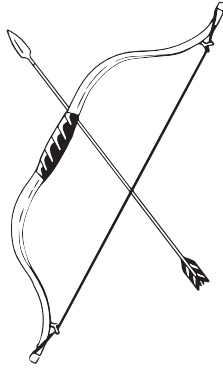


THE ODYSSEY

Homer

Translated into blank verse by William Cullen Bryant

*With an Introduction by
Louis Markos*



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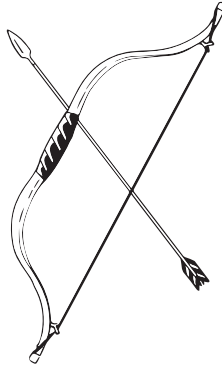
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INTRODUCTION

If the *Iliad* is the first tragedy ever written, then the *Odyssey* is the first comedy. Whereas the first gives us man the warrior, seeking glory on the battlefield, the second gives us man the husband and father, seeking domestic bliss with his family. The first values strength and prowess; the second wit and perseverance. The first takes place in a world where the dividing line between good and evil is often hard to identify; the second in a world where virtue and vice are more defined.

The World Around

There was almost surely a real war fought between the Greeks and the Trojans, whose city of Troy was located on the northwest coast of modern day Turkey. And that war was most likely fought around 1200 BC, at the height of the Mycenaean Bronze Age.

When we speak of the Mycenaean, we speak of a loosely federated group of individual city-states spread out across Greece, but mostly located in the Peloponnese. The chief of these city-states was Mycenae, but there were others at Argos, Sparta, Pylos, Salamis, Phthia, Thebes, and Athens, not to mention the islands of Crete and Ithaca. The leader of each city-state was a king in his own right, though they all looked to Agamemnon of Mycenae as their commander-in-chief.

Although the Mycenaeans defeated the Trojans, they did not set up any bases in Troy; instead, they returned home with their plunder. But their glory and power was not to last much longer. By 1100, Mycenaean civilization had collapsed, plunging Greece into a three-hundred-year Dark Age during which the art of writing was lost.

In the absence of writing, an oral tradition sprang up to preserve the memory of the Golden Age of Mycenae. That oral tradition was later carried across the Aegean to the coast of modern day Turkey, where it was systematized and perfected by a group of bards who learned the skill of reciting long tales from memory.

Although the *Odyssey* takes place in the same time period as the *Iliad*, it offers us a world and an ethos that reflect the Dark Ages rather than the Mycenaean Bronze Age.

About the Author

Though Homer was a Greek, he did not live in Greece but somewhere along the coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Seven cities competed for his birthplace, but he was most likely a resident of the island of Chios. Though we do not know for certain if Homer was blind, there is good reason to believe that he was—especially given the fact that he includes a blind bard in the *Odyssey* who may very well be a surrogate for himself.

The genius of Homer did not consist in his ability to “make up” stories out of his imagination, but to give shape to the oral tales of the homecomings (*nostoi* in Greek; root of our world nostalgia, which means “homecoming pain”) of the Trojan warriors that had been handed down to him. It was most likely Homer who chose to center the *Odyssey* on Odysseus and his son Telemachus rather than on Agamemnon and Menelaus and their son/nephew Orestes.

Though he most likely lived near the end of the eighth century BC, at a time when Greece was reclaiming her written language from the Phoenicians, Homer was almost surely illiterate, the last in a long line

Finally, when his surviving men ate the forbidden Cattle of the Sun, they were all killed, leaving Odysseus alone and stranded on the island of Calypso.

After the sympathetic Phaeacians set him back home on Ithaca (Books XIII-XXIV), Odysseus reveals himself to Telemachus and the two plot together, first to test and then to kill the evil suitors. Husband and wife are reunited, and order is restored.

Worldview Analysis

The reader who moves from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey* should notice immediately that the *Odyssey* takes place in a far more ethical world where the distinctions between good and evil are clearer for both the characters and the reader. Whereas we feel great remorse when Hector, the purported antagonist of the *Iliad*, dies, we feel no sorrow whatsoever when Odysseus kills the suitors.

