
HOMER

THE ODYSSEY

ABRIDGED

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 [here](#)). This abridged translation is roughly one-third the length 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 many places no summary is provided for missing material.

For a pdf version of this translation, please contact [Ian Johnston](#). A printed paperback edition of this abridged translation is available from [Richer Resources](#)

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At the end of this text there is a Glossary of Names and Places.

HOMER ODYSSEY ABRIDGED

In numbering the lines, the translator has normally included a short indented line with the shorter 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.

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—that's why he snatched away their chance 10 of getting home someday. So now, daughter of Zeus, tell us his story, starting anywhere you wish.¹

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 wished to make Odysseus her husband.
But as the seasons came and went, the year
arrived

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in which, according to what gods had once ordained,
he was to get back to Ithaca, his home—
not that he would be free from troubles even there,
among his family. 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.

But at that moment,
Poseidon was among the Ethiopians,
a long way off. But other gods had gathered
in the great hall of Olympian Zeus. Among them
all,

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the father of gods and men was first to speak.
In his heart he was remembering royal Aegisthus,
whom Orestes, Agamemnon's famous son,
had killed. With him in mind, Zeus addressed the gods:

“It's disgraceful how these humans blame the gods.
They say their tribulations come from us,
when they themselves, through their own foolishness,
bring hardships which are not decreed by fate.
Now there's Aegisthus, who took for himself
the wife of Agamemnon, Atreus'
son,

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and then murdered him, once the man came home.
None of that was set by Fate. Aegisthus knew
his acts would bring about his total ruin.
So he has paid for everything in full.”²

Athena, goddess with the 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.
May any other man who does what he did
also be destroyed! But my heart is
torn

50

for skilful Odysseus, ill-fated man,

who has had to suffer such misfortune
for so many years, a long way from friends.
He's on an island, surrounded by the sea,
the one that forms the ocean's navel stone.
In the forests of that island lives a goddess,
who stops the sad, unlucky man from leaving.
But Odysseus yearns to see even the smoke
rising from his native land and longs for death.
And yet, Olympian Zeus, your
heart

60

does not respond to him. Did not Odysseus
offer you delightful sacrifices
on Troy's far-reaching plain beside the ships?
Why then, Zeus, 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 is a stubborn
god,

70

constantly enraged about the Cyclops,
the one whose eye Odysseus destroyed,
godlike Polyphemus, the mightiest
of all the Cyclopes. Thoosa bore him,
the nymph, a daughter of that Phorcys
who commands the restless seas. Poseidon,
down in those hollow caves, had sex with her.
That's the reason Earthshaker Poseidon
makes Odysseus wander from his country.
Still, he has no plans to kill him. But

come,

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 opposing him."³

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes replied to Zeus:

“Son of Cronos and father to us
all,
ruling high 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.⁴
I’ll go to Ithaca and urge his son
to be more active, put courage in his heart,
so he will call those long-haired Achaeans
to assembly, and there address the
suitors,
who keep on slaughtering his flocks of sheep
and shambling bent-horned cattle.⁵ I’ll send him
on a trip to Sparta and sandy
Pylos, 100
to learn about his father’s voyage home—
he may hear of it somewhere—and to gain
a worthy reputation among men.”

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

God-like Telemachus
observed Athena first, well before the
others.

He moved up near Athena, 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.”

Saying this,
Telemachus led Pallas Athena into his home.
He brought Athena in and sat her in a chair,
a beautifully crafted work. Under it
he rolled out a linen mat and then arranged
a foot stool 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
brought in the bread and set it down before them.
Next, she laid out a wide variety of food,
drawing freely on supplies she had in store.
A carver sliced up many different cuts of meat
and served them. He set out goblets made of gold,
as a herald went back and forth pouring their 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 some baskets full of bread,
while young lads filled their bowls up to the brim with
drink.
The suitors reached out with their hands to grab
the tasty food prepared and placed in front of them.
When each and every man had satisfied his need
for food and drink, their hearts craved 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.

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 so easy for them,
because they gorge themselves on what
belongs

to someone else, and with impunity,
a man whose white bones now may well be lying
on the mainland somewhere, rotting in the
rain,

160

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 clothes.
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,
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 Mentes,
son of the wise Anchialus, and king
of the oar-loving Taphians. My ship
is berthed some distance from the city.
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.
It strikes me that these men are acting here
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

have changed all that completely. They make sure Odysseus stays where nobody can see him—they've not done this to anyone before. But it's not him alone who makes me sad and cry out in distress. For now the gods have brought me other grievous troubles. 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.
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 has wandered
off
when you need him here so much! He could lay
his hands upon these shameless suitors.
Listen now to what I’m going to tell

you.

210

Tomorrow you must call Achaea's warriors
to an assembly and address them all,
appealing to the gods as witnesses.

Tell the suitors to return to their own 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 power with great capabilities.

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
may tell you something, or you may hear
a voice from Zeus, which often brings men news.

Sail first to Pylos—speak to noble

Nestor.

After you've been there, proceed to Sparta
and fair-haired Menelaus, the last one
of all bronze-clad Achaeans to get
home.

230

You must not keep on acting like a child—
the time has come when you're too old for that."

Prudent Telemachus then answered her:

"Stranger, you've been speaking as a friend,
thinking as 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 had a bath
and your fond heart is fully satisfied,
then go back to your ship with your

spirit

240

full of joy, carrying a costly present,
something really beautiful, which will be

my gift to you, an heirloom of the sort
dear guest-friends give to those who are their friends."

Goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes then said to him:

"Since I'm eager to depart, don't keep me here
a moment longer. And whatever
gift

your heart suggests you give me as a friend,
present it to me when I come back here,
and pick me 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,
even more so than before. In his mind, Telemachus
pictured her, and his heart was full of wonder.

He thought she was a god. So he moved
away.

And then the noble youth rejoined the suitors.
Celebrated Phemius was performing for them,
as they sat in silence, listening. He was
singing

260

of the return of the Achaeans, that bitter trip
Athena made them take when they sailed home from Troy.

In her upper room, the daughter of Icarius,
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.
Once beautiful Penelope reached the
suitors,
she stayed beside the door post in the well-built room,
with a small bright veil across her face. On either side
her two attendants stood. With tears streaming
down,

270

Penelope addressed the famous singer:

"Phemius,
you know all sorts of other ways to charm
an audience, actions of the 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 always remember 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 prompts him to? One can't blame the singers.
It seems to me it's Zeus' fault. He hands

out

to toiling men, each and every one of them,
whatever he desires. There's nothing wrong
with this man's singing of the evil

fate

290

of the Danaans, for men praise the most
the song which they have heard most recently.

Your heart and spirit should endure 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 a man's concern, every

man's,

but especially mine, since in this house
I'm the one in charge."

Astonished at his words,
Penelope went back to her own
chambers,

300

setting in her heart the prudent words her son had said.
With her attendant women she climbed the stairs
up to her rooms and there wept for Odysseus,
her dear husband, until bright-eyed Athena
cast sweet sleep on her eyelids.

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

“You suitors of my mother, who all have
such insolent arrogance, let us for
now 310
enjoy our banquet, but no more shouting,
for it’s grand to listen to a singer
as fine as this one—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.
Make yourself some different meals which eat
up
your own possessions, moving house to house.
But if you think it’s preferable and better
for one man’s livelihood to be
consumed 320
without paying anything, I’ll call upon
the immortal gods to see if 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 that he’d spoken out
so boldly. Then, Antinous, son of
Eupeithes,
declared:

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

At that point, the suitors
switched to dancing and to singing lovely songs.

They amused themselves until dark evening came.
Then each man went 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
Eurykleia 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 on the bed, and pulled off his soft tunic,
handed 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,
pulling the door shut by its silver handle.
Telemachus lay there all night long, wrapped
up 350
in sheep's wool, his mind thinking of 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 up out of bed and dressed.
He slung a sharp sword from his shoulders, then laced
his lovely sandals over his shining feet.
At once he asked the loud-voiced heralds to summon
all the long-haired Achaean to assembly.

They issued the call, and the Achaeans came,
gathering quickly. When the assembly had convened,
Telemachus moved to the meeting. Among the men,
heroic Aegyptius was the first to
speak, 10
a man stooped with age.

“Men of Ithaca,
listen now to what I have to say.
We have not held a general meeting
or assembly since the day Odysseus
sailed off 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 tell us details of its journey home,
or is it some other public business
he will introduce and talk
about?”

20

Odysseus’ dear son Telemachus began to speak,
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 along to you,
nor is there other public business
I’ll announce or talk about. The issue
here

30

is my own need, for on my household
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’re don’t want to journey to her father,
Icarius, in his home, where he himself
could set 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, fat goats, and sheep.
They keep on feasting, drinking sparkling 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 others 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 frustrate 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:
in her room she had a large loom set
up, 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 lord Odysseus is dead, you must wait,
although you're keen for me to marry,
till I complete this cloak—otherwise
my weaving would be wasted and in vain.
It is a shroud for warrior Laertes,
for the day a lethal Fate will strike him dead.
Then none of the Achaean women

here 80
will be annoyed with me because a man

who acquired so many rich possessions
should 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.
Thus, we forced her to complete the cloak
against her will. The suitors now say this,
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 going back to our own lands,
or some place 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 didn't do that, then her father
would treat me badly, and some
deity 110
would send other troubles, since my mother,
as she left this house, would call upon
the dreaded Furies. Men would blame me, too.
That's why I'll never issue such an order.
Just give me a swift ship and twenty rowers—
so I can make a journey and return

to various places, to sandy Pylos
and 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'll give my mother to a husband."

Telemachus said this and soon dissolved the meeting.
The men dispersed, each man to his own house.

Telemachus walked away to the ocean
shore.

130

There, once he'd washed his hands in gray salt water,
to Athena he made this prayer:

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

As he said this prayer, Athena came up close to
him,

140

looking and sounding just like Mentor. She spoke—
her words had wings:

"You must not delay
that trip you wish to make. I am a friend
of your ancestral home, so much so that I
will furnish a fast ship for you and come
in person with you. But 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 best one for you, and then, 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 Eurycleia*

*to get some supplies ready for his voyage. He swears her to
secrecy.]*

Telemachus went up into the dining hall
and there rejoined the company of suitors.

Then goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes
thought of something else. Looking like Telemachus,
she went all through the city. To every man
she came up to she gave 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.
Athena dragged the fast ship down into the sea
and stocked it with supplies, all the materials
well-decked boats have stowed on board, then moved the
ship
to the harbour's outer edge. There they assembled,
that group of brave companions, and the goddess
instilled fresh heart in every one of them.

Then bright-eyed Athena told
Telemachus 170
to come outside, by the entrance to the spacious hall.

