

Homer's *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey* is full of marvels, journeys, and domestic household scenes. It is more "popular" than the *Iliad*, less "sublime". Like the *Iliad*, it begins *in medias res* (in the middle of things), but its structure is far more complex because of its use of "flash-back".

The beginning of the *Odyssey* is in Olympus, where the gods describe the situation of Ulysses/Odysseus kept prisoner for almost ten years after the fall of Troy on the island of the nymph Calypso while his wife and son in Ithaka wonder if he is alive or dead. Athena goes to his son, Telemachus, and orders him to go on a journey looking for news of his father. The house of Penelope is invaded by suitors wanting to become her husband but she weaves an endless shroud for her father-in-law, saying she will remarry when it is finished. Telemachus sets out, and goes to visit Helen and Menelaus now reunited, to see if they have news. But nothing clear can be known about his father's fate.

Only in *Book 5* does the gods' messenger Hermes go to Calypso and order her to let Odysseus go. He makes a raft and sets out. He is almost shipwrecked on rocks but manages to land in an estuary. There he is found by the local princess Naussikaa, and brought to her home, the court of Alkinoos her father, who makes him welcome. During the evening he hears a minstrel sing a song of the wooden horse and the fall of Troy (*Book 8*) and he weeps. Asked why, he declares his identity and tells his tale.

Books 9-12 are the story of Odysseus's "Odyssey" from Troy to Calypso's island, told by him to Alkinoos: he and his companions avoid the dangers of the land of the Lotus-eaters and reach the Island of the one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus, son of Poseidon. They enter the cave in which he pens his sheep, not realizing what a monster he is. Finding them there, he makes them his prisoners and begins to eat them. Fortunately, Odysseus sees a way of escape. First he prepares a sharp stake of wood, then he makes Polyphemus drunk with wine. He tells Polyphemus that his name is 'Nobody'.

And now I drove the stake under a heap of ashes,
to bring it to a heat, and with my words
emboldened all my men, that none might flinch through fear.
Then when the olive stake, green though it was, was ready to take fire,
and through and through was all aglow, I snatched it from the fire,
while my men stood around
and Heaven inspired us with great courage.
Seizing the olive stake, sharp at the tip, they plunged it in his eye,
and I, perched up above, whirled it around.
As when a man bores shipbeams with a drill,
and those below keep it in motion with a strap held by the ends,
and steadily it runs; even so we seized the fire-pointed stake
and whirled it in his eye. Blood bubbled round the heated thing.
The vapor singed off all the lids around the eye, and even the brows,
as the ball burned and its roots crackled in the flame.
As when a smith dips a great axe or adze into cold water,
hissing loud, to temper it, for that is strength to steel,
so hissed his eye about the olive stake.
A hideous roar he raised; the rock resounded; we hurried off in terror.
He wrenched the stake from out his eye, all dabbled with the blood,
and flung it from his hands in frenzy.
Then he called loudly on the Cyclops who dwelt about him in the caves,
along the windy heights. They heard his cry, and ran from every side,
and standing by the cave they asked what ailed him:
"What has come on you, Polyphemus,
that you scream so in the immortal night,
and keep us thus from sleeping?
Is a man driving off your Hocks in spite of you?"

Is a man murdering you by craft or force?'
"Then in his turn from out the cave big Polyphemus answered:
'Friends, Nobody is murdering me by craft. Force there is none.'
"But answering him in winged words they said:
"If nobody harms you when you are left alone,
illness which comes from mighty Zeus you cannot fly.
But make your prayer to your father, lord Poseidon.'

Odysseus and his companions tie themselves under the bellies of the sheep.

"Soon as the early rosy-fingered dawn appeared,
the rams hastened to pasture,
but the ewes bleated un milked about the pens,
for their udders were well nigh bursting.
Their master, racked with grievous pains,
felt over the backs of all the sheep as they stood up,
but foolishly did not notice how under the breasts of the woolly sheep
men had been fastened.
After we were come a little distance from the cave and from the yard,
first from beneath the ram I freed myself
and then set free my comrades.
So at quick pace we drove away those long-legged sheep, heavy with fat,
many times turning round, until we reached the ship.
A welcome sight we seemed to our dear friends,
as men escaped from death.
Yet for the others they began to weep and wail;
but this I did not suffer; by my frowns I checked their tears.
Instead, I bade them straightway toss
the many fleecy sheep into the ship, and sail away over the briny water.
Quickly they came, took places at the pins,
and sitting in order smote the foaming water with their oars.
But when I was as far away as one can call,
I shouted to the Cyclops in derision: (...)
I called aloud out of an angry heart:
' Cyclops, if ever mortal man asks you
the story of the ugly blinding of your eye,
say that Odysseus made you blind, the spoiler of cities,
Laertes' son, whose home is Ithaca.'
"So I spoke, and with a groan he answered:
'Ah, surely now the ancient oracles are come upon me!
Here once a prophet lived, a prophet brave and tall,
Telemus, son of Eurymus,
who by his prophecies obtained renown
and in prophetic works grew old among the Cyclops.
He told me it should come to pass in aftertime
that I should lose my sight by means of one Odysseus;
but I was always watching
for the coming of some tall and comely person, arrayed in mighty power;
and now a little miserable feeble creature has blinded me of my eye,
overcoming me with wine. nevertheless,
come here, Odysseus, and let me give the stranger's gift,
and beg the famous Land-shaker to aid you on your way.