In the last book of the *Iliad*, Achilles says that Zeus has two urns by his throne: one filled with blessings; the other with curses. When he showers on us the contents of the first, our lives are filled with joy; when the contents of the second rain down on us, our lives are destroyed by suffering and pain. How does Zeus choose which urn to draw from? No one can say; at least from Achilles' point of view, the choice is arbitrary.

In the first book of the *Odyssey*, Zeus himself rejects this point of view: "What a lamentable thing it is that men should blame the gods and regard *us* as the source of their troubles, when it is their own transgressions which bring them suffering that was not their destiny" (I.33–35).^{*} Then, to prove his point, he tells the melodramatic story of how Agamemnon was killed by Aegisthus, the lover of his wife,

^{*} All quotes from Homer are taken from *The Odyssey*, trans. by E. V. Rieu, rev. by D. C. H. Rieu (London: Penguin, 1991). References from this prose translation will be given in the text by book and line number.

Clytemnestra. Aegisthus was wrong to do this deed, asserts Zeus, and was justly killed by Agamemnon's son, Orestes.

It is safe to suggest that Homer here agrees with Zeus, for, in telling the story of the family of Agamemnon, he leaves out those parts that muddy the ethical waters. Thus, in the fuller version of the story—later dramatized by the Greek tragedian Aeschylus in his trilogy, the *Oresteia*—Agamemnon is killed by his wife (not by her lover), and Orestes follows his slaying of Aegisthus by doing the same to his mother. Matricide and wives-killing-husbands make for great tragic dilemmas, but that is not Homer's focus.

To drive home the ethical worldview around which his epic is constructed, Homer skillfully parallels the Agamemnon-Clytemnestra-Aegisthus-Orestes subplot with his central story of Odysseus, Penelope, the suitors, and Telemachus. The suitors, like Aegisthus, are simple villains, and no taboos are broken when Telemachus, like Orestes, avenges the indignities paid to his father. (Telemachus, in fact, consciously takes up Orestes as his role model.) That Penelope, *unlike* Clytemnestra, stays faithful to her absent husband only emphasizes further that our choices determine our fate.

Since the *Odyssey* takes place in a moral universe, it is vital that readers be provided with a key for distinguishing the good guys from the bad guys. In the Bible, the virtues of obedience, gratitude, faith, hope, and love separate saint from sinner, the righteous from the unrighteous. In the *Odyssey*, it is the good relationship between the guest and the host (*xenia* in Greek) that distinguishes the hero from the villain.

We immediately know Telemachus is a good person, for, when Athena comes to the palace in disguise, Telemachus alone takes her in and feeds her. While visiting Nestor and Menelaus, he further reveals his *xenia* by being a good and noble guest. The suitors, on the other hand, are bad guests who take advantage of Penelope's hospitality, just as the Lotus Eaters and Calypso are bad hosts who detain their guests against their will.

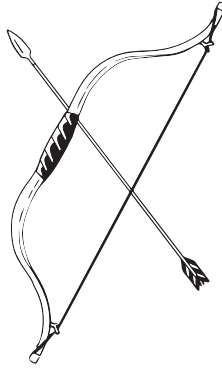
While on his journeys, Odysseus meets both good hosts (Aeolus, who freely gives him a bag of wind that will afford him safe passage home; the Phaeacians, who feed him royally and then escort him back to Ithaca) and bad hosts (Polyphemus, who, rather than feeding Odysseus's men, feeds *on* them; Circe, who turns his men to swine). In most cases, Odysseus is a good guest; however, in the cave of Polyphemus, Odysseus plays the role of a bad guest and pays for it by provoking the Cyclops' curse.

Though *xenia* is not as strong a theme in the Bible, hospitality is significant in the Old Testament—where the men of Sodom and Gomorrah are punished for treating the angels who visit their town with contempt and perverse lust (Genesis 19)—and in the New—where we are instructed to show hospitality because, by so doing, we may entertain angels unawares (Heb. 13:2). Whether in the Bible or in the *Odyssey*, the way one treats a guest or a host offers a window into that person's soul, revealing his inner character.

Though Odysseus is the protagonist of the epic, Homer unexpectedly devotes Books I–IV to Telemachus' maturation process. Like so many characters in literature (Orestes, Henry V, Huck Finn, Frodo Baggins) and the Bible (Samuel, David, Peter, Paul) Telemachus must go through a rite of passage that will test his mettle and enable him to come of age.