"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 embarked. She sat in the stern.
Telemachus sat right beside her, as the
men untied the stern ropes, then climbed aboard the ship
and went to seat themselves beside their oarlocks.
Bright-eyed Athena arranged a fair breeze for them,
a strong West Wind blowing across the wine-dark sea.
As the ship sliced straight 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 arrive at Menelaus' home in Sparta; Menelaus gives a long account of his travels in Egypt, especially his adventures with the Old Man of the Sea, the death of the lesser Ajax, and the death of Agamemnon; Menelaus invites Telemachus to stay, but Telemachus declines.]

Meanwhile, back in Telemachus' Ithaca,
the suitors were outside Odysseus' palace,
enjoying themselves by throwing spears and discus
on level ground in front—with all the arrogance
they usually displayed. Their two leaders,
Antinous and handsome Eurymachus,
were sitting there—by far the best of all the suitors.

Then Noemon, Phronius' son, came up to question Antinous. He said:

“Here’s trouble.
In his overbearing way Telemachus,
with this voyage of his, has now achieved
significant success. And we believed
he’d never see it through. 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 into deep water. The suitors then embarked and sailed away on their trip across the water, minds fully bent on slaughtering Telemachus. Out at sea, half way between Ithaca and rugged Samos, there's the rocky island Asteris. It's small, but ships can moor there in a place with openings in both directions. The Achaeans waited

there

40

and set up 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.
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
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 organize 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
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.”

Zeus finished speaking. The killer of Argus,
his messenger, obeyed. 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, he rose up,
out of the violet sea, and moved on shore,
until he reached the massive cave, where Calypso,
the fair-haired nymph, had her home. 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 lovely voice
Calypso sang inside the cave, as she moved
back and forth before her loom—she was weaving
with a golden shuttle. All around her
cave

50

trees were in bloom, alder and sweet-smelling cypress,
and poplar, too, with long-winged birds nesting there—
owls, hawks, and chattering sea crows, who spend their
time

out on the water. A garden vine, fully ripe
and rich with grapes, trailed through the hollow cave.
From four fountains, close to each other in a row,
clear water flowed in various directions,
and all around soft meadows spread out in full bloom
with violets and parsley. Even a god,
who lives forever, coming there, would be
amazed

60

to see it, and his heart would fill with pleasure.
The killer of Argus, god’s messenger, stood there,
marvelling at the sight. But once 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 crying 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 bright shining chair. Then the lovely goddess
questioned him:

“Hermes, my honoured guest,
why have you come here with your golden wand?
You haven’t been a visitor before.
Tell me what’s on your mind. My heart desires
to carry out what you request, if I
can,

80

and if it’s something fated to be done.”

After this speech, Calypso set out a table
laden with ambrosia, then mixed red nectar.
And so the messenger god, killer of Argus,
ate and drank.⁶ 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 other ones
who fought nine years round Priam’s city,
which in the tenth year they destroyed and left
to get back home. Now Zeus is ordering 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'd heard Zeus's message, went off to find
great-hearted Odysseus. She found him by the shore,
sitting down, with his eyes always full of
tears,

100

because his sweet life was passing while he mourned
for his return. The nymph no longer gave him joy.
At night he slept beside her in the hollow cave,
as he was forced to do—not of his own free will,
though she was keen enough. Moving up,
close to him, the lovely goddess spoke:

“Poor man,
spend no more time in sorrow on this island
or waste 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 as much food and water and red wine
as you will need to satisfy your wants.”

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Odysseus quickly put on a cloak and tunic,
and the nymph dressed in a long white shining robe,
a lovely lightly woven dress. Then she organized her plans
so brave Odysseus could leave. She handed
him

120

a massive axe, well suited to his grip, and made
of two-edged bronze. It had a finely crafted shaft
of handsome olive wood. Next she provided him
a polished adze. Then she led him on a path
down to the edges of the island, where tall trees grew,
alder, poplar, and pine that reached the upper sky,
well-seasoned, dried-out wood, which could keep him
afloat.

Once she'd pointed out to him where the large trees grew,
Calypso, the lovely goddess, went back home.
Odysseus then began to cut the timber. His

work

130

proceeded quickly. He cut down twenty trees,
used his bronze axe to trim and deftly smooth them,
then lined them up. The fair goddess Calypso
then brought him augers, so he bored each timber,
fastened them to one another, and tightened them
with pins and binding. Next he set up a mast
with a yard arm fastened to it and then made
a steering oar to guide the raft. Calypso,
the beautiful goddess, brought him woven cloth
to make a sail—which he did very
skilfully. 140

On it he tied bracing ropes, sheets, and halyards.
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 sent him
from the island. The goddess stowed on board the raft
a sack full of dark wine and another large one,
full of water, and a bag of food, in which she put
many tasty things for him to eat. She sent him
a warm and gentle wind, and lord Odysseus
sailed 150

for ten days on the water, then for seven more,
and on the eighteenth day some shadowy hills appeared,
where the land of the Phaeacians, like a shield
riding on the misty sea, lay very close to him.

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

“Something’s wrong!

The gods must have changed what they were planning
for Odysseus, while I’ve been far away
among the Ethiopians. For
now, 160

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,
and shook up the sea. He brought on stormy blasts
from every kind of wind, concealing land and sea
with clouds, so darkness fell from heaven. East Wind
clashed with South Wind, while West Wind, raging in a
storm, ¹⁷⁰
smashed into North Wind, born in the upper sky,
as it pushed a massive wave. Odysseus's knees gave way,
his spirit fell, and in great distress he spoke aloud,
addressing his great heart:

"I've got such a wretched fate!
How is all this going to end up for me?
I'm afraid everything the goddess said
was true, when she claimed that out at sea,
before I got back to my native land,
I'd have my fill of troubles."

As he said this,
a massive wave charged at him with tremendous
force, ¹⁸⁰
swirled round the raft, then from high above crashed down.
Odysseus let go his grip on the steering oar
and fell out, a long way from the raft. The fierce gusts
of howling winds snapped the mast off in the middle.

Then Athena, Zeus's daughter, thought up something new.
She blocked the paths 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 divinely born Odysseus might yet meet
the people of Phaeacia, who love the
oar, ¹⁹⁰
avoiding death and Fates.

So for two days and nights
he floated on the ocean waves, his heart filled
with many thoughts of death. But when fair-haired Dawn

gave rise at last to the third day, the wind died down,
the sea grew calm and still. He was lifted up
by a large swell, and as he quickly looked ahead,
Odysseus saw the land close by. He kept swimming on
and reached the mouth of a fair-flowing river,
which seemed to him the finest place to go onshore.
There were no rocks, and it was sheltered from the
wind.

200

Odysseus recognized the river as it flowed
and prayed to him deep in his heart. Both knees bent,
he let his strong hands fall—the sea had crushed his spirit.
All his skin was swollen, and sea water flowed in streams
up in his mouth and nose. He lay there breathless,
without a word, hardly moving. Close by the water
he found a place with a wide view. So he crept
underneath two bushes growing from one stem—
one was an olive tree, the other a wild thorn.
Athena then poured sleep onto his
eyes,

210

covering his eyelids, so he could find relief,
a quick respite from his exhausting troubles.

BOOK SIX ODYSSEUS AND NAUSICAA

While much-enduring lord Odysseus slept 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, one like immortal goddesses
in form and loveliness. She was Nausicaa,
daughter of great-hearted Alcinous. Like a gust of wind,
Athena slipped over to the young girl's
bed,

10

stood by her head, then spoke to her.
Her appearance changed to look like Dymas' daughter—
a young girl the same age as Nausicaa,
whose heart was well disposed to her. In that form,
bright-eyed Athena spoke out and said:

“Nausicaa,
how did your mother bear a girl so careless?
Your splendid clothes are lying here uncared for.
And your wedding day is not so far away,
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 noble reputation among men
and please your honoured mother and father.
Come, at day break let's wash out the clothing.
Ask your noble father to provide you,
this morning early, a wagon and some mules,
so you can carry the bright coverlets,
the robes and sashes. That would be better
than going on foot, because the washing tubs
stand some distance from the
town.” 30

As soon as Dawn on her splendid throne arrived
and woke fair-robed Nausicaa, she was curious
about her dream. So she went through the house.
Nausicaa went to stand close by her father
and then 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 garments on your
person 40
when you're with our leading men in council.
You have five dear sons living in your home—
two are married, but three are now young men
still unattached, and they always require
fresh-washed clothing when they go out dancing.
All these things I have to think about.”

Nausicaa said these words because she felt ashamed
to remind her father of her own happy thoughts

of getting married. But he understood all that and answered, saying:

“I have no
objection,
my 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.”

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Once he'd said this, he called out to his slaves, and they did what he ordered. 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 bed. Her mother loaded on a box full of all sorts of tasty food.

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She put in delicacies, as well, 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 the clothing and the girl, not by herself, for her attendants went with her as well.

When they reached the stream of the fair-flowing river, the girls picked up the clothing from the wagon, carried it in their arms down to the murky water, and trampled it inside the washing trenches, each one trying to work more quickly than the others.

70

Once they'd washed the clothes and cleaned off all the stains, they laid the items out in rows along the sea shore, right where the waves which beat upon the coast had washed the pebbles clean. Once they had bathed themselves

and rubbed their bodies well with oil, they ate a meal beside the river mouth, waiting for the clothes to dry in the sun's warm rays. When they'd enjoyed their food, the girl and her attendants threw 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

at one of those attendants with her, she missed the girl and tossed it in the deep and swirling river.

They gave a piercing cry which woke up lord Odysseus. So he sat up, thinking in his heart and mind:

“Here’s trouble! In this country I have reached, what are the people like? Are they violent and wild, without a sense of justice? Or are they kind to strangers? In their minds do they fear the gods? A young woman’s shout 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? Come on then, I'm going to try to find out for myself."

With these words, lord Odysseus crept out of the thicket. With his strong hands, he broke off from thick bushes a leafy branch to hold across his body and conceal his sexual organs. He emerged, moving just like a mountain lion which relies on its own strength—though hammered by the rain and wind, it creeps ahead,

its two eyes burning, coming in among the herd of sheep or cattle, or stalking a wild deer—his belly tells him to move in against the flocks, even within a well-built farm. That how Odysseus was coming out to meet those fair-haired girls, although he was stark naked. He was in great 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 to stand her ground was Alcinous' daughter

So he quickly used his cunning and spoke to her with soothing language:

“O divine queen,

I come here as a suppliant to you.

Are you a goddess or a mortal being?

