him once it dried.  
 To human eyes it seemed just like the mast  
 on a black merchant ship with twenty oars,  
 a broad-beamed vessel which can move across 290  
 the mighty ocean—that's how long and wide  
 that huge club looked. Moving over to it,  
 I chopped off a piece, about six feet in length,  
 gave it to my companions, telling them  
 to smooth the wood. They straightened it, while I,  
 standing at one end, chipped and tapered it  
 to a sharp point. Then I picked up the stake  
 and set it in the smoldering fire to harden.  
 That done, I placed it carefully to one side,  
 concealing it beneath some of the dung 300  
 which lay throughout the cave in massive piles.  
 And then I told my comrades to draw lots  
 to see which men would risk their lives with me—  
 when sweet sleep came to settle on the cyclops,  
 we'd lift that stake and twist it in his eye.  
 The crew drew lots and picked the very men  
 I would have chosen myself, four of them,  
 and I would be the fifth man in the group.

In the evening he came back, leading on  
 his fine-skinned animals and bringing them 310  
 inside the spacious cave, every sheep and goat  
 in his rich flock—not leaving even one  
 in the open courtyard. Perhaps he had

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<sup>1</sup>Quiver: Bag used for carrying arrows.

a sense of something wrong, or else a god  
 had given him an order. He picked up  
 and put his huge rock door in place, then sat  
 to milk each ewe and bleating goat, one by one,  
 taking care to set beside each mother  
 one of her young. When this task was finished,  
 he quickly seized two men and wolfed them down. 320  
 I moved up and stood beside the cyclops  
 and offered him a bowl of ivy wood  
 full of my dark red wine. I said:

‘Cyclops,  
 take this wine and drink it, now you’ve had  
 your meal of human flesh, so you may know  
 the kind of wine we had on board our ship,  
 a gift of drink that I was bringing you,  
 in hope you’d pity me and send me off  
 on my journey home. But your savagery  
 is something I can’t bear. You cruel man, 330  
 how will any of the countless other men  
 want to visit you in future? How you act  
 is so against all human law.’

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

‘Be kind and give me some of that again.  
 And now, without delay tell me your name,  
 so, as my guest, I can offer you a gift,  
 something you’ll like. Among the Cyclopes, 340  
 grain-bearing earth grows clusters of rich grapes,  
 which Zeus’s rain increases, but this drink—  
 it’s a stream of nectar and ambrosia.’

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

‘Cyclops, you asked about my famous name.  
 I’ll tell you. Then you can offer me a gift, 350

as your guest here. My name is Nobody.  
My father and my mother, all my friends—  
they call me Nobody.’

That’s what I said.

His ruthless heart replied:

‘Well, Nobody,  
I’ll eat all your companions before you  
and have you at the end—my gift to you,  
since you’re my guest.’

After saying these words,  
he collapsed, toppling over on his back,  
lying with his neck twisted to one side.  
All-conquering Sleep overpowered him.<sup>1</sup> 360  
In his drunken state he kept on vomiting,  
his gullet drooling wine and human flesh.  
So then I pushed the stake deep in the ashes,  
to make it hot, and spoke to all my men,  
urging them on, so no one, in his fear,  
would hesitate. Once that stake of olive wood,  
though green, was glowing hot, with its sharp point  
ready to catch fire, I walked up to it  
and, with all my comrades standing round me,  
removed it from the fire. And then some god 370  
breathed powerful courage into all of us.  
They lifted up that stake of olive wood  
and jammed its sharpened end down in his eye,  
while I, placing my weight at the upper end,  
twisted it around—just as a shipwright  
bores timber with a drill, while those below  
make it rotate by pulling on a strap  
at either end, so the drill keeps moving—  
that’s how we held the red-hot pointed stake,  
twisting it inside the socket of his eye. 380  
Blood poured out through the heat—around his eye,  
lids and brows were singed, as his eyeball burned—  
roots crackling in the fire. When a blacksmith  
thrusts an axe or adze in frigid water  
with a loud hissing sound, to temper it

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<sup>1</sup>*All-conquering ... overpowered him*: The dramatic effects of the wine on Cyclops may in part be because Odysseus gave it to him unmixed.

and make the iron strong—that’s how his eye  
 sizzled around the stake of olive wood.  
 His horrific cries echoed through the rock.  
 We drew back, terrified. He yanked the stake  
 out of his eye—it was all smeared with blood— 390  
 hurled it away from him, and waved his arms.  
 He screamed out to the cyclopes nearby,  
 who lived in caves up on the windy heights,  
 his neighbours. When they heard him shouting out,  
 they came crowding round from all directions.  
 Standing at the cave mouth, they questioned him,  
 asking what was wrong:

‘Polyphemus,  
 what’s so bad with you that you keep howling  
 through the immortal night and wake us up?  
 Is some mortal human stealing your flocks 400  
 or killing you by treachery or force?’

From the cave mighty Polyphemus roared:

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

They answered him—their words had wings:

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

With these words,  
 they went away, and my heart was laughing— 410  
 my cunning name had pulled off such a trick.  
 But Cyclops groaned, writhing in agony.  
 Groping with his hands he picked up the stone,  
 removed it from the door, and sat down there,  
 in the opening. He stretched out his arms,  
 attempting to catch anyone who tried  
 to escape there with the sheep. In his heart,  
 he took me for a fool. But I was thinking  
 the best thing I could do would be to find  
 if somehow my companions and myself 420

could avoid being killed. I wove many schemes,  
 all sorts of tricks, the way a man will do  
 when his own life's at stake—and we were faced  
 with a murderous peril right beside us.  
 To my heart the best plan was as follows.  
 In Cyclops's flocks the rams were really fat—  
 fine, large animals, with thick fleecy coats  
 of deep black wool. I picked three at a time  
 and, keeping quiet, tied them together  
 with twisted willow shoots, part of the mat  
 on which the monster Polyphemus slept. 430  
 The middle ram carried a single man.  
 The two on either side were for protection.  
 So for each one of us there were three sheep.  
 I, too, had my own ram, the finest one  
 in the whole flock by far. I grabbed its back  
 then swung myself below its fleecy gut  
 and lay there, face upwards, with my fingers  
 clutching its amazing fleece. My heart was firm  
 We waited there like that until bright Dawn. 440

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
 males in the flock trotted off to pasture,  
 while the females, who had not yet been milked  
 and thus whose udders were about to burst,  
 bleated in their pens. Their master, in great pain,  
 ran his hands along the backs of all his sheep  
 as they moved past him, but was such a fool,  
 he failed to notice how my men were tied  
 below their fleecy bellies. Of that flock,  
 my ram was last to move out through the door, 450  
 weighed down by its thick wool and my sly thoughts.  
 Huge Polyphemus, as he stroked its back,  
 spoke to the animal:

'My lovely ram,  
 how come you are the last one in the flock  
 to move out of the cave? Not once before  
 have you ever lagged behind the others.  
 No. You have always been well out in front,  
 striding off to graze on fresh shoots of grass  
 and be the first to reach the river's stream.  
 And you're the one who longs to get back home, 460  
 once evening comes, before the others do.

But now you're last of all. You must be sad,  
 grieving for your master's eye, now blinded,  
 thanks to that that evil fellow and his crew.  
 That Nobody destroyed my wits with wine.  
 But, I tell you, I can still destroy him.  
 If only you could feel and speak like me—  
 you'd tell me where he's hiding from my rage.  
 I'd smash his brains out on the ground in here,  
 sprinkle them in each corner of this cave, 470  
 and then my heart would ease the agonies  
 this worthless Nobody has brought on me.'

Saying these words, he pushed the ram aside,  
 out through the door. After the ram had moved  
 a short distance from the cave and courtyard,  
 first I got out from underneath its gut  
 and then untied my men. We rushed away,  
 driving off those rich, fat, long-legged sheep,  
 often turning round to look behind us,  
 until we reached our ship—a welcome sight 480  
 to fellow shipmates—we'd escaped being killed,  
 although they groaned and wept for those who'd died.  
 But I would not allow them to lament—  
 with a scowl I ordered everyone to stop  
 and told them they should quickly lead on board  
 the many fine-fleeced sheep and then set sail  
 across the salty sea. They climbed aboard,  
 each man taking his place beside an oar,  
 and, sitting in good order in the boat,  
 they struck the gray sea surface with their blades. 490  
 When we had rowed as far as a man's voice  
 can carry when he yells, I shouted out  
 and mocked the mighty cyclops:

'Cyclops,  
 it seems he was no weakling, after all,  
 the man whose comrades you so wished to eat,  
 using brute force in that hollow cave of yours.  
 Your evil acts were bound to catch you out,  
 you wretch—you didn't even hesitate  
 to gorge yourself on guests in your own home.  
 Now Zeus and other gods have paid you back.' 500

That's what I said. My words increased his rage.  
 He snapped off a huge chunk of mountain rock  
 and hurled it. The stone landed up ahead,  
 by our ship's dark prow. As the boulder sank,  
 the sea surged under it, waves pushed us back  
 towards the land, and, like a tidal flood,  
 drove us on shore. I grabbed a long boat hook  
 and pushed us off, encouraging the crew,  
 and, with a nod of my head, ordered them  
 to ply their oars and save us from disaster. 510  
 They put their backs into it then and rowed.  
 But when we'd got some distance out to sea,  
 about twice as far, I started shouting,  
 taunting the cyclops, although around me  
 my comrades cautioned me from every side,  
 trying to calm me down:

That's too reckless.  
 Why attempt to irritate that savage?  
 Just now he threw a huge rock in the sea  
 and pushed us back on shore. We really thought  
 he'd killed us there. If he had heard us speak 520  
 or uttering a sound, he'd have hurled down  
 another jagged stone and crushed our skulls  
 and the timbers on this ship. His huge arms  
 are strong enough to throw this far.'

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

'Cyclops, if any mortal human being  
 asks about the injury that blinded you,  
 say your eye was burned out by Odysseus,  
 sacker of cities, Laertes's son, 530  
 a man from Ithaca.'

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

'Hear me, Poseidon, Enfolder of the Earth,  
 dark-haired god, if I truly am your son  
 and if you are my father, as you claim,

grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities,  
 a man from Ithaca, Laertes's son,  
 never gets back home. If it's his destiny  
 to see his friends and reach his native land 540  
 and well-built house, may he arrive there late  
 and in distress, after all his comrades  
 have been killed, and in someone else's ship.  
 And may he find misfortune in his home.'

That's what he prayed. The dark-haired god heard him.  
 Then Cyclops once again picked up a rock,  
 a much larger stone, swung it round, and threw,  
 with all his unimaginable force.  
 It landed right behind the dark-prowed ship  
 and almost hit the steering oar. Its impact 550  
 convulsed the sea, and waves then pushed us on,  
 driving our ship up to the further shore.

We reached the island where our well-decked ships  
 were gathered. Our comrades sat beside them,  
 in great sorrow, always watching for us.  
 We rowed in, drove our ship up on the sand,  
 and climbed out through the surf. From the ship's hold  
 we unloaded Cyclops's flock and shared it.  
 I took great care to see that all men there  
 received an equal part. But when the flock 560  
 was given out, my well-armed companions  
 awarded me the ram, my special gift,  
 one just for me. I sacrificed that ram,  
 there on the shore, to Zeus, son of Cronos,  
 lord of the dark cloud, and ruler of all,  
 offering him burnt pieces of the thigh.  
 But he cared nothing for my sacrifice.  
 Instead he started planning to destroy  
 all my well-decked ships and loyal comrades.

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared, 570  
 I roused my crew and ordered them aboard,  
 to untie cables fastened to the sterns.  
 They got in at once, each man in his place,  
 and sitting in good order in their rows,  
 they churned the gray sea surface with their oars.  
 So we moved away from there, sad at heart,

happy to have avoided a dark fate,  
although some dear companions had been killed.”

BOOK TEN  
AEOLUS, THE LAESTRYGONIANS, AND CIRCE

“We reached Aeolia, a floating island,  
where Aeolus lived, son of Hippotas,  
whom immortal gods hold dear.<sup>1</sup> Around it  
runs an impenetrable wall of bronze,  
and cliffs rise up in a sheer face of rock.  
His twelve children live there in the palace,  
six daughters as well as six full-grown sons.  
He gave the daughters to the sons in marriage,  
and they are always at a banquet feasting,  
beside their dear father and good mother, 10  
with an infinite store of fine things to eat.  
We reached the splendid palace in the city,  
and for one whole month he entertained me,  
always asking questions about everything—  
Troy, Argive ships, and the return back home.  
I described it all from start to finish.  
When, for my part, I asked to take my leave  
and told him he should send me on my way,  
he denied me nothing and helped me go.  
He gave me a bag made out of ox-hide, 20  
skin flayed from an animal nine years old,  
and tied up in it all the winds that blow  
from every side, for the son of Cronos  
has made Aeolus keeper of the winds,  
and he could calm or rouse them, as he wished.  
With a bright silver cord he lashed that bag  
inside my hollow ship, so as to stop  
even the smallest breath from getting out.  
He also got a West Wind breeze to blow  
to carry ships and men on their way home. 30

For nine whole days and nights we held our course,  
and on the tenth we glimpsed our native land.  
We came in so close we could see the men  
who tend the beacon fires. But then sweet Sleep

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<sup>1</sup>*Aeolia*: Small island to the north of Sicily; *Aeolus*: The god of the winds.

overcame me—I was so exhausted.  
 All that time my hands had gripped the sail rope—  
 I'd not let go of it or passed it on  
 to any shipmate, so that we'd get home  
 more quickly. But as I slept, my comrades  
 started talking to each other, claiming 40  
 I was taking gold and silver with me.  
 Glancing at the man who sat beside him,  
 one of the crew would mutter words like these:

'It's not fair. Everyone adores this man  
 and honours him, no matter where he goes,  
 to any city, any land. From Troy  
 he's taking a huge stash of splendid loot—  
 but those of us who've been on the same trip  
 are coming home with empty hands. And now,  
 Aeolus, because he's a friend of his, 50  
 has willingly presented him these gifts.  
 Come on, let's see how much gold and silver  
 he has in this bag.'

As they talked like this,  
 my companions' envious thoughts prevailed.  
 They untied the bag. All the winds rushed out.  
 Then storms winds seized them, swept them out to sea,  
 in tears, away from their own native land.  
 At that point I woke up. Deep in my heart  
 I was of two minds—I could jump overboard  
 and drown or just keep going in silence, 60  
 remain among the living. I stayed there  
 and suffered on. Covering up my head,  
 I just lay there on the deck, while our ships,  
 loaded with my whimpering companions,  
 were driven by those wicked blasts of wind  
 all the way back to Aeolus's island.

I set off for Aeolus's splendid home  
 and found him feasting with his wife and children.  
 So we went in the house and sat down there,  
 on the threshold, right beside the doorposts. 70  
 In their hearts they were amazed. They asked me

'Odysseus, why have you returned to us?  
 We took great care to send you on your way

so you'd get home, back to your native land.'

That is what they said. With a heavy heart,  
I answered them:

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

I said these words  
to reassure them. But they stayed silent. 80  
And then their father gave me this reply:

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

Once he'd said this, he sent me from his house,  
for all my heavy groans. Then, sick at heart,  
we sailed on further, my crewmen's spirits 90  
worn down by the weary work of rowing.  
Because we'd been such fools, there was no breeze  
to help us on our way. We kept going  
for six whole days and nights. On the seventh  
we came to Telepylus, great citadel  
of Lamus, king of Laestrygonians,  
into a lovely harbour, with sheer cliffs  
around it on both sides.<sup>1</sup> Jutting headlands  
facing one another extended out  
past the harbour. The entrance was quite small. 100  
All my companions brought their curved ships up  
and moored them inside the hollow harbour  
in a tightly clustered group—in that spot  
there were never any waves, large or small.  
Everything was calm and bright around them.  
But I moored my black ship all by itself  
outside the harbour, right against the land,

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<sup>1</sup>to *Telepylus ... of Laestrygonians*: The land of the Laestrygonians seems to be north of Sicily, possibly Corsica.

tying it to the rock. I climbed the cliff  
 and just stood there, on a rugged outcrop,  
 looking round. I could see no evidence 120  
 of human work or ploughing, only smoke  
 rising from the land. I sent some comrades  
 to learn what the inhabitants were like.  
 They left the ships and came to a smooth road,  
 which wagons used to haul wood to the town  
 from high mountain slopes. Outside the city  
 they met a young girl collecting water,  
 a noble daughter of Antiphates,  
 a Laestrygonian. They asked the girl  
 who ruled the people there and who they were. 130  
 She quickly pointed out her father's home.  
 They reached the splendid house and found his wife,  
 an immense woman, like a mountain peak.  
 They were horrified. She called her husband,  
 strong Antiphates, from an assembly,  
 and he arranged a dreadful death for them—  
 he seized one of my shipmates and prepared  
 to make a meal of him. The other two  
 jumped up, ran off, and got back to the ships.  
 Antiphates then raised a hue and cry 140  
 throughout the city. Once they heard his call,  
 the mighty Laestrygonians poured out,  
 thronging in countless numbers from all sides—  
 not like men at all, but Giants. From cliffs  
 they hurled rocks down on us, the largest stones  
 a man can lift. The clamour from the ships  
 was dreadful—my men were being destroyed,  
 ships were smashing into one another,  
 with those huge monsters spearing men like fish,  
 and taking them to eat a gruesome meal. 150  
 While they were slaughtering the sailors there,  
 trapped in that deep harbour, I grabbed my sword,  
 pulled it from my thigh, and cut the cables  
 on my dark-prowed ship, yelling to my crew,  
 ordering them to put their oars to work,  
 so we could get away from this disaster.  
 They all churned the water with their oar-blades,  
 afraid of being killed. We were relieved,  
 as my ship left the beetling cliffs behind,  
 moving out to sea. But the other ships, 160  
 those in the harbour, were totally destroyed.

We sailed away from there with heavy hearts  
 until we reached the island of Aeaëa,  
 home of that dread goddess, fair-haired Circe.<sup>1</sup>  
 Here, in silence, we brought our ship to land,  
 inside a harbour with fine anchorage.  
 Some god was guiding us. We disembarked  
 and laid up in that spot two days and nights,  
 our hearts consumed with weariness and pain.

As soon as rose-fingered earl Dawn appeared, 170  
 I called a meeting and addressed them all:

‘Shipmates, let’s quickly put our heads together  
 to see if there’s some scheme we can devise.  
 I’m not sure there is. I climbed a rocky crag,  
 and from that vantage point spied out the land.  
 It’s an island with deep water round it,  
 low-lying and flat. I did see some smoke  
 rising in the middle of the island,  
 through dense brush and trees.’

That’s what I said.  
 But their spirits fell, as they remembered 180  
 what the Laestrygonian king had done  
 and the brute force of mighty Polyphemus,  
 that man-eating cyclops. They wept aloud,  
 shedding frequent tears. But those cries of theirs  
 were not much help to us. So I split up  
 my well-armed comrades in two separate groups,  
 each with its own leader. I commanded one,  
 and godlike Eurylochus the other.

We shook tokens in a helmet made of bronze.  
 When brave Eurylochus’s lot fell out, 190  
 he set off with twenty-two companions,  
 all in tears, leaving us behind to grieve.  
 In a forest clearing they found Circe’s house  
 of polished stone, with views in all directions.  
 There were mountain wolves and lions round it,  
 all bewitched by Circe’s wicked potions.

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

But they made no attack against my men.  
 No. They stood up on their hind legs and fawned,  
 wagging their long tails. Just as dogs will beg  
 around their master coming from a feast, 200  
 for he keeps bringing scraps to please their hearts—  
 that’s how the wolves and sharp-clawed lions there  
 kept fawning round those men, who were afraid  
 just looking at those terrifying beasts.  
 My comrades stood by fair-haired Circe’s gate  
 and heard her sweet voice singing in the house,  
 as she went back and forth before her loom,  
 weaving a huge, immortal tapestry,  
 the sort of work that goddesses create,  
 finely woven, luminous, and beautiful. 210  
 They all started shouting out, calling her.  
 She came out at once, opened the bright doors,  
 and asked them to come in. In their folly,  
 they all went in the house. Eurylochus  
 was the only one of them to stay outside—  
 he thought that Circe might be tricking them.  
 She led the others in and sat them down  
 on stools and chairs, then made them all a drink  
 of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey  
 stirred into Pramnian wine.<sup>1</sup> But with the food 220  
 she mixed a vicious drug, so they would lose  
 all memories of home. When they’d drunk down  
 the drink she’d given them, she took her wand,  
 struck each of them, then stuck them in her pens.  
 They had bristles, heads, and voices just like pigs—  
 their bodies resembled swine—but their minds  
 were as before. Inside their pens they wept.  
 Circe threw down some feed in front of them—  
 acorns, beech nuts, and cornel fruit—the stuff  
 pigs eat when they are wallowing in mud. 230

Eurylochus came back immediately  
 to our swift black ship, bringing a report  
 of his companions’ fate, eyes full of tears.  
 I slung my large bronze silver-studded sword  
 across my shoulder, grabbed my bow, and left.

As I was moving through the sacred groves

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<sup>1</sup>*Pramnian wine*: High-quality wine, possibly from the island of Lesbos.

on my way to Circe's home, a goddess  
 skilled in many magic potions, I met  
 Hermes of the Golden Wand. I was going  
 towards the house. He looked like a young man 240  
 when the first growth of hair is on his lip,  
 the age when youthful charm is at its height.  
 He gripped my hand, then spoke to me and said:

'Your shipmates, over there in Circe's house,  
 have been penned up like swine in narrow stalls.  
 Are you intending now to set them free?  
 I do not think you'll make it back yourself—  
 you'll remain there with the others. But come,  
 I will keep you free from harm and save you.  
 Take a remedial medicine with you, 250  
 and go to Circe's house. It will protect you  
 and keep your head safe from any danger  
 this day brings. She will not have the power  
 to cast a spell on you. The potent herb  
 that I'll provide you will not allow it.'

After these words, the Killer of Argus  
 pulled a plant out of the ground, offered it,  
 and explained its features. Its roots were black,  
 the flower milk-white. Gods call it Moly.<sup>1</sup>  
 Then Hermes left, through the wooded island, 260  
 bound for high Olympus. I continued on  
 to Circe's home. As I moved on, my heart  
 was turning over many gloomy thoughts.  
 After I had walked up to the gateway|  
 of fair-haired Circe's house, I just stood there  
 and gave a shout. The goddess heard my voice.  
 She came out at once, opened her bright doors,  
 and invited me inside. I entered,  
 heart full of misgivings. She led me in  
 and sat me on a silver-studded chair, 270  
 a lovely object, beautifully made,  
 with a stool underneath to rest my feet.  
 She mixed her potion in a golden cup  
 for me to drink. In it she placed the drug,

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

heart still bent on mischief, gave it to me,  
and, when I drank, without being bewitched,  
she struck me with her wand and said these words:

‘Off now to your sty, and lie down in there  
alongside all the rest of your companions.’

She spoke. I drew the sharp sword on my thigh 280  
and charged at her, as if intent on murder.  
She gave a piercing scream, ducked, then ran up,  
reaching for my knees. Through her tears she spoke—  
her words had wings:

‘What sort of man are you?  
Where are you from? Where is your native town?  
Your parents? I’m amazed you drank this drug  
and then were not bewitched. No other man  
who’s tried it has been able to resist,  
once it’s passed the barrier of his teeth.  
Inside that chest of yours your mind holds out 290  
against my spell. You must be Odysseus,  
that resourceful man. The Killer of Argus,  
Hermes of the Golden Wand, always said  
Odysseus in his swift black ship would come  
on his way back from Troy. So put that sword  
back in its sheath, and let the two of us  
go up into my bed. When we’ve made love,  
then we can trust each other.’

Once she said this,  
I answered her and said:

‘O Circe, 300  
how can you ask me to be kind to you?  
In your own home you’ve changed my crew to pigs  
and keep me here. You’re plotting mischief now,  
inviting me to go up to your room,  
into your bed, so when I have no clothes,  
you can do me harm, destroy my manhood.  
But I will not agree to go to bed,  
unless, goddess, you will agree to swear  
a solemn oath that you’ll make no more plans  
to injure me with some new devious trick’

When I'd said this, she made the oath at once, 310  
 as I had asked, that she'd not injure me.  
 Once she had sworn and finished with the oath,  
 I went with Circe to her splendid bed.