In Telemachus' case, he must discover whether he is the true son of his father. In the epic, it is Athena who calls upon the unsure, untested Telemachus to live up to his noble father: "You are no longer a child: you must put childish thoughts away.... You, my friend—and what a tall and splendid young man you have grown!—must be as brave as Orestes. Then future generations will sing your praises" (I.297–304; see 1 Cor. 13:11 for an interesting, though probably unconscious, echo by the classically educated Paul).

Whereas the typical teenager of today would balk at being told to live up to the deeds of some other young man, much less the deeds



BOOK I*

Tell me, O Muse, of that sagacious man 1
Who, having overthrown the sacred town
Of Ilium, wandered far and visited
The capitals of many nations, learned
The customs of their dwellers, and endured 5
Great suffering on the deep: his life was oft
In peril, as he labored to bring back
His comrades to their homes. He saved them not,
Though earnestly he strove; they perished all,
Through their own folly; for they banqueted, 10
Madmen! upon the oxen of the Sun—
The all-o'erlooking Sun, who cut them off
From their return. O goddess, virgin-child
Of Zeus, relate some part of this to me.
Now all the rest, as many as escaped is 15
The cruel doom of death, were at their homes
Safe from the perils of the war and sea,
While him alone, who pined to see his home

* Note: this translation does not match the line numbering of the original Greek text.

And wife again, Calypso, queenly nymph,
 Great among goddesses, detained within 20
 Her spacious grot, in hope that he might yet
 Become her husband. Even when the years
 Brought round the time in which the gods decreed
 That he should reach again his dwelling-place
 In Ithaca, though he was with his friends, 25
 His toils were not yet ended. Of the gods
 All pitied him save Poseidon, who pursued
 With wrath implacable the godlike chief,
 Odysseus, even to his native land.
 Among the Ethiopians was the god 30
 Far off—the Ethiopians most remote
 Of men. Two tribes there are: one dwells beneath
 The rising, one beneath the setting sun.
 He went to grace a hecatomb of beeves
 And lambs, and sat delighted at the feast; 35
 While in the palace of Olympian Zeus
 The other gods assembled, and to them
 The father of immortals and of men
 Was speaking. To his mind arose the thought
 Of that Aegisthus whom the famous son 40
 Of Agamemnon, Prince Orestes, slew.
 Of him he thought and thus bespake the gods:
 “How strange it is that mortals blame the gods
 And say that we inflict the ills they bear,
 When they, by their own folly and against 45
 The will of fate, bring sorrow on themselves!
 As late Aegisthus, unconstrained by fate,
 Married the queen of Atreus’ son and slew
 The husband just returned from war. Yet well
 He knew the bitter penalty, for we 50

Warned him. We sent the herald Argicide,
 Bidding him neither slay the chief nor woo
 His queen, for that Orestes, when he came
 To manhood and might claim his heritage,
 Would take due vengeance for Atrides slain. 55
 So Hermes said; his prudent words moved not
 The purpose of Aegisthus? who now pays
 The forfeit of his many crimes at once.”
 Pallas, the blue-eyed goddess, thus replied:
 “O father, son of Cronus, king of kings! 60
 Well he deserved his death. So perish all
 Guilty of deeds like his! But I am grieved
 For sage Odysseus, that most wretched man,
 So long detained, repining, and afar
 From those he loves, upon a distant isle 65
 Girt by the waters of the central deep—
 A forest isle, where dwells a deity
 The daughter of wise Atlas, him who knows
 The ocean to its utmost depths, and holds
 Upright the lofty columns which divide 70
 The earth from heaven. The daughter there detain
 The unhappy chieftain, and with flattering words
 Would win him to forget his Ithaca.
 Meanwhile, impatient to behold the smokes
 That rise from hearths in his own land, he pines 75
 And willingly would die. Is not thy heart,
 Olympius, touched by this? And did he not
 Pay grateful sacrifice to thee beside
 The Argive fleet in the broad realm of Troy?
 Why then, O Zeus, art thou so wroth with him?” 80
 Then answered cloud-compelling Zeus: “My child,
 What words have passed thy lips? Can I forget