If you're one of the gods who hold wide heaven,
then 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 noble mother are thrice-
blest,

120

and thrice-blest your brothers, too. In their hearts
they must glow with pleasure for you always,
when they see a child like you moving up
into the dance. But the happiest heart,
more so than all the rest, belongs to him
who with his wedding gifts will lead you home.
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

130

from Ogygia island. But, divine queen,
have pity. You're the first one I've approached,
after going through so much grief. I don't know
any other people, 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 had for the clothes."

White-armed Nausicaa then answered him and said:

"Stranger, you don't seem to be a wicked man,
or foolish. Olympian Zeus
himself

140

gives happiness to bad and worthy men,
each one receiving just what Zeus desires.
But now you've reached our land and city,
you'll not lack clothes or any other thing
we owe a hard-pressed suppliant we meet.
I'll show the town to you, and I'll tell you
what our country's called—the Phaeacians
own this city and this land. As for me,
I am the daughter of brave Alcinous—
Phaeacian power and strength depend on
him."

150

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

“Stand up, you girls,
Have you run off because you’ve seen a man?
Surely you don’t think he is an enemy?
So, my girls, give this stranger food and drink.
Then bathe him in the river, in a place
where there’s some shelter from the wind.”

Nausicaa finished. They stood up and called out to one another. Then they took Odysseus aside, to a sheltered spot, following what

Nausicaa, 160
daughter of great-hearted Alcinous, had ordered.
They set out clothing for him, a cloak and tunic,
and gave him the gold flask full of smooth olive oil.

They told him to bathe there in the flowing river.
When he’d washed himself all over and rubbed on oil,
he put on clothes the unmarried girl had given him.
Then Odysseus went to sit some distance off,
beside the shore, glowing with charm and beauty.
Nausicaa gazed at him in admiration. They set out
food and drink before resourceful lord

Odysseus. 170
He ate and drank voraciously—many days had passed
since he’d last tasted food. Then white-armed Nausicaa
thought of something else. She folded up the clothes,
put them in the handsome wagon, harnessed up
the strong-hooved mules, and climbed up by herself.
She called out to Odysseus, then spoke to him:

“Get up now, stranger, and go to the city.
I’ll take you to my wise father’s house,
where, I tell you, you will get to meet
all the finest of Phaeacians. You
seem

180

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
behind the mules and wagon. I’ll lead the way.
You’ll come across 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,

190

until we move into the city and reach
my father's house. When you think we've had time
to reach my home, then go in the city
of the Phaeacians and inquire about
my father's house, great-hearted Alcinous.
Once inside the house and in the courtyard,
move through the great hall quickly till you reach
my mother Arete seated by the fire,
against a pillar, spinning purple yarn—
a marvelous sight. Servants sit behind

her.

200

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

Saying this, Nausicaa cracked the shining whip
and struck the mules. They quickly left the flowing river,
moving briskly forward at a rapid pace.

Using her judgment with the whip, she drove on
so Odysseus and her servants could keep up on foot.
Just at sunset, they reached the celebrated grove,
sacred to Athena. Lord Odysseus sat down
there

210

and made a quick prayer to great Zeus' daughter.

BOOK SEVEN ODYSSEUS AT THE COURT OF ALCINOUS IN PHAEACIA

So lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, prayed there,
while two strong mules took the girl into the city.
Then Odysseus got up and set off for the city.
Odysseus moved towards Alcinous's splendid home.
The Phaeacians, so celebrated for their ships,
did not see him as he moved across the city
in their midst. Athena, fair-haired fearful goddess,

would not permit that. Her heart cared about him, so she cast around him an amazing mist.

Odysseus moved towards Alcinous' splendid house.

10

Above the high-vaulted home of brave Alcinous there was a radiance, as if from sun or moon.

Bronze walls extended out 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, immortal creatures who would never

age,

20

created by Hephaestus' matchless artistry, to guard the palace of great-hearted Alcinous.

Lord Odysseus, who had endured so much, stood there and gazed around. When his heart had marvelled at it all, he moved fast across the threshold into the house.

Long-suffering lord Odysseus, still enclosed in mist, the thick covering poured around him by Athena, went through the hall until he came to Arete and Alcinous, the king. With his arms Odysseus embraced the knees of Arete, and at that

moment

30

the miraculous mist dissolved away from him.

The people in the palace were all silent, as they gazed upon the man, struck 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’s experienced so much distress—and to those feasting here. May gods grant them happiness in life, and may they each pass

on

40

riches in their homes to all their children, and noble honours given by the people.

Please rouse yourself to help me return home,
to get back quickly to my native land.
I've been suffering trouble for a long time
so far away from friends."

When he heard these words,
brave and kingly Alcinous stretched out his hand,
reached for Odysseus, that wise and crafty man,
raised him from the hearth, and invited him to sit.
Then noble Alcinous spoke to his
herald: 50

"Pontonous, prepare wine in the mixing bowl,
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."

Once Alcinous said this,
Pontonous prepared the honeyed wine, and then poured
the first drops for libation into every cup.
When they'd made their offering and drunk their fill of
wine,
Alcinous then addressed the gathering and said:

"You Phaeacians counselors and
leaders, 60
pay attention to me so I can say
what the heart here in my chest commands.
Now that you have all 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. Then after that,
we'll think about how we can send him off,
so that this stranger, with us escorting
him 70

and without further pain or effort, may reach
his native land, 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."

80

Resourceful Odysseus then answered Alcinous:

"Alcinous, you should not concern yourself
about what you've just said—for I'm not like
the immortal gods who hold wide heaven,
not in my form or shape. I'm like mortal men.
Indeed, I could recount a longer story—
all those hardships I have had to suffer
from the gods. But let me eat my dinner,
though I'm in great distress. For there's nothing
more shameless than a wretched

stomach,

90

which commands a man to think about its needs,
even if he's really sad or troubles
weigh down his heart, just the way my spirit
is now full of sorrow, yet my belly
is always telling me to eat and drink,
forgetting everything I've had to bear,
and ordering me to stuff myself with food.

But when dawn appears, you should stir
yourselves

so you can set me in my misery
back on my native soil, for all I've
suffered.

100

If I can see my goods again, my slaves,
my large and high-roofed home, then let life end."

Once Odysseus finished, they all approved his words,
and, because he'd spoken well and to the point,
they ordered that their guest should be sent 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 next 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 has requested confirmation from us.
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 can’t return back home.”

Alcinous spoke and led them off. The sceptred kings
came after him, while a herald went to find
the godlike singer. Fifty-two hand-picked young men
went off, as Alcinous had ordered, to the shore
beside the restless sea. Once they’d reached the boat,
they dragged the black ship into deeper water,
set the mast and sails in place inside the vessel,
lashed the rowing oars onto their leather
pivots, 20
then hoisted the white sail. Next, they moored the ship
well out to sea and then returned to the great home
of their wise king. Halls, corridors, and courtyards
were full of people gathering—a massive crowd,
young and old. On their behalf Alcinous slaughtered
eight white-tusked boars, two shambling oxen, and twelve
sheep.
These carcasses they skinned and dressed and then
prepared
a splendid banquet. Meanwhile the herald was returning
with the loyal singer, a man the Muse so loved
above all others. She’d given him both bad and
good, 30
for she’d destroyed his eyes, but had bestowed on him

the gift of pleasing song. The herald, Pontonous, then brought up a silver-studded chair for him.

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

This was the song the celebrated minstrel sang.⁷

Alcinous then asked Laodamas and Halius to dance alone. No man could match their dancing skill. The two men picked up a lovely purple ball. Then, leaning back, one of them would throw it high, towards the shadowy clouds, and then the other, before his feet touched ground, would catch it easily. Once they'd shown their skill in tossing it straight up, they threw it back and forth, as they kept dancing on the life-sustaining earth, while more young men 50 stood at the edge of the arena, beating time. The dancing rhythms made a powerful sound.

Then lord Odysseus spoke:

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

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

“Leaders and counselors of the
Phaeacians, 60
listen—this stranger seems to me a man
with an uncommon wisdom. So come now,
let's give him gifts of friendship, as is right.

Twelve distinguished kings are rulers here
and govern in this land, and I myself
am the thirteenth king. Let each of you
bring a fresh cloak and tunic, newly washed,
and a talent of pure gold. All of this
we should put together very quickly,
so this stranger has his gifts in
hand 70
and goes to dinner with a joyful heart."

Alcinous spoke. All those present agreed with him
and said it should be done. Then every one of them
sent an attendant out to bring back presents.
As the sun went down, the splendid presents were brought
in,
carried to Alcinous' home by worthy heralds.
The sons of noble Alcinous took the lovely gifts
and set them down before their honoured mother.

Nausicaa, whose beauty was a gift from god,
standing by the doorway of that well-built
hall, 80
looked at Odysseus and was filled with wonder.
She spoke winged words to him:

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

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

“Nausicaa, daughter of great Alcinous,
may Hera's loud-thundering husband, Zeus,
grant that I see the day of my return
when I get home. There I will pray to
you 90
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,

who then spoke out at once to his Phaeacians,
lovers of the sea:

“Listen to me now,
you Phaeacians counsellors and leaders.
To any man with some intelligence,
a stranger coming as a suppliant
brings the same delight a brother does.
And you, our guest, should no longer
hide 100
behind those cunning thoughts of yours and skirt
the things I ask you. It’s better to be frank.
Tell me your name, what they call you at home—
your mother and your father and the others,
those in the town and in the countryside.
Tell me 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? 110
What men’s countries have you visited?
Tell me of people and their well-built towns,
whether they are cruel, unjust, and savage,
or welcome strangers and fear god in their hearts.”

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 gives one more delight
than when joy grips entire groups of men
who sit in proper order in a hall
feasting and listening to a singer,
with tables standing there beside them
laden with bread and meat, as the steward
draws wine out of the mixing bowl, moves round,
and fills the cups. To my mind this
seems 10
the finest thing there is. But 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 extends all the way to heaven.
I live in Ithaca, a land of sunshine.
From far away one sees a mountain there,
thick with whispering trees, Mount Neriton,
and many islands lying around it
close together. It's a rugged island
and nurtures fine young men. But come, I'll tell you
of the miserable journey back which
Zeus 30
arranged for me when I returned from Troy.

“I was carried by the wind from Troy
to Ismarus, land of the Cicones.⁸
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 all men got an equal share.
Then I gave orders we should leave on foot—
and with all speed. But the men were fools.
They didn't listen. They drank too much
wine 40
and on the shoreline slaughtered many sheep,
as well as shambling cows with twisted horns.
Meanwhile the Cicones set off and gathered up
their neighbours, tribesmen living further inland.
There're more of them, and they are braver men.
They reached us in the morning, thick as leaves.
They set their ranks and fought by our swift ships.
We threw our bronze-tipped spears at one another.