Meanwhile four women serving in her home  
 were busy in the hall, children of springs,  
 groves, and sacred rivers flowing out to sea.  
 One of them threw lovely purple coverlets  
 across the chairs and spread linen underneath.  
 And one pulled silver tables to each chair  
 and on them set baskets made of silver. 320  
 The third one mixed deliciously sweet wine  
 inside a silver bowl, then served it out  
 in cups of gold. The fourth brought water in,  
 lit a large fire under a huge cauldron,  
 and warmed the water up until it boiled  
 inside the bronze. She sat me in a tub,  
 and, diluting water from that cauldron  
 so it was right for me, gave me a bath,  
 pouring water on my head and shoulders,  
 until the weariness that sapped my heart 330  
 had left my limbs. After giving me a bath,  
 she rubbed me with rich oil, then fitted me  
 in a fine cloak and tunic and led me  
 to a handsome chair embossed with silver,  
 finely worked, with a footstool underneath.  
 A maid brought in a lovely golden jug,  
 poured out water in a silver basin,  
 so I could wash, and set a polished table  
 at my side. Then the distinguished steward  
 brought in bread and set it there before me, 340  
 placing with it large quantities of food,  
 given freely from her stores. She bade me eat.  
 But in my heart I had no appetite.  
 So I sat there, thinking of other things,  
 my spirit sensing something ominous.  
 When Circe noticed me just sitting there,  
 not reaching for the food, weighed down with grief,  
 she came up close and spoke winged words to me:

'Odysseus, why are you just sitting here,  
 like a man who's mute, wearing out your heart, 350  
 never touching food or drink? Do you think

this is another trick? Don't be afraid—  
I've already made a solemn promise  
I won't injure you.'

When she said this,  
I answered her and said:

'O Circe,  
what man with any self-respect would start  
to eat and drink before he had released  
his shipmates and could see them face to face?  
If you are being sincere in asking me  
to eat and drink, then set my comrades free, 360  
so my own eyes can see my trusty crew.'

When I said this, Circe went through the hall,  
her wand clutched in her hand, and opened up  
the pig-sty doors. She drove the whole herd out.  
They looked like full-grown pigs at nine years old,  
standing there before her. She went through them,  
smearing on them all a different potion.  
Those bristles brought on by that toxic drug  
which they'd received from Circe earlier  
fell from their limbs, and they were men again, 370  
more youthful and much taller than before,  
more handsome to the eye. Now they knew me.  
Each shipmate grabbed my hand, and all of them  
were overcome with passionate weeping,  
so the house around them echoed strangely.  
Circe herself was moved to pity then—  
standing close to me, the lovely goddess said:

'Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes  
and child of Zeus, go now to the sea shore,  
back to your swift ship, drag it up on land, 380  
and stash your goods and all the things you need  
inside the caves. Then come back here again,  
and bring your loyal companions with you.'

Her words persuaded my proud heart. I left,  
going back to our swift ship beside the sea.  
I found my trusty comrades at the ship  
lamenting sadly, shedding many tears.  
Just as on farms calves frisk around the herd

when cows, having had their fill of grazing,  
 return back to the yard—they skip ahead, 390  
 and pens no longer hold them, as they run,  
 mooing in a crowd around their mothers,  
 that’s how my companions, once they saw me,  
 thronged around, in tears—in their hearts it felt  
 as if they they’d just sailed back to their own land,  
 the rugged town of Ithaca itself.

Meanwhile, Circe had been acting kindly  
 to the rest of my companions in her home.  
 She’d given them baths, rubbed them with rich oil,  
 and had dressed them in warm cloaks and tunics. 400  
 We found them all, in fine spirits, eating  
 in the hall. When my men saw each other  
 and recognized their shipmates face to face,  
 their cries and weeping echoed through the house.

The lovely goddess came to me and said:

‘Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes,  
 come now, enjoy my food, and drink my wine—  
 revive once more the spirit in your chest  
 you had when you first left your native land  
 of rugged Ithaca. You’re weary now— 410  
 you have no spirit—you’re always brooding  
 on your painful wanderings. There’s no joy  
 inside your heart—you have endured so much.’

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

‘You god-driven man, now the time has come 420  
 to think again about your native land,  
 if you’re someone who’s destined to be saved  
 and reach your lofty home and soil once more.’

My proud heart was persuaded by their words.  
 So all day long until the sun went down,  
 we sat there, feasting on huge plates of meat

and on sweet wine. After the sun had set  
 and darkness came, they all lay down to sleep  
 in the shadowy hall. I went to Circe  
 in her impressive bed and clasped her knees. 430  
 The goddess listened to me as I spoke,  
 pleading with her—my words had wings:

‘Circe,  
 fulfill the promises you made to me  
 to send me home. My spirit’s keen to leave,  
 as are the hearts in my companions, too,  
 who, as they grieve around me, drain my heart,  
 whenever you are not here among us.’

I spoke. The goddess answered me at once.

‘Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes  
 and Zeus’s child, if it’s against your will, 440  
 you should not now remain here in my house.<sup>1</sup>  
 But first you must complete another trip—  
 to the home of Hades and Persephone,<sup>2</sup>  
 to consult the shade of blind Teiresias,  
 the Theban prophet.<sup>3</sup> His mind is unimpaired.  
 Even though he’s dead, dread Persephone  
 has granted him the power to understand—  
 the others simply flit about, mere shadows.’

As Circe finished, my spirit was breaking.  
 I sat weeping on her bed, for my heart 450  
 no longer wished to live or glimpse the light.  
 But when I’d had enough of shedding tears  
 and rolling in distress, I answered her:

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

The lovely goddess gave me a quick answer:

‘Resourceful Odysseus, son of Laertes

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<sup>1</sup>*Zeus’s child*: This phrase is an indication of respect and should not be taken literally. Odysseus is not a child of Zeus.

<sup>2</sup>*Hades and dread Persephone*: God and goddess of the Underworld (which is itself often called Hades).

<sup>3</sup>*shade*: Ghost or spirit; *Teiresias*: The most famous human prophet, who has now died and resides in Hades.

and Zeus's child, do not concern yourself  
 with a pilot for your ship. Raise the mast,  
 spread out your white sail, and just take your seat. 460  
 And then the breath of North Wind Boreas  
 will take you on your way.<sup>1</sup> But once your ship  
 has crossed flowing Ocean, drag it ashore  
 at Persephone's groves, on the level beach  
 where tall poplars grow, willows shed their fruit,  
 right beside deep swirling Oceanus.  
 Then you must go to Hades's murky home,  
 where Periphlegethon and Cocytus,  
 a stream which branches off the river Styx,  
 flow into Acheron.<sup>2</sup> There's a boulder 470  
 where these two foaming rivers meet. Go there,  
 heroic man, and do just what I say—  
 move close and dig a hole there two feet square.<sup>3</sup>  
 Pour libations to the dead around it,  
 the first with milk and honey, next sweet wine,  
 and then a third with water. And shake out  
 white barley meal. Then pray there in earnest  
 to all the hapless heads of those who've died,  
 with a vow that, when you reach Ithaca, 480  
 at home you'll sacrifice a barren heifer,  
 the best you have, and will cram the altar  
 with lovely gifts and make an offering  
 to Teiresias, a black ram just for him,  
 the finest creature in your flocks. And then,  
 when you've offered prayers of supplication  
 to celebrated nations of the dead,  
 you'll sacrifice a ram and a black ewe,  
 twisting their heads down towards Erebus,  
 while you turn to face the flowing rivers,  
 looking back.<sup>4</sup> At that point many spirits 490  
 will emerge—they'll be shadows of the dead.  
 Then call your crew. Tell them to flay and burn  
 the sheep lying there, killed by ruthless bronze.

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<sup>1</sup>*Boreas*: Name of the god of the north wind.

<sup>2</sup>*flowing Oceanus ... into Acheron*: Oceanus or Ocean is a river which in Homeric geography surrounds the lands and the sea. It is, as it were, the outer rim of the world (which is flat). The Periphlegethon, Cocytus, Styx, and Acheron are the rivers of the underworld, Hades.

<sup>3</sup>The Greek reads "as great as the length of a *pugon* (the distance from the elbow to the first finger joints) here and there." This is the length of a cubit, about two feet.

<sup>4</sup>*Erebus*: Place below the earth that the dead pass through on their way to Hades.

Pray to the gods, to powerful Hades  
and dread Persephone. Then from your thigh,  
you must yourself draw out that sharpened sword,  
and, sitting there, prevent the powerless heads  
of those who've died from coming near the blood,  
until you've heard Teiresias.'

Circe spoke.

When early Dawn appeared on her golden throne, 500  
Circe dressed me in a cloak and tunic  
and clothed her body in a long white robe,  
a lovely, finely woven garment, and tied  
a splendid golden belt around her waist.  
On her head she placed a veil. Then I went  
through her whole house, rousing my companions,  
with words of reassurance to them all:

'No more sleeping now, no sweet slumbering.  
Let's go—Queen Circe's told me what to do.'

That's what I said. And their proud hearts agreed." 510

BOOK ELEVEN

ODYSSEUS MEETS THE SHADES OF THE DEAD

"Once we had reached our boat down on the beach,  
we dragged it out into the gleaming sea,  
set up the mast and sail in our black ship,  
led on the sheep, and then embarked ourselves,  
still full of sorrow, shedding many tears.  
All day long, the sail stayed full. We sped on  
across the sea, until the sun went down  
and all sea routes grew dark. Our ship then reached  
the banks of the deep stream Oceanus,  
a region always wrapped in mist and cloud.<sup>1</sup> 10  
We sailed in there, then dragged our ship on shore,  
and walked along the shores of Oceanus,  
until we reached the place Circe described.

Perimedes and Eurylochus held the sheep,  
our sacrificial victims, while I unsheathed

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<sup>1</sup>No location on Odysseus's voyage has been more discussed and disputed the place where he meets the spirits of the dead. Suggestions range from Averneus (in Italy) to Gibraltar to mainland Spain and elsewhere.

the sharp sword on my thigh and dug a hole,  
 two feet each way. I poured out libations  
 to all the dead—first with milk and honey,  
 second with wine, and a third with water.  
 Around the pit I sprinkled barley meal. 20  
 Then to the helpless heads of the departed  
 I offered many prayers, with promises  
 I'd sacrifice, once I returned to Ithaca,  
 a barren heifer. With prayers and pledges  
 I called upon the families of the dead.  
 Next, I held out the sheep above the hole,  
 slit their throats, and let the dark blood flow.

Then out of Erebus came swarming up  
 shades of the dead—brides, young unmarried men,  
 old ones worn out with toil, young tender girls, 30  
 with hearts still new to grief, and many men  
 wounded by bronze spears, who'd died in battle,  
 still in their blood-stained armour. Crowds of them  
 came thronging in from all sides of the pit,  
 with amazing cries. Pale fear seized my heart.  
 Then I called my comrades, ordering them  
 to flay and burn the sheep still lying there,  
 slain by cruel bronze, and pray to the gods,  
 to mighty Hades and Persephone.  
 And then I drew the sharp sword on my thigh 40  
 and sat there, stopping the powerless heads  
 of all the dead from getting near the blood,  
 until I'd asked Teiresias my questions.

Then appeared the ghost of my dead mother,  
 Anticleia, Autolycus's child.  
 I'd left her still alive when I set off  
 for sacred Troy. Once I caught sight of her,  
 I wept, and I felt pity in my heart.  
 Nonetheless, in spite of my great sorrow,  
 I could not let her get too near the blood, 50  
 until I'd questioned blind Teiresias.

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

'Venturous Odysseus,

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

When Teiresias said this, I drew back 60  
 and thrust my studded sword inside its sheath.  
 Once the blameless prophet had drunk dark blood,  
 he said these words:

'Glorious Odysseus,  
 you ask about your honey-sweet return.  
 But a god will make your journey bitter.  
 As soon as you've escaped the dark blue sea  
 and reached the island of Thrinacia  
 in your sturdy ship, you'll find grazing there  
 the cattle and rich flocks of Helios,  
 who hears and watches over everything. 70  
 If you leave them unharmed and keep your mind  
 on your return, you may reach Ithaca,  
 though you'll have trouble. But if you touch them,  
 then I foresee destruction for your crew,  
 for you, and for your ship. And even if  
 you yourself escape, you'll get home again  
 late and grieving, in someone else's ship,  
 after losing all of your companions.  
 There'll be trouble at home—insolent men  
 eating up your livelihood and wooing 80  
 your godlike wife by giving courtship gifts.  
 But when you come, you'll surely take revenge  
 for all their violence. Once you have killed  
 the suitors in your house with your sharp sword,  
 by cunning or in public, then take up  
 a well-made oar and go, until you reach  
 a people who know nothing of the sea,  
 who don't put salt on any food they eat,  
 and have no knowledge of ships painted red  
 or well-made oars that serve those ships as wings. 90  
 I'll tell you a sure sign you won't forget—  
 when someone else runs into you and says  
 you've got a shovel used for winnowing  
 on your broad shoulders, then fix that fine oar  
 in the ground and offer rich sacrifice

to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,  
 and a boar that breeds with sows.<sup>1</sup> And then leave.  
 Go home, and there make sacred offerings  
 to immortal gods, who hold wide heaven,  
 all of them in order. Your death will come 100  
 out of the sea, such a gentle passing,  
 when you are bowed down with a ripe old age,  
 and your people prospering around you.<sup>2</sup>  
 In all these things I'm telling you the truth.'

He finished speaking. Then I replied and said:

'Teiresias, no doubt the gods themselves  
 have spun the threads of this. But come, tell me—  
 and speak the truth—I can see there the shade  
 of my dead mother, sitting near the blood,  
 saying nothing. She does not dare confront 110  
 the face of her own son or speak to him.  
 Tell me, my lord, how she may understand  
 just who I am.'

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

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

After these words,  
 the shade of lord Teiresias returned 120  
 to Hades, having made his prophecy.  
 I stayed there undaunted, till my mother  
 came up and drank dark blood. Then she knew me.  
 Full of sorrow, she spoke—her words had wings:

'My son, how have you come while still alive

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<sup>1</sup>*winnowing*: Separating grain from chaff; *take up ... Then leave*: These remarks seem to suggest that Odysseus must finally propitiate Poseidon by going somewhere far inland, where people have never heard of that god and, in effect, make him known with the oar planted in the ground and a sacrifice.

<sup>2</sup>*Your death ... the truth*: This prophecy of the death of Odysseus has prompted much comment, especially the phrase "out of the sea," which some interpreters wish to emend to read "from the sea" (i.e., someone will arrive by boat and bring about Odysseus's death).

down to this sad darkness? For living men  
 it's difficult to come and see these things—  
 huge rivers, fearful streams, stand between us,  
 first and foremost, Oceanus, which no man  
 can cross on foot. He needs a sturdy ship. 130  
 Have you only now journeyed here from Troy,  
 after a long time wandering with your ship  
 and your companions? Have you still not reached  
 Ithaca or seen your wife in your own house?

Once she'd finished, I answered her:

'Mother,

I had to come down here to Hades' house,  
 meet the shade of Teiresias of Thebes,  
 and hear his prophecy. I have not yet  
 come near Achaea's shores or disembarked  
 in our own land. I've been wandering round 140  
 in constant misery, ever since I left  
 with noble Agamemnon, bound for Troy,  
 to fight against the Trojans. But come now,  
 tell me this—and make sure you speak the truth—  
 what grievous form of death took you away?  
 A lengthy illness? Did archer Artemis  
 attack and kill you with her gentle arrows?<sup>1</sup>  
 And tell me of my father and my son,  
 whom I left behind. Tell me of the wife  
 I married. What are her thoughts and plans? 150  
 Is she still there with our son, keeping watch  
 on everything? Or has she been married  
 to the finest of Achaeans?'

When I said this,  
 my honored mother answered me at once:

'You can be sure she's waiting in your home,  
 her heart still faithful. But her nights and days  
 all end in sorrow, with her shedding tears.  
 As for your father, he stays on his farm  
 and never travels down into the town.  
 He lives in sorrow, nursing in his heart 160  
 enormous grief, longing for your return.'

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<sup>1</sup>archer Artemis: Artemis, virgin goddess of the hunt, is frequently depicted wielding a bow and arrow.

A harsh old age has overtaken him.  
 That's how I met my fate and died, as well.  
 I was not struck and killed inside my home  
 by gentle arrows of the keen-eyed archer,  
 nor did I die of some disease which steals  
 spirit from our limbs, as we waste away  
 in pain. No. It was my longing for you,  
 glorious Odysseus, for your loving care,  
 that robbed me of my life, so honey-sweet.' 170

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

'Mother, why do you not linger with me?  
 I'd like to hold you, so that even here  
 in Hades, we might throw our loving arms 180  
 around each other and then have our fill  
 of icy lamentation. Or are you  
 a phantom royal Persephone has sent  
 to make me groan and grieve still more?'

I spoke.  
 My honored mother quickly answered me:

'My child, of all men most unfortunate,  
 no, dread Persephone, daughter of Zeus,  
 is not deceiving you. Once mortals die,  
 this is what's ordained for them. Their sinews  
 no longer hold flesh and bone together. 190  
 The mighty power of a blazing fire  
 destroys them, once our spirit flies from us,  
 from our white bones. And then it slips away,  
 and, like a dream, it flutters to and fro.'

*[Odysseus then describes to the Phaeacians how he saw a large number of shades of famous women from olden times.]*

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence,  
 saying not a word, spellbound in the shadowy hall.

The first to speak was white-armed Arete, who said:

“Phaeacians, how does this man seem to you  
 for beauty, stature, and, within himself,  
 a fair, well-balanced mind? He is my guest, 200  
 though each of you shares in this honour, too.  
 So don’t be quick to send him on his way,  
 and don’t hold back your gifts to one in need.”

Then old warrior Echeneus addressed them all—  
 one of the Phaeacian elders there among them:

“Friends, what our wise queen has just said to us,  
 as we’d expect, is not wide of the mark.  
 You must attend to her. But the last word  
 and the decision rest with Alcinous.”

Once Echeneus finished, Alcinous spoke out: 210

“The queen indeed will have the final word,  
 as surely as I live and am the king  
 of the Phaeacians, men who love the oar.  
 But though our guest is longing to return,  
 let him agree to stay until tomorrow.  
 By then I’ll have collected all our gifts.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men most renowned,  
 if you asked me to stay for one whole year,  
 to arrange my escort and give splendid gifts, 220  
 then I would still agree. It’s far better  
 to get back to one’s own dear native place  
 with more wealth in hand. I’ll win more respect,  
 more love from anyone who looks at me,  
 whenever I return to Ithaca.”

Alcinous then replied to him and said:

“Odysseus,  
 when we look at you, we do not perceive  
 that you’re in any way a lying fraud,  
 like many men the black earth nourishes

and scatters everywhere, who make up lies  
 from things no man has seen. You speak so well,  
 and you have such a noble heart inside. 230  
 You've told your story with a minstrel's skill,  
 the painful agonies of the Argives  
 and your own, as well. Come then, tell me this—  
 and speak the truth—did you see your comrades,  
 those godlike men who went with you to Troy  
 and met their fate there? This night before us  
 will be lengthy, astonishingly so.  
 It's not yet time to sleep here in the halls,  
 so tell me of these marvellous events." 240

Adventurous Odysseus answered Alcinous  
 and said this in reply:

“Lord Alcinous,  
 If you are eager to hear even more,  
 I will not hesitate to speak to you  
 of other things more pitiful than these.  
 I mean the troubles of those friends of mine  
 who perished later—they managed to escape  
 the Trojans' fearsome battle cries but died  
 when they returned, thanks to the deviousness  
 of a malicious woman. 250

Once Persephone  
 dispersed those female shadows here and there,  
 then the grieving shade of Agamemnon,  
 son of Atreus, appeared. Around him  
 other shades had gathered, all those who died  
 and met their fate alongside Agamemnon  
 in Aegisthus's house. He knew me at once,  
 and after drinking blood, he wept aloud,  
 shedding many tears, and stretched out his hands,  
 keen to reach me. But he no longer had  
 any inner power or strength, not like  
 the force his supple limbs possessed before. 260  
 I watched him and wept. Pity filled my heart.  
 Then I called out to him—my words had wings:

‘Lord Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
 king of men, what fatal net of grievous death  
 destroyed you? Did Poseidon stir the winds

into a furious storm and strike your ships?  
 Or were you killed by enemies on land,  
 while you were cutting out their cattle herds 270  
 or rich flocks of sheep? Or were you fighting  
 to seize their town and carry off their wives?

I paused, and he at once gave me his answer:

‘Ingenious Odysseus, Laertes’ son,  
 and Zeus’s child, Poseidon did not kill me  
 in my ships by rousing turbulent winds  
 into a vicious storm. Nor was I slain  
 by enemies on land. No. Aegisthus  
 brought on my fatal end. He murdered me, 280  
 and he was helped by my accursed wife,  
 after he’d welcomed me into his home  
 and prepared a feast for me, like an ox  
 one butchers at the trough. And so I died  
 the most pitiful of deaths. Around me  
 they kept killing all of my companions,  
 like white-tusked pigs. The saddest thing I heard  
 was Cassandra, Priam’s daughter, screaming.<sup>1</sup>  
 That traitor Clytaemnestra slaughtered her  
 right there beside me. Though I was dying,  
 I raised my arms to strike her with my sword, 290  
 but that dog-faced bitch turned her back on me.  
 Even though I was on my way to Hades,  
 she made no attempt to use her fingers  
 to close my eyelids or to shut my mouth.’<sup>2</sup>

Agamemnon finished. I replied at once:

‘That’s appalling! Surely wide-thundering Zeus  
 for many years has shown a lethal hate  
 towards the family of Atreus,  
 thanks to the conniving of some woman.  
 Many died because of Helen, and then 300  
 Clytaemnestra arranged a trap for you,

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<sup>1</sup>*Cassandra*: Cassandra, daughter of the king of Troy, was given to Agamemnon by the army as part of his share of the captured Trojan loot; Cassandra, who had prophetic powers, had predicted the fall of Troy but was not believed.

<sup>2</sup>*no attempt ... my mouth*: Actions made out of respect for the dead on their way to Hades; the refusal to carry them out shows the greatest disrespect.

while you were fighting somewhere far away.<sup>1</sup>

As we two stood there in sad conversation,  
 full of sorrow and shedding many tears,  
 Achilles's shade came up, son of Peleus,  
 with those of glorious Antilochus  
 and Patroclus, too, as well as Ajax,  
 who in his looks and body was the best  
 of all Danaans, after Achilles,  
 whom no one else could match.<sup>2</sup> Then the shadow 310  
 of the swift-footed son of Aeacus  
 knew who I was, and with a cry of grief,  
 Achilles spoke to me—his words had wings:

'Adventurous Odysseus, Laertes's son  
 and Zeus's child, what a bold man you are!  
 What exploit will your heart ever dream up  
 to top this one? How can you dare to come  
 down here into Hades, the dwelling place  
 for the mindless dead, shades of worn-out men?'

Achilles spoke. I answered him at once: 320

'Achilles, son of Peleus, mightiest  
 by far of the Achaeans, I came here  
 because I had to see Teiresias,  
 and hear his prophecy of my return  
 to rugged Ithaca. I've not yet reached  
 Achaean land. I have not disembarked  
 on my own soil. I'm in constant trouble.  
 But as for you, Achilles, there's no man  
 in former days who was more blessed than you,  
 and none will come in future. Before now, 330  
 while you were still alive, we Achaeans  
 honoured you as we did the gods. And now,  
 since you've come down here, you rule with power  
 among those who have died. So Achilles,  
 you have no cause to grieve because you're dead.'

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<sup>1</sup>*because of Helen*: The elopement of Helen with Paris, a prince of Troy, had been the immediate cause of the Trojan war.

<sup>2</sup>*Achilles*: The greatest Achaean warrior during the Trojan War, and the hero of Homer's *Iliad*. In honour of his grandfather, a son of Zeus, he is sometimes called "son of Aeacus." Achilles died at Troy.