Godlike Odysseus, who in gifts of mind
 Excels all other men, and who has brought
 Large offerings to the gods that dwell in heaven? 85
 Yet he who holds the earth in his embrace,
 Poseidon, pursues him with perpetual hate
 Because of Polypheme, the Cyclops, strong
 Beyond all others of his giant race,
 Whose eye Odysseus had put out. The nymph 90
 Thoosa brought him forth—a daughter she
 Of Phorcys, ruling in the barren deep—
 And in the covert of o'erhanging rocks
 She met with Poseidon. For this cause the god
 Who shakes the shores, although he slay him not, 95
 Sends forth Odysseus wandering far away
 From his own country. Let us now consult
 Together and provide for his return,
 And Poseidon will lay by his wrath, for vain
 It were for one like him to strive alone 100
 Against the might of all the immortal gods.”
 And then the blue-eyed Pallas spake again:
 “O father! son of Cronus, king of kings!
 If such the pleasure of the blessed gods
 That now the wise Odysseus shall return 105
 To his own land, let us at once dispatch
 Hermes, the Argicide, our messenger,
 Down to Ogygia, to the bright-haired nymph,
 And make our steadfast purpose known to bring
 The sufferer Odysseus to his home, 110
 And I will haste to Ithaca, and move
 His son, that with a resolute heart he call
 The long-haired Greeks together and forbid
 The excesses of the suitor train, who slay

His flocks and slow-paced beeves with crooked horns. 115
To Sparta I will send him and the sands
Of Pylos, to inquire for the return
Of his dear father. So a glorious fame
Shall gather round him in the eyes of men.”
She spake, and fastened underneath her feet 120
The fair, ambrosial golden sandals worn
To bear her over ocean like the wind,
And o’er the boundless land. In hand she took,
Well-tipped with trenchant brass, the mighty spear,
Heavy and huge and strong, with which she bears 125
Whole phalanxes of heroes to the earth,
When she, the daughter of a mighty sire,
Is angered. From the Olympian heights she plunged,
And stood among the men of Ithaca,
Just at the porch and threshold of their chief, 130
Odysseus. In her hand she bore the spear,
And seemed the stranger Mentés, he who led
The Taphians. There before the gate she found
The haughty suitors. Some beguiled the time
With draughts, while sitting on the hides of beeves 135
Which they had slaughtered. Heralds were with them,
And busy menials: some who in the bowls
Tempered the wine with water, some who cleansed
The tables with light sponges, and who set
The banquet forth and carved the meats for all. 140
Telemachus the godlike was the first
To see the goddess as he sat among
The crowd of suitors, sad at heart, and thought
Of his illustrious father, who might come
And scatter those who filled his palace halls, 145
And win new honor, and regain the rule

Over his own. As thus he sat and mused
 Among the suitors, he beheld where stood
 Pallas, and forth he sprang; he could not bear
 To keep a stranger waiting at his door. 150
 He came, and taking her right hand received
 The brazen spear, and spake these winged words:
 "Hail, stranger! thou art truly welcome here;
 First come and share our feast and be refreshed,
 Then say what thou requirest at our hands." 155
 He spake and led the way, and in his steps
 Pallas Athene followed. Entering then
 The lofty halls, he set the spear upright
 By a tall column, in the armory
 With polished walls, where rested many a lance 160
 Of the large-souled Odysseus. Then he placed
 His guest upon a throne, o'er which he spread
 A covering many-hued and beautiful,
 And gave her feet a footstool. Near to her
 He drew his party-colored seat, aloof 165
 From where the suitors sat; that so his guest
 Might not amid those haughty revelers
 Be wearied with the tumult and enjoy
 His meal the less, and that himself might ask
 News of his absent father. In a bowl 170
 Of silver, from a shapely ewer of gold,
 A maid poured water for the hands, and set
 A polished table near them. Then approached
 A venerable matron bringing bread 180
 And delicacies gathered from the board; 175
 And he who served the feast before them placed
 Chargers with various meats, and cups of gold;
 While round the board a herald moved, and poured