While the morning lasted and that sacred day
gained strength, we held our ground and beat them
back, 50

for all their greater numbers. But as the sun
moved to the hour when oxen are unyoked,
the Cicones broke through, overpowering
Achaeans. Of my well-armed companions,
six from every ship were killed. The rest of us
made our escape, avoiding Death and Fate.^o

“We sailed away from there, hearts full of grief
at losing loyal companions, though happy
we’d eluded death ourselves. Cloud-gatherer Zeus
then stirred North Wind to rage against our
ships— 60

a violent 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.
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 sampled it
lose his desire to ever journey home
or bring back word to us—they wished to stay,
to remain among the Lotus-

eaters, 80
feeding on the plant, eager to forget
about their homeward voyage. I forced them,
eyes full of tears, into our hollow ships,
dragged them underneath the rowing benches,

and tied them up. Then I issued orders
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,
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
makes laws for his own wives and children,
and they shun all dealings with each other.⁹

“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. They have no 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 led us in through the murky night—
we couldn’t see a thing, and all our ships
were swallowed up in fog. Clouds hid the moon,
so there was no light coming from the sky.

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 hauled up our ships, took down all the

sails,

120

went up 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 and spoke to all the men:

‘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,
whether they are rough and violent,
with no sense of law, or kind to strangers,
with hearts that fear the gods.’

“I said these
words,

130

then went down to my ship and told my crew
to loose the cables lashed onto the stern
and come onboard. They embarked with speed,
and, seated at the oarlocks in their rows,
struck the gray sea with their oars. And then,
when we’d made the short trip to the island,
on the coast there, right beside the sea,
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 towering oaks. At night a giant slept there,
one 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 lives by eating bread, no, more like
a lofty wooded mountain crag, standing

there

150

to view in isolation from the rest.

“I told the rest of my trustworthy crew
to stay there by the ship and guard it,
while I selected twelve of my best men
and went off to explore. I took with me

a goatskin full of dark sweet wine. Maron,
Euanthes' son, one of Apollo's priests,
the god who kept guard over Ismarus,
gave it 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 soon reached his 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 astonishing—crates full of
cheese,

170

pens crammed with livestock—lambs and kids
sorted into separate groups, with yearlings,
older lambs, and newborns each in different pens.
All 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've been much 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.
We stayed inside the cave and waited there,
until he led his flocks back home. He came,
bearing an enormous pile of dried-out wood
to cook his dinner. He hurled his load
inside the cave with a huge crash. In our fear,
we moved back to the far end of the
cave,

190

into the deepest corner. He then drove

his fat flock right 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,
good ones, too, could not have shifted it
along the ground—that’s how immense it was,
the rock he planted right in his
doorway.

200

He sat down with his bleating goats and ewes
and milked them all, each in turn, setting
beside each one its young. Next, 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 dinner.
Once he’d finished working at these tasks,
he lit a fire. Then he spied us and said:

sea

210

at random, like pirates sailing anywhere,
risking their lives to injure other men.’

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

guests,

220

he cares for all respected visitors.’

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

‘What fools you are, you strangers,
or else you come from somewhere far away—
telling me to fear the gods and shun their rage.
The Cyclopes care nothing about Zeus,
who bears the aegis, or the blessed gods.
We are much more powerful than them.
I wouldn’t spare you or your comrades
to escape the wrath of Zeus, not

unless

230

my own heart prompted me to do it.

But now, tell me this—when you landed here, where did you moor your ship, a spot close by or further off? I'd like to know that.'

“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 island, on the rocks there. He brought us close to

land,

240

hard by the headland, then winds pushed us inshore from the sea. But we escaped—me and these men here. We weren't destroyed.'

“That’s what I said. 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, stretched out there among his flocks. Then, 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 bright Dawn.

“As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
he lit a 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 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. Then Cyclops,
whistling loudly, drove his fat flocks away
towards the mountain. He left me there,
plotting a nasty scheme deep in my

heart,

280

some way of gaining my revenge against him,
if Athena would grant me that glory.

My heart came up with what appeared to me
the best thing I could do. An enormous club
belonging to Cyclops was lying there
beside a stall, a section of green olive wood
he'd cut to carry with him once it dried.
To human eyes it seemed just like the mast
on a black merchant ship with twenty oars,
a broad-beamed vessel which can move

across

290

the mighty ocean—that's how long and wide
that huge club looked. Moving over to it,
I chopped off a piece, 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 blazing 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.

Then I told my comrades to draw lots
to see which men would risk their lives with me—
when sweet sleep came upon 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 for myself, four of them,
with me included as 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
out in the open courtyard. Perhaps he had
a sense of something wrong, or else a god
had given him an order. He picked up
and put his huge rock door in place, then sat
to milk each ewe and bleating goat,
one by one, setting beside each mother
one of her young. When this task was over,
he quickly seized two men and wolfed them

down.

320

Then I moved up and stood at Cyclops' side,
holding in my hands a bowl of ivy wood
full of my dark 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 I was carrying for 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
ever 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'd 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' rain increases, but this drink—
it's a stream of nectar and ambrosia.'

"He spoke. So 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 the wine had addled Cyclops' wits,
I spoke these reassuring words to him:

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

350

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

"That's what I said.

His pitiless 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.'

"As he said this,
he collapsed and toppled over on his back,
lying with his thick neck twisted to one side.

All-conquering sleep then overpowered
him. 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. When that stake of olive wood,
though green, was glowing hot, its sharp point
ready to catch fire, I walked across to it
and with my comrades standing round me
pulled 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 a timber with a drill, while those below
make it rotate by pulling on a strap
at either end, so the drill keeps moving—
that's how we held the red-hot pointed stake
and twisted 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—
its roots were crackling in fire. When a blacksmith
plunges a great axe or adze in frigid water
with a loud hissing sound, to temper it
and make the iron strong—that's how his eye
sizzled around the stake of olive wood.
His horrific screams 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 started yelling out to near-by Cyclopes,
who lived in caves up on the windy heights,
his neighbours. They heard him shouting out
and 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 shouting
through the immortal night and wake us
up?’

“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 get out 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 crewmen and
myself 420

could escape 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' flocks the rams were really fat—
fine, large creatures, with thick fleecy coats
of deep black wool. I picked three at a time
and, keeping quiet, tied them up together,
with twisted willow shoots, part of the

mat

430

on which the lawless monster Polyphemus
used to sleep. The middle ram carried a man.
The two on either side were for protection.
So for every man 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 under 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 been milked
and thus whose udders were about to burst,
bleated in their pens. Their master, in great pain,
ran his hands across the backs of all his sheep
as they moved past him, but was such a fool,
he didn’t notice how my men were tied
underneath their bellies. Of that flock
my ram was the last to move out through the
door,

450

weighed down by its thick fleece and my sly thoughts.
Mighty Polyphemus, as he stroked its back,
spoke to the animal:

‘My lovely ram,
why are you the last one in the flock
to come out of the cave? Not once before
have you ever lagged behind the sheep.
No. You’ve always been well out in front,
striding off to graze on tender shoots of grass
and be the first to reach the river’s stream.
You’re the one who longs to get back
home,

460

once evening comes, before the others.
But now you're last of all. You must be sad,
grieving for your master's eye, now blinded
by that evil fellow with his hateful crew.
That Nobody destroyed my wits with wine.
But, I tell you, he's not yet escaped being
killed.

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 every corner of this
cave, 470

and then my heart would ease the agonies
this worthless Nobody has brought on me.'

"With these words, he pushed the ram away from him,
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 by comrades. 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 crewmen—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 told everyone to stop.
I ordered them to quickly fling on board
the many fine-fleeced sheep and then set sail
across the salty sea. They climbed aboard
at once, took their places on the rowing bench,
and, sitting in good order in their rows,
struck the gray sea with their oars. But

then, 490
when I was as far from land as a man's voice
can carry when he yells. I cried out
and mocked the 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. It made his heart more angry.
He snapped off a huge chunk of mountain rock
and hurled it. The stone landed up ahead of us,
just by our ship's dark prow. As the stone 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, ordering 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,
calling the Cyclops, although around me
my comrades cautioned me from every side,
trying to calm me down:

"That's reckless.
Why are you trying to irritate that savage?
He just threw a boulder in the sea
and pushed us back on shore. We really thought
he'd killed us there. If he'd heard us
speak

520

or uttering a sound, he'd have hurled down
another jagged rock, and crushed our skulls,
the timbers on this ship, as well. He's strong,
powerful enough to throw this far.'

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

'Cyclops, if any mortal human being
asks about the injury that blinded you,
tell them Odysseus destroyed your eye,

a sacker of cities, Laertes'
son, 530
a man from Ithaca.'

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

'Hear me, Poseidon, Enfolder of the Earth,
dark-haired god, if I truly am your son
and if you claim to be my father,
grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities,
a man from Ithaca, Laertes' 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 get back late
and in distress, after all his comrades
have been killed, and in someone else's ship.
And may he find troubles in his house.'

"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 it,
using all his unimaginable force.
It landed right behind the dark-prowed ship
and almost hit the steering oar. Its

fall 550
convulsed the sea, and waves then pushed us on,
carrying our ship up to the further shore.

"We'd reached the island where our well-decked ships
were grouped together. Our comrades sat around
them,

in great sorrow, always watching for us.
We rowed in, drove our ship up on the sand,
then climbed out through the surf. From the ship's

hold
we unloaded Cyclops' flock and shared it out.
I took great care to see that all men there
received an equal part. But when the

flock 560
was being divided up, my well-armed comrades

awarded me the ram, my special gift,
one just for me. I sacrificed that ram,
there on the shore, to Zeus, Cronos' son,
lord of the dark cloud, ruler of all,
offering him burnt pieces of the thigh.
But he did not care 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 shipmates and ordered them aboard
to untie cables fastened to the sterns.
They got in at once, moved to the rowing bench,
and sitting in good order in their rows,
they struck the gray sea with their oar blades.
So we sailed away from there, sad at heart,
happy to have avoided being destroyed,
although some dear companions had been killed.”

BOOK TEN AEOLUS, THE LAESTRYGONIANS, AND CIRCE

“Next we reached Aeolia, a floating island,
where Aeolus lived, son of Hippotas,
whom immortal gods hold dear. 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 supply of tasty food.

“We reached the splendid palace in the city,
and for one whole month he entertained me,
always asking questions about everything—
Troy, Argive ships, how Achaeans made it home—
and I told him 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
flayed from a creature nine years old,
and tied up in it all the winds that blow
from every quarter, for Cronos' son
has made Aeolus keeper of the winds,
and he could calm or rouse them, as he wished.
With a shining 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
came over me—I was too worn out.
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,
claiming40
I was taking gold and silver back with me.
Glancing at the man who sat beside him,
one of them would say something like this:

‘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 glorious 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 freely given him these presents.