I paused, and he immediately replied

‘Don’t try to comfort me about my death,  
glorious Odysseus. I’d rather live  
working as a wage-labourer for hire  
by some other man, one who had no land  
and not much in the way of livelihood,  
than lord it over all the wasted dead.’ 340

With these words the shade of swift Achilles  
moved off through meadows filled with asphodel.<sup>1</sup>

The other shadows of the dead and gone  
stood there in sorrow, all asking questions  
about the ones they loved. The only one  
who stood apart was the shade of Ajax,  
son of Telamon, still full of anger  
for my victory, when I’d bested him  
beside our ships, in that competition 350  
for Achilles’s arms. His honored mother  
had offered them as prizes. The judges  
were Athena and captive sons of Troy.  
How I wish I’d never won that contest!<sup>2</sup>  
Those weapons were the cause earth swallowed up  
the life of Ajax, such a splendid man,  
who, in his looks and actions, was the best  
of all the Argives after Achilles,  
great son of Peleus. I called to him—  
to offer him some reassurance: 360

‘Ajax,  
worthy son of Telamon, can’t you forget,  
even when you’re dead, your anger at me  
over those destructive weapons? The gods  
turned them to a curse against the Argives,

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<sup>1</sup>*asphodel*: Genus of liliaceous flowers; said to cover the Elysian fields, the paradise in which the blessed or heroic would reside after death.

<sup>2</sup>*Ajax ... Achilles’s arms*: Ajax, king of Salamis, (known as the Greater Ajax) was the finest Achaean warrior after Achilles. When Achilles died, there was a contest for his armour, in which the two main claimants were Odysseus and Ajax. When Odysseus was awarded the weapons by the judges, Ajax went mad and later killed himself; *sons of Troy*: The issue of who decided to award the arms of Achilles to Odysseus rather than to Ajax has been much discussed. In one version of the story, the Achaeans asked a number of Trojan prisoners which warrior leader they feared more. Achilles’s mother, who gave the weapons up to be awarded as a prize, was the minor sea goddess Thetis.

when they lost you, such a tower of strength.  
 Now you've been killed, Achaeans mourn your death  
 unceasingly, just as they do Achilles,  
 son of Peleus. No one is to blame  
 but Zeus, who in his terrifying rage 370  
 against the army of Danaan spearmen  
 brought on your death. Come over here, my lord,  
 so you can hear me as I talk to you.  
 Let your proud heart and anger now relent.'

I finished. He did not reply, but left,  
 moving away towards Erebus, to join  
 the other shadows of the dead and gone.  
 For all his rage, he would have talked to me,  
 or I to him, but in my chest and heart  
 I wished to see more shades of those who'd died. 380

And I saw Tityus, son of glorious Earth,  
 lying on the ground. His body covered  
 nine acres and more.<sup>1</sup> Two vultures sat there,  
 one on either side, ripping his liver,  
 their sharp beaks jabbing deep inside his guts,  
 for his hands could not protect his body.  
 He'd attacked Leto, Zeus's lovely wife,  
 as she was passing through Panopeus,  
 with its fine dancing grounds, towards Pytho.  
 Then I saw Tantalus in agony, 390  
 standing in a pool of water so deep  
 it almost reached his chin.<sup>2</sup> He looked as if  
 he had a thirst but could not take a drink.  
 Whenever that old man bent down, desperate  
 to drink, the water there was swallowed up  
 and vanished. You could see black earth appear  
 around his feet. A god dried up the place.  
 Some high and leafy trees above his head  
 were in full bloom—pears and pomegranates,  
 apple trees—all with gleaming fruit—sweet figs 400

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<sup>1</sup>*Tityus, son ... and more*: Tityus was a monstrous son of Gaia (the divine personification of the Earth). Hera persuaded Tityus to attack Leto, whose children, Apollo and Artemis, came to her help and killed him; in Hades he was left to the mercy of vultures, who feasted on his liver, as punishment. The measurement describing his size is unclear.

<sup>2</sup>*Tantalus*: a son of Zeus. His punishment comes from some action he committed against the gods (stealing the gods' food or murdering his son Pelops and serving him to the gods for dinner).

and luscious olives. Each time the old man stretched out his arms and tried to reach for them, a wind would raise them to the shadowy clouds.

And then, in his painful torment, I saw Sisyphus striving with both hands to raise a massive rock.<sup>1</sup> He'd brace his arms and feet, then strain to push it up a nearby hill. But as he was about to get that stone up to the top, its overpowering weight would make it change its course—the cruel rock would roll back down again along the plain. Then he'd strain once more to get it up the slope. His limbs dripped sweat, and dust rose from his head. 410

And then I noticed mighty Hercules, or at least his image, for he himself was with immortal gods, enjoying their feasts.<sup>2</sup> Hebe with the lovely ankles is his wife, daughter of great Zeus and Hera, goddess of the golden sandals. Around him there shades of the dead were making noises, like birds fluttering here and there, quite terrified. And like dark night, he was glaring round him, his unsheathed bow in hand, with an arrow against the string, as if prepared to shoot. The strap across his chest was frightening, a golden belt inlaid with images—amazing things—bears, wild boars, and lions with glittering eyes, battles, fights, murders, and men being killed. I hope the craftsman whose skill conceived the pictures on that belt never made or ever makes another. His eyes saw me and knew just who I was. With a mournful tone he called out to me—his words had wings: 420 430

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<sup>1</sup>*Sisyphus*: Sisyphus gave away the secrets of the gods and once tricked the god of death, so that the dead could not reach the underworld.

<sup>2</sup>*mighty Hercules ... their feasts*: Hercules, a mortal, had the very rare distinction of being admitted to heaven after death; hence, Odysseus meets an “image” of Hercules. His later mention of having to serve an inferior man is a reference to the Labours of Hercules, work he had to carry out for king Eurystheus over a twelve-year period.

‘Odysseus, you resourceful man,  
 son of Laertes and a child of Zeus,  
 are you now bearing an unhappy fate  
 below the sunlight, as I, too, did once?  
 I was a son\_of Zeus, child of Cronos,  
 and yet I had to bear so many troubles,  
 forced to perform those labours for a man 440  
 vastly inferior to me, someone  
 who kept assigning me the harshest tasks.  
 One time he sent me here to bring away  
 Hades’s hound. There was no other challenge  
 he could dream up more difficult for me  
 than that one. But I carried the dog off  
 and brought him back from Hades with my guides,  
 Hermes and glittery-eyed Athena.’

With these words he returned to Hades’s home.  
 But I stayed at that place a while, in case 450  
 one of those heroic men who perished  
 in days gone by might come. I might have seen  
 still more men from earlier times, the ones  
 I wished to see—Theseus and Perithous,  
 great children of the gods. Before I could,  
 a thousand tribes of those who’d died appeared,  
 with an astounding noise. Pale fear gripped me—  
 holy Persephone might send at me  
 a horrific monster, the Gorgon’s head.<sup>1</sup>

I quickly made my way back to the ship 460  
 and told my crew to get themselves on board  
 and loosen off the cables at the stern.  
 They went aboard at once and took their seats  
 along each rowing bench. A rising swell  
 carried our ship away down Ocean’s stream.  
 We rowed at first, but then a fair wind blew.”

BOOK TWELVE  
 THE SIRENS, SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS, THE CATTLE OF THE SUN

“Our ship sailed on, away from Ocean’s stream,  
 across the great wide sea, and reached Aeaëa,

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<sup>1</sup>*Gorgon’s head*: The Gorgons were three terrifying sisters, the most famous being Medusa, the only one who was not immortal. Her head, even when cut off, could turn men to stone.

the island home and dancing grounds of Dawn.  
 We sailed in, hauled our ship up on the beach,  
 then walked along the shore beside the sea.  
 There, waiting for bright Dawn, we fell asleep.

Circe was well aware of our return  
 from Hades' home. Dressed in her finery,  
 she quickly came to us. With her she brought  
 servants carrying bread, plenty of meat, 10  
 and bright red wine. Then the lovely goddess  
 stood in our midst and spoke:

'You reckless men,  
 you've been down to Hades while still alive,  
 to meet death twice, when other men die once.  
 But come, enjoy this food and drink this wine.  
 Take all day. Then, as soon as Dawn arrives,  
 you'll sail. I'll show you your course and tell you  
 each sign to look for, so you'll not suffer,  
 or, thanks to ill-thought acts on sea and land,  
 endure great pain.'

Circe finished speaking. 20  
 And our proud hearts agreed with what she'd said.  
 So all that day until the sun went down  
 we sat there eating rich supplies of meat  
 and drinking down sweet wine. The sun then set,  
 and darkness came. So we lay down and slept  
 beside our ship's stern cables. But Circe  
 took me by the hand and led me away,  
 some distance from the crew. She made me sit,  
 while she stretched out beside me on the ground.  
 I told her every detail of our trip, 30  
 describing all of it from start to finish.  
 Then lovely Circe spoke to me and said:

'All these things have thus come to an end.  
 But you must listen now to what I say—  
 a god himself will be reminding you.  
 First of all, you'll run into the Sirens.  
 They seduce all men who come across them,  
 and no man who unwittingly sails past  
 and hears the Sirens' call ever returns.  
 His wife and infant children in his home 40

will never stand beside him full of joy.  
 No. Instead, the Sirens' clear-toned singing  
 will captivate his heart. They'll be sitting  
 in a meadow, surrounded by a pile,  
 a massive heap, of rotting human bones  
 encased in shrivelled skin. Row on past them.  
 Roll some sweet wax in your hand and stuff it  
 in your companions' ears, so none of them  
 can listen. But if you're keen to hear them,  
 make your crew tie you down in your swift ship. 50  
 When your men have rowed on past the Sirens,  
 I cannot tell you which alternative  
 to follow on your route—for you yourself  
 will have to trust your heart. But I'll explain  
 the options. One has overhanging rocks,  
 on which dark-eyed Amphitrite's great waves  
 smash with a roar. These cliffs the sacred gods  
 have called the Planctae.<sup>1</sup> No birds pass through there.  
 No human ship has ever reached this place  
 and made it past. Instead, waves from the sea 60  
 and deadly blasts of fire carry away  
 a whirling mass of timbers from the boat  
 and human corpses. Only one ocean ship,  
 most famous of them all, has sailed on by,  
 the Argo, on her way home from Aetes,  
 and waves would soon have smashed that vessel, too,  
 against the massive rocks, had Hera not  
 propelled her through. For Jason was her friend.<sup>2</sup>  
 On the other route there are two rock cliffs.  
 One has a sharp peak jutting all the way 70  
 up to wide heaven. Around that mountain  
 a dark cloud sits, which never melts away.  
 No human being could climb up that rock  
 and stand on top. Halfway up the cliff face  
 there's a shadowy cave. It faces west,  
 to Erebus. You'll steer your ship at it.  
 In there lives Scylla. She has a dreadful yelp.  
 It's true her voice sounds like a new-born pup,  
 but she's a vicious beast. No mortal man

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<sup>1</sup>*Amphitrite*: Goddess of the sea and wife of Poseidon.

<sup>2</sup>*the Argo ... her friend*: The Argo, a ship named after its builder Argus, carried Jason and his companions (the Argonauts) to Colchis on their trip to capture the Golden Fleece and back again; Jason was favored by Hera. *Aetes*: king of Colchis.

would feel good seeing her, nor would a god 80  
 who crossed her path. She has a dozen feet,  
 all deformed, six enormously long necks,  
 with a horrific head on each of them,  
 and three rows of teeth packed close together,  
 full of murky death. Her lower body  
 she keeps in her hollow cave, out of sight,  
 but sticks her heads outside the fearful hole,  
 and fishes there, scouring around the rock  
 for dolphins, swordfish, or some bigger prey,  
 whatever she can seize of all those beasts 90  
 moaning Amphitrite keeps nourishing  
 in numbers past all counting. No sailors  
 yet can boast they and their ship sailed by her  
 without disaster. Each of Scylla's heads  
 carries off a man, snatching him away  
 right off the dark-prowed ship. Then, Odysseus,  
 you'll see the other cliff. It's not so high.  
 There's a huge fig tree there with leaves in bloom.  
 Just below that tree divine Charybdis  
 sucks black seawater down. She spews it out 100  
 three times a day, and then three times a day  
 she gulps it down—a terrifying sight.  
 May you never meet her when she swallows!  
 Nothing can save you from destruction then,  
 not even Poseidon, Shaker of the Earth.  
 Make sure your ship stays close to Scylla's rock.  
 Row past there with all speed. It's much better  
 to mourn for six companions in your ship  
 than to have them all wiped out together.

Next you'll reach the island of Thrinacia, 110  
 where Helios's many cattle graze,  
 his rich flocks, too—seven herds of cattle  
 and just as many lovely flocks of sheep,  
 with fifty in each group. They bear no young  
 and never die. Their herders are divine.  
 Now, if you leave these animals unharmed  
 and focus on your journey home, I think  
 you may get back to Ithaca, although  
 you'll meet misfortune. But if you harm them,  
 then I foresee destruction for your ship 120  
 and crew. Even if you yourself escape,  
 you'll get back home in great distress and late,

after all your shipmates have been killed.’

Circe finished speaking. When Dawn came up  
 on her golden throne, the lovely goddess  
 left to go up-island. So I returned  
 back to the ship, where I urged my comrades  
 to get on board and loosen off the ropes.  
 They quickly climbed into the ship, sat down  
 in proper order at each rowing bench, 130  
 and struck the gray sea surface with their oars,  
 as fair winds blew behind our dark-prowed ship.

Then the wind died down. Everything was calm,  
 without a breeze. Some god had stilled the waves.  
 My comrades stood up, furled the sail, stowed it  
 in the hollow ship, then sat at their oars,  
 churning the water white with polished blades  
 carved out of pine. With my sharp sword I cut  
 a large round chunk of wax into small bits,  
 then kneaded them with my strong fingertips. 140  
 Once I had plugged my comrades’ ears with wax,  
 they tied me hand and foot onto the ship,  
 so I stood upright hard against the mast.  
 They lashed the rope ends to the mast as well,  
 then sat and struck the gray sea with their oars.  
 But when we were about as far away  
 as a man shouts, moving forward quickly,  
 our swift ship did not slip past the Sirens,  
 once it came in close, without being seen.<sup>1</sup>  
 So they began their clear-toned cry:

‘Odysseus, 150  
 you famous man, great glory of Achaeans,  
 come over here. Let your ship pause awhile,  
 so you can hear the songs we two will sing.  
 No man has ever rowed in his black ship  
 past here without attending to our songs,  
 sweet-voiced melodies sung from our own lips.  
 That brings him joy, and he departs from here  
 a wiser man, for we two understand  
 all the misfortunes men endured at Troy,

---

<sup>1</sup> Odysseus’s encounter with the Sirens seems to take place on an island between the west coast of Italy and Sicily.

hardships faced by Trojans and Achaeans, 160  
 thanks to what the gods then willed, for we know  
 all things that happen on this fertile earth.'

They paused. The voice that reached me was so fine  
 my heart longed to listen. I told my crew  
 to set me free, sending them clear signals  
 with my eyebrows. But they fell to the oars  
 and rowed ahead. Then two of them got up,  
 Perimedes and Eurylochus, bound me  
 with more rope and lashed me even tighter.  
 When they'd rowed on well beyond the Sirens, 170  
 my loyal crew quickly removed the wax  
 I'd stuffed in each man's ears and loosed my ropes.

But once we'd left the island far behind,  
 I saw giant waves and smoke. Then I heard  
 a crashing roar. The crew was terrified.  
 I went through the ship, cheering up the men,  
 standing beside each one and speaking words  
 of reassurance:

'Friends, up to this point,  
 we have not been strangers to misfortune.  
 Surely the bad things now are nothing worse 180  
 than when the cyclops with his savage force  
 kept us prisoners in his hollow cave.  
 But even there, thanks to my excellence,  
 intelligence, and planning, we escaped.  
 I think someday we'll be remembering  
 these dangers, too. But come now, all of us  
 should follow what I say. Stay by your oars,  
 keep striking them against the surging sea.  
 Great Zeus may somehow let us all survive.'

I spoke. They quickly followed what I'd said. 190  
 I did not mention Scylla—for she was  
 a threat for which there was no remedy—  
 in case my comrades, overcome with fear,  
 stopped rowing and huddled up together  
 inside the boat. So we kept moving on,  
 up the narrow strait, groaning as we went.  
 On one side lay Scylla; on the other  
 divine Charybdis terrified us all,

by swallowing salt water from the sea.<sup>1</sup>  
 When she spewed it out, she seethed and bubbled 200  
 uncontrollably, just like a cauldron  
 on a huge fire, while high above our heads  
 the spray rained down on top of both the cliffs.  
 And when she sucked the salt sea water down,  
 everything there looked totally confused,  
 a dreadful roar arose around the rocks,  
 and in the depths the dark and sandy ground  
 was plain to see. Pale fear gripped my comrades.  
 When we saw Charybdis, we were afraid  
 we'd be destroyed. Then Scylla snatched away 210  
 six of my companions, right from the deck,  
 the strongest and the bravest men I had.  
 I turned to watch the crew and the swift ship—  
 already I could see their hands and feet,  
 as Scylla carried them high overhead.  
 They cried out and screamed, calling me by name  
 one final time, their hearts in agony.  
 Then, in the entrance to her cave, Scylla  
 devoured the men—they still kept on screaming,  
 stretching out their arms in my direction, 220  
 as they met their painful deaths. Of all things  
 my eyes have witnessed in my journeying  
 on pathways of the sea, the sight of them  
 was the most piteous I've ever seen.

Once we had made it past those rocks and fled,  
 escaping Scylla and dread Charybdis,  
 we reached the lovely island of the god,  
 home to those fine herds of broad-faced cattle  
 and numerous rich flocks belonging to  
 Helios Hyperion, god of the sun.<sup>2</sup> 230  
 While I was still at sea in my black ship  
 and heard the lowing cattle being penned  
 and bleating sheep, there fell into my heart  
 the speeches of Teiresias of Thebes,  
 the sightless prophet—Circe's words, as well,  
 back on Aeaea. So with heavy heart

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<sup>1</sup>Scylla and Charybdis are commonly located on either side of the narrow Strait of Messina, between Italy and Sicily.

<sup>2</sup>The location of Thrinacia, the island where Helios's cattle live, is uncertain. It may be in Sicily or perhaps Malta.

I spoke to my companions:

‘Shipmates,  
let all of you now swear this solemn oath—  
if by chance we find a herd of cattle  
or a large flock of sheep, not one of you  
will be so overcome with foolishness  
that you will kill a cow or sheep. Instead,  
you’ll be content to eat the food supplies  
which goddess Circe gave.’

240

Once I’d said this,  
they swore, as I had asked, they’d never kill  
those animals. When they had made the oath  
and finished promising, we moved our ship  
inside a hollow harbor, by a spring  
whose water tasted sweet. Then my crewmen  
disembarked and made a welcome dinner.  
When everyone had eaten food and drunk  
to ease his heart, they wept as they recalled  
those dear companions Scylla snatched away  
out of the hollow ship and then devoured.  
As they cried there, sweet sleep came over them.

250

But when three-quarters of the night had passed  
and the stars had shifted their positions,  
cloud-gatherer Zeus stirred up a hostile wind  
and an amazing storm, which hid in clouds  
both land and sea alike, and then dark night  
descended. Once rose-fingered Dawn arrived,  
we dragged up our ship and then secured it  
inside a hollow cave, a place nymphs used  
as a fine dancing and assembly ground.

260

But then South Wind kept blowing one whole month.  
It never stopped. No other wind sprang up,  
except those times when East and South Wind blew.  
Now, while the men still had red wine and bread,  
they did not touch the cattle. They were keen  
to stay alive. But once what we had stored  
inside our ship was gone, they had to roam,  
scouring around for game and fish and birds,  
whatever came to hand. They made bent hooks  
to fish, as starvation gnawed their stomachs.

270

At that point I went inland, up-island,  
 to pray to the gods, hoping one of them  
 would show me a way home. Once I had moved  
 across the island, far from my companions,  
 I washed my hands in a protected spot,  
 a shelter from the wind, and said my prayers 280  
 to all the gods who live on Mount Olympus.  
 Then they poured sweet sleep across my eyelids.

Meanwhile, Eurylochus began to give  
 truly bad advice to my companions:

‘Shipmates, although you’re suffering distress,  
 hear me out. For wretched human beings  
 all forms of death are hateful. But to die  
 from lack of food, to meet one’s fate like that,  
 is worst of all. So come, let’s drive away 290  
 the best of Helios’s herds, and then  
 we’ll sacrifice to the immortal gods  
 who hold wide heaven. And if we get home,  
 make it to Ithaca, our native land,  
 for Helios Hyperion we’ll build  
 a splendid temple, and inside we’ll put  
 many expensive gifts. If he’s enraged  
 about his straight-horned cattle and desires  
 to wreck our ship and other gods agree,  
 I’d rather lose my life once and for all  
 by choking on a wave than starve to death 300  
 on an abandoned island.’

Eurylochus spoke.

My other comrades agreed with what he said.  
 They quickly rounded up the finest beasts  
 from Helios’s herd, which was close by,  
 sleek, broad-faced animals with curving horns,  
 grazing near the dark-prowed ship. My comrades  
 stood around them, all praying to the gods.  
 They broke off tender leaves from a high oak,  
 for there was no white barley on the ship.<sup>1</sup>  
 Once they had prayed, they cut the creatures’ throats, 310  
 flayed them, and cut out portions of the thighs.  
 These they hid in double layers of fat

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<sup>1</sup>white barley: Traditionally required for sacrifice.

and laid raw meat on top. They had no wine  
to pour down on the flaming sacrifice,  
so they used some water for libations  
and roasted all the entrails in the fire.  
Once the thigh parts were completely roasted  
and they'd had a taste of inner organs,  
they sliced the rest and skewered it on spits.  
That was the moment sweet sleep left my eyes. 320  
I went down by the shore to our swift ship.  
As I drew closer to our curving ship,  
the sweet smell of hot fat floated round me.  
I groaned and cried out to the immortals:

'Father Zeus and you other sacred gods,  
who live forever, you forced it on me,  
that cruel sleep, to bring about my doom.  
For my companions who remained behind  
have planned something disastrous.'

A messenger  
quickly came to Helios Hyperion, 330  
long-robed Lampetie, bringing the news—  
we had killed his cattle.<sup>1</sup> Without delay,  
he spoke to the immortals, full of rage:

'Father Zeus and you other blessed gods,  
who live forever, take your vengeance now  
on those men, companions of Odysseus,  
Laertes's son, who, in their arrogance,  
have killed my animals, the very ones  
I always look upon with such delight  
whenever I move up to starry heaven 340  
and then turn back from there towards the earth.  
If they don't pay me proper restitution  
for those beasts, then I'll go down to Hades  
and shine among the dead.'

Cloud-gatherer Zeus  
answered him and said:

'Helios, I think  
you should keep on shining for immortals

---

<sup>1</sup>*Lampetie*: Daughter of Helios, one of the guardians of his cattle.

and for mortal beings on fertile earth.  
 With a dazzling thunderbolt I myself  
 will quickly strike at that swift ship of theirs  
 and, in the middle of the wine-dark sea, 350  
 smash it to tiny pieces.'

I learned of this  
 from fair Calypso, who said she herself  
 had heard it from Hermes the Messenger.

I came down to the sea and reached the ship.  
 There I bitterly attacked my crewmen,  
 each of them in turn, standing by the boat.  
 But we could not find a single remedy—  
 the cattle were already dead. The gods  
 immediately sent my men bad omens—  
 hides crept along the ground, while on the spits 360  
 the meat began to bellow, and a sound  
 like cattle lowing filled the air.

For six days,  
 those comrades I had trusted feasted there,  
 eating the cattle they had rounded up,  
 the finest beasts in Helios's herd.  
 But when Zeus, son of Cronos, brought to us  
 the seventh day, the stormy winds died down.  
 We went aboard at once, put up the mast,  
 hoisted the white sail, and left the island,  
 out on the wide sea.