Wine for the guests. The haughty suitors now
Came in, and took their places on the thrones 180
And couches; heralds poured upon their hands
The water; maidens heaped the canisters
With bread, and all put forth their hands to share
The banquet on the board, while to the brim
Boys filled the beakers. When the calls of thirst 185
And hunger were appeased, the suitors thought
Of other things that well become a feast—
Song and the dance. And then a herald brought
A shapely harp, and gave it to the hands
Of Phemius, who had only by constraint 190
Sung to the suitors. On the chords he struck
A prelude to his lay, while, as he played,
Telemachus, that others might not hear,
Leaned forward, and to blue-eyed Pallas spake:
“My friend and guest, wilt thou take no offence 195
At what I say? These revelers enjoy
The harp and song, for at no cost of theirs
They waste the substance of another man,
Whose white bones now are moldering in the rain
Upon some main-land, or are tossed about 200
By ocean billows. Should they see him once
In Ithaca, their prayers would rather rise
For swifter feet than richer stores of gold
And raiment. But an evil fate is his,
And he has perished. Even should we hear 205
From any of the dwellers upon earth
That he is near at hand, we could not hope.
For him is no return. But now, I pray,
Tell me, and frankly tell me, who thou art,
And of what race of men, and where thy home, 210

And who thy parents; how the mariners
 Brought thee to Ithaca, and who they claim
 To be, for well I deem thou couldst not come
 Hither on foot. All this, I pray, relate
 Truly, that I may know the whole. Art thou 215
 For the first time arrived, or hast thou been
 My father's guest? for many a stranger once
 Resorted to our palace, and he knew
 The way to win the kind regard of men."
 Pallas, the blue-eyed goddess, answered thus: 220
 "I will tell all and truly. I am named
 Mentès; my father was the great in war
 Anchialus. I rule a people skilled
 To wield the oar, the Taphians, and I come
 With ship and crew across the dark blue deep 225
 To Temese, and to a race whose speech
 Is different from my own, in quest of brass,
 And bringing bright steel with me. I have left
 Moored at the field behind the town my bark,
 Within the bay of Reithrus, and beneath 230
 The woods of Neius. We claim to be
 Guests by descent, and from our fathers' time,
 As thou wilt learn if thou shouldst meet and ask
 Laertes, the old hero. It is said
 He comes no more within the city walls, 235
 But in the fields dwells sadly by himself,
 Where an old handmaid sets upon his board
 His food and drink when weariness unnerves
 His limbs in creeping o'er the fertile soil
 Of his rich vineyard. I am come because 240
 I heard thy father had at last returned,
 And now am certain that the gods delay

His journey hither; for the illustrious man
Cannot have died, but is detained alone
Somewhere upon the ocean, in some spot 245
Girt by the waters. There do cruel men
And savage keep him, pining to depart.
Now let me speak of what the gods reveal,
And what I deem will surely come to pass,
Although I am no seer and have no skill 250
In omens drawn from birds. Not long the chief
Will be an exile from his own dear land.
Though fettered to his place by links of steel;
For he has large invention, and will plan
A way for his escape. Now tell me this, 255
And truly; tall in stature as thou art,
Art thou in fact Odysseus' son? In face
And glorious eyes thou dost resemble him
Exceedingly; for he and I of yore
Were oftentimes companions, ere he sailed 260
For Ilium, whither also went the best
Among the Argives in their roomy ships,
Nor have we seen each other since that day."
Telemachus, the prudent, spake: "O guest,
True answer shalt thou have. My mother says 265
I am his son; I know not; never man
Knew his own father. Would I were the son
Of one whose happier lot it was to meet
Amidst his own estates the approach of age.
Now the most wretched of the sons of men 270
Is he to whom they say I owe my birth.
Thus is thy question answered." Then again
Spake blue-eyed Pallas: "Of a truth, the gods
Ordain not that thy race, in years to come,