Come on, let's see how much gold and silver
he has in this bag.'

"As they talked like this,
my companions' greedy thoughts prevailed.
They untied the bag. All the winds rushed out—
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 at sea or just keep going in
silence, 60

remain among the living. I stayed there
and suffered on. Covering up my head,
I lay down 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' island.

"I set off for Aeolus' splendid palace.
I found him feasting with his wife and children.
So we went into the house and sat down
on the threshold, right beside the door
posts. 70

In their hearts they were amazed. They asked me
'Odysseus, how is it you've come back here?
We took great care to send you on your way
so you'd get home, back to your native land.'

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

'My foolish comrades,
aided by malicious Sleep, have injured me.
But, my friends, you can repair all this—
that's in your power.'

"I said these words
to reassure them. But they stayed
silent. 80

Then their father gave me this reply:

'Of all living men, you are the worst—
so you must leave this island with all speed.
It would violate all sense of what is right
if I assisted or escorted on his way
a man the blessed gods must hate. So leave.
You're here because 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 went on like this
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 a sheer cliff
around it on both sides. Jutting headlands
facing one another extended out
beyond the harbour mouth, a narrow
entrance. ¹⁰ 100

All my shipmates brought their curved ships up and moored them inside the hollow harbour in a tightly clustered group—in that spot there were never any waves, large or small. Everything was calm and bright around them. But I moored my black ship all by itself outside the harbour, right against the land, tying it to the rock. I clambered up the cliff and stood there, on a rugged outcrop, looking round. I could see no evidence

of human work or ploughing, only smoke arising from the land. I sent some comrades out 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,

the noble daughter of Antiphates,
a Laestrygonian. They asked the girl
who ruled the people here and who they
were.

130

She quickly pointed out her father's lofty home.
They reached the splendid house and found his wife,
a gigantic woman, like a mountain peak.
They were appalled. She called her husband,
strong Antiphates, out of a meeting,
and he arranged a dreadful death for them—
he seized one of my shipmates and prepared
to make a meal of him. The other two
jumped up, ran off, and came back to the ships.
Antiphates then raised a hue and

cry

140

throughout the city. Once they heard his call,
the powerful Laestrygonians poured out,
thronging in countless numbers from all sides—
not like men at all, but Giants. From the cliffs
they hurled rocks down on us, the largest stones
a man can lift. The clamour rising from the ships
was dreadful—men were being destroyed,
ships were smashing into one another,
with those monsters spearing men like fish,
and taking them to eat a gruesome
meal.

150

While they were slaughtering the sailors there,
trapped in the deep harbour, I grabbed my sword,
pulled it from my thigh, and cut the cables
on my dark-prowed ship, yelling to my crew,
ordering them to put their oars to work,
so we could get away from this disaster.
They all churned the water with their oar-blades,
terrified of being killed. We were relieved,
as my ship left the beetling cliffs behind,
moving out to sea. But all the other
ships,

160

moored together in the harbour, were destroyed.

“We sailed on from there with heavy hearts
until we reached the island of Aeaea,

where fair-haired Circe lived, fearful goddess.
Here, in silence, we brought our ship to land,
inside a harbour with fine anchorage.
Some god was guiding us. Then we disembarked
and laid up in that spot two days and nights,
our hearts consumed with weariness and pain.

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

‘Shipmates, let’s quickly put our heads together
to see if we have any options left.
I don’t think we do. 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 saw with my own eyes
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 Laestrygonian Antiphates had done
and the violence of great Polyphemus,
that man-eating Cyclops. They wept aloud,
shedding frequent tears. But their laments
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 led the other.
We shook our tokens in a bronze helmet.
When brave Eurylochus’ 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—
built of polished stone, with views in all directions.
There were mountain wolves and lions round it,
all bewitched by Circe’s wicked potions.
But these beasts made no attack against my men.
No. They stood on their hind legs and fawned,

wagging their long tails. Just as dogs will beg
around their master when he comes from
dinner—

200

since 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 fearful animals.

They stood in fair-haired Circe's gateway
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 which goddesses create,
finely woven, luminous, and
beautiful.

210

They all started shouting, calling her.
She came out at once, opened the bright doors,
and asked them in. In their foolishness,
they all accompanied her. Eurylochus
was the only one who stayed outside—
he thought it could be something of a trick.
She led the others in and sat them down
on stools and chairs, then made them a drink
of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey
stirred into Pramnian wine. 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 gave them, she took her wand,
struck each man, then penned them in her pigsties.
They had bristles, heads, and voices just like pigs—
their bodies looked like swine—but their minds
were as before, unchanged. In their pens they wept.
In front of them Circe threw down feed,
acorns, beech nuts, 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 comrades' bitter fate, eyes full of tears.

I slung my large bronze silver-studded sword
across my shoulder, grabbed my bow, and left.

“But while I was moving through the sacred groves
on my way to Circe’s home, a goddess
skilled in many magic potions, I met
Hermes of the Golden Wand. I was going
toward 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, spoke to me, and said:

‘Your comrades, over there in Circe’s house,
are penned up like swine in narrow stalls.
Are you intending now to set them free?
I don’t think you’ll make it back yourself—
you’ll stay there with the rest of them. But come,
I’ll keep you free from harm and save you.
Here, take a remedial potion with

you,

250

go in Circe’s house. It’s a protection
and will clear your head of any dangers
this day brings. She won’t have power
to cast a spell on you. This fine potion,
which I’ll provide you, won’t allow it.’

“After saying this, the Killer of Argus
pulled a herb out of the ground, gave it to me,
and explained its features. Its roots were black,
the flower milk-white. Moly the gods call it.
Then Hermes left, through the wooded
island,

260

bound for high Olympus. I continued on
to Circe’s home. As I kept going, my heart
was turning over many gloomy thoughts.
Once I’d made it over to the gateway
of fair-haired Circe’s house, I just stood there
and called out. The goddess heard my voice.
She came out at once, opened her bright doors,
and asked me in. So I went in with her,
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,
her heart still bent on mischief. She gave it me,
and, when I'd drunk it, without being bewitched,
she struck me with her wand and said these words:

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

“She spoke. But I pulled out the sharp sword on my
thigh 280
and charged at Circe, as if I meant to kill her.
She gave a piercing scream, ducked, ran up,
and clasped my knees. Through her tears she spoke—
her words had wings:

‘What sort of man are you?
Where are you from? Where is your city?
Your parents? I’m amazed you drank this drug
and were not bewitched. No other man
who’s swallowed it has been able to resist,
once it’s passed the barrier of his teeth.
In 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 told me
Odysseus in his swift black ship would come
on his way back from Troy. Come, 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,
how can you ask me to be kind to
you?’ 300

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 won't agree to climb into your bed,
unless, goddess, you'll agree to swear
a solemn oath that you'll make no more plans
to injure me with some new mischief.'

"When I'd said this, she made the oath at
once, 310
as I had asked, that she'd not harm me.
Once she'd sworn and finished with the oath,
I went up 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 to the sea.
One of them threw lovely purple coverlets
across the chairs and spread linen underneath.
Another pulled silver tables over to each chair
and then placed silver baskets on
them. 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 shining bronze. She sat me in a tub,
then, 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
spirit 330

had left my limbs. After bathing me,
she rubbed me with rich oil, then dressed me
in a fine cloak and tunic and led me
to a handsome chair embossed with silver,
finely crafted, with a footstool underneath.
A servant brought in a lovely golden jug,
poured water out into a silver basin,

so I could wash, and set a polished table
at my side. Then the worthy steward
brought in bread and set it there before
me, 340
placing with it large quantities of food,
given freely from her stores. She bid 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 sitting here like this,
like someone who can’t speak, eating out your
heart, 350
never touching food or drink? Do you think
this is another trick? You don’t need to fear—
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’d said this, Circe went through the hall,
her wand clutched in her hand, and opened up
the pig-sty doors. She drove the herd out.
They looked like full-grown pigs, nine years old,
standing in front of her. She went through them,
smearing on each one another potion.
Those bristles brought on by that nasty 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 man 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:

‘Son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus,
born from Zeus, go now to the sea shore,
back to your swift ship, drag it up on

land, 380

380

and stash your goods and all equipment

in the caves. Then come back here in person, 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 miserably, shedding many tears.
Just as on a farm calves skip around the herd
when cows, having had their fill of grazing,
return back to the yard—they skip

ahead, 390

390

and pens no longer hold them, as they run,
mooing in a crowd around their mothers,
that's how my shipmates, once they saw me,
thronged around, weeping—in their hearts it felt
as if they they'd got back to their native 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 dressed them in warm cloaks and tunics.

We found them all quite cheerful, eating in the hall. When my men saw each other and recognized their shipmates face to face, their crying and moaning echoed through the house.

“The lovely goddess came to me and said:

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
come now, eat my food, and drink my wine,
until you've got back that spirit in your chest
you had when you first left your native land
of rugged Ithaca. You're exhausted

now—

410

you have no spirit—you're always brooding
on your painful wanderings. There's no joy
inside your hearts—you've been through 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 large supplies of meat.
But as the months and seasons came and went,
long spring days returned. A year had passed.
My trusty comrades summoned me and said:

come

420

to think about your native land once more,
if you are fated to be saved and reach
your high-roofed home and your own country.'

"My proud heart was persuaded by their words.
So all day long until the sun went down,
we sat there, feasting on huge amounts of meat
and on sweet wine. Once the sun had set
and darkness came, they lay down to sleep
in the shadowy hall. I went to Circe,
in her splendid bed and clasped her
knees.

430

The goddess listened to me as I begged,
speaking these winged words to her:

'Circe, grant me the promise which you made
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 among us.'

"I spoke. The lovely goddess answered me at once.

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
and Zeus' child, if it's against your
will,

440

you should not now remain here in my house.
But first you must complete another journey—
to the home of Hades and dread Persephone.
Consult the shade of that Theban prophet,
blind Teiresias. His mind is unimpaired.
Even though he's dead, Persephone
has granted him the power to understand—
the others flit about, mere shadows.'

"As Circe finished, my spirit was breaking.
I sat weeping on her bed, for my
heart

450

no longer wished to live or glimpse the daylight.
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 journey?
No one ever sailed a black ship down to Hades.'

"The lovely goddess gave me a quick answer:

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
and Zeus' child, don't concern yourself
about a pilot for your ship. Raise the mast,
spread your white sail, and just take your
seat.