Once we'd sailed away, 370  
 no other land appeared, just sky and sea.  
 The son of Cronos sent us a black cloud,  
 above our hollow ship, while underneath  
 the sea grew dark. Our boat sailed on its course,  
 but not for long. All at once, West Wind whipped up  
 a frantic storm—the blasts of wind snapped off  
 both forestays on the mast, which then fell back,  
 and all our rigging crashed down in the hold.  
 In the stern part of the ship, the falling mast  
 struck the helmsman on his head, caving in 380  
 his skull, every bone at once. Then he fell,  
 like a diver, off the boat. His proud spirit  
 left his bones. Then Zeus roared out his thunder

and with a bolt of lightning struck our ship.  
 The blow from Zeus's lightning made our craft  
 shiver from stem to stern and filled it up  
 with sulphur smoke. My men fell overboard  
 and rode atop the waves, like cormorants,  
 around our blackened ship, because the god  
 had robbed them of their chance to get back home. 390

But I kept moving up and down the deck,  
 until the breaking seas had loosened off  
 both sides of the keel. Waves were holding up  
 the shattered ship but then snapped off the mast  
 right at the keel. But the ox-hide backstay  
 had fallen over it, and so with that  
 I lashed them both together, mast and keel.  
 I sat on these and then was carried off  
 by those destructive winds. But when the storms  
 from West Wind ceased, South Wind began to blow, 400  
 and that distressed my spirit—I worried  
 about floating back to grim Charybdis.  
 All night I drifted. When the sun came up,  
 I reached Scylla's cliff and dread Charybdis  
 still sucking down salt water from the sea.  
 I jumped up into the lofty fig tree  
 and held on there, as if I were a bat.  
 But there was nowhere I could plant my feet,  
 nor could I climb the tree—its roots were spread  
 far down below me, and its branches stretched 410  
 above me, out of reach, immense and long,  
 shadowing Charybdis. So I hung there,  
 staunch in my hope that when she spewed again  
 she'd throw up keel and mast. And to my joy,  
 at last they surfaced. My hands and feet let go,  
 and from up high I fell into the sea  
 beside those lengthy spars. I sat on them  
 and used my hands to paddle my way through.

I drifted for nine days. On the tenth night,  
 I was guided to Ogygia by the gods, 420  
 the island where fair-haired Calypso lives,  
 fearful goddess with the power of song.  
 She welcomed me and treated me with care.  
 But why should I tell you that story now?  
 It was only yesterday, in your home,

I told it to you and your noble wife.  
 And it's an irritating thing, I think,  
 to re-tell a story once it's clearly told."

BOOK THIRTEEN  
 ODYSSEUS LEAVES PHAEACIA AND REACHES ITHACA

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence,  
 motionless and spellbound in the shadowy hall,  
 Then Alcinous again spoke up and said to him:

"Odysseus, since you're visiting my home,  
 with its brass floors and high-pitched roof, I think  
 you won't leave here and go back disappointed,  
 although you've truly suffered much bad luck.  
 Clothing for our guest is packed already,  
 stored in a polished chest inlaid with gold,  
 as well as all the other gifts brought here  
 by Phaeacia's counsellors."

10

Mighty Alcinous

dispatched a herald to conduct him to the sea  
 and his fast ship. Once they had walked down to the ship,  
 beside the sea, the noble youths escorting him  
 immediately took the food and drink on board  
 and stowed them in the hollow ship. They spread a rug  
 and linen sheet on the deck inside the hollow ship,  
 at the stern, so Odysseus could have a peaceful sleep.  
 He went aboard, as well, and lay down in silence.  
 Each man sat in proper order at his oarlock.  
 They loosed the cable from the perforated stone.  
 Once they leaned back and stirred the water with their oars,  
 a calming sleep fell on his eyelids, undisturbed  
 and very soothing, a sensation much like death.  
 Just as four stallions yoked together charge ahead  
 across the plain, all racing on beneath the lash,  
 and jump high as they gallop quickly on their way,  
 that's how the stern part of that ship leapt up on high,  
 while in her wake the dark waves of the roaring sea  
 were churned to a great foam, as she sped on her path,  
 secure and safe. Not even wheeling hawks in flight,  
 the swiftest of all flying things, could match her speed,  
 as she raced ahead, slicing through the ocean waves,  
 bearing on board a man whose mind was like a god's.

20  
 30

His heart in earlier days had undergone much pain,  
 as he moved through men's wars and suffered on the waves.  
 Now he slept in peace, forgetting all his troubles.

When the most splendid of the morning stars appeared,  
 which always comes to herald light from early Dawn,  
 the fast sea-faring ship was nearing Ithaca. 40  
 Those rowers' arms had so much strength that half the boat,  
 which was moving quickly, was driven up on shore.  
 Once the crew had clambered from that well-built ship  
 onto dry land, first they carried off Odysseus,  
 lifting him out of the hollow ship still wrapped up  
 in the linen sheet and splendid blanket, placed him  
 down on the sand, fast asleep, then brought ashore  
 the gifts Phaeacia's noblemen had given him,  
 thanks to the goodwill of powerful Athena,  
 when he was setting out for home. They put these gifts 50  
 against the trunk of an olive tree, in a pile,  
 some distance from a path, in case someone came by,  
 before Odysseus could wake up, stumbled on them,  
 and robbed him. Then the Phaeacians set off for home.

*[Poseidon complains to Zeus about what the Phaeacians are doing to help Odysseus, and Zeus tells him to punish them. So Poseidon turns the Phaeacian ship and crew to stone, just as the ship is about to reach home.]*

Meanwhile, brave Odysseus, asleep in his own land,  
 woke up. He did not recognize just where he was.  
 And so all things seemed unfamiliar to their king,  
 the long straight paths, the harbour with safe anchorage,  
 the sheer-faced stony cliffs, the trees in rich full bloom.  
 So he jumped up and looked out at his native land. 60  
 He groaned aloud and struck his thighs with both his palms,  
 and then cried out in sorrow:

“Where am I now?  
 Whose strange country have I come to this time?  
 Are they violent, unjust, and cruel,  
 or do they welcome strangers? Do their minds  
 respect the gods? And all this treasure here,  
 where do I take that? Where do I go next?”

Then, overwhelmed with longing for his native land,  
 he wandered on the shore beside the crashing sea,

with many cries of grief. But then Athena came, 70  
 moving close to him in the form of a young man.  
 Odysseus, happy to catch sight of her, came up  
 and spoke to her—his words had wings:

“My friend,  
 since you’re the first one I’ve encountered here,  
 tell me the truth, so I can understand—  
 What country is this? Who are these people?  
 Is it some sunny island or a cape  
 jutting from the mainland out to sea?”

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

“Stranger, you must be a fool, or else come 80  
 from somewhere far away, if you must ask  
 about this land. Its name is not unknown—  
 not at all—many men have heard of it.  
 Ithaca is well known, even in Troy,  
 a long way from Achaean land, they say.”

Athena spoke, and much-enduring lord Odysseus  
 felt great joy, happy to learn of his ancestral lands.  
 Bright-eyed Athena smiled and stroked him with her hand.  
 Then she changed herself into a lovely woman,  
 tall and very skilled in creating splendid things. 90  
 She spoke to him—her words had wings:

“Odysseus,  
 of all men you’re the best at making plans  
 and giving speeches, and among all gods  
 I’m well known for subtlety and wisdom.  
 Still, you failed to recognize Athena,  
 daughter of Zeus, who’s always at your side,  
 looking out for you in every crisis.  
 Yes, I made all those Phaeacians love you.  
 Now I have come to weave a scheme with you  
 and hide these goods Phaeacian noblemen 100  
 offered as you were setting out for home,  
 thanks to my plans and what I had in mind.  
 I’ll tell you what Fate has in store for you.  
 You’ll find harsh troubles in your well-built home.  
 Be patient, for you must endure them all.  
 Don’t tell anyone, no man or woman,

you've just returned from wandering around.  
 Instead, keep silent. Bear the many pains.  
 When men act like savages, do nothing.  
 Now, let's not wait, but put away these goods 110  
 in some dark recess of this sacred cave,  
 where they'll stay safely stored inside for you.  
 And then let's think about how all these things  
 may turn out for the best."

*[Athena and Odysseus hide the gifts Odysseus brought with him on the ship.]*

Then the two of them  
 sat down by the trunk of a sacred olive tree  
 to think of ways to kill those insolent suitors.  
 Athena, bright-eyed goddess, was the first to speak:

"Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes's son  
 and child of Zeus, think how your hands may catch  
 these shameless suitors, who for three years now 120  
 have been lording it inside your palace,  
 wooing your godlike wife and offering her  
 their marriage gifts. She longs for your return.  
 Although her heart is sad, she feeds their hopes,  
 by giving each man hints he may prevail.  
 But her mind is filled with other matters."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"Goddess, if you had not told me all this,  
 I would have shared the fate of Agamemnon,  
 son of Atreus—death in my own home. 130  
 Come, weave a plan so I can pay them back.  
 Stand in person by my side, and fill me  
 with indomitable courage, as you did  
 when we loosed the bright diadem of Troy."

Gleaming-eyed goddess Athena then answered him:

"You can be certain I will stand by you.  
 I won't forget you when the trouble starts.  
 I think the brains and blood of many suitors  
 who consume your livelihood will spatter  
 this wide earth. But come, I will transform you, 140  
 so that no one here will recognize you."

Then you must go first to see the swineherd,  
 who tends your pigs. He's well-disposed to you  
 and loves your son and wise Penelope.  
 If you have questions, just ask the swineherd.  
 I'll go to Sparta, land of lovely women,  
 and there, Odysseus, I will summon back  
 your dear son, Telemachus, who has gone  
 to spacious Lacedaemon, to the home  
 of Menelaus, to hear news of you, 150  
 to learn if you are still alive somewhere."<sup>1</sup>

As she said this, Athena touched him with her staff.  
 She wrinkled the fine smooth skin on his supple limbs  
 and took the dark hair from his head. His arms and legs  
 she covered with an old man's ancient flesh and dimmed  
 his eyes, which earlier had been so beautiful.  
 She dressed him in different clothes—a ragged cloak,  
 a dirty tunic, tattered, dishevelled, and stained  
 with stinking smoke. Then around his shoulders she threw  
 a large hairless hide from a swift deer and gave him 160  
 a long staff and shabby leather pouch, full of holes,  
 with a twisted strap.

When the two of them  
 had made their plans, they parted, and Athena went  
 to Lacedaemon to bring back Odysseus' son.

BOOK FOURTEEN  
 ODYSSEUS MEETS EUMAEUS

Odysseus left the harbour, taking the rough path  
 into the woods and across the hills, to the place  
 where Athena told him he would meet the swineherd,  
 who was, of all the servants lord Odysseus had,  
 the one who took greatest care of his possessions.  
 He found him sitting in the front part of his home,  
 a built-up courtyard with a wide extensive view,  
 a large, handsome place, with cleared land all around it.  
 The swineherd built it by himself to house the pigs,  
 property belonging to his absent master. 10

All of a sudden, the dogs observed Odysseus.

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<sup>1</sup>*Lacedaemon*: Another name for Sparta.



even if one worse off than you arrived,  
for every guest and beggar comes from Zeus.”

*[Eumaeus and Odysseus talk at length. Odysseus gives a long false story about how he is from Crete and about how he reached Ithaca.]*

As these two were talking like this to each other,  
the other herdsmen came up, bringing home their swine.  
They shut the sows up in their customary pens,  
so they could sleep. The pigs gave out amazing squeals,  
as they were herded in. Then the trusty swineherd  
called out to his companions:

“Bring a boar in here, 50  
the best there is, so I can butcher it  
for this stranger from another country.  
We too will get some benefit from it,  
seeing we’ve worked so hard for a long time  
and gone through hardships for these white-tusked pigs,  
while others gorge themselves on our hard work  
without paying anything.”

Once he’d said this,  
with his sharp bronze axe he chopped up wood for kindling,  
while others led in a large fat boar, five years old,  
and stood it by the hearth. The swineherd’s heart was sound— 60  
he did not neglect the gods and began the meal  
by throwing in the fire some bristles from the head  
of the white-tusked boar and uttering a prayer  
that wise Odysseus would get back to his own home.  
He raised his arm, and with a club made out of oak,  
which he had lying beside him, he struck the boar.  
Life left the beast. The other herdsmen slit its throat,  
singd its bristles, and, working quickly, carved it up.  
Then adventurous Odysseus spoke to him and said:

“Eumaeus, may father Zeus treat you as well 70  
as you are treating me with this boar’s chine,  
the very finest cut of meat, even though  
I’m just a beggar.”<sup>1</sup>

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,

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<sup>1</sup>Chine: a back cut of meat.

you replied by saying:

“Eat, god-guided stranger,  
and enjoy the kind of food we offer.  
A god gives some things and holds others back,  
as his heart prompts, for he can do all things.”

Eumaeus spoke and offered to eternal gods  
the first pieces he had cut. He poured gleaming wine  
as a libation, handed it to Odysseus, 80  
sacker of cities, then sat to eat his portion.

Night came on, bringing stormy winds. There was no moon.  
And Zeus sent blustery West Wind blowing in with rain.  
Eumaeus then jumped up and went to place a bed  
for Odysseus near the fire. On the bed he threw  
some skins from sheep and goats. Odysseus lay down there.  
Eumaeus covered him up with a huge thick cloak,  
which he kept as a change of clothing in the hut,  
something to wear whenever a great storm blew in.  
So Odysseus went to sleep there, and the young men 90  
slept around him. But Eumaeus had no desire  
to have his bed indoors and sleep so far away  
from all his boars. So he prepared to go outside.  
First, Eumaeus slung a sharp sword from his shoulder,  
then wrapped a thick woollen cloak around his body,  
to protect him from the wind. He took a huge fleece  
from a well-nourished goat and grabbed a pointed spear  
to warn off dogs and men. And then he left the hut,  
going to lie down and rest where the white-tusked boars  
slept beneath a hollow rock, sheltered from the wind. 100

BOOK FIFTEEN  
TELEMACHUS RETURNS TO ITHACA

*[Pallas Athena visits Telemachus in Sparta and tells him to return home and to visit the swineherd Eumaeus. In Ithaca Odysseus and Eumaeus continue to talk about the situation in the royal palace.]*

Meanwhile, Telemachus, summoned by Athena,  
had left Sparta for Pylos and set sail for home.

As Telemachus and his crew were nearing land,  
 they furled and stowed the sail, quickly lowered the mast,  
 and used their oars to move into an anchorage.  
 They tossed out mooring stones, lashed cables at the stern,  
 and then left the boat, wading through the crashing surf.  
 They prepared a meal and mixed the gleaming wine.  
 Once they had food and drink to satisfy their hearts,  
 shrewd Telemachus was the first of them to speak:

10

“You men row the black ship to the city,  
 while I’m checking on the fields and herdsmen.  
 I’ll come to the city in the evening,  
 after I have visited my estates.  
 In the morning I’ll lay out a banquet  
 as compensation to you for the trip,  
 a splendid meal of meat and sweetened wine.”

Telemachus tied sturdy sandals on his feet,  
 then from the deck picked up his powerful spear  
 with a sharp bronze point. The crew untied stern cables  
 and then pushed out to sea, sailing to the city,  
 as Telemachus, dear son of lord Odysseus,  
 had ordered them to do, while he strode quickly off,  
 his feet carrying him onward, until he reached  
 the farmyard and the herds of pigs in countless numbers,  
 among whom the loyal swineherd still lay asleep,  
 always thinking gentle thoughts about his master.

20

BOOK SIXTEEN  
 ODYSSEUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO TELEMACHUS

Meanwhile at dawn Odysseus and the loyal swineherd,  
 once they had sent the herdsmen out with droves of pigs,  
 lit a fire in the hut and prepared their breakfast.  
 As Telemachus approached the hut, the yelping dogs  
 stopped barking and fawned around him. Lord Odysseus  
 noticed what the dogs were doing and heard footsteps.  
 He quickly shouted to the swineherd—his words had wings:

“Eumaeus, some friend of yours is coming,  
 or someone you know. The dogs aren’t barking  
 and are acting friendly. I hear footsteps.”

10

He hardly finished speaking when his own dear son stood in the doorway. The swineherd, amazed, jumped up—the bowls that he was using to mix gleaming wine fell from his hands. He went up to greet his master, kissed his head, both his handsome eyes, and his two hands. Then through his tears he spoke to him—his words had wings:

“You’ve come back, Telemachus, you sweet light.  
I thought I’d never see you any more,  
once you went off to Pylos in that ship.  
Come in here now, dear boy, so that my heart  
can feel the joy of seeing you in my home,  
now that you’ve returned from distant places.”

20

He said this, took the bronze spear from Telemachus, and let him in, crossing the threshold made of stone. As he approached, Odysseus, his father, got up to offer him his seat, but from across the room Telemachus stopped him and said:

“Stay put, stranger.  
We’ll find a seat somewhere inside this hut.  
Here’s a man who will arrange that for us.”

He spoke. Odysseus went back and sat down again.  
Eumaeus made a pile of green brushwood on the floor  
and spread a fleece on top. Odysseus’s dear son  
sat down there. The swineherd then set out before them  
platters of roast meat, left over from the dinner  
they had made the day before, and quickly heaped up  
baskets full of bread. In a wooden bowl he mixed  
wine as sweet as honey and then sat down himself,  
opposite godlike Odysseus. Their hands reached out  
to the welcome meal prepared and spread before them.  
When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,  
Telemachus spoke out to the trusty swineherd:

30

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“Old friend, you must go quickly and report  
to wise Penelope that I’ve returned,  
I’m safely home from Pylos. I’ll stay here,  
until you’ve told the news to her alone  
and have returned. No other Achaean  
must learn about it, for many of them  
are hatching dangerous plans against me.

After you have informed her of that news,  
 get back here right away. Don't go roaming  
 around the fields looking for Laertes. 50  
 Instead, tell my mother to send her maid,  
 the housekeeper, quickly and in secret.  
 She can report the news to the old man."

His words spurred on the swineherd. He took his sandals,  
 tied them on his feet, and set off for the city.

It did not escape the notice of Athena  
 that swineherd Eumaeus was going from the farm.  
 She approached the hut, appearing like a woman,  
 beautiful, tall, and skilled in making lovely things. 60  
 She stood there, just outside the entrance to the farm  
 and was visible to no one but Odysseus.  
 Telemachus could not observe her shape or face  
 or notice she was there. For when the gods appear,  
 they do not let all men perceive the form they take.  
 But Odysseus saw her. So did the dogs, as well.  
 But there was no barking. Instead, they slunk away,  
 whimpering in fear, to the far side of the hut.  
 She gave a signal with her eyebrows—Odysseus  
 noticed and moved out of the hut, past the large wall 70  
 that ran around the yard, and stood in front of her.  
 Then Athena spoke to him:

"Son of Laertes,  
 adventurous Odysseus, sprung from Zeus,  
 Now is the time to speak to your own son—  
 make yourself known and don't conceal the facts,  
 so you can plan the suitors' lethal fate,  
 then go together to your famous city.  
 I won't be absent from you very long—  
 I'm eager for the fight."

As she said this, Athena  
 touched Odysseus with her golden wand. To start with, 80  
 she placed an unblemished cloak around his body,  
 then made him taller and restored his youthful looks.  
 His skin grew dark once more, his countenance filled out,  
 and the beard covering his chin turned black again.  
 Once she'd done this, Athena left, and Odysseus  
 went back into the hut. His dear son was amazed.

He turned his eyes away, afraid it was a god,  
and spoke to him—his words had wings:

“Stranger,  
now you look different than you did before—  
you’re wearing different clothes, your skin has changed. 90  
You’re one of the gods who hold wide heaven.  
If so, be gracious, so we can give you  
pleasing offerings, well-crafted gifts of gold.  
But spare us.”

Long-suffering lord Odysseus  
then answered him and said:

“I’m not one of the gods.  
Why do you compare me to immortals?  
But I am your father, on whose account  
you are grieving and suffer such distress,  
having to bear men’s acts of insolence.”

Once he’d said this, he sat down, and Telemachus 100  
embraced his noble father, cried out, and shed tears.  
A desire to lament arose in both of them—  
they both wailed aloud, as insistently as birds,  
like two sea eagles or hawks with curving talons  
whose young chicks have been carried off by country folk  
before being fully fledged. That’s how those two men  
let tears of sorrow fall from underneath their eyes.  
And now light from the sun would have gone down on them,  
as they wept, if Telemachus had not spoken.  
He suddenly addressed his father:

“In what kind of ship, 110  
dear father, did sailors carry you here,  
to Ithaca? Who did they say they were?  
For I don’t think you made it back on foot.”

Noble long-suffering Odysseus answered him:

“All right, my child, I will tell you the truth.  
Phaeacians, those famous sailors, brought me.  
They escort other men, as well, all those  
who visit them as guests. But now it’s time  
to tell me the number of the suitors,

so I may know how many men there are  
and what they're like. Then, once my noble heart  
has thought it over, I'll make up my mind,  
whether we two are powerful enough  
to take them on alone, without assistance,  
or whether we should seek out other men." 120

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

“Father,  
I've always heard about your great renown,  
a mighty warrior—your hands are strong,  
your plans intelligent. But what you say  
is far too big a task. I'm astonished. 130  
Two men cannot fight against so many—  
and they are powerful. In an exact count,  
there are not just ten of them or twice ten,  
but many more. Here, you can soon add up  
their numbers—from Dulichium there are  
fifty-two hand-picked young men, six servants  
in their retinue, from Same twenty-four,  
from Zacynthus twenty young Achaeans,  
and from Ithaca itself twelve young men,  
all nobility. Medon, the herald, 140  
is with them, as is the godlike minstrel,  
and two attendants skilled in carving meat.  
If we move against all these men inside,  
I fear revenge may bring a bitter fate,  
now you've come home. So you should consider  
if you can think of anyone who'll help,  
someone prepared to stand by both of us  
and fight with all his heart.”

Then lord Odysseus,  
who had endured so much, replied him and said:

“All right, I'll tell you. Pay attention now,  
and listen. Do you believe Athena, 150  
along with Father Zeus, will be enough  
for two of us, or should I think about  
who else might help us?”

Prudent Telemachus  
answered with these words:

“Those two allies you mention  
are excellent. They sit high in the clouds,  
ruling others, immortal gods and men.”

Long-suffering lord Odysseus then said to him:

“The two of them won’t stand apart for long  
from the great fight—we can be sure of that—  
when Ares’s warlike spirit in my halls  
is put to the test between these suitors  
and ourselves. But for now, when Dawn arrives,  
go to the house, join those haughty suitors.  
The swineherd will bring me to the city  
later on. I’ll be looking like a beggar,  
old and wretched. If they’re abusive to me,  
let that dear heart in your chest endure it,  
while I’m being badly treated, even if  
they drag me by my feet all through the house  
and out the door or start hurling things at me.  
Keep looking on, and hold yourself in check.  
I’ll tell you something else—keep it in mind.  
When wise Athena puts it in my mind,  
I’ll nod my head to you. Once you see that,  
take all the weapons of war lying there,  
inside the hall. Stow them in a safe place,  
all of them, in the lofty storage room.  
But leave behind a pair of swords, two spears,  
and two ox-hide shields for the two of us  
to grab up when we make a rush at them—  
Pallas Athena and Counsellor Zeus  
will keep the suitors’ minds preoccupied.  
I’ll tell you something else—keep it in mind.  
If you are my son—truly of our blood—  
let no one hear Odysseus is back home.  
Don’t let Laertes know or the swineherd,  
or the slaves, or Penelope herself.”

So the two men talked about these things together.

Meanwhile, the well-built ship which brought Telemachus  
from Pylos with his comrades had reached Ithaca.  
Once the crew had rowed the boat inside the harbour,  
they hauled the black ship up on shore. Eager servants

carried away their weapons and without delay  
 took the lavish gifts to the home of Clytius.  
 They also sent a herald to the royal home,  
 to report to wise Penelope, telling her  
 Telemachus had gone to visit the estates  
 and had told the ship to sail off for the city,  
 in case the noble lady might get sick at heart 200  
 and start to weep. This herald and the swineherd met  
 because they'd both been sent off with the same report  
 to tell the queen. When they reached the royal palace,  
 the herald spoke out in front of female servants:

“My queen, your much-loved son has just returned.”

But the swineherd walked up, straight to Penelope,  
 and informed her of all the details her dear son  
 had instructed him to say. Once he had mentioned  
 in his account what he had been ordered to report,  
 he went away, leaving the courtyard and the hall, 210  
 to get back to his pigs. The suitors were unhappy,  
 their hearts dismayed, and they departed from the hall,  
 moving past the courtyard wall. There, before the gates,  
 they sat down. The first one of them to speak a word  
 was Eurymachus, son of Polybus:

“My friends,  
 to tell the truth, in his great arrogance  
 Telemachus has carried out his trip—  
 and has had great success. We never thought  
 he would complete it. So let's do something.  
 Let's launch a ship, the very best we have, 220  
 collect some sailors, a crew of rowers,  
 so they can quickly carry a report  
 to those other men<sup>1</sup> to come home at once.”