Should be inglorious, since Penelope 275
 Hath borne thee such as I behold thee now.
 But frankly answer me—what feast is here,
 And what is this assembly? What may be
 The occasion? is a banquet given? is this
 A wedding? A collation, where the guests 280
 Furnish the meats, I think it cannot be,
 So riotously goes the revel on
 Throughout the palace. A well-judging man,
 If he should come among them, would be moved
 With anger at the shameful things they do.” 285
 Again Telemachus, the prudent, spake:
 “Since thou dost ask me, stranger, know that once
 Rich and illustrious might this house be called
 While yet the chief was here. But now the gods
 Have grown unkind and willed it otherwise, 290
 They make his fate a mystery beyond
 The fate of other men. I should not grieve
 So deeply for his loss if he had fallen
 With his companions on the field of Troy,
 Or midst his kindred when the war was o’er. 295
 Then all the Greeks had built his monument,
 And he had left his son a heritage
 Of glory. Now has he become the prey
 Of Harpies, perishing ingloriously,
 Unseen, his fate unheard of, and has left 300
 Mourning and grief, my portion. Not for him
 Alone I grieve; the gods have cast on me
 Yet other hardships. All the chiefs who rule
 The isles, Dulichium, Samos, and the groves
 That shade Zacynthus, and who bear the sway 305
 In rugged Ithaca, have come to woo

My mother, and from day to day consume
My substance. She rejects not utterly
Their hateful suit, and yet she cannot bear
To end it by a marriage. Thus they waste 310
My heritage, and soon will seek my life.”
Again in grief and anger Pallas spake:
“Yea, greatly dost thou need the absent chief
Odysseus here, that he might lay his hands
Upon these shameless suitors. Were he now 315
To come and stand before the palace gate
With helm and buckler and two spears, as first
I saw him in our house, when drinking wine
And feasting, just returned from Ephyre,
Where Ilus dwelt, the son of Mermerus— 320
For thither went Odysseus in a bark,
To seek a deadly drug with which to taint
His brazen arrows; Ilus gave it not;
He feared the immortal gods; my father gave
The poison, for exceedingly he loved 325
His guest—could now Odysseus, in such guise,
Once meet the suitors, short would be their lives
And bitter would the marriage banquet be.
Yet whether he return or not to take
Vengeance, in his own palace, on this crew 330
Of wassailers, rests only with the gods.
Now let me counsel thee to think betimes
How thou shalt thrust them from thy palace gates.
Observe me, and attend to what I say:
Tomorrow thou shalt call the Achaian chiefs 335
To an assembly; speak before them all,
And be the gods thy witnesses. Command
The suitors all to separate for their homes;

And if thy mother's mind be bent to wed,
Let her return to where her father dwells, 340
A mighty prince, and there they will appoint
Magnificent nuptials, and an ample dower
Such as should honor a beloved child.
And now, if thou wilt heed me, I will give
A counsel for thy good. Man thy best ship 345
With twenty rowers, and go forth to seek
News of thy absent father. Thou shalt hear
Haply of him from some one of the sons
Of men, or else some word of rumor sent
By Zeus, revealing what mankind should know. 350
First shape thy course for Pylos, and inquire
Of noble Nestor; then, at Sparta, ask
Of fair-haired Menelaus, for he came
Last of the mailed Achaeans to his home.'
And shouldst thou learn that yet thy father lives, 355
And will return, have patience yet a year,
However hard it seem. But shouldst thou find
That he is now no more, return forthwith
To thy own native land, and pile on high
His monument, and let the funeral rites 360
Be sumptuously performed as may become
The dead, and let thy mother wed again.
And when all this is fully brought to pass,
Take counsel with thy spirit and thy heart
How to destroy the suitor crew that haunt 365
Thy palace, whether by a secret snare
Or open force. No longer shouldst thou act
As if thou wert a boy; thou hast outgrown
The age of childish sports. Hast thou not heard
What honor the divine Orestes gained 370