460

Then the breath of North Wind Boreas
will take you on your way. But once your ship
crosses flowing Oceanus, 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' murky home.
There Periphlegethon and Cocytus,
a stream which branches off the river Styx,
flow into Acheron.¹¹ There's a
boulder

470

where these two foaming rivers meet. Go there,
heroic man, and follow my instructions—

move close and dig a hole there two feet square.
Pour libations to the dead around it,
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 many powerless heads of those who've died,
with a vow that, when you reach Ithaca,
At home, you'll sacrifice a barren

heifer,

480

the best you have, and will cram the altar
with fine gifts, and that you'll 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 must sacrifice a ram and a black ewe,
twisting their heads down toward Erebus,
while you turn to face the flowing rivers,
looking backwards. At that point many

spirits

490

will emerge—they're the shadows of the dead.
Then call your crew. Tell them to flay and burn
the sheep lying there, killed by pitiless bronze.
Pray to the gods, to powerful Hades
and dread Persephone. Then from your thigh,
you must yourself draw that sharp sword out,
and, sitting there, prevent the powerless heads
of those who've died from coming near the blood,
until you've listened to Teiresias.'¹²

“Circe finished. Dawn soon came on her golden
throne.

500

The nymph then 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 house, rousing my companions,
going up to each man and reassuring him:

‘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

“When we reached our boat down on the beach,
we dragged it out into the glittering 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, and we sped on
across the sea, until the sun went down
and all sea routes grew dark. Our ship then reached
the boundaries of deep-flowing Oceanus,
a region always wrapped in mist and
cloud. 10

We sailed in there, dragged our ship on land,
and walked along the stream of Oceanus,
until we reached the place Circe described.

“Perimedes and Eurylochus held the sheep,
our sacrificial victims, while I unsheathed
the sharp sword on my thigh and dug a hole,
two feet each way. I poured out libations
to all the dead—first with milk and honey,
then sweet wine, and then a third with water
Around the pit I sprinkled barley
meal. 20

Then to the powerless heads of the departed
I offered many prayers, with promises
I’d sacrifice, once I returned to Ithaca,
a barren heifer in my home. With prayers and vows
I called upon the families of the dead.
Next I held the sheep above the hole
and slit their throats. Dark blood flowed down.

“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 sorrow, and many men
wounded by bronze spears, who'd died in war,
still in their blood-stained armour. Crowds of
them

came thronging in from all sides of the pit,
with amazing cries. Pale fear took hold of me.
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 dread 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, brave Autolycus’ daughter.
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.
But still, in spite of all my sorrow,
I could not let her get too near the
blood,

50

until I'd asked Teiresias my questions.

“Then came the shade of Teiresias from Thebes,
holding a golden staff. He knew who I was
and started speaking:

‘Resourceful Odysseus,
Laertes’ son and Zeus’ 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.’

“Teiresias finished talking. I drew
back

60

and thrust my silver-studded sword inside its sheath.
When the blameless prophet had drunk dark blood,
he said these words to me:

‘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
in distress and late, in someone else’s ship,
after losing every one of your companions.
There’ll be trouble in your home—arrogant 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 there, and make rich sacrifice
to lord Poseidon with a ram, a bull,
and a boar that breeds with sows. Then leave.¹³
Go home, and there make sacred
offerings

to the immortal gods, who hold wide heaven,
to all of them in order. Your death will
come 100
far from the sea, such a gentle passing,
when you are bowed down with a ripe old age,
and your people prospering around you.
In all these things I'm telling you the truth.¹⁴

“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,
in silence. 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 saying this,
the shade of lord Teiresias
returned 120
to Hades' home, having made his prophecy.
But I stayed there undaunted, till my mother
came and drank dark blood. Then she knew me.
Full of sorrow, she spoke out—her words had wings:

‘My son, how have you come while still alive
down to this sad darkness? For living men
it's difficult to come and see these things—
huge rivers, fearful waters, stand between us,
first and foremost Oceanus, which no man
can cross on foot. He needs a sturdy

ship.

130

Have you only now come here from Troy,
after a long time wandering with your ship
and your companions? Have you not reached
Ithaca, nor seen your wife in your own home?"

“Once she’d finished, I answered her:

‘Mother,

I had to come down here to Hades' home,
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

around

140

in constant misery, ever since I left
with noble Agamemnon, bound for Troy,
to fight against the Trojans. But come now,
tell me—and make sure you speak the truth—
What grievous form of death destroyed you?
A lingering disease, or did archer Artemis
attack and kill you with her gentle arrows?
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 her son, keeping watch
on everything? Or has she been married
to the finest of Achaeans?’

“When I’d said this,
my honoured mother answered me at once:

'You can be sure she's waiting in your home,
her heart still faithful. But her nights and days
all end in sorrow, with her shedding

tears.

As for your father, he stays on his farm
and never travels down into the city.
There he lies in sorrow, nursing in his

heart

160

enormous grief, longing you'll come back.
A harsh old age has overtaken him.

That's how I met my fate and died, as well.
I was not attacked and killed in my own home
by gentle arrows of the keen-eyed archer,
nor did I die of some disease which takes
the 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. I considered how in my heart
I wished to hold the shade of my dead mother.
Three times my spirit prompted me to grasp her,
and I jumped ahead. But each time she slipped
out of my arms, like a shadow or a dream.
The pain inside my heart grew even sharper.
Then I spoke to her—my words had wings:

'Mother, why do you not wait for me?
I'd like to hold you, so that even here,
in Hades' home, we might throw loving
arms

180

around each other and then have our fill
of icy lamentation. Or are you
just a phantom royal Persephone has sent
to make me groan and grieve still more?'

"I spoke. My honoured mother quickly said:

'My child, of all men most unfortunate,
no, Persephone, daughter of Zeus,
is not deceiving you. Once mortals die,
this is what's set for them. Their sinews
no longer hold the flesh and bone
together.'

190

The mighty power of blazing fire
destroys them, once our spirit flies from
us,
from our white bones. And then it slips away,
and, like a dream, flutters to and fro.'

[Odysseus then describes 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 try to stay until tomorrow.
By then I’ll have completed all our gifts.”

Resourceful Odysseus then replied to him and said:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men most renowned,
if you asked me to stay for one whole year,
to organize 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 land
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 answered 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

230

from things no man has seen. You speak so well, and you have such a noble heart inside.

You've told your story with a minstrel's skill,
the painful agonies of all the Argives
and your own, as well. Come then, tell me this—
and speak the truth—did you see any 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.

240

so tell me of these marvellous events."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said these words:

“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, who managed to escape
the Trojans frightening battle cries, but died
when they returned, thanks to the
deviousness 250
of a malicious woman.

“Once sacred 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' house. He knew me at once.¹⁵
When he'd drunk some blood, he wept aloud,
shedding many tears, stretching out his hands,
keen to reach me. But he no longer

had

260

any inner power or strength, not like
the force his supple limbs possessed before.
I looked at him and wept. Pity filled my heart.
Then I spoke 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

270

or rich flocks of sheep? Or were you fighting
to seize their city and their women?'

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

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son,
and Zeus' child, Poseidon didn't kill me
in my ships by rousing savage winds
into a vicious storm. Nor was I killed
by enemies on land. No. Aegisthus
brought on my fatal end. He murdered me,
and he was helped by my accursed

wife,

280

after he'd invited me into his home
and prepared a feast for me, like an ox
one butchers in its stall. And so I died
the most pitiful of deaths. Around me
they kept killing the rest of my
companions,

like white-tusked pigs. The saddest thing I heard
was Cassandra, Priam's daughter, screaming.
That traitor Clytaemnestra slaughtered her
right there beside me. Though I was dying,
I raised my arms to strike her with my

sword,

290

but that dog-faced bitch turned her back on me.
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.'¹⁶

"Agamemnon finished. I answered him at once:

'That's horrible. Surely wide-thundering Zeus
for many years has shown a dreadful hate
towards the family of Atreus,
thanks to the conniving of some woman.
Many died for Helen's sake, and

then

300

Clytaemnestra organized a trap for you,
while you were somewhere far away.'

"As we two stood there in sad conversation,
full of sorrow and shedding many tears,
Achilles' shade came up, son of Peleus,
with those of splendid Antilochus
and Patroclus, too, as well as Ajax,
who in his looks and body was the best
of all Danaans, after Achilles,
who had no equal. Then the

shadow

310

of the swift-footed son of Aeacus
knew who I was, and with a cry of grief,
he spoke to me—his words had wings.¹⁷

'Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' son
and Zeus' 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 into Hades' home, 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.

He might tell me a plan for my return
to rugged Ithaca. I've not yet come near
Achaean land. I've still not disembarked
in my own country. I'm in constant trouble.
But as for you, Achilles, there's no man
in earlier days who was more blest than you,
and none will come in future. Before
now, 330
while you were still alive, we Argives
honoured you as we did the gods. And now,
since you've come here, you rule with power
among those who have died. So Achilles,
you have no cause to grieve because you're dead.'

"I paused, and he immediately replied:

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

"With these words the shade of swift Achilles
moved off through meadows filled with asphodel.

"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 350

beside our ships, in that competition
for Achilles' arms. His honoured mother
had offered them as prizes. The judges
were sons of Troy and Pallas Athena.

How I wish I'd never won that contest!¹⁸
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

‘Ajax,

worthy son of Telamon, can't you forget, even when you're dead, your anger at me over those destructive weapons? The gods made them a curse against the Argives, when they lost you, such a tower of strength. Now you've been killed, Achaeans mourn your

death

unceasingly, just as they do Achilles, 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 off toward Erebus, to join
the other shadows of the dead and gone.
For all his anger, 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.¹⁹ Two vultures sat there,
one on either side, ripping his liver,
their beaks jabbing deep inside his guts.
His hands could not fend them off his body.
He’d assaulted Leto, Zeus’ 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. He looked as if
he had a thirst but couldn't take a drink.²⁰
Whenever that old man bent down, so keen
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

and luscious olives. Each time the old man
stretched out his arms 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. He'd brace his arms and feet,
then strain to push it uphill to the top.
But just as he was going to get that stone
across the crest, its overpowering weight
would make it change direction. The cruel

rock

410

would roll back down again onto the plain.
Then he'd strain once more to push it up the slope.
His limbs dripped sweat, and dust rose from his head.²¹

“And then I noticed mighty Hercules,
or at least his image, for he himself
was with immortal gods, enjoying their feasts.²²
Hebe with the lovely ankles is his wife,
daughter of great Zeus and Hera, goddess
of the golden sandals. Around him there
the dead were making noises, like

birds

420

fluttering to and fro quite terrified.
And like dark night, he was glaring round him,
his unsheathed bow in hand, with an arrow
on 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, and murders,
men being killed. I hope whoever made it,
the one whose skill conceived that belt's
design,

430

never made or ever makes another.
His eyes saw me and knew just who I was.
With a mournful tone he spoke to me—
his words had wings:

‘Resourceful Odysseus,
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 countless troubles,
forced to carry out labours for a

man

440

vastly inferior to me, someone
who kept assigning me the harshest tasks.
Once he sent me here to bring away
Hades' hound. There was no other challenge
he could dream up more difficult for me
than that one. But I carried the dog off
and brought him back from Hades with my guides,
Hermes and gleaming-eyed Athena.’