No sooner had he said this, than Amphinomus,  
 turning in his place, saw a ship in the deep harbour.  
 Men were bringing down the sail, others holding oars.  
 With a hearty laugh, he then addressed his comrades:

“Don't bother with a message any more.  
 They have arrived back home. Either some god

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<sup>1</sup>*those other men*: The suitors waiting out at sea to ambush Telemachus on his voyage home.

gave them news, or they saw his ship themselves,  
as it sailed past, but could not attack it.” 230

He spoke. They all got up and went to the sea shore,  
then quickly dragged the ship up onto drier ground,  
while eager attendants carried off the weapons.  
Then in a large group they went to their meeting place.  
No others were permitted to sit there with them,  
no old or younger men. Antinous addressed them,  
son of Eupheithes:

“Well, this is bad news—  
the gods made sure Telemachus was safe.  
Our lookouts sat each day on windy heights, 240  
always in successive shifts. At sunset  
we never spent the night on shore, but sailed  
over the sea in our swift ship, waiting  
for sacred Dawn, as we set our ambush  
for Telemachus, so we could capture  
and then do away with him. But some god  
has brought him home again. So let’s devise  
a sad end for Telemachus right here—  
ensure he does not get away from us.  
For as long as he’s alive, I don’t think 250  
what we’re doing will bring us much success.  
He himself is clever, shrewd in counsel,  
and people don’t regard us well at all.  
So come now, before he calls Achaeans  
to assembly. I don’t think he will concede.  
He’ll get angry and stand up to proclaim  
to everyone how we planned to kill him,  
and how our ambush failed. Then the people  
will turn against us, once they learn about  
what we have done. Take care. They may harm us 260  
and force us out, away from our own homes,  
then send us off into a foreign land.  
Let’s move first—capture him out in the fields,  
far from the city, or else on the road.  
If what I’ve been saying displeases you,  
and you prefer he still remain alive,  
retaining all the riches of his fathers,  
let’s not keep on gathering in this place,  
consuming his supply of pleasant things.  
Instead, let each man carry on his courtship 270

from his home, seeking to prevail with gifts.  
 She can marry the one who offers most,  
 the husband her own fate has set for her.”

He finished. They all sat quiet, saying nothing.  
 Then Amphinomus spoke out and addressed them,  
 a son of Nisus. Thinking of their common good,  
 Amphinomus called to them and said:

“My friends,  
 I would not want to slay Telemachus.  
 It’s reprehensible to kill someone  
 of royal blood. But first let’s ask the gods  
 for their advice. If Zeus’s oracles  
 approve the act, I myself will kill him  
 and tell all other men to do so, too.  
 But if the gods decline, I say we stop.”

280

Amphinomus finished. They agreed with what he said.  
 So they immediately got up and went away  
 to Odysseus’s house. Once they reached the palace,  
 they sat down on polished chairs in the great hall.

At evening the fine swineherd came to Odysseus  
 and to his son, both busy preparing dinner.  
 They killed and singed a boar, a yearling. Athena  
 went up to Odysseus and touched him with her wand,  
 transforming him into an old man once again.  
 She put shabby clothing on his body, in case  
 the swineherd, by looking up, would recognize him  
 and hurry off to tell faithful Penelope,  
 unable to keep secret what was in his heart.

290

BOOK SEVENTEEN  
 ODYSSEUS GOES TO THE PALACE AS A BEGGAR

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
 Telemachus, dear son of godlike Odysseus,  
 tied sandals on his feet, took a powerful spear,  
 well suited to his grip, and, as he headed off  
 towards the city, called out to the swineherd:

“Old friend, I’m now leaving for the city,  
 so I can see my mother. I don’t think  
 her dreadful grieving and her sorry tears

will stop until she sees me for herself.  
 So I'm telling you to do as follows— 10  
 take this vagrant stranger to the city.  
 Once there, he can beg food from any man  
 who'll offer him bread and cups of water.  
 I can't take on the weight of everyone,  
 not when I have these sorrows on my heart.  
 As for the stranger, if he's upset at this,  
 things will turn out worse for him."

Odysseus,

that adventurous man, then answered him and said:

"Friend, I myself am not all that eager  
 to be held back here. For a beggar man 20  
 it's better to ask people for a meal  
 inside cities instead of in the fields.  
 Whoever's willing should give me something."

Odysseus finished. Telemachus walked away,  
 out through the farmyard, moving at a rapid pace.  
 He was sowing seeds of trouble for the suitors.  
 When he entered the beautifully furnished house,  
 Telemachus walked through the hall, gripping his spear.  
 Two swift dogs went with him. The arrogant suitors  
 thronged around him, making courteous conversation, 30  
 but deep within their hearts they nurtured evil plans.

*[A meal is prepared and set out in the hall.]*

Telemachus's mother sat across from him,  
 by the doorpost of the hall, leaning from her seat  
 to spin fine threads of yarn. They reached out with their hands  
 to take the fine food prepared and set before them.  
 When they had satisfied their hearts with food and drink,  
 the first to speak to them was wise Penelope:

"Telemachus, once I've gone up to my room,  
 I'll lie in bed, which has become for me  
 a place of sorrow, always damp with tears, 40  
 ever since Odysseus sailed off to Troy  
 with Atreus's sons. Yet you don't dare  
 to tell me clearly of your father's trip,

before the haughty suitors come back here  
and shame my home, no word of what you learned.”

Prudent Telemachus then answered her and said:

“All right then, mother, I’ll tell you the truth.  
First, we sailed to Pylos and reached Nestor,  
shepherd of his people. He welcomed us  
into his home with hospitality 50  
and kindness, like a father for a son  
who has just returned from far-off places  
after many years—that’s how lord Nestor  
looked after me, helped by his splendid sons,  
with loving care. But of brave Odysseus,  
alive or dead, he had not heard a thing  
from any man on earth. He sent me off  
with horses and a well-built chariot  
to that famous spearman Menelaus,  
son of Atreus. I saw Argive Helen, 60  
for whom countless Trojans and Achaeans  
struggled hard—as the will of gods decreed.  
Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, at once  
questioned me: Why had I come to Sparta?  
What was I looking for? I told the truth,  
all the details. He answered me and said:

“That is disgraceful! They want to lie down  
in the bed of a courageous warrior,  
when they themselves are cowards—just as if  
a doe has put two new-born suckling fawns 70  
in a lion’s thicket, so they can sleep,  
and roams mountain slopes and grassy valleys  
seeking pasture, and then the lion comes  
back to that lair and brings a dismal fate  
for both those fawns—that is how Odysseus  
will bring those men to their disastrous end.’

That’s what great spearman Menelaus said,  
the son of Atreus. When I was finished,  
I came home, and the immortals gave me  
favouring winds which quickly carried me 80  
back to my home once more.”

Meanwhile Odysseus

and the loyal swineherd were hastening to leave  
 their country fields and start walking to the city.  
 Eumaeus offered Odysseus a staff he liked.  
 Then the two of them set off, while dogs and herdsmen  
 remained behind to guard the farmyard. The swineherd  
 led his master to the city, like a beggar  
 leaning on a stick, an old and wretched vagrant,  
 with his body covered by shabby, threadbare rags.  
 But as they made their way along the rugged path, 90  
 getting near the city, they reached a well-made spring,  
 with a steady flow, where townsfolk drew their water.  
 Here Melanthius, son of Dolius, met them—  
 he was driving a herd of goats, the finest ones  
 in all the flocks, to serve as dinner for the suitors.  
 Two herdsmen followed him. When he caught sight of them,  
 Melanthius started yelling shameful insults—  
 Odysseus in his heart was enraged at such abuse:

“Now here we have a truly filthy man  
 leading on another filthy scoundrel. 100  
 As always, a god matches like with like.  
 You wretched swineherd, where are you off to  
 with this disgusting pig, this beggar man,  
 a tedious bore who’ll interrupt our feasts?”

Melanthius spoke, and after moving past them,  
 strode ahead and quickly reached the royal house  
 He went in at once and sat among the suitors,  
 opposite Eurymachus, who was fond of him  
 more so than were the others. A household servant  
 set down a portion of the meat in front of him. 110  
 The worthy housekeeper then carried in the bread  
 and placed it there for him to eat.

Meanwhile Odysseus

and the loyal swineherd paused as they came closer.  
 Around them rang the music of the hollow lyre,  
 for Phemius was about to sing. But then a dog,  
 prone in the dirt, raised its head and pricked up its ears.  
 It was Argus, brave Odysseus’s hunting dog,  
 whom he himself had brought up many years ago.  
 But before he could enjoy being with the hound,  
 he left for sacred Troy. In earlier days, young men 120

would take the dog to hunt wild goats, deer, and rabbits,  
 but now, with his master gone, he lay neglected  
 in the piles of dung left there by mules and cattle,  
 heaped up before the doors, until the household slaves  
 took it to manure some large field. Argus lay there,  
 covered in fleas. But then, when he saw Odysseus,  
 who was coming closer, Argus wagged his tail  
 and dropped his ears. But he no longer had the strength  
 to approach his master. Odysseus looked away  
 and brushed aside a tear—he did so casually  
 to hide it from Eumaeus. Then he questioned him: 130

“Eumaeus, it’s strange this dog is lying here,  
 in the dung. He has a handsome body.  
 I’m not sure if his speed once matched his looks  
 or if he’s like those table dogs men have,  
 the pets their masters raise and keep for show.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

“Yes, this dog belongs to a man who died  
 somewhere far away. If he had the form  
 and acted as he did when Odysseus 140  
 left him and went to Troy, you’d quickly see  
 his speed and strength, and then you’d be amazed.  
 No wild animal he chased escaped him  
 in deep thick woods, for he could track a scent.  
 He’s in a bad way now. His master’s dead  
 in some foreign land, and careless women  
 don’t look after him. For when their masters  
 no longer exercise their power, slaves  
 have no desire to do their proper work.  
 For Zeus steals half the value of a man 150  
 the day he’s taken and becomes a slave.”

This said, Eumaeus went inside the stately palace,  
 straight into the hall to join the noble suitors.  
 But once he’d seen Odysseus after nineteen years,  
 Argus collapsed, gripped in the fatal clutch of Death.

As the swineherd Eumaeus came inside the house,  
 godlike Telemachus was the first to see him,  
 well before the others. He quickly summoned him

by nodding. Eumaeus looked around, then picked up  
 a stool placed where a servant usually sat 160  
 and carved massive cuts of meat to serve the suitors,  
 when they were feasting in the house. He took this stool,  
 placed it by Telemachus's table, facing him,  
 and then sat down. Meanwhile, a herald offered him  
 a portion of the meat, set it in front of him,  
 and then helped him to some bread served in a basket.  
 Odysseus came in the house behind Eumaeus,  
 looking like an old and miserable beggar,  
 leaning on his staff, with his body dressed in rags.  
 He sat on the ash-wood threshold in the doorway, 170  
 propping his back against a post of cypress wood,  
 which a craftsman had cut and planed with utmost skill  
 and set in true alignment. Then Melanthius,  
 the goatherd, called out to them and said:

“Listen to me,  
 those of you courting the glorious queen,  
 about this stranger. I've seen him before.  
 The swineherd was the one who brought him here.  
 I don't know his identity for sure  
 or the family he claims to come from.”

Once he said this, Antinous turned on Eumaeus, 180  
 to reprimand him:

“You really are a man  
 who cares for pigs—why bring this fellow here  
 into the city? As far as vagrants go,  
 do we not have enough apart from him,  
 greedy beggars who disrupt our banquets?”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

“Antinous, you may be a noble man,  
 but what you've said is not a worthy speech.  
 You are abusive to my master's slaves,  
 more so than any of the other suitors, 190  
 especially to me. But I don't care,  
 not while faithful Penelope lives here  
 with brave Telemachus, inside these halls.”

*[Odysseus moves around begging food from the suitors.]*

Then Antinous spoke out and said:

“What god  
sent this nuisance to interrupt our feast?  
You’re an insolent and shameless beggar—  
you come up to each of us, one by one,  
and we give you things, with no holding back,  
for there’s no check or scruple when one gives  
from someone else’s goods, and each of us  
has so much food set here in front of him.”

200

Resourceful Odysseus then moved back and replied:

“Well now, it seems as if that mind of yours  
does not match your looks—you’d refuse to give  
even a grain of salt from your own house  
to a follower of yours, and now you sit  
in someone else’s house and do not dare  
to take some bread and offer it to me.  
And yet there’s plenty right in front of you.”

Odysseus finished. Antinous, deep in his heart,  
was even angrier than before. He glared at him  
and, with a scowl, gave his response—his words had wings:

210

“I no longer think you’ll leave this hall unharmed,  
now that you’ve begun to babble insults.”

As he said these words, he grabbed a stool and threw it.  
It hit Odysseus at the base of his right shoulder,  
where it joins the back. But he stood firm, like a rock—  
what Antinous had thrown did not make him stagger.  
He shook his head in silence, making cruel plans,  
then walked back to the door and sat down in his place.

220

Penelope was talking with her servant women,  
sitting in her room, while lord Odysseus ate.  
Then she called out to the loyal swineherd, saying:

“Good Eumaeus, go and ask the stranger  
to come here, so I can greet him warmly  
and ask if he perhaps has heard about  
my brave Odysseus, or caught sight of him

with his own eyes. For he looks like a man  
who's spent a long time wandering around."

Penelope finished. Once Eumaeus heard her, 230  
he went off and, standing close beside Odysseus,  
spoke to him—his words had wings:

"Honoured stranger,  
wise Penelope is summoning you,  
Telemachus's mother. For her heart,  
in spite of bearing much anxiety,  
is urging her to ask about her husband."

Odysseus then replied:

"Eumaeus, I'll tell the truth,  
all the details, to wise Penelope,  
daughter of Icarius, and quickly.  
I know Odysseus well. Tell Penelope, 240  
for all her eagerness, to wait right now,  
there in the hall, until the sun goes down.  
Let her ask me then about her husband  
and the day of his return. Let me sit  
close by the fire, for the clothes I'm wearing  
are pitiful, as you yourself well know,  
since I came to you first of all for help."

Then the loyal swineherd joined the crowd of suitors.  
Moving up close to Telemachus, so others  
could not hear, he spoke to him—his swift words had wings: 250

"Friend, I'm going to leave and guard the swine  
and other things, your livelihood and mine.  
You take charge of what's going on in here.  
First and foremost, protect yourself. Your heart  
must stay alert, so you don't suffer harm."

Prudent Telemachus then answered him and said:

"It will happen, old friend. Now, you should eat  
before you leave. Come here in the morning,  
and bring fine animals for sacrifice.  
Everything in here will be my concern, 260  
mine and the immortals."

Telemachus spoke.

The swineherd sat down on the polished chair again.  
Once he had filled his heart with food and drink, he left,  
returning to his pigs, through the hall and courtyard,  
where the throngs of suitors were enjoying themselves  
with dance and song, for evening had already come.

BOOK EIGHTEEN  
ODYSSEUS AND IRUS THE BEGGAR

*[Irus, a beggar, comes to the palace and starts abusing Odysseus; they fight, and Odysseus knocks Irus out; Penelope encourages the suitors to bring presents for her, and they do so; Odysseus talks to the female servants, criticizing them for being sympathetic to and friendly with the suitors; Eurymachus makes fun of Odysseus and throws a stool at him but misses and hits the wine steward; the suitors continue feasting and then leave.]*

BOOK NINETEEN  
EURYCLEIA RECOGNIZES ODYSSEUS

*[Telemachus and Odysseus remove the weapons from the hall and conceal them in a storage room.]*

Telemachus moved away, striding through the hall,  
below the flaming torches, out into the room  
where he used to rest when sweet Sleep overcame him.  
Then he lay down in bed, waiting for early Dawn.  
Lord Odysseus stayed there, lingering in the hall,  
thinking how to kill the suitors with Athena's help.

Then wise Penelope emerged out of her room,  
looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.  
Beside the fire where she used to sit, servants placed  
a chair for her, inlaid with ivory and silver.  
Penelope sat, then spoke to Eurynome,  
her housekeeper, and said:

10

“Eurynome,  
fetch a chair over here with a thick fleece,  
so the stranger can sit and talk to me  
and hear me out. I want to question him.”

Once Penelope had spoken, Eurynome  
quickly brought a polished chair and placed it by her.

She threw a sheep fleece over it. Lord Odysseus,  
 who had endured so much hardship, sat down with her.  
 Then wise Penelope began to speak to him: 20

“Stranger, first of all I’ll ask this question—  
 Who are you among men? Where are you from?  
 From what city? And where are your parents?”

Resourceful Odysseus replied:

“Noble lady,  
 wife of Odysseus, all right, I’ll tell you.  
 But you’ll be giving me more miseries  
 than those which grip my heart—as is the rule  
 when a man’s been absent from his homeland  
 as long as I have, wandering around,  
 through many towns of mortal men, suffering 30  
 great distress. Still, I’ll answer what you ask,  
 all those questions you have posed. There’s a place  
 in the middle of the wine-dark sea called Crete,  
 where I was born, son of Deucalion,  
 son of Minos. I saw Odysseus there  
 and gave him welcoming gifts. The wind’s force  
 brought him to Crete, as he was sailing on,  
 headed for Troy. So I invited him  
 into my house and entertained him well,  
 with a warm welcome, using the rich store 40  
 of goods inside my home.”

As Odysseus spoke,  
 he made his many falsehoods sound just like the truth.  
 Penelope listened, tears flowing from her eyes.  
 Her flesh melted—just as up on high mountain peaks  
 the snow drifts melt away beneath West Wind’s warm thaw,  
 once East Wind starts to blow them down, and, as they melt,  
 the flowing rivers fill—that’s how her lovely cheeks  
 melted then, as she kept weeping for her husband,  
 the man sitting there beside her. Lord Odysseus  
 in his heart felt great pity for his grieving wife, 50  
 but he held his eyes steady between his eyelids,  
 like horn or iron, and he kept up his deceit  
 and concealed his tears. But then, when Penelope  
 had had her fill of shedding tears and her laments,  
 she spoke to him once more and said:

“Now, stranger,  
 I think I’d really like to test you out,  
 to see if you did, in fact, entertain  
 my husband and his fine companions there,  
 in your halls, as you just claimed. So describe  
 the style of clothing he was wearing then  
 and the kind of man he was. And tell me  
 about his comrades, the ones there with him.”

60

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Lady, it’s difficult to tell you this  
 for any man who’s been away so long—  
 it’s almost twenty years since he set out  
 and sailed from Crete. But I’ll describe for you  
 how my heart pictures him. Lord Odysseus  
 wore a woollen purple cloak, a double one.  
 The brooch on it was made of gold—it had  
 a pair of clasps and a fine engraving  
 on the front, a dog held in its forepaws  
 a dappled fawn and gripped it as it writhed.  
 Everyone who saw it was astonished  
 at those gold animals—the dog held down  
 the fawn, as he throttled it, and the fawn  
 was struggling with its feet, trying to flee.  
 I noticed the tunic on his body  
 glistening like a dried-out onion skin—  
 it was so soft and shone out like the sun.”

70

80

As Odysseus spoke, in Penelope he roused  
 desire to weep still more, because she recognized  
 in what Odysseus said signs that he spoke the truth.  
 But then, when she had had enough of tearful grief,  
 she answered him and said these words:

“Stranger,  
 though I pitied you before, in my home  
 you’ll now find genuine welcome and respect.  
 I was the one who put him in those clothes  
 you talk about. I brought them from the room,  
 smoothed them out, and pinned on the shining brooch  
 to be an ornament for him. But now,

90

I'll not be welcoming him here again,  
when he returns to his dear native land."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"Wife of Odysseus, Laertes's son,  
don't mar your lovely skin or waste your heart  
by weeping for your husband. Dry your tears,  
and listen to my words. I'll speak the truth,  
hiding nothing—I have already heard  
about Odysseus's return. He's close by,  
in the wealthy land of Thesprotians,  
still alive and bringing much fine treasure."<sup>1</sup>

100

Wise Penelope then answered him:

"O stranger,  
I wish what you have said might come about.  
You'd soon come to recognize my friendship,  
so many gifts from me that any man  
who looked at you would call you truly blessed.  
But my heart has a sense of what will be—  
Odysseus won't be coming home again,  
and you'll not find an escort out of here,  
because there are no leaders in this house,  
not the quality of man Odysseus was.  
But, you servant women, wash this stranger,  
and prepare a place to sleep—a bed, cloaks,  
bright coverlets—so in warmth and comfort  
he may await the golden throne of Dawn."

110

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,  
I've hated cloaks and shining coverlets  
since I first left the mountain snows of Crete,  
when I departed on my long-oared ship.  
So I'll lie down, as I have done before  
through sleepless nights. For I have often lain  
on filthy bedding, awaiting bright-throned Dawn.  
And having my feet washed brings no delight  
into my heart. No woman in your house

120

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<sup>1</sup> *Thesprotians*: People of Thesprotis, who had friendly relations with Ithaca.

will touch my feet, none of those who serve you  
 in your home, unless there is an old one,  
 who knows true devotion and has suffered  
 in her heart as many pains as I have. 130  
 I'd not resent it if she touched my feet."

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

"Dear stranger, no visitor from far-off lands  
 who's come into my house has ever been  
 as wise as you or more welcome—your words  
 are all so sensible and kind. I have  
 a woman with an understanding heart.  
 She gave my helpless husband her fine care  
 the day his mother first gave birth to him.  
 Although she's weak and old, she'll wash your feet. 140  
 So come now, stand up, wise Eurycleia.  
 Bathe this man the same age as your master."

Penelope spoke. The old woman clasped her hands  
 and then said to Odysseus:

"And I'm willing.  
 For Penelope's sake I'll bathe your feet."

The old woman took a bright bowl to wash his feet.  
 She poured in plenty of cold water and added  
 warmer water to it. Odysseus then sat down  
 some distance from the hearth and quickly turned around  
 towards the darkness. For suddenly in his heart 150  
 he was afraid that, when she touched him, she might see  
 a scar he had, and then the truth would be revealed.  
 When Eurycleia began to wash her master,  
 she recognized the scar immediately, a wound  
 he suffered years ago from white tusks on a boar,  
 when he went to Parnassus, making a visit  
 to Autolycus, his mother's splendid father.<sup>1</sup>  
 She traced it out, recognized it, and dropped his foot.  
 His leg fell in the basin, and the bronze rang out.  
 It tipped over on its side and spilled the water. 160  
 All at once, joy and sorrow gripped her heart. Her eyes

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<sup>1</sup>*Parnassus*: Mountain in central Greece which features in several Greek myths.

welled up with tears, and her full voice was speechless.  
She reached up to his chin and said:

“It’s true, dear child,  
You are Odysseus—I did not know you  
until my hands had touched my master’s leg.”

She spoke, and her eyes glanced over at Penelope,  
anxious to tell her that her husband had come home.  
Odysseus’s arms reached out for Eurycleia—  
with his right hand he grabbed her firmly by the throat  
and with the other pulled her even closer to him.  
Then he said:

170

“Stay silent, so in these halls  
no one finds out. For I’ll tell you something—  
and it will happen. If gods overcome  
these haughty suitors, set them at my feet,  
I will not spare you, though you are my nurse,  
when I kill other women in my home.”

Once Odysseus spoke, the old woman left the room  
to fetch water for his feet, since what she had before  
had all been spilled. When she had finished bathing him,  
she rubbed him with rich oil. Then Odysseus once more  
pulled his chair closer to the fire to warm himself.  
He hid the scar beneath his rags. Wise Penelope  
began to speak to him. She said:

180

“Stranger,  
if you wished to sit with me in these halls  
to bring me pleasure, sleep would never fall  
on these eyelids of mine. But there’s no way  
mortals can go forever without sleep.  
Immortal gods have set a proper time  
for every man on this grain-bearing earth.  
So now I’ll go up to my upstairs room  
and lie down on the bed, which is for me  
a place for grieving, always damp with tears,  
since Odysseus went to wicked Ilion,<sup>1</sup>  
a name no one should ever talk about.  
I’ll lie down there. But you can stretch out here,

190

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<sup>1</sup> *Ilion*: Another name for Troy,

in the house, putting cushions on the floor.  
Or let the servants make a bed for you.”