With all men, when he slew the murderer,
 The crafty wretch Aegisthus, by whose hand
 The illustrious father of Orestes died?
 And then, my friend, for I perceive that thou
 Art of a manly and a stately growth— 375
 Be also bold, that men hereafter born
 May give thee praise. And now must I depart
 To my good ship, and to my friends who wait,
 Too anxiously perhaps, for my return.
 Act wisely now, and bear my words in mind.” 380
 The prudent youth Telemachus rejoined:
 “Well hast thou spoken, and with kind intent,
 O stranger! like a father to a son;
 And ne’er shall I forget what thou hast said.
 Yet stay, I pray thee, though in haste, and bathe 385
 And be refreshed, and take to thy good ship
 Some gift with thee, such as may please thee well,
 Precious and rare, which thou mayst ever keep
 In memory of me—a gift like those
 Which friendly hosts bestow upon their guests.” 390
 Then spake the blue-eyed Pallas: “Stay me not,
 For now would I depart. Whatever gift
 Thy heart may prompt thee to bestow, reserve
 Till I come back, that I may bear it home, 394
 And thou shalt take some precious thing in turn.”
 So spake the blue-eyed Pallas, and withdrew,
 Ascending like a bird. She filled his heart
 With strength and courage, waking vividly
 His father’s memory. Then the noble youth
 Went forth among the suitors. Silent all 400
 They sat and listened to the illustrious bard,
 Who sang of the calamitous return

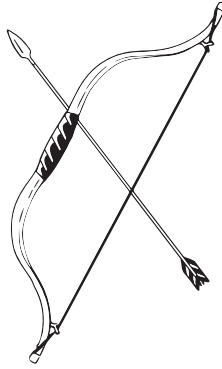
Of the Greek host from Troy, at the command
 Of Pallas. From her chamber o'er the hall
 The daughter of Icarus, the sage queen 405
 Penelope, had heard the heavenly strain,
 And knew its theme. Down by the lofty stairs
 She came, but not alone; there followed her
 Two maidens. When the glorious lady reached
 The threshold of the strong-built hall, where sat 410
 The suitors, holding up a delicate veil
 Before her face, and with a gush of tears,
 The queen bespake the sacred minstrel thus:
 "Phemius! thou knowest many a pleasing theme—
 The deeds of gods and heroes, such as bards 415
 Are wont to celebrate. Take then thy place
 And sing of one of these, and let the guests
 In silence drink the wine; but cease this strain;
 It is too sad; it cuts me to the heart,
 And wakes a sorrow without bounds—such grief 420
 I bear for him, my lord, of whom I think
 Continually; whose glory is abroad
 Through Hellas and through Argos, everywhere."
 And then Telemachus, the prudent, spake:
 "Why, O my mother! canst thou not endure 425
 That thus the well-graced poet should delight
 His hearers with a theme to which his mind
 Is inly moved? The bards deserve no blame;
 Zeus is the cause, for he at will inspires
 The lay that each must sing. Reprove not, then, 430
 The minstrel who relates the unhappy fate
 Of the Greek warriors. All men most applaud
 The song that has the newest theme; and thou—
 Strengthen thy heart to hear it. Keep in mind

That not alone Odysseus is cut off 435
 From his return, but that with him at Troy
 Have many others perished. Now withdraw
 Into thy chamber; ply thy household tasks,
 The loom, the spindle; bid thy maidens speed
 Their work. To say what words beseem a feast 440
 Belongs to man, and most to me; for here
 Within these walls the authority is mine.”
 The matron, wondering at his words, withdrew
 To her own place, but in her heart laid up
 Her son’s wise sayings. When she now had reached, 445
 With her attendant maids, the upper rooms,
 She mourned Odysseus, her beloved spouse,
 And wept, till blue-eyed Pallas closed her lids
 In gentle slumbers. Noisily, meanwhile,
 The suitors reveled in the shadowy halls; 450
 And thus Telemachus, the prudent, spake:
 “Ye suitors of my mother, insolent
 And overbearing; cheerful be our feast,
 Not riotous. It would become us well
 To listen to the lay of such a bard, 455
 So like the gods in voice. I bid you all
 Meet in full council with the morrow morn,
 That I may give you warning to depart
 From out my palace, and to seek your feasts
 Elsewhere at your own charge—haply to hold 460
 Your daily banquets at each other’s homes.
 But if it seem to you the better way
 To plunder one man’s goods, go on to waste
 My substance; I will call the immortal gods
 To aid me, and if Zeus allow 465
 Fit retribution for your deeds, ye die,