“With these words he returned to Hades' 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 former 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.²³

I quickly made my way back to the
ship,

460

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 down Oceanus' 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 Aeaea,
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,
and bright red wine. Then the lovely goddess
stood in our midst and spoke:

10

"You reckless men,
you've gone to Hades' home while still alive,
to meet death twice, when other men die once.
But come, eat this food and drink this wine.
Take all day. 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 vicious plans of 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 stern cables of our ship. But Circe
took me by the hand and led me off,
some distance from the crew. She made me sit,
while she lay there on the ground beside me.
I told her every detail of our

trip,

30

describing all of it from start to finish.

Then queen 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.
Whoever unwittingly goes past them
and hears the Sirens' call never gets back.
His wife and infant children in his

home

40

will never stand beside him full of joy.
No. Instead, the Sirens' clear-toned song
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 crew has 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 tell you
the options. One has overhanging rocks,
on which dark-eyed Amphitrite's great waves
smash with a roar. These cliffs the blessed gods
have called the Planctae. No birds pass through

there.

No human ship has ever reached this place
and got away. Instead, waves from the

and deadly blasts of fire carry away
a whirling mass of timbers from the boat
and human bodies. Only one ocean ship,
most famous of them all, has made it
through,
the Argo, sailing on her way from Aeetes,
and waves would soon have smashed that vessel,
too,
against the massive rocks, had not Hera
sent her through. For Jason was her friend.²⁴
On the other route there are two cliffs.
One has a sharp peak jutting all the

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. Half way up the rock face
there's a shadowy cave. It faces west,
towards 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 monster. Nobody
would feel good seeing her, nor would a

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 out of sight in her hollow cave,
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

moaning Amphitrite keeps nourishing
in numbers past all counting. No sailors
can yet boast they and their ship sailed past her
without getting hurt. 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 water 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 quickly. 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' 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 bear misfortunes. 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 comrades 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 and urged my comrades
to get on board and loosen off the stern ropes.
They quickly climbed into the ship, sat down
in proper order at each rowing
bench,

130

and struck the gray sea with their oars. Fair winds began to blow 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, and 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 in my strong

fingers.

140

Once I'd 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 can shout, moving forward quickly, our swift ship did not get past the Sirens, once it came in close, without being noticed. 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 this island and not listened to us, sweet-voiced melodies sung from our lips. That brings him joy, and he departs from here a wiser man, for we two understand all the things that went on there in Troy, all Trojan and Achaean

suffering,

160

thanks to what the gods then willed, for we know everything that happens on this fertile earth.'

"They paused. The voice that reached me was so fine my heart longed to listen. I told my crew to set me free, sent them clear signals

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.
Once they'd rowed on well beyond the
Sirens,170
my loyal crewmates quickly pulled out 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 men were terrified.
I went through the ship, cheering up the crew,
standing beside each man and speaking words
of reassurance:

‘Friends, up to this point,
we've not been strangers to misfortunes.
Surely the bad things now are nothing
worse180
than when the Cyclops with his savage force
kept us his 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,
and keep striking them against the surging sea.
Zeus may somehow let us escape from here.’

“I spoke. They quickly followed what I'd
said.190

I didn't speak a word of Scylla—she was
a threat for which there was no remedy—
in case my comrades, overcome with fear,
might stop rowing and huddle together
inside the boat. We kept sailing on,
up the narrow strait, groaning as we moved.
On one side lay Scylla; on the other one
divine Charybdis terrified us all,
by swallowing salt water from the sea.
When she spewed it out, she seethed and

bubbled

200

uncontrollably, just like a cauldron
on a massive fire, while high above our heads
spray was falling on top of both the cliffs.
When she sucked the salt sea water down,
everything in there looked totally confused,
a dreadful roar arose around the rocks,
and underneath the dark and sandy ground
was visible. Pale fear gripped my crewmen.
When we saw Charybdis, we were afraid
we'd be destroyed. Then Scylla snatched

away

210

six of my companions, right from the ship,
the strongest and the bravest men I had.
When I turned to watch the swift ship and crew,
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, who still kept 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'd made it past those rocks and fled,

escaping Scylla and dread Charybdis,
we reached the lovely island of the god,
home of those splendid broad-faced cattle
and numerous rich flocks belonging to
Helios Hyperion, god of the

sun.

230

While I was still at sea in my black ship,
I heard the lowing cattle being penned
and bleating sheep. There fell into my heart
the speeches of Teiresias of Thebes,
the sightless prophet—Circe's words, as well,

on Aeaea. So with a heavy heart
I spoke to my companions:

‘Comrades,
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 240
will be so overcome with foolishness
that you’ll kill a cow or sheep. No. Instead,
you’ll be content to eat the food supplies
which goddess Circe gave.’

“Once I’d said this,
they swore, as I had asked, they’d never kill
those animals. When they had made the oath
and finished promising, we moved our ship
inside a hollow harbour, by a spring
whose water tasted sweet. Then my crewmen
disembarked and made a skilful
dinner. 250

When everyone had eaten food and drunk
to his heart’s ease, 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.

“But when three-quarters of the night had passed
and the stars had shifted their positions,
cloud-gatherer Zeus stirred up a nasty wind
and an amazing storm, which hid in clouds
both land and sea alike. And from
heaven 260

dark Night rushed down. Once rose-fingered Dawn
arrived,

we dragged up our ship and made it secure
inside a hollow cave, a place nymphs used
as a fine dancing and assembly ground.

“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.
As long as the men had red wine and bread,

they didn't touch the cattle. They were keen
to stay alive. But once what we had
stored

270

inside our ship was gone, they had to roam,
scouring around for game and fish and birds,
whatever came to hand. They used bent hooks
to fish, while hunger gnawed their stomachs.
At that point I went inland, up island,
to pray to the gods, hoping one of them
would show me a way home. Once I'd moved
across the island, far from my comrades,
I washed my hands in a protected spot,
a shelter from the wind, and said my

prayers

280

to all the gods who hold Mount Olympus.
Then they poured sweet sleep across my eyelids.
Meanwhile Eurylochus began to give
disastrous 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 that way,
is worst of all. So come, let's drive away
the best of Helios' cattle, and

then

290

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 wealthy offerings. 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
choking on a wave than starving to

death

300

on an abandoned island.'

"Eurylochus spoke.
My other comrades agreed with what he'd said.
They quickly rounded up the finest beasts

from Helios' herd, which was close by,
sleek, broad-faced animals with curving horns
grazing near the dark-prowed ship. My comrades
stood around them, praying to the gods.
They broke off tender leaves from a high oak,
for there was no white barley on the ship.²⁵
After their prayers, they cut the creature's
throats, 310
flayed them, and cut out portions of the thighs.
These they covered in a double layer of fat
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 up the rest and skewered it on spits.
That was the moment sweet sleep left my
eyes. 320

I went down to our swift ship by the shore.
As I drew closer to our curving ship,
the sweet smell of hot fat floated round me.
I groaned and cried out to immortal gods:

'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 him the news—
we had killed his cattle. 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 companions of Odysseus,
Laertes' 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 toward the earth.
If they don't pay me proper retribution
for those beasts, then I'll go down to Hades
and shine among the dead.'

"Cloud-gatherer Zeus
answered him and said:

'Helios, I think
you should keep on shining for immortals
and for human beings on fertile earth.
With a dazzling thunderbolt I myself
will quickly strike at that swift ship of theirs
and, in the middle of the wine-dark
sea,

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.
Then I bitterly attacked my crewmen,
each of them in turn, standing by the boat.
But we couldn't 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' 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 then set off,
out on the wide sea.

“Once we’d left that
island, 370
no other land appeared, only 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 ship. 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’ lightning made our boat
shiver from stem to stern and filled it up
with sulphurous smoke. My crew fell overboard
and were carried in 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 pacing up and down the ship,
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
sucking salt water from the sea.
But I jumped up into the high 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,
overshadowing Charybdis. I hung there,
staunch in my hope that when she spewed again
she'd throw up keel and mast. And to my joy,
they finally appeared. My hands and feet let go,
and from up high I fell into the sea
beyond 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,
the gods conducted me to
Ogygia, 420
the island where fair-haired Calypso lives,
fearful goddess with the power of song.
She welcomed and took good care of me.
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,
without saying a word, 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 10
by Phaeacia's counselors."

Mighty Alcinous
dispatched a herald to conduct him to the sea
and his fast ship. Once they'd come down to the ship,
beside the sea, the noble youths accompanying him
immediately took all 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 sleep in peace.
He went aboard, as well, and lay down in silence.
Each man sat in proper order at his
oarlock. 20
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 sweet, something very similar to death.
Just as four stallions yoked together charge ahead
across the plain, all running underneath the lash,
and jump high as they gallop quickly on their way,
that's how the stern 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, 30

safe and secure. Not even a wheeling hawk,
the swiftest of all flying things, could match her speed,
as she raced ahead, slicing through the ocean waves,
carrying a man whose mind was like a god's.
His heart in earlier days had endured 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 brightest of the stars rose up, the one
which always comes to herald light from early Dawn,
the sea-faring ship sailed in close to
Ithaca. 40

Those rowers' arms had so much strength, half the boat, which was moving fast, was driven up on shore.

Once they climbed out of that well-built rowing ship onto dry land, first they took Odysseus out, lifting him from the hollow ship still wrapped up in the linen sheet and splendid blanket, placed him, fast asleep, down on the sand, then carried out the gifts Phaeacia's noblemen had given him, thanks to the goodwill of great-hearted Athena, when he was setting out for home. They put these gifts

50

against the trunk of the olive tree, in a pile, some distance from the path, in case someone came by, before Odysseus could wake up, stumbled on them, and robbed him. Then they set off, back to Phaeacia.

[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, Odysseus, asleep in his own land, woke up. He didn't 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 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, then expressed his grief, saying:

“Where am I now?
Whose 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 sorrow. 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 headland
of the fertile mainland reaching out to sea?”