Once she said this, she went to her bright upper room,  
not by herself, for two attendants went with her.  
When she and both her servants reached the upstairs room, 200  
she cried out for Odysseus, her dear husband,  
until Athena cast sweet sleep across her eyes.

BOOK TWENTY  
ODYSSEUS PREPARES FOR HIS REVENGE

When Dawn arrived inside Odysseus’s fine home,  
the women were already up kindling tireless fire.  
Then the men who served the Achaean lords arrived.  
Behind them came the swineherd, leading in three hogs,  
the best of all he had. He turned them loose to feed  
inside the splendid yard, while he talked to Odysseus,  
with words of reassurance:

“Stranger, these Achaeans—  
do they have any more regard for you?  
Or in these halls are they insulting you  
the way they did before?”

Shrewd Odysseus 10  
then answered him and said:

“Well, Eumaeus,  
I hope the gods pay back the injuries  
arrogant men so recklessly have planned  
in another’s home, with no sense of shame.”

As these two were talking to each other in this way,  
Melanthius, the goatherd, came up close to them,  
leading the very finest she-goats in his flocks,  
part of the suitors’ feast. Two herdsmen came with him.  
He tied the goats up by the echoing portico,  
then once more started hurling insults at Odysseus: 20

“Stranger, are you still bothering us here,  
inside the house, begging from the people?  
Why don’t you get out? I think it’s obvious  
we two will not say goodbye, not until

we've had a taste of one another's fists.  
The way you beg is not appropriate.  
Achaean do hold feasts in other homes."

Melanthius spoke, but shrewd Odysseus said nothing.  
He shook his head in silence. Deep within his heart  
he was planning trouble. Then a third one joined them, 30  
Philoetius, an outstanding man, bringing  
a sterile heifer and plump goats for the suitors.  
He tied up these beasts with care, approached Odysseus,  
and spoke—his words had wings:

"Greetings, honoured stranger.  
Though you are facing many troubles now,  
may you find happiness in future days.  
When I recall Odysseus and think of him,  
I start to sweat. My eyes fill up with tears.  
For he, I think, is dressed in rags like these,  
roaming among men somewhere, if indeed 40  
he's still alive, looking at the sunlight."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"Herdsman, you don't appear to be a man  
who's bad or one who lacks intelligence,  
for I can sense your sympathetic heart.  
And so I'll swear a mighty oath to you.  
Odysseus will come home. With your own eyes,  
you'll see the suitors killed, if that's your wish,  
those men who act as if they own the place."

The cattle herder answered him:

"Ah stranger, 50  
how I wish Cronos' son might bring about  
what you've just told me. Then you would find out  
how strong I am and what my hands can do."

Eumaeus also prayed like that to all the gods  
for Odysseus to return to his own home.

*[The suitors continue to feast and to abuse Odysseus in disguise.]*

BOOK TWENTY-ONE  
THE CONTEST WITH ODYSSEUS'S BOW

Bright-eyed Athena then placed inside the heart  
of wise Penelope, Icarius's daughter,  
the thought that she should set up in Odysseus's halls  
the bow and gray iron axes for the suitors,  
as a competition and prelude to their deaths.

*[Penelope goes to the storage chamber and collects Odysseus's bow and his axes.]*

Once the lovely lady reached the suitors, she stood  
beside the door post of the well-constructed hall,  
a bright veil covering her face. On either side  
stood loyal attendant women. Then Penelope  
addressed the suitors with these words:

"Listen to me, 10

bold suitors, who've been ravaging this home  
with your incessant need for food and drink,  
now that my husband's been away so long.  
The only story you could offer up  
as an excuse is that you all desire  
to marry me and take me as your wife.  
So come now, suitors, since I seem to be  
the prize you seek, I'll place this great bow here—  
a weapon that belonged to brave Odysseus.  
Whichever one of you can grip this bow 20  
and string it with the greatest ease, then shoot  
an arrow through twelve axes, all of them,  
I'll go with him, leaving my married home,  
this truly lovely house and all these goods  
one needs for living—things I'll remember,  
even in my dreams."<sup>1</sup>

When she'd said this,  
she told Eumaeus, the good and faithful swineherd  
to set the bow and iron axes for the suitors.

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<sup>1</sup> *shoot ... my dreams*: The details of this famous trial of shooting an arrow through a row of axes have been much discussed. Some interpreters have suggested that it makes sense if we imagine that there is a hole in the head of each axe and that they can be lined up so that an arrow might pass through them all, obviously a very difficult shot. Some ancient axes apparently had this feature. Others have suggested that the holes are rings at the bottom end of the shaft or that the holes are those which normally hold the axe shaft, so that the line of axes is actually a line of axe heads with the shaft removed.

But then among them all Telemachus spoke out  
with royal authority:

“Well now, Zeus, 30  
son of Cronos, must have made me foolish—  
my dear mother, although quite sensible,  
says she’ll be leaving with another man,  
abandoning this home, and I just laugh.  
My witless heart finds that enjoyable.”

As he said this, Telemachus quickly threw off  
the purple cloak covering his back, then jumped up  
and removed the sharp sword hanging from his shoulders.  
He set up the axes, by digging out a trench,  
one lengthy ditch for all of them, in a straight line. 40  
Then his feet trampled the earth down flat around them.<sup>1</sup>  
Amazement gripped the suitors as they looked at him  
and watched how he aligned those axes properly,  
though before then he had never even seen them.

Then Antinous, Eupheithes’s son, addressed them:

“All you suitors, get up in order now,  
from left to right, beginning from the place  
where the steward pours the wine.”

Antinous spoke,  
and what he had proposed they found agreeable.  
The first to stand was Leiodes, Oenops’s son, 50  
their soothsayer. He always sat furthest away,  
beside the lovely mixing bowl. That was the man  
who first picked up the bow and the swift arrow.  
After moving to the threshold and standing there,  
he tried he bow, but he could not string it. His hands,  
which were quite delicate and feeble, grew weary,  
before he could succeed in hooking up the string.  
He then spoke out among the suitors:

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<sup>1</sup> *the earth down flat around them*: The contest with the bow and axes appears to take place in the great hall, which, as Merry, Riddell, and Monro note (in *Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey*, 1865), had a floor consisting of hard packed earth. However, the precise location of the contest (inside or outside) has long been a matter of dispute.

“My friends,  
 I’m not the man to use this bow. So now,  
 let someone else take hold of it. This bow  
 will take away from many fine young men  
 their lives and spirits, since it’s far better  
 to die than live and fail in the attempt  
 to have what we are gathered here to get,  
 remaining here in hope, day after day.”

60

He sat down again where he had just been sitting.  
 But Antinous took issue with what he had said,  
 talking directly to him:

“Leiodes,  
 what wretched, sorry words! As I listened,  
 it made me angry—as if this bow would,  
 in fact, take away the lives and spirits  
 of the very finest men, just because  
 you could not string it. Your royal mother  
 did not produce in you the sort of man  
 who has sufficient strength to draw a bow  
 and shoot an arrow. But some other men  
 among these noble suitors will succeed.”

70

This said, Antinous called out to Melanthius,  
 the goatherd:

“Come now, Melanthius,  
 light a fire in the hall. Set a large chair  
 in front of it and spread a fleece across.  
 And fetch a hefty piece of fat—there’s some  
 inside the house—so that these young men here  
 can warm the bow and rub grease into it,  
 then test the bow and end this competition.”

80

Once Antinous said this, Melanthius soon lit  
 a tireless fire. Then he carried a large chair up,  
 draped a fleece on it, set it down beside the fire,  
 and from inside the house fetched a large piece of fat.  
 So then the young men warmed the bow and tested it.  
 But they could not string it—whatever strength they had  
 was far too little. Antinous and Eurymachus,  
 the suitors’ leaders, still remained—the two of them  
 with their abilities, were the best men by far.

90

The cattle herder and the keeper of the swine  
 belonging to godlike Odysseus had gone out,  
 both together, so lord Odysseus moved away,  
 left the palace, walked through the yard, and followed them.  
 When they had passed beyond the courtyard and the gates,  
 Odysseus called to them with reassuring words:

100

“You there, cattleman and swineherd, shall I  
 tell you something or keep it to myself?  
 My spirit tells me I should speak to you.  
 If Odysseus were to come back suddenly,  
 brought from somewhere by a god, would you two  
 be the sort of men who would defend him?  
 Would you support the suitors or Odysseus?”

Then the cattle herder answered him:

“O Father Zeus,  
 would that you might fulfill this very wish—  
 may that man come, and led on by some god.  
 Then you would know the kind of strength I have  
 and how my hands can demonstrate my power.”

110

And then Eumaeus, too, made the same sort of prayer  
 to all the gods that wise Odysseus would come back  
 to his own home. Once Odysseus had clearly seen  
 how resolute they were, he spoke to them again,  
 saying these words:

“Well, here I am in person—  
 after suffering much distress, I’ve come home,  
 back in the twentieth year to my own land.  
 Of those who work for me, I recognize  
 that you’re the only two who want me back.  
 Among the rest, I’ve heard no one praying  
 that my return would bring me home again.  
 I’ll tell you both how this is going to end—  
 and I’ll speak the truth—if, on my behalf  
 some god will overcome those noble suitors,  
 I’ll bring you each a wife, and I’ll provide  
 possessions and a house built near my own.  
 Then, you’ll be my companions—and kinsmen  
 of Telemachus. I’ll show you something,  
 a sign, so you will clearly know it’s me

120

130

and trust me in your hearts—here’s the old scar  
I got from a boar’s white tusk, on a visit  
to Parnassus with Autolycus’s sons.”

As he said this, Odysseus pulled aside his rags,  
exposing the great scar. Once those two had seen it  
and noted every detail, they both threw their arms  
around the wise Odysseus—bursting into tears,  
they welcomed him, kissing his head and shoulders.  
Odysseus did the same—he kissed their heads and hands. 140  
Those men would have kept on weeping until sunset,  
if Odysseus had not called a halt, saying to them:

“Stop these laments. Let’s have no more crying.  
Someone might come out from the hall, see us,  
and tell people in the house. Let’s go in,  
one by one, not all at once. I’ll go first.  
You come later. And let’s make this our sign.  
All those other men, the noble suitors,  
will not allow the quiver and the bow  
to be given to me. But, Eumaeus, 150  
as you carry that bow around the hall,  
put it in my hands, and tell the women  
they must lock their doors.”

After he said this,  
Odysseus went back into the hall and sat down  
on the stool where he had been sitting. The two men,  
godlike Odysseus’s servants, went in after him.

Eurymachus already had the bow in hand,  
warming it here and there in light from the hot fire.  
But even doing that, he could not string the bow.  
Then his courageous heart gave out a mighty groan, 160  
and he spoke to them directly—he was angry:

“It’s too bad. I’m frustrated for myself  
and for you all. I’m not that unhappy  
about the marriage, though I am upset.  
There are many more Achaean women—  
some here in sea-girt Ithaca itself,  
others in various towns. But if we are  
so weak compared to godlike Odysseus

that we can't string his bow, it's a disgrace  
which men will learn about in years to come." 170

Antinous, Euphithes' son, answered him and said:

"Eurymachus, that's not going to happen,  
as you yourself well know. At this moment,  
in the country there's a feast day, sacred  
to the god. So who would bend the bow? No,  
set it aside without saying a thing.  
Come now, let the steward begin to pour  
wine in the cups, so we can make libations.  
Put the curved bow down, and in the morning,  
we'll test the bow again and end the contest." 180

Antinous finished. Once they had poured libations  
and drunk wine to their heart's content, Odysseus,  
a crafty man who had a scheme in mind, spoke out:

"Suitors of the splendid queen, listen to me,  
so I can say what the heart here my chest  
is prompting me to state. It's a request,  
a plea, especially to Eurymachus  
and godlike Antinous, since what he said  
was most appropriate—for the moment  
you should postpone this business with the bow  
and turn the matter over to the gods. 190  
Give me the polished bow, so in this hall  
I can test these hands of mine and find out  
if my supple limbs still possess the strength  
they used to have, or if my wandering  
and my lack of food have quite destroyed it."

Odysseus finished. They were extremely angry,  
fearing that a beggar might string the polished bow.  
So lord Antinous, addressing him directly,  
took Odysseus to task:

"You wretched stranger, 200  
your mind lacks any sense—you've none at all.  
Aren't you content to share a feast with us,  
such noble men, without being disturbed  
or lacking any food, and to listen  
to the words we speak to one another?"

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“Antinous, it’s neither good nor proper  
to deny guests of Telemachus a chance,  
no matter who it is comes to this house.  
And if, trusting in his strength and power, 210  
the stranger strings Odysseus’s great bow,  
do you believe this man will take me home  
and make me his wife? I’m sure he himself  
bears no such hope inside that chest of his.  
So none of you should be at dinner here  
with sorrow in your heart because of him—  
that would show you lack all sense of honour.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Among Achaeans, no man has a right  
stronger than my own to offer this bow 220  
to anyone I wish or withhold it—  
none of those who rule in rocky Ithaca  
or in the islands neighbouring Elis,  
where horses graze. Among these men, no one  
will deny my will by force, if I wish  
to give the bow, even to this stranger  
as an outright gift to take away with him.  
But, mother, you should go to your own rooms  
and keep busy with your proper duties,  
the loom and spindle, and tell your women 230  
to go about their tasks. The bow will be  
a matter for the men, especially me,  
since power in this house is justly mine.”

Penelope, astonished, went back to her rooms,  
taking to heart the prudent words her son had said.

The worthy swineherd had picked up the curving bow  
and was carrying it. He came to shrewd Odysseus  
and placed it in his hands. Then he summoned the nurse,  
Eurycleia, and said to her:

“Wise Eurycleia,  
Telemachus is telling you to lock 240  
the closely fitted doorway to this hall.

If anyone hears groans inside this room  
 or any noise from men within these walls,  
 she's not to run outside, but stay in there,  
 busy with her work and saying nothing."<sup>1</sup>

After he had said this, her words could find no wings.  
 She bolted all the doors to that well-furnished hall.  
 And Philoetius, without a word, slipped out  
 and locked the courtyard gates, then went inside again,  
 moved to the chair where he had been before, sat down, 250  
 and watched Odysseus, who already had the bow.  
 He was turning it this way and that, testing it  
 in different ways to see if, while its lord was gone,  
 worms had nibbled on the horns. Shrewd Odysseus,  
 once he had raised the weapon and looked it over  
 from every angle, then—just as someone truly skilled  
 at playing the lyre and singing has no trouble  
 when he loops a taut string around a brand-new peg,  
 tying the twisted sheep's gut down at either end—<sup>2</sup>  
 that's how easily lord Odysseus strung that bow. 260  
 Holding it in his right hand, he tested the string.  
 Then he picked up an arrow lying by itself  
 on the table there beside for him. He set it  
 against the bow, on the bridge, pulled the notched arrow  
 and the bowstring back—still sitting in his seat—  
 and with a sure aim let it fly. It did not miss,  
 not even a single hole in all the axe heads.  
 The arrow, weighted down with bronze, sped straight on through  
 and out the other end. At that point, Odysseus  
 called out to his son:

“Telemachus, the stranger 270  
 sitting in your halls has not disgraced you.  
 I did not miss my aim or work too long  
 to string that bow. My strength is still intact,  
 in spite of all the suitors' scornful gibes.  
 Now it's time to get a dinner ready  
 for these Achaeans, while there's still some light,  
 then entertain ourselves in different ways,

<sup>1</sup> *lock up ... in silence*: The doorway in question is the entrance to the women's quarters. They are to be locked in so that they don't interrupt the revenge killings or run off to raise a general alarm. For a sense of the layout of Odysseus's home, see the floorplan diagram at the end of this text (p. 168).

<sup>2</sup> *twisted sheep's gut*: The strings of ancient lyres were made from the fibres found in sheep's intestines.

with singing and the lyre. For these are things  
which should accompany a dinner feast.”

As he spoke, he gave a signal with his eyebrows. 280  
Telemachus, godlike Odysseus’s dear son,  
cinched his sword belt tight, closed his fist around a spear,  
moved in close beside his father, next to his seat,  
and stood there by him, fully armed with gleaming bronze.

BOOK TWENTY-TWO  
THE KILLING OF THE SUITORS

Resourceful Odysseus stripped off his rags, grabbed up  
the bow and quiver full of arrows, and sprang up,  
moving to the doorway. He dumped his swift arrows  
beside his feet and then shouted at the suitors:

“This contest to determine who is best  
is over. But there’s another target—  
one no man has ever struck—I’ll find out  
if I can hit it. May Apollo grant  
I get the glory.”

As Odysseus spoke,

he aimed a bitter arrow straight at Antinous, 10  
who was just about to raise up to his lips  
a fine double-handled goblet he was holding  
in his hands, so he could drink some wine. In his heart  
there was no thought of slaughter. Among those feasting,  
who would ever think, in such a crowd of people,  
that one man, even if his strength was truly great,  
would risk confronting evil death, his own black fate?  
Odysseus took aim and hit him with an arrow,  
right in the neck—its point passed through his tender throat.  
He slumped over on his side, and, as he was hit, 20  
the goblet fell to the ground, and thick spurts of blood  
came flowing quickly from his nose. Then suddenly  
he pushed the table from him with his foot, spilling  
his food onto the floor—the bread and roasted meat  
were ruined. When the suitors saw Antinous fall,  
they raised an uproar. All of them began to shout,  
yelling words of anger at Odysseus:

“Stranger,  
 you’ll pay for shooting arrows at this man.  
 It’s certain you’ll be killed once and for all.  
 You’ve hit a man, by far the finest youth  
 in all of Ithaca. And now vultures  
 are going to feast on you.”

30

They did not realize  
 he had killed the man on purpose. In their folly,  
 they did not realize that they were now enmeshed  
 in destruction’s net. Shrewd Odysseus scowled at them  
 and gave his answer:

“You dogs, because you thought  
 I’d not come back from Troy to my own home,  
 you’ve been ravaging my house, raping women,  
 and, in devious ways, wooing my wife,  
 while I was still alive, with no fear of gods  
 who hold wide heaven, or of any man  
 who might take his revenge in days to come.  
 And now a fatal snare has caught you all.”

40

As Odysseus said this, pale fear seized the suitors.  
 Each man looked around to see how he might flee  
 complete destruction. Only Eurymachus spoke—  
 he answered him and said:

“If, in fact, it’s true  
 that you’re Odysseus of Ithaca,  
 back home again, you’re right in what you say  
 about the actions of Achaeans here,  
 their frequent reckless conduct in your home,  
 their many foolish actions in the fields.  
 But the man who is responsible for this—  
 I mean bold Antinous—has just been killed.  
 Now he himself is dead, as he deserved.  
 At this point, then, you should spare your people.  
 Later on we’ll collect throughout the land  
 payment for what we’ve had to eat and drink  
 inside your halls, and every man will bring  
 compensation on his own, an amount  
 worth twenty oxen, paying you in gold  
 and bronze until your heart is mollified.”

50

60

Shrewd Odysseus scowled at him and then replied:

“Eurymachus, even if you offered  
all the goods you got from your own fathers,  
everything which you now own, and added  
other assets you could obtain elsewhere,  
not even then would I hold back my hands  
from slaughter, not until the suitors pay  
for all their arrogance. Now you’ve a choice— 70  
to fight here face to face or, if someone  
wishes to evade his death and lethal fate,  
to run away. But I don’t think there’s one  
who will escape being utterly destroyed.”

As Odysseus said this, their knees and hearts went slack  
right where they stood. Then Eurymachus spoke once more,  
calling out to them:

“Friends, this man won’t check  
those all-conquering hands of his. Instead,  
now he’s got the polished bow and quiver,  
from that threshold he’ll just keep on shooting, 80  
until he’s killed us all. So let’s think now  
about how we should fight. Pull out your swords,  
and set tables up to block those arrows—  
they bring on death so fast—and then let’s charge,  
go at him all together in a group.”

Once he said this, Eurymachus pulled out his sword,  
a sharp two-edged blade of bronze, and then charged out,  
rushing at Odysseus with a blood-curdling shout.  
As he did so, lord Odysseus shot an arrow. 90  
It hit him in the chest, striking near his nipple—  
and the swift shaft sped on, straight into his liver.  
Eurymachus’s sword slipped down onto the ground.  
He bent double, writhing on a table, and collapsed,  
knocking food and two-handled cups onto the floor.  
His forehead kept hammering the earth, his heart  
in agony, as both his feet kicked at the chair  
and made it shake. A mist fell over both his eyes.

Then Amphinomus went at glorious Odysseus,  
charging straight for him, his sharp sword drawn and ready,  
to see if he would somehow yield the door to him. 100

But Telemachus moved in too quickly for him—  
 he threw a bronze-tipped spear and hit him from behind,  
 between the shoulder blades. He drove it through his chest.  
 With a crash, Amphinomus fell, and his forehead  
 struck hard against the ground. Telemachus jumped back,  
 leaving his spear in Amphinomus, afraid that,  
 if he tried recovering the long-shadowed spear,  
 some Achaean might attack and strike him with a sword  
 or lunge at him as he was dealing with the corpse.  
 So he backed off quickly and made his way across 110  
 to his dear father. Standing close to him, he spoke—  
 his words had wings:

“Father, now I’ll bring you  
 a shield, two spears, a helmet made of bronze,  
 one that fits your temples. When I get back,  
 I’ll arm myself and hand out other weapons  
 to the swineherd and keeper of the goats.  
 It’s better if we fully arm ourselves.”

Quick-witted Odysseus answered him and said:

“Get them here fast, while I still have arrows  
 to protect myself, in case they push me 120  
 from the doorway, since I’m here by myself.”

Odysseus spoke. Telemachus obeyed the orders  
 of his dear father. He hurried to the storeroom  
 where they kept their splendid weapons. From there he took  
 four shields, eight spears, and four helmets made of bronze,  
 with thick horsehair plumes. He went out carrying these  
 and made his way back quickly to his dear father.  
 First, he armed himself with bronze around his body,  
 and the two servants did the same, dressing themselves  
 in dazzling armour. Then they went to take their place 130  
 in the doorway beside skilled and shrewd Odysseus,  
 who, as long as he had arrows to protect him,  
 continued shooting at the suitors in his home,  
 killing them one by one. As his arrows hit them,  
 they fell down in heaps. But once he’d used his arrows,  
 the king could shoot no more. So he then propped the bow  
 against the doorpost of the well-constructed wall,  
 and let it lean beside the shining entrance way.  
 Then with his fists he grabbed two heavy bronze-tipped spears.

In in that well-built wall there was a narrow passage,  
 blocked off by a close-fitting doorway. Odysseus  
 told the worthy swineherd to stand beside this door  
 and watch, for there was just one way of reaching it. 140

Then Agelaus cried, calling all the suitors:

“Friends, can someone climb up to that side door  
 and tell the men to raise a quick alarm?  
 Then this man won’t be shooting anymore.”

Melanthius, the goatherd, answered him and said:

“It can’t be done, god-raised Agelaus.  
 The main gate to the yard is really near,  
 and the entrance very hard to get through. 150  
 One man could block the way for everyone,  
 if he were brave. But come, let me bring you  
 armour from the storeroom. You could use it.  
 It’s in the house, I think—there’s nowhere else  
 Odysseus and his noble son could stash  
 their weapons.”

Once goatherd Melanthius said this,  
 he climbed up a flight of stairs inside the palace,  
 to Odysseus’s storerooms. There he took twelve shields,  
 as many spears, and twelve helmets made of bronze,  
 with bushy horsehair plumes. After he made it back, 160  
 carrying the weapons as quickly as he could,  
 he gave them to the suitors. Odysseus saw them  
 putting that armour on and their hands brandishing  
 those fine weapons and felt his knees and heart grow slack.  
 His task appeared enormous. He quickly called out  
 to Telemachus—his words had wings:

“Telemachus,  
 it seems one of the women in the house  
 has stirred up a nasty fight against us,  
 or perhaps Melanthius is the one.” 170

Prudent Telemachus then said in his reply:

“Father, I bear the blame for this myself.  
 It’s no one else’s fault. I left it open—  
 the close-fitting door of that storage room.  
 One of them has keener eyes than I do.  
 Come, good Eumaeus, shut the storeroom door.  
 Try to find out if it was a woman  
 who did this, or if it was Melanthius,  
 Dolius’s son. I suspect it’s him.”