Within this very palace, unavenged."
 He spake; the suitors bit their close-pressed lips,
 Astonished at the youth's courageous words.
 And thus Antinous, Eupheithes' son, 470
 Made answer: "Most assuredly the gods,
 Telemachus, have taught thee how to frame
 Grand sentences and gallantly harangue.
 Ne'er may the son of Cronus make thee king
 Over the sea-girt Ithaca, whose isle 475
 Is thy inheritance by claim of birth."
 Telemachus, the prudent, thus rejoined:
 "Wilt thou be angry at the word I speak,
 Antinous? I would willingly accept
 The kingly station if conferred by Zeus. 480
 Dost thou indeed regard it as the worst
 Of all conditions of mankind? Not so
 For him who reigns; his house grows opulent,
 And he the more is honored. Many kings
 Within the bounds of sea-girt Ithaca 485
 There are, both young and old, let any one
 Bear rule, since great Odysseus is no more;
 But I will be the lord of mine own house,
 And o'er my servants whom the godlike chief,
 Odysseus, brought from war, his share of spoil." 490
 Eurymachus, the son of Polybus,
 Addressed the youth in turn: "Assuredly,
 What man hereafter, of the Achaean race,
 Shall bear the rule o'er sea-girt Ithaca
 Rests with the gods. But thou shalt keep thy wealth, 495
 And may no son of violence come to make
 A spoil of thy possessions while men dwell
 In Ithaca. And now, my friend, I ask

Who was thy guest; whence came he, of what land
 Claims he to be, where do his kindred dwell 500
 And where his patrimonial acres lie?
 With tidings of thy father's near return
 Came he, or to receive a debt? How swift
 Was his departure, waiting not for us
 To know him! yet in aspect and in air 505
 He seemed to be no man of vulgar note."
 Telemachus, the prudent, answered thus:
 "My father's coming, O Eurymachus,
 Is to be hoped no more; nor can I trust
 Tidings from whatsoever part they come, 510
 Nor pay regard to oracles, although
 My mother send to bring a soothsayer
 Within the palace, and inquire of him.
 But this man was my father's guest; he comes
 From Taphos; Mentès is his name, a son 515
 Of the brave chief Anchialus; he reigns
 Over the Taphians, men who love the sea."
 He spake, but in his secret heart he knew
 The immortal goddess. Then the suitors turned.
 Delighted, to the dance and cheerful song, 520
 And waited for the evening. On their sports
 The evening with its shadowy blackness came;
 Then each to his own home withdrew to sleep,
 While to his lofty chamber, in full view,
 Built high in that magnificent palace home, 525
 Telemachus went up, and sought his couch,
 Intent on many thoughts. The chaste and sage
 Dame Eurycleia by his side went up
 With lighted torches—she a child of Ops,
 Pisenor's son. Her, in her early bloom, 530

Laertes purchased for a hundred beeves,
And in his palace honored equally
With his chaste wife; yet never sought her bed.
He would not wrong his queen. 'Twas she who bore
The torches with Telemachus. She loved 535
Her young lord more than all the other maids,
And she had nursed him in his tender years.
He opened now the chamber door and sat
Upon the couch, put his soft tunic off
And placed it in the prudent matron's hands. 540
She folded it and smoothed it, hung it near
To that fair bed, and, going quickly forth,
Pulled at the silver ring to close the door,
And drew the thong that moved the fastening bolt.
He, lapped in the soft fleeces, all night long. 545
Thought of the voyage Pallas had ordained.



BOOK II

Now when the Morning, child of Dawn, appeared, 1
The dear son of Odysseus left his bed
And put his garments on. His trenchant sword
He hung upon his shoulders, and made fast
His shapely sandals to his shining feet, 5
And issued from his chamber like a god.
At once he bade the clear-voiced heralds call
The long-haired Greeks to council. They obeyed;
Quickly the chiefs assembled, and when all
Were at the appointed place, Telemachus 10
Went to the council, bearing in his hand
A brazen spear, yet went he not alone.
Two swift dogs followed him, while Pallas shed
A heavenly beauty over him, and all
Admired him as he came. He took the seat 15
Of his great father, and the aged men
Made way for him. And then Aegyptius spake,
A hero bowed with age, who much had seen
And known. His son, the warlike Antiphus,
Went with the great Odysseus in his fleet 20
To courser-breeding Troy, and afterward