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

“Stranger, you’re a fool, or else you’ve
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.
The name of Ithaca is even known 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 making splendid
things. 90
She spoke to him—her words had wings:

“Of all men you’re the best in making plans
and giving speeches, and among all gods
I’m well known for subtlety and wisdom.
Still, you failed to recognize Pallas 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’ve come to weave a scheme with you
and hide these goods Phaeacian
noblemen 100
gave you 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 returned from wandering around.
Instead, keep silent. Bear the many pains,
and, when men act savagely, do nothing.
Now, let's not delay, but put away these
goods

110

in some hidden corner 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 the sacred olive tree
to think of ways to kill those arrogant suitors.
Bright-eyed goddess Athena was the first to speak:

"Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes' 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 words of reassurance.
But her mind is full of other things."

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, and died 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."

Bright-eyed goddess Athena then answered him:

“You can be sure I’ll stand beside 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
the wide earth. But come, I’ll transform

you,

140

so you’ll be unrecognizable to all.
You must go first of all to see the swineherd,
who tends your pigs. He’s well disposed to you
and loves your son and wise Penelope.
Ask him questions about everything.
I’ll go to Sparta, land of lovely women,
and there, Odysseus, I’ll summon back
your dear son, Telemachus, who has gone
to spacious Lacedaemon, to the home
of Menelaus, to find out news of

you,

150

to learn if you are still alive somewhere.”

As she said this, Athena touched him with her staff.
She wrinkled the fair 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 had been so beautiful before.
She dressed him in different clothes—a ragged cloak,
a dirty tunic, ripped and dishevelled, stained
with stinking smoke. Then she threw around him
a large hairless hide from a swift deer and gave
him

160

a staff and a tattered leather pouch, full of holes
and 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 best care of his possessions.
He found him sitting in the front part of his house,
a built-up courtyard with a panoramic view,
a large, fine place, with cleared land all around.
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.
They howled and ran at him, barking furiously.
Odysseus was alert enough to drop his staff
and sit. Still, he'd have been severely mauled
in his own farmyard, but the swineherd ran up fast
behind them, dropping the leather in his hands.
Charging through the gate and shouting at his dogs,
he scattered them in a hail of stones here and there.
Then he spoke out to his master:

“Old man,
those dogs would've ripped at you in no
time,

20

and then you'd have heaped the blame on me.
Well, I've got other troubles from the gods,
things to grieve about. For as I stay here,
raising fat pigs for other men to eat,
I'm full of sorrow for my noble master,
who's probably going hungry somewhere,
as he wanders through the lands and cities
where men speak a foreign tongue, if, in fact,
he's still alive and looking at the sunlight.

But follow me, old man. Come in the
hut.

30

When you've had enough to eat and drink
and your heart's satisfied, you can tell me
where you come from, what troubles you've endured.”

With these words, the loyal swineherd went inside the hut,
brought Odysseus in, and invited him to sit,

Odysseus was glad to get this hospitality,
so he addressed him, saying:

“Stranger,
may Zeus and other gods who live forever
give you what you truly want—you’ve welcomed me
with such an open heart.”

Then, swineherd
Eumaeus,
you answered him and said.²⁶

“It would be wrong,
stranger, for me to disrespect a guest,
even if one worse off than you arrived,
for all guests and beggars come 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 in with 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,
the best there is, so I can butcher it
for this stranger from another country.
We too will get some benefit from it,
seeing that we’ve worked hard for such a long time
and gone through troubles 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 big fat boar, five years old,
and stood him by the hearth. The swineherd's heart was
sound, 60

he did not forget the gods. So he began
by throwing in the fire some bristles from the head
of the white-tusked boar and praying to all the gods
that wise Odysseus would come back to his own home.

So resourceful Odysseus spoke to him and said:

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

Then, swineherd Eumaeus,
you replied by saying:

“Eat up, god-guided
stranger, 70
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, passed it over to Odysseus,
sacker of cities, then sat to eat his portion.

Night came on, bringing storms. There was no moon.
And Zeus sent blustery West Wind blowing in with rain.
Eumaeus then jumped up and placed a
bed 80
for Odysseus near the fire. On the bed he threw
some skins from sheep and goats. Odysseus lay down there.
Eumaeus covered him with a huge thick cloak,
which he kept there as a change of clothing,
something to wear whenever a great storm blew.
So Odysseus went to sleep there, and the young men
slept around him. But Eumaeus had no wish
to have his bed inside and sleep so far away
from all his boars. So he prepared to go outside.
First, Eumaeus slung his sharp sword from his

shoulder

90

and wrapped a really thick cloak all around him, to keep out the wind. Then he took a massive fleece from a well-fed goat and grabbed a pointed spear to fight off dogs and men. Then he left the hut, going to lie down and rest where the white-tusked boars slept beneath a hollow rock, sheltered from North Wind.

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' comrades were approaching land, they furled the sail and quickly lowered the mast. Then, with their oars they rowed into an anchorage, tossed out mooring stones, and lashed the cables at the stern. They themselves then disembarked in the crashing surf, to prepare a meal and mix the gleaming wine. When they'd had food and drink to their heart's content, prudent Telemachus was the first to speak:

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“You men row the black ship to the city,
while I check on the fields and herdsmen.
I'll come to the city in the evening,
after I've looked over my estates.
In the morning I'll lay out a banquet
as payment to you for the journey,
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

20

and then pushed out to sea, sailing to the city,
as Telemachus, godlike Odysseus' dear son,
had ordered them to do, while he strode quickly off,
his feet carrying him onward, until he reached
the farmyard and the pigs in countless numbers,
among whom the worthy swineherd lay asleep,
always thinking gentle thoughts about his master.

BOOK SIXTEEN ODYSSEUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO TELEMACHUS

Meanwhile at dawn Odysseus and the loyal swineherd,
once they'd sent the herdsmen out with droves of pigs,
made a fire in the hut and prepared their breakfast.
As Telemachus came closer, the yelping dogs
stopped barking and fawned around him. Lord Odysseus
noticed what the dogs were doing and heard his footsteps.
At once he spoke out to Eumaeus—his words had wings:

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

10

He'd hardly finished speaking when his own dear son
stood in the doorway. The swineherd, amazed, jumped
up—

the bowls he was using to mix the gleaming wine
fell from his hands. He went up to greet his master,
kissed his head, both his handsome eyes, his two hands.
Then through his tears he spoke winged words to him:

“You've come, Telemachus, you sweet light.
I thought I'd never see you any more,
once you went off in that ship to Pylos.
Come in now, dear boy, so that my
heart

20

can rejoice to see you here in my home,
now you've just returned from distant places.”

Once he'd said this, he took Telemachus' bronze spear,
and let him enter. He crossed the stone threshold.
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 chair in the hut somewhere else.
Here's a man who'll get one for us."

He spoke. Odysseus went back and sat down
again. 30

Eumaeus piled up green brushwood on the floor
and spread a fleece on top. Odysseus' dear son
sat down there. The swineherd then set out before them
platters of roast meat, left over from the meal
they'd had the day before, and quickly heaped up
baskets full of bread. In a wooden bowl he mixed
wine sweet as honey, and then sat down himself,
opposite godlike Odysseus. Their hands reached out
to the fine meal prepared and spread before them.
When they'd had food and drink to their heart's
content, 40

Telemachus then said to the splendid swineherd:

"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 given the news to her alone
and come back here. No other Achaean
must learn about it, for many of them
are planning nasty things against me.
After you've delivered your message,
then come back here. Don't go
wandering 50

around the fields looking for Laertes.
Instead, tell my mother to send her maid,
the housekeeper, quickly and in secret.
She can report the news to the old man."

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

Now, it did not escape the notice of Athena
that swineherd Eumeus was going from the farm.
She approached the hut, appearing like a woman,
beautiful, tall, and skilled in making lovely
things. 60

She stood just outside the entrance to the farm
and was visible to no one but Odysseus.

Telemachus did not see her face to face
or notice she was there. For when gods appear,
there's no way their form is perceptible to all.
But Odysseus saw her. So did the dogs, as well.
But they didn't bark. Instead, they crept away,
whimpering in fear, to the far side of the hut.

She signalled with her eyebrows. Lord Odysseus
noticed and went out of the hut, past the large
wall 70
around the yard, and stood in front of her.

Then Athena spoke to him:

“Son of Laertes,
resourceful 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 two can plan the suitors' lethal fate,
then go together to the famous city.
I won't be absent from you very long—
I'm eager for the battle.”

As she said this, Athena
touched Odysseus with her golden wand. To start
with, 80
she placed a well-washed 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 around his chin turned black again.
Once she'd done this, Athena left. But Odysseus
returned 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,
you look different to me 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 grieve and suffer so much trouble,
having to endure men's acts of violence."

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 wailed aloud, as insistently as birds,
like sea eagles or hawks with curving talons
whose young have been carried off by country folk
before they're fully fledged. That's how both men then
let tears of pity fall from underneath their eyelids.
And now light from the sun would've 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 bring you here,
to Ithaca? Who did they say they were?
For I don't think you made it here on foot."

Noble long-suffering Odysseus answered him:

"All right, my child, I'll tell you the truth.
Phaeacians, those famous sailors, brought me.
They escort other men, as well, all those
who visit them. But come now,
tell me about the number of the suitors,
so I know how many men there

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

Shrewd Telemachus answered him and said:

"Father,
I've always heard about your great renown,
a mighty warrior—your hands are very 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 suitors 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
whether 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, answered him and said:

"All right, I'll tell you. Pay attention
now,

150

and listen. Do you believe Athena,
along with Father Zeus, will be enough

for the two of us, or should I think about
someone else to help us?"

Shrewd Telemachus

then said in reply:

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

Long-suffering lord Odysseus answered him and said:

"The two of them won't stand apart for long
from the great fight—we can be sure of
that—160

when Ares' war-like 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 arrogant 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 throughout the
house

170

and out the door or throw things and hit 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. When you see that,
take all the weapons of war lying there,
in the hall, and put them in a secret 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

180

to grab up when we make a rush at them,
while 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 and truly of our blood,
let no one hear Odysseus is back home.

Don't let Laertes know or the swineherd,
or any servants, or Penelope herself."

So the two men talked about these things together.

Meanwhile, the well-built ship which brought
Telemachus 190
from Pylos with all his comrades had reached Ithaca.
Once they'd come inside the deep water harbour,
they hauled the black ship up on shore. Eager servants
carried off their weapons and without delay
took the splendid gifts to Clytius' home.
They also sent a herald to Odysseus' house,
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 queen might get sick at
heart 200
and shed some tears. 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 dear son has just returned."

But the swineherd came up close to Penelope
and gave her all the details her dear son
had ordered him to say. Once he'd told her
every item he'd been asked to mention to her,
he went off, leaving the courtyard and the
hall, 210
back to his pigs. The suitors were unhappy,
their hearts dismayed, and they departed from the hall,
past the large courtyard wall. There, before the gates,
they sat down. The first one of them to say something
was Eurymachus, son of Polybus:

"O my friends,
to tell the truth, in his great arrogance