While they were saying these things to one another, 180  
 Melanthius the goatherd went back once again,  
 to carry back more armour from the storage room.  
 But the diligent swineherd saw him and spoke out,  
 with a quick word to Odysseus, who was close by:

“Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’s son,  
 raised from Zeus, I can see that man again,  
 the wretch we think is going to the storeroom.  
 Give me clear instructions—should I kill him,  
 if I prove the stronger man, or should I  
 bring him to you here? He can pay you back 190  
 for the many insolent acts he’s done,  
 those devious schemes he’s thought up in your home.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“These proud suitors Telemachus and I  
 will keep penned up in here, inside the hall,  
 no matter how ferociously they fight.  
 You two twist Melanthius’s feet and arms  
 behind him, then throw him in the storeroom,  
 with boards lashed against his back.”

As Odysseus spoke, 200  
 they listened eagerly and did what he advised.  
 They moved off to the storeroom, without being seen  
 by the man inside. He was, as it turned out, searching  
 in a corner of the room for more bronze weapons.  
 As Melanthius, the goatherd, made his way out  
 and moved across the threshold, the two men jumped out,  
 grabbed him, hauled him by the hair back inside the room,  
 and threw him on the ground—the man was terrified.  
 They tied up his feet and hands with heart-wrenching bonds  
 and lashed them tight behind his back, as Odysseus,

Laertes's royal son, who had endured so much, 210  
 had ordered. They tied him up with a twisted rope,  
 yanked him up the lofty pillar, and raised him high,  
 up near the roof beams. They left Melanthius there,  
 roped up and dangling in bonds which would destroy him.  
 The two picked up their weapons, closed the shining door,  
 and made their way to wise and crafty Odysseus.  
 Filled with fighting spirit, they stood there, four of them  
 on the threshold, facing many brave men in the hall.

The suitors were being urged on by Agelaus,  
 Damastor's son, by Eurynomus, Amphimedon, 220  
 Demoptolemus, Peisander, Polyctor's son,  
 and shrewd Polybus. Among the suitors still alive  
 these were the finest men by far. Odysseus's bow  
 and his swift arrows had brought down all the others.  
 Agelaus spoke out, addressing all the suitors:

“Friends, this man's hands have been invincible,  
 but now they'll stop. Don't throw those spears at them,  
 not all at once. Come, you six men throw first,  
 to see if Zeus will let us strike Odysseus  
 and win glory. Those others over there 230  
 will be no trouble after he's collapsed.”

The suitors kept on throwing spears with frantic haste,  
 but, though there were a lot, Athena made them miss.  
 One suitor struck the doorpost of the well-built hall.  
 Another hit the closely fitted door. One ash spear,  
 weighted down with its bronze tip, was hurled into the wall.  
 But Amphimedon did hit Telemachus's hand  
 a glancing blow across the wrist. The bronze spear point  
 sliced the surface of his skin. And with his long spear  
 Ctesippus grazed the swineherd's shoulder above his shield, 240  
 but then the spear veered off and fell down on the ground.

At close range Odysseus wounded Damastor's son  
 with his long spear, and Telemachus managed to hit  
 Leocritus, son of Evenor—he struck him  
 with his spear right in the groin and drove the bronze point  
 right through the body. Leocritus fell forward,  
 his entire face and forehead hammering the ground.  
 Just as falcons with hooked talons and curving beaks  
 fly down from the mountains chasing birds, driving them

well below the clouds, as they swoop along the plain, 250  
 then pounce on them and kill, for there is no defence,  
 no flying away, while men get pleasure from the chase,  
 that's how Odysseus and his men pursued the suitors  
 and struck them down, one by one, all through the hall.  
 As their heads were smashed in, horrific cries arose,  
 and the whole floor in the hall was awash with blood.

And then the minstrel Phemius, son of Terpes,  
 who had been compelled to sing before the suitors,  
 attempted to evade his own disastrous fate.  
 He set down his hollow lyre, left it on the ground, 260  
 between the mixing bowl and silver-studded chair,  
 rushed out in person to clasp Odysseus's knee,  
 and addressed him with this plea—his words had wings:

“I implore you, Odysseus, show respect  
 and pity. There'll be sorrow for you later,  
 if you kill me, a minstrel, for I sing  
 to gods and men. I am self-taught. The god  
 has planted in my heart all kinds of songs,  
 and I'm good enough to sing before you,  
 as to a god. Don't be too eager then 270  
 to cut my throat. Your son Telemachus  
 could tell you that it wasn't my desire  
 nor did I need to spend time at your house,  
 singing for the suitors at their banquets.  
 But their greater power and their numbers  
 brought me here by force.”

As Phemius said this,  
 royal Telemachus, who was standing near him,  
 heard his words and spoke up, calling to his father:  
 “Hold on. Don't let your sword injure this man.  
 He's innocent. We should save Medon, too, 280  
 the herald, who always looked out for me  
 inside the house when I was still a child,  
 unless Philoetius has killed him,  
 or the swineherd, or he ran into you  
 when you were on a rampage in the hall.”

Telemachus spoke. Medon, whose mind was clever,  
 heard him, for he was cowering beneath a chair,  
 his skin covered by a new-flayed ox-hide, trying

to escape his own black fate. He quickly jumped out  
 from underneath the chair, threw aside the ox-hide, 290  
 rushed up to clasp Telemachus's knee, and begged—  
 his words had wings:

“Here I am, my friend!  
 Stop! Tell your father to restrain himself,  
 in case, as he exults in his great strength,  
 he slaughters me with that sharp bronze of his,  
 in his fury with the suitors, those men  
 who consumed his goods here in his own hall,  
 those fools who did not honour you at all.”

Resourceful Odysseus then smiled at him and said:

“Don't worry! This man here has saved your life. 300  
 He's rescued you, so you know in your heart  
 and can tell someone else how doing good  
 is preferable by far to acting badly.”

After Odysseus spoke, the two men went away,  
 outside the hall, and sat down there, by the altar  
 of great Zeus, peering around in all directions,  
 always thinking that they might be killed.

Odysseus then  
 began to search the house to check if anyone  
 was hiding there, still alive, trying to escape  
 his own murky fate. But every man he looked at— 310  
 and there were many—had fallen in blood and dust,  
 like fish which, in the meshes of a net, sailors  
 have pulled from the gray sea up on the curving beach,  
 lying piled up on the sand, longing for sea waves,  
 while a bright sun drains away their life—that is how  
 the suitors were heaped up, piled on one another.

Resourceful Odysseus then said to Telemachus:

“Telemachus, go and call the nurse here,  
 Eurycleia, so I can speak to her.  
 Something's on my mind—I want to tell her.” 320

After Odysseus spoke, Telemachus obeyed  
 what his dear father said. He shook the door and called  
 to Eurycleia, saying:

“Get up, old woman,  
 born many years ago—the one in charge  
 of female household servants in our home.  
 Come on out. My father’s calling for you.  
 He has something in mind and wants to talk.”

He spoke. But Eurycleia’s words could find no wings.  
 She opened up the door of the well-furnished hall  
 and came out. Telemachus went first and led the way. 330  
 There she found Odysseus with bodies of the dead,  
 spattered with gore and blood, like a lion moving on  
 from gorging on a farmyard ox, his entire chest  
 and both sides of his muzzle caked with fresh-spilt blood,  
 a terrifying sight, that’s how Odysseus looked,  
 with bloodstained feet and upper arms. Eurycleia,  
 once she saw the bodies and huge amounts of blood,  
 was ready to cry out for joy now she had seen  
 such a mighty act. But Odysseus held her back  
 and checked her eagerness. He challenged her and said— 340  
 his words had wings:

“Old woman, you can rejoice  
 in your own heart—but don’t cry out aloud.  
 Restrain yourself. For it’s a sacrilege  
 to boast above the bodies of the slain.  
 Divine Fate and their own reckless actions  
 have killed these men, who refused to honour  
 any man on earth who came among them,  
 bad or good. And so, through their depravity,  
 they have met an evil fate. But come now,  
 tell me about the women in these halls, 350  
 the ones who disrespect me and the ones  
 who bear no blame.”

His dear nurse Eurycleia  
 then answered him and said:

“All right my child,  
 I’ll tell you the truth. In these halls of yours,  
 there are fifty female servants, women

we have taught to carry out their duties,  
to comb out wool and bear their slavery.  
Of these, twelve women in all have acted  
without a sense of shame and no respect  
for me or for Penelope.”

Odysseus

360

then said to her:

“Those who before all this  
behaved so badly, tell them to come here.”

Odysseus then summoned Telemachus to him,  
together with Eumaeus and Philoetius.  
He addressed them all—his words had wings:

“You three men,  
start carrying these corpses outside now,  
then punish those shameless servant women.  
Have them clean these splendid chairs and tables,  
and wipe them with sponges soaked in water.  
Once you’ve put the entire house in order, 370  
then take those servants from the well-built hall  
to a spot outside between the roundhouse  
and the sturdy courtyard wall and kill them.<sup>1</sup>  
Slash them with long swords, until life is gone  
from each of them and they cannot recall  
Aphrodite and how they loved the suitors  
when they enjoyed sex with them in secret.”

Odysseus spoke. The crowd of servant women came,  
wailing plaintively and shedding many tears.  
First they gathered up the bodies of the dead 380  
and laid the corpses out beneath the portico,  
leaning them on one another in the well-fenced yard.  
Odysseus himself told them what they had to do  
and hurried on the work. The women were compelled  
to carry out the dead. Once that was done, they cleaned  
the splendid chairs and tables, wiping off the gore  
with porous sponges soaked in water. Telemachus,  
along with Philoetius and Eumaeus,  
with shovels scraped the floor inside the well-built hall,

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<sup>1</sup> *Roundhouse*: The roundhouse is in one corner of the courtyard.

and women took the dirt and threw it in the yard. 390  
 Once they had restored due order in the hall,  
 they led the servant women from the sturdy home  
 to a place between the courtyard wall and roundhouse,  
 herding those household slaves into a narrow space,  
 where there was no way to escape. Telemachus  
 began by speaking to the others:

“I don’t want  
 to take these women’s lives with a clean death.  
 They poured insults on my head, on my mother,  
 and were always sleeping with the suitors.”

He spoke, then tied the cable of a dark-prowed ship 400  
 to a large pillar, threw one end above the roundhouse  
 and pulled it taut and high, so that no woman’s foot  
 could reach the ground. Just as doves or long-winged thrushes  
 charge into a snare set in a thicket, as they seek  
 their roosting place, only to find they have been welcomed  
 by a dreadful bed, that is how those women stood,  
 all in a row, with nooses fixed around their necks,  
 so they might have a pitiful death. For some time,  
 their feet kept twitching, but that did not last long.

Then they brought Melanthius out through the doorway 410  
 into the yard. With pitiless bronze they sliced off  
 his nose and ears, then ripped away his cock and balls  
 as raw meat for dogs to eat, and in their fury  
 hacked off his hands and feet. After they’d done that,  
 they washed their hands and feet and went inside the house,  
 returning to Odysseus. Their work was finished.  
 But he called Eurycleia, his dear nurse:

“Old woman,  
 bring sulphur here to purify the house.  
 And fetch me fire so I can purge the hall.  
 Ask Penelope to come here with her slaves, 420  
 and get the women in the house, as well.”

Dear nurse Eurycleia then followed what he said.  
 She brought in fire and sulphur, so lord Odysseus  
 purged the house and yard completely. Eurycleia  
 went back through Odysseus’s splendid home to tell  
 the women what had happened and to order them

to reappear. They all came out, holding torches,  
 and gathered around Odysseus, embracing him.  
 They clasped and kissed his head, his hands, his shoulders,  
 in loving welcome. A joyful longing seized him 430  
 to sigh and weep, for in his heart he knew them all.

BOOK TWENTY-THREE  
 ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

Old Eurycleia climbed up to an upstairs room,  
 laughing to herself, so she could tell her mistress  
 that Odysseus, her dear husband, was in the house.  
 She stood beside her lady's head and spoke to her:

“Wake up now, Penelope, my dear child,  
 so you yourself can see with your own eyes  
 what you've been wanting each and every day.  
 Odysseus has arrived. He may be late,  
 but he's back in the house. And he's just killed  
 those haughty suitors who upset this home, 10  
 used up his goods, and victimized his son.”

Penelope rejoiced. She jumped up out of bed,  
 hugged the old woman, tears falling from her eyelids,  
 and spoke to Eurycleia—her words had wings:

“Come now,  
 dear nurse, tell the truth. If he's truly here,  
 back home as you maintain, then how could he  
 turn his hands against those shameless suitors?  
 He was alone, and in this house those men  
 are always in a group.”

Her dear nurse Eurycleia  
 then answered her:

“I didn't see or hear about it. 20  
 I only heard the groans of men being killed.  
 I found Odysseus standing with the bodies—  
 dead men on the hard earth all around him,  
 heaped up together, a heart-warming sight—  
 and he was there, covered with blood and gore,  
 just like a lion. Come along with me,  
 so you two can be happy in your hearts.

You've been through so much misfortune, and now  
 what you've been looking forward to so long  
 has finally happened. He's come himself, 30  
 to his own hearth while still alive—he's found  
 you and your son inside these halls and taken  
 revenge on all the suitors in his home,  
 whose actions have inflicted so much harm."

Wise Penelope then answered Eurycleia:

"But this story can't be true, not the way  
 you've told it. One of the immortal gods  
 has killed the noble suitors out of rage  
 at their heart-rending pride and shameless deeds.  
 They've met disaster through their foolishness. 40  
 But in some place far away Odysseus  
 has given up his journey to Achaea,  
 and he himself is lost. You find it hard  
 to grasp the plans of the eternal gods,  
 even though you're truly wise. But let's go  
 to my son, so I can see the suitors  
 now they're all dead—and the man who killed them."

Penelope spoke. Then she left her upper room.  
 Crossing the stone threshold, she went into the hall  
 and sat down by the fire opposite Odysseus, 50  
 beside the further wall. He was just sitting there,  
 by a tall pillar, looking at the ground, waiting  
 to find out if his noble wife would speak to him  
 when she saw him with her own eyes. But she sat down  
 and stayed silent a long time, wonder in her heart.  
 Sometimes her eyes looked straight at him, full in the face,  
 but at other times she failed to recognize him,  
 he had such shabby clothing covering his limbs.  
 Telemachus spoke up, addressing a rebuke  
 directly at her:

"Mother, you're a cruel woman, 60  
 with an unfeeling heart. Why turn aside  
 from my father in this way? Why not sit  
 over there, close to him, ask him questions?  
 No other woman's heart would be so hard  
 to make her this distant from a husband  
 who's come home to her in his native land

in the twentieth year, after surviving  
so many harsh ordeals. That heart of yours  
is always harder than a stone.”

Wise Penelope

then answered him:

“My child, inside my chest  
my heart is quite amazed. I cannot speak  
or ask questions, or look him in the eye.  
If indeed it’s true he is Odysseus  
and is home again, surely the two of us  
have more certain ways to know each other.  
We have signs only we two understand,  
and other people will not recognize.”

70

As she spoke, lord Odysseus, who had borne so much,  
smiled and immediately addressed Telemachus—  
his words had wings:

“Telemachus, let your mother  
test me in these halls. She will soon possess  
more certain knowledge. Right now I’m filthy,  
with disgusting clothing on my body.  
That’s why she rejects me and will not say  
I am Odysseus.”

80

Once he said this, Eurynome,  
the housekeeper, gave great-hearted Odysseus a bath,  
rubbed him with rich oil, and put a tunic on him  
and a gorgeous cloak. Athena poured beauty on him—  
her abundance made him taller and more robust  
to look at. Then on his head she transformed his hair,  
so it flowed in curls just like hyacinths in bloom.  
He settled back in the chair where he was sitting,  
opposite his wife, and said to her:

90

“Strange lady,  
to you those who live on Mount Olympus  
have given, more than to any other wives,  
an unfeeling heart. No other woman  
would harden herself and keep her distance,  
if her husband, in the twentieth year,  
came back to her in his own native land,

after going through so much misfortune. 100  
 So come now, nurse, spread out a bed for me,  
 so I can lie down by myself. The heart  
 inside her breast must be made of iron.”

Wise Penelope then answered him:

“Strange man,  
 I am not making too much of myself,  
 or ignoring you. Nor is it the case  
 that you’ve offended me in any way.  
 I understand the sort of man you were  
 when you left Ithaca in your long-oared ship.  
 So come, Eurycleia, set up for him 110  
 outside the well-built bedroom that strong bed  
 he made himself. Put that sturdy bedstead  
 out there for him and throw some bedding on,  
 fleeces and cloaks and shining coverlets.”

Penelope said these words to test her husband.  
 But Odysseus, upset at his true-hearted wife,  
 replied and said:

“Woman, those words you uttered  
 are very painful. Who’s shifted my bed  
 to somewhere else? That would be difficult,  
 even for someone truly skilled, unless 120  
 a god came down in person—for he could,  
 if he so wished, set it elsewhere with ease.  
 But among men there is no one living,  
 no matter how much energy he has,  
 who would find it easy to shift that bed.  
 For built into the well-constructed bedstead  
 is a great symbol which I made myself  
 with no one else. A long-leaved olive bush  
 was growing in the yard. It was in bloom  
 and flourishing—it looked like a pillar. 130  
 I built my bedroom round this olive bush,  
 till I had finished it with well-set stones.  
 I put a fine roof on it and added  
 closely fitted jointed doors. After that,  
 I cut back the foliage, removing  
 the branches from that long-leaved olive bush.  
 I trimmed the trunk off, upward from the root,

cutting it skillfully and true with bronze,  
 so it followed a straight line. Once I'd made  
 the bedpost, with an augur I bored out 140  
 the entire piece. That was how I started.  
 Then I carved out my bed, till I was done.  
 And that's the symbol I describe for you.  
 Lady, I don't know if that bed of mine  
 is still in place or if some other man  
 has cut that olive tree down at its base  
 and set the bed up in a different spot."

Odysseus spoke, and sitting there, Penelope  
 felt a weakness in her knees, and her heart grew soft.  
 For she recognized that it was true—that symbol 150  
 Odysseus had described to her. Eyes full of tears,  
 she ran across to him, threw her arms around his neck,  
 kissed his head, and said:

“Don't be angry, Odysseus,  
 not with me. In every other matter  
 you've been the cleverest of men. The gods  
 have brought us sorrows—they were not willing  
 that we two should stay beside each other  
 to enjoy our youth and reach together  
 the threshold of old age. Now's not the time  
 to rage at me, resenting what I've done 160  
 because I did not welcome you this way  
 when I first saw you. There are many men  
 who dream up wicked schemes. Argive Helen,  
 a child of Zeus, would never have had sex  
 with a man who came from somewhere foreign,  
 if she had known Achaea's warrior sons  
 would bring her back to her dear native land.<sup>1</sup>  
 But now you have described that clear symbol,  
 our bed, which no one else has ever seen,  
 other than the two of us, you and me, 170  
 and a single servant girl, Actoris,  
 a gift my father gave when I came here.  
 For both of us she kept watch at the doors  
 of our securest room. You've won my heart,  
 though it's been truly stubborn.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Argive Helen*: I.e., Helen of Troy.

Penelope spoke  
 and stirred in him an even more intense desire  
 to weep. As he held his loyal and loving wife,  
 he cried, as well. And then rose-fingered early Dawn  
 would have arrived with both of them still weeping there,  
 if goddess Athena with the glittering eyes 180  
 had not come up with something else—for she prolonged  
 the lengthy night as it came to an end, keeping  
 Dawn and her golden throne delayed at Ocean's stream.

While they kept talking to each other in this way,  
 Eurynome and the old nurse prepared the bed  
 with soft coverlets, by light from flaming torches.  
 Once they had hurriedly arranged the sturdy bed,  
 Eurycleia returned to own her room to rest,  
 and the bedroom servant, Eurynome, led them  
 on their way to bed, with a torch gripped in her hand. 190  
 Once she brought them there, Eurynome went away.  
 Odysseus and Penelope approached with joy  
 the place where their bed still stood from earlier days.

When Odysseus and Penelope had enjoyed  
 making love together, they entertained themselves  
 telling stories, in mutual conversation.  
 The lovely lady talked of all she had to bear  
 in her own home, dealing with that destructive group,  
 the suitors, who, because of her, kept butchering  
 so many cattle and fat sheep and draining jars 200  
 of so much wine. Odysseus, born from Zeus, told her  
 all the troubles he had brought on men and the grief  
 he had endured all on his own. Penelope  
 was happy listening, and Sleep did not swoop down  
 and close her eyes until his story had been told.

Then Athena, goddess with the glittering eyes,  
 came up with something else. When she thought Odysseus  
 and his wife had satisfied their hearts with pleasure  
 and with sleep, she quickly stirred up Dawn, enthroned in gold,  
 to move from Ocean's stream and bring her light to men. 210  
 Odysseus rose from his soft bed and told his wife:

“Now that we've come back to the bed we love,  
 you should tend to our wealth inside the house.  
 As for the flocks those haughty suitors stole,

I'll seize many beasts as plunder on my own,  
 and Achaeans will give more—they'll fill up  
 each and every pen. Now I'm going out  
 to check my forest lands, and there I'll see  
 my noble father, who on my behalf  
 has suffered so much worry. So, dear wife, 220  
 since I know how intelligent you are,  
 I'm asking you to follow my advice—  
 once sunrise comes, the story will be out  
 about the suitors slaughtered in our home.  
 So you should go now to your upstairs room  
 with your female attendants and stay there.  
 Do not visit or question anyone."

Once he said this, he put his splendid armour on,  
 around his shoulders, and summoned Telemachus,  
 Philoetius, and Eumaeus, and told them all 230  
 to get weapons in their hands ready for a fight.  
 They did not disobey, but dressed themselves in bronze,  
 opened the doors, and went outside, with Odysseus  
 in the lead. By now light was shining on the ground,  
 but Athena kept their group hidden by the night  
 and quickly escorted them outside the city.

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR  
 ZEUS AND ATHENA END THE FIGHTING

Once Odysseus and his men had left the city,  
 they soon reached his father's fertile, well-managed farm,  
 which Laertes had once won by his own efforts,  
 after much hard labour. His house was there, with sheds  
 surrounding it on every side, where his servants,  
 bonded slaves who worked to carry out his wishes,  
 ate and sat and slept. An ancient Sicilian woman  
 lived inside his house, looking after the old man,  
 caring for him at the farm, far from the city.  
 Odysseus then spoke to his servants and his son: 10

"You men should now go in the well-built home  
 and quickly kill the finest pig they have,  
 so we can eat. I'll sound out my father,  
 to find out if he recognizes me,  
 sees who I am, once he's laid eyes on me,

or if he doesn't know me anymore,  
since I've been away so long."

Odysseus spoke,  
then handed his battle weapons to his servants.  
In the well-tended vineyard he found his father.  
He was digging around a plant, all by himself, 20  
dressed in a disgusting, shabby, patched-up tunic,  
with laced-up shin pads on his legs, stitched from ox-hide,  
to protect himself from scratches, and on his hands  
he wore gloves, for in that ground many thistles grew.  
On his head he had a goatskin cap. In these clothes  
he was dealing with his grief. He stirred Odysseus's heart.  
As Odysseus gazed at his father, he could feel  
sharp pain shooting up his nostrils. He jumped over,  
embraced Laertes, kissed him, and then said:

"Father,  
I'm here—back home in the twentieth year, 30  
on my own native soil. Stop your grieving,  
these tearful sighs. I'll tell you everything,  
although we have to move with all due speed.  
I've killed the suitors in our home, avenged  
their evil and heart-rending insolence."

Laertes then answered him and said:

"If that's true,  
if you are indeed my son Odysseus  
and have come back, show me some evidence,  
something clear so I can be quite certain."

Resourceful Odysseus replied to him and said: 40

"First, let your eyes inspect this scar—a boar  
inflicted that on me with its white tusk,  
when I visited Parnassus, sent there  
by you and by my honorable mother,  
to her cherished father, Autolycus,  
so I could get the gifts he'd promised me,  
what he'd agreed to give when he was here."

As Odysseus spoke, his father's fond heart and knees  
gave way—he clearly recognized the evidence

Odysseus had presented. He threw both his arms  
 around the son he loved and struggled hard to breathe. 50  
 Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, held him.  
 After he revived and the spirit was restored  
 inside his chest, Laertes spoke again and said:

“Father Zeus, it appears you gods are still  
 on high Olympus, if it’s true those suitors  
 have paid the price of their proud arrogance.  
 But now my heart contains a dreadful fear—  
 all the men of Ithaca will rush here  
 against us, and they’ll send out messengers 60  
 to every town in Cephallenia.”<sup>1</sup>

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

“Take courage, and do not allow these things  
 to weigh down your heart. Let’s go to the house,  
 the one close by the orchard, where I sent  
 Telemachus, together with the swineherd  
 and the keeper of the goats, telling them  
 to prepare a meal as quickly as they could.”

After they talked like this, they went to the fine house.  
 Once they reached his father’s well-furnished home, they found 70  
 Telemachus with the goatkeeper and swineherd  
 carving large cuts of meat and mixing gleaming wine.

Meanwhile, the other servants had finished working,  
 and dinner was prepared. They sat down one by one  
 on stools and chairs. As they were reaching for the food,  
 old Dolius<sup>2</sup> appeared. He had his sons with him,  
 exhausted from their work. The old Sicilian woman,  
 their mother, had gone out and told them to return.  
 Dolius went straight up to him, both arms outstretched,  
 grabbed Odysseus’s hand and kissed it on the wrist. 80  
 Then he spoke to him—his words had wings:

“My friend,  
 you’re back with us, who longed for your return

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<sup>1</sup> *Cephallenia*: Island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus’ kingdom, often applied to that kingdom and its people generally.

<sup>2</sup> *Dolius*: Old servant of Laertes and Penelope.

but never thought to see it! Gods themselves  
must have been leading you. Joyful greetings!  
May gods grant you success!"

Then Dolius's sons  
also came up around glorious Odysseus,  
clasping both his hands with joyful words of welcome.

While this was going on, Rumour the Messenger  
sped swiftly through the entire city, spreading news  
of the suitors' appalling deaths, their destiny.<sup>1</sup> 90  
People heard about it all at once and came in  
from all directions, gathering with mournful sighs  
before Odysseus's home. Each one brought his dead  
outside the house and buried them, and all the men  
from other cities they sent home, carrying them  
aboard swift ships to be taken back by sailors.  
Then, with sorrowful hearts, they all went in person  
to meet in an assembly and once they met there,  
together in one group, Eupheithes rose to speak.  
Constant grief weighed down his heart for his own son, 100  
Antinous, the first man killed by lord Odysseus.  
As he wept for him, he spoke to the assembly:

"My friends, this man has planned and carried out  
dreadful acts against Achaeans. He took  
many courageous sons when he embarked,  
then lost his hollow ships, with all men dead.  
Now he's returned and killed the best men by far  
among the Cephalenians. So come,  
before he can hurry off to Pylos  
or holy Elis, where Epeians rule, 110  
let's get started. If not, in future days  
we'll be eternally disgraced, since men  
yet to be born will learn about our shame,  
if we don't act to take out our revenge  
on those killers of our sons and brothers.  
As far as I'm concerned, the life we'd live  
would not be sweet. I'd rather die right now  
and live among the dead. So we should act,  
in case those men have a head start on us  
and get across the sea."

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<sup>1</sup>*Rumour the Messenger*: goddess Pheme, who was responsible for gossip, fame, and scandal.

As Euphithes said this, 120  
 he wept. All Achaeans there were seized with pity.  
 Then Medon and the godlike singer, just released  
 from sleep, approached them from Odysseus's house  
 and stood up in their midst. The crowd there was amazed.  
 Then Medon, a shrewd man, spoke out:

“Men of Ithaca,  
 listen. Odysseus did not plan these acts  
 without the gods' consent. I myself observed  
 an immortal god who stood beside him,  
 looking in every detail just like Mentor.  
 The deathless god appeared before Odysseus 130  
 at that time to spur him on to action,  
 and, at another time, charged through the hall,  
 panicking the suitors. They collapsed in droves.”

He ended. Some men stayed together in their seats,  
 but others, more than half, jumped up with noisy shouts.  
 The words Medon had spoken did not stir their hearts—  
 for many had been persuaded by Euphithes  
 and quickly hurried away to get their weapons.

Then Athena spoke to Zeus, son of Cronos, saying:

“Father of us all and son of Cronos, 140  
 highest of all those who rule, answer me  
 when I ask this—what are you concealing  
 in that mind of yours? Will you now foster  
 further savage war and fearful battle,  
 or bring both sides together here as friends?”

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered her and said:

“My child, why are you asking this of me?  
 Why all these questions? Were you not the one  
 who put this plan in motion by yourself,  
 so Odysseus could take out his revenge 150  
 against these suitors, after he got back?  
 Do as you wish. But I'll lay out for you  
 what I think is right. Since lord Odysseus  
 has now paid the suitors back, let them swear  
 a binding oath that he'll remain their king

for life, and let us make them all forget  
 the way their brothers and their sons were killed  
 and love each other as they did before.  
 And let there be wealth and peace in plenty.”

His words roused Athena, who was already keen. 160  
 She left, swooping down from lofty Mount Olympus.

Meanwhile, after his men had satisfied their hearts  
 with a meal as sweet as honey, lord Odysseus,  
 who had borne so much, was the first of them to speak:

“Someone should go outside and look around,  
 to see if they are getting close to us.”

Once he said this, a son of Dolius got up,  
 as Odysseus had ordered, walked to the doorway,  
 and saw a crowd of armed men moving to the hut.  
 He called out to Odysseus—his swift words had wings: 170

“They’re here—and closing in! Let’s get weapons—  
 we’d better hurry!”

At these words, they leapt up  
 and put on their armor. Odysseus and his men  
 were four, the sons of Dolius six, and with them  
 Dolius and Laertes, though they had gray hair,  
 were dressed in armour, too, forced to be warriors.  
 Once they put glittering bronze around their bodies,  
 they opened up the doors and left the hut. Odysseus  
 led them out. But then Athena, Zeus’s daughter,  
 with the shape and voice of Mentor, came up to them. 180  
 stood by Laertes, and said:

“Child of Arcesius,<sup>1</sup>  
 by far the dearest of those I cherish,  
 pray to the young girl with the flashing eyes  
 and to Father Zeus. Then, without delay  
 brandish that long spear of yours and hurl it.”

Pallas Athena spoke and then breathed into him  
 enormous power. Laertes said a prayer

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<sup>1</sup> *Arcesius*: A son of Zeus, and Odysseus’s grandfather.

to great Zeus's daughter, and quickly lifting up  
 his long-shadowed spear, he threw it. It hit home,  
 piercing the cheek piece on Eupheithes's helmet, 190  
 which did not stop the spear—its point continued on.  
 Eupheithes collapsed, falling with a thud, his armour  
 crashing round him. Odysseus and his splendid son  
 charged at the fighters in the front, attacking them  
 with swords and two-edged spears. They would have killed them all,  
 cut them down so not one of them returned, had not  
 Athena, born from aegis-bearing Zeus, cried out—  
 her voice made men on both sides pause:

“Men of Ithaca,  
 you must stop this disastrous war at once,  
 so you can quickly go your separate ways 200  
 without spilling any blood.”

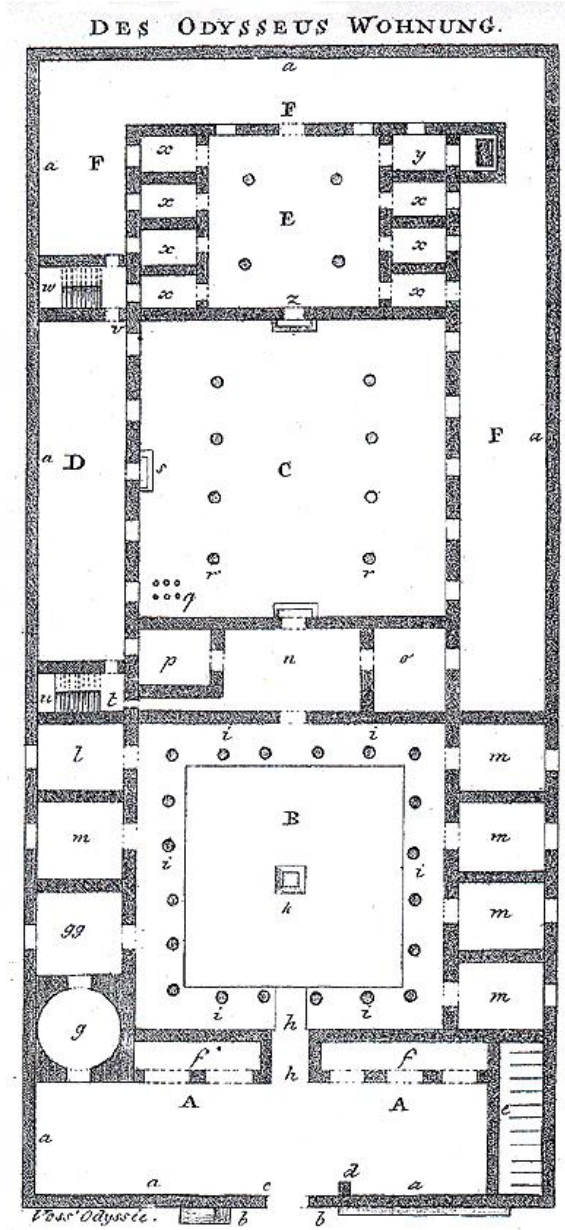
Athena spoke,  
 and pale fear gripped the men. They were so terrified,  
 they let go their weapons, which all fell on the ground,  
 at the sound of her ear-splitting voice. They turned around,  
 back towards the city, eager to save their lives.  
 Then much-enduring lord Odysseus gave out  
 a blood-curdling shout, gathered himself, and swooped down,  
 like an eagle from on high. But at that moment,  
 Zeus, son of Cronos, shot a fiery thunderbolt.  
 It struck between the feet of the bright-eyed daughter 210  
 of almighty father Zeus. And then Athena,  
 goddess with the gleaming eyes, said to Odysseus:

“Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son,  
 and child of Zeus, hold back. Stop the fighting,  
 this all-embracing war, in case great Zeus,  
 who sees far and wide, grows angry with you.”

When he heard Athena's words, Odysseus obeyed,  
 joy in his heart. And then Pallas Athena,  
 daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, in shape and form  
 appearing just like Mentor, had both parties swear 220  
 a solemn treaty designed to last forever.



POSSIBLE FLOOR PLAN OF ODYSSEUS HOUSE (VOSS 1820)



- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room
- a. the outer wall
- b. the entrance
- c. the gates
- d. location of the dog Argus
- e. standing place for mules
- f. two halls
- g. the dome
- h. the entrance to the court
- i. the hall
- k. Zeus' altar in the court
- l. Telemachus' room
- m. various rooms
- n. vestibule
- o. room for bathing
- p. activity room
- q. wine preparation room
- r. pillars
- s. simple doors
- t. door from vestibule
- u. stair to Odysseus' rooms
- v. door to women's rooms
- w. stairs to Penelope's room
- x. ground floor rooms
- y. Penelope's bedroom
- z. door
- A. courtyard and fence
- B. level middle court
- C. the hall
- D. passage by-passing the hall
- E. Penelope's work room
- F. rear courtyard

When Odysseus kills the Suitors, he is standing with his bow at the lower entrance to the main hall, C. The doors to the women's quarters (at v and z) have been locked. The only way out for the Suitors is a small door at s, which leads to the passageway D. Odysseus places Eumaeus at the end of the passage (at point t) to prevent any Suitor getting out into the courtyard B.

(Diagram and explanation courtesy of Carlos Parada, Greek Mythology Link.)

EXPLANATION OF DIAGRAM

## GLOSSARY

The following glossary includes the names of the main characters and places in this abridged *Odyssey* and a few others. Guides to pronunciation are provided in square brackets, Note that the syllables in capital letters in the pronunciation guide indicate where the stress falls.<sup>1</sup>

ACHAEANS: [*ah-KAY-ans*] a collective name of the Greeks (used interchangeably with Danaans [*DAN-eh-ans*] and Argives [*ARE-gyves*]).

ACHILLES: [*ah-KILL-ease*] son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaean warriors at Troy, where he died and was buried.

AEGISTHUS: [*eh-GISTH-us*] son of Thyestes, lover of Clytaemnestra and murderer of Agamemnon.

AEOLUS: [*EH-oh-luss*] son of Hippotas, god of the winds, living on the island Aeolia.

AGAMEMNON: [*ah-ga-MEM-non*] son of Atreus, king of Argos, leader of the Achaean forces which attacked and destroyed Troy.

AGELAUS: [*ah-gel-AH-us*] son of Damastor, one of the Suitors.

AJAX: [*EH-jacks*] son of Telamon, greatest Achaean warrior after Achilles at Troy, where he died and was buried.

ALCINOUS: [*al-KIN-oo-us* or, more commonly, *AL-kin-oose*] son of Nausithous, husband of Arete, king of the Phaeacians.

AMPHIMEDON: [*am-fee-MED-on*] son of Melaneus, one of the Suitors.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the main sources of concern in the pronunciation of classical Greek names involves ones which end with the letters *-aus* or *-eus* or *-ius* or *-ium*. These endings are in almost all cases two syllables: e.g. *Menelaus* (four syllables), *Atreus* (three syllables), *Agelaus* (four syllables), *Dolius* (three syllables). The ending *-ous* is, however, commonly (though not always) one syllable: *Antinous* (three syllables) and *Alcinous* (three syllables) A double vowel combination in the final letters of a name is usually pronounced as two syllables: e.g. *Cephalenia* (five syllables), *Dulicium* (four syllables), *Nausicaa* (four syllables), *Ogygia* (four syllables), *Aeaea* (three syllables), and so on. With polysyllabic names it is not always clear nor is there always agreement about where the stress should fall. In many cases, the stress comes on the penultimate syllable (the second one from the end): *ag-a-MEM-non*, *men-eh-LAY-us*, *pol-iff-EE-mus*). However, there is also a tendency to move the stress to the antepenultimate syllable (the third one from the end). Hence, there is uncertainty: Should we pronounce *Demodocus de-MOD-ok-us* or *de-mo-DOKE-us*, *Eurylochus you-RIL-oh-kuss* or *you-ri-LOH-kuss*, *Amphinomus am-PHI-no-moos* or *am-phi-NO-moos*, and so on. My own tendency when in doubt is to stress the antepenultimate syllable.

The name *Odysseus*, like a number of others, is a special case, because, following the usual practice with a familiar English word, people generally pronounce it with three syllables, although if we adhere to the first convention mentioned above, the classical Greek name should be pronounced with four (the final *-eus* forming two syllables). However, it is a common (though not universal) practice in English translations of Homer to render names that are familiar to readers of English literature in their English form and to pronounce them as we do the English word: e.g., *Achilles* (Greek: *Akhilleus*), *Ajax* (Greek: *Aias*), *Circe* (Greek: *Kirke*), *Hercules* (Greek: *Herakles*), *Ocean* (Greek: *Okeanus*), *Sirens* (Greek: *Sirenes*), *Troy* (Greek: *Troia*), *Zeus* (one syllable, not two), and *Phaeacians* (three syllables not four). One name for which there does not seem to be general agreement is *Nausicaa* (this translation treats the name as a four-syllable word).

AMPHINOMUS: [*am-fee-NO-moos*] son of Nisus, one of the Suitors from Dulichium.

ANTICLEIA: [*an-ti-CLAY-ah*] daughter of Autolycus, mother of Odysseus.

ANTINOUS: [*an-TIN-oh-us* or, more commonly, *AN-tea-nous*] son of Eupheithes, one of the leaders of the Suitors.

ANTIPHATES: [*an-TIFF-a-teez*] king of the Laestrygonians.

APHRODITE: [*aff-roe-DYE-tee*] divine daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of erotic love.

APOLLO: [*ah-POLL-o*] divine son of Zeus and Leto, often called Phoebus or Phoebus Apollo.

ARES: [*AIR-ease*] divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of war.

ARETE: [*ah-REE-tea*] wife of Alcinous, queen of the Phaeacians.

ARGIVES: [*ARE-gyves*] see ACHAEANS.

ARTEMIS: [*ART-em-iss*] divine daughter of Zeus and Leto, goddess of the hunt.

ATHENA: [*ath-EE-na*] divine daughter of Zeus, goddess of wisdom.

CALYPSO: [*kal-IP-so*] daughter of Atlas, goddess living on the island of Ogygia.

CEPHALLENIA: [*keff-ah-LEN-ee-ah*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom, often applied to that kingdom and its people generally.

CHARYBDIS: [*ka-RIB-dis*] a divine sea monster who acts as a whirlpool and water spout.

CICONES: [*SICK-oh-neeze* or *KICK-oh-neeze*] inhabitants of Ismarus, a city close to Troy.

CIRCE: [*SIR-see*] a goddess living on the island of Aea.

CLYTAEMNESTRA: [*kly-tem-NEST-ra*] daughter of Tyndareus, wife of Agememnon.

CYCLOPES [*SIGH-klop-es*] (singular CYCLOPS [*SIGH-klops*): monstrous creatures with one eye.

CRONOS: [*KRON-oss*] father of Zeus, overthrown by his son and imprisoned deep in the earth.

DEMODOCUS: [*de-MOD-ok-us* or, less commonly, *de-mo-DOKE-us*] the blind minstrel in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.

DOLIUS: [*DOLL-ee-us*] an old servant of Laertes and Penelope.

DULICHIMUM: [*doo-LICK-ee-um*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus's kingdom.

EUMAEUS: [*you-MAY-us*] a servant of Odysseus, keeper of pigs.

EUPEITHES: [*you-PEITH-eeze*] father of Antinous (one of the Suitors).

EURYCLEIA: [*you-RICK-lay-a*] daughter of Ops, elderly family servant to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.

EURYLOCHUS: [*you-RILL-oh-kuss*] one of Odysseus's companions, related to him by marriage.

EURYMACHUS: [*you-RIM-ah-kuss*] son of Polybus, one of the leading Suitors.

EURYNOME: [*you-RIN-o-mee*] housekeeper in Odysseus's and Penelope's home.

HEPHAESTUS: [*heff-EYE-stuss*] divine son of Zeus and Hera, god of the forge, divine artisan.

- HERCULES: [*HER-cue-lees*] mortal son of Zeus, made into a god after his death.
- HERMES: [*HER-meez*] divine son of Zeus and the nymph Maia, messenger god, often called “killer of Argus.”
- HYPERION: [*high-PEER-ee-on*] god of the sun (also called HELIOS [*HE-lee-os*]).
- ILION: [*ILL-ee-on*] another name for TROY.
- ITHACA: [*ITH-ack-ah*] island off the west coast of mainland Greece, kingdom ruled by Odysseus.
- LAERTES: [*lay-AIR-tees*] son of Arcesius, father of Odysseus.
- LAESTRYGONIANS: [*lay-stri-GON-ee-ans*] race of giants living in Telepylus.
- LEIODES [*LIE-od-es*] son of Oenops, one of the Suitors, a soothsayer.
- LEOCRITUS: [*lay-OCK-ri-tus*] son of Euenor, one of the Suitors.
- MEDON: [*MEH-don*] a herald in Odysseus’s palace.
- MELANTHIUS: [*meh-LANTH-ee-us*] son of Dolius, a goatherd friendly to the Suitors.
- MENELAUS: [*men-eh-LAY-us*] son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, king of Sparta.
- MENTOR: [*MEN-tor*] son of Alcimus, steward of Odysseus’s place, an old companion of Odysseus.
- NAUSICAA: [*now-SICK-ah-ah* often also *now-SICK-ah* or *now-SICK-ee-ah*] daughter of Arete, princess of the Phaeacians.
- NESTOR: [*NES-tor*] son of Neleus, king of Pylos.
- OCEANUS: [*oh-SAY-an-us*; or *oh-KAY-an-us*] the river running around the outer rim of the world; the name is often written OCEAN and pronounced like the English word.
- ODYSSEUS: [*oh-DISS-eh-uss*; more commonly in English *oh-DISS-yus*] king of Ithaca, son of Laertes, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus.
- OLYMPUS: [*oh-LIM-puss*] mountain in northern Greece where the major deities live (the Olympians).
- OGYGIA: [*oh-GIDGE-ee-ah*] island where Calypso lives and where she detains Odysseus.
- ORESTES: [*or-ESS-tees*] son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra, killer of Aegisthus.
- PENELOPE: [*pe-NEL-oh-pee*] daughter of Icarius, wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachus.
- PERSEPHONE: [*per-SEFF-oh-nee*] wife of Hades, goddess of the underworld.
- PHAEACIANS: [*fay-AH-kee-ans* or, more commonly in English, *fay-EE-shuns*] inhabitants of Scheria, master sailors.
- PHEMIUS: [*FEE-me-uhs*] son of Terpes, the professional minstrel in Odysseus’s palace.
- PHILOETIUS: [*fill-oh-EE-tee-uhs* or *phil-oh-ea-shus*] a goat and cattle herder on Ithaca friendly to Odysseus.
- POLYPHEMUS: [*poll-iff-EE-mus*] a cyclops, son of Poseidon.
- PONTONOUS: [*PON-toe-nous*] a herald in the court of Alcinous in Phaeacia.

POSEIDON: [*po-SIGH-don*] god of the sea, brother of Zeus, often called “encircler of the earth” or “Earthshaker.”

PRIAM: [*PRY-am*] king of Troy, killed when the city was captured by Achaeans.

PYLOS: [*PIE-loss*] city state in the south Peloponnese ruled by Nestor.

PYTHO: [*PIE-tho*] the location of the shrine of Apollo.

SAME: [*SA-mee*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus’s kingdom.

SCHERIA: [*scare-EE-ah* or *share-EE-ah*] distant land where the Phaeacians live.

SCYLLA: [*SILL-ah* or *SKILL-ah*] a monster with many heads.

SIRENS: [*SIGH-rens*] two singers who lure sailors to their destruction.

SPARTA: city in the central Peloponnese ruled by Menelaus.

STYX: [*STICKS*] river in Hades by which the gods swear their most solemn oaths.

SUITORS: aristocratic young men courting Penelope in hopes of marrying her.

TEIRESIAS: [*tie-REE-see-ass*] a blind prophet from Thebes.

TELEMACHUS: [*te-LEM-ah-kuss*] son of Odysseus and Penelope.

TROY: city in Asia Minor, near the Hellespont, besieged by the Achaean (Greek) forces for ten years.

ZACYNTHUS: [*za-KIN-thuhs*] an island close to Ithaca, part of Odysseus’s kingdom.

ZEUS: [*ZOOSE*] major divine presence on Olympus, often called “son of Cronos.”

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is an Emeritus Professor at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* and of *Essays and Arguments: A Handbook for Writing Student Essays*. He also translated a number of works, including the following:

Aeschylus, *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides*)  
 Aeschylus, *Persians*  
 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*  
 Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*  
 Aeschylus, *Suppliant Women*  
 Aristophanes, *Birds*  
 Aristophanes, *Clouds*  
 Aristophanes, *Frogs*  
 Aristophanes, *Knights*  
 Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*  
 Aristophanes, *Peace*  
 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Abridged)  
 Cuvier, *Discourse on the Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth*  
 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*  
 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*  
 Diderot, *A Conversation Between D'Alembert and Diderot*  
 Diderot, *D'Alembert's Dream*  
 Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*  
 Euripides, *Bacchae*  
 Euripides, *Electra*  
 Euripides, *Hippolytus*  
 Euripides, *Medea*  
 Euripides, *Orestes*  
 Homer, *Iliad* (Complete and Abridged)  
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 Kafka, *Selected Shorter Writings*  
 Kant, *Universal History of Nature and Theory of Heaven*  
 Kant, *On Perpetual Peace*  
 Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy, Volume I*  
 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*  
 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*  
 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*  
 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*  
 Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life*  
 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*

Rousseau, *Social Contract*

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Sophocles, *Ajax*

Sophocles, *Electra*

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

Sophocles, *Philoctetes*

Wedekind, *Castle Wetterstein*

Wedekind, *Marquis of Keith*

Most of these translations have been published as books or audiobooks (or both)—by Richer Resources Publications, Broadview Press, Naxos, Audible, and others.

Ian Johnston maintains a web site where texts of these translations are freely available to students, teachers, artists, and the general public. The site includes a number of Ian Johnston's lectures on these (and other) works, handbooks, curricular materials, and essays, all freely available.

The address where these texts are available is as follows:

<http://johnstoniatexts.x10host.com/>