His son am I; he calls himself my father.
He, if he will, shall heal me; none else can,
whether among the blessed gods or mortal men.'
"So he spoke, and answering him said I:
'Ah, would I might as surely strip you of life and being
and send you to the house of Hades,
as it is sure the Earth-shaker will never heal your eye!'
"So I spoke, whereat he prayed to lord Poseidon,
stretching his hands forth toward the starry sky:
'Hear me, thou girder of the land, dark-haired Poseidon
If I am truly thine, and thou art called my father,
vouchsafe no coming home to this Odysseus,
spoil of cities, Laertes' son, whose home is Ithaca.
Yet if it be his lot to see his friends once more,
and reach his stately house and native land,
late let him come, in evil plight, with loss of all his crew,
on the vessel of a stranger,
and may he at his home find trouble.'

This curse, which inspires the enmity of the god Poseidon, is the explanation for all the disasters that befall Odysseus in his attempts to return home.

He continues with his tale, telling of the careless loss of the winds given by Aiolus, and the dangers of the witch Circe, able to turn men into swine, but who at last is forced to help Odysseus (*Book 10*); then comes the visit to the shades of the Underworld to consult the spirit of the wise Tiresias about the way home. There he meets Agamemnon and hears of the murderous way Clytemnestra and Aegisthus welcomed him on his return from Troy. He meets others of the dead, his mother too, from whom he learns that his father still lives (*Book 11*).

The Odyssey: BOOK 11 (Meeting with the dead)

THEN, when we had got down to the sea shore we drew our ship into the water and got her mast and sails into her; we also put the sheep on board and took our places, weeping and in great distress of mind. Circe, that great and cunning goddess, sent us a fair wind that blew dead aft and stayed steadily with us keeping our sails all the time well filled; so we did whatever wanted doing to the ship's gear and let her go as the wind and helmsman headed her. All day long her sails were full as she held her course over the sea, but when the sun went down and darkness was over all the earth, we got into the deep waters of the river Oceanus, where lie the land and city of the Cimmerians who live enshrouded in mist and darkness which the rays of the sun never pierce neither at his rising nor as he goes down again out of the heavens, but the poor wretches live in one long melancholy night. When we got there we beached the ship, took the sheep out of her, and went along by the waters of Oceanus till we came to the place of which Circe had told us.

"Here Perimedes and Eurylochus held the victims, while I drew my sword and dug the trench a cubit each way. I made a drink-offering to all the dead, first with honey and milk, then with wine, and thirdly with water, and I sprinkled white barley meal over the whole, praying earnestly to the poor feckless ghosts, and promising them that when I got back to Ithaca I would sacrifice a barren heifer for them, the best I had, and would load the pyre with good things. I also particularly promised that Teiresias should have a black sheep to himself, the best in all my flocks. When I had prayed sufficiently to the dead, I cut the throats of the two sheep and let the blood run into the trench, whereon the ghosts came trooping up from Erebus—brides, young bachelors, old men worn out with toil, maids who had been crossed in love, and brave men who had been killed in battle, with their armour still smirched with blood; they came from every quarter and flitted round the trench with a strange kind of screaming sound that made me turn pale with fear. When I saw them coming I told the men to be quick and flay the carcasses of the two dead sheep and make burnt offerings of them, and at the same time to repeat prayers to Hades and to Proserpine; but I sat where I was with my

sword drawn and would not let the poor feckless ghosts come near the blood till Teiresias should have answered my questions.

"The first ghost 'that came was that of my comrade Elpenor, for he had not yet been laid beneath the earth. We had left his body unwaked and unburied in Circe's house, for we had had too much else to do. I was very sorry for him, and cried when I saw him: 'Elpenor,' said I, 'how did you come down here into this gloom and darkness? You have arrived here on foot quicker than I have with my ship.'

"Sir,' he answered with a groan, 'it was all bad luck, and my own unspeakable drunkenness. I was lying asleep on the top of Circe's house, and never thought of coming down again by the great staircase but fell right off the roof and broke my neck, so my soul came down to the house of Hades. And now I beseech you by all those whom you have left behind you, though they are not here, by your wife, by the father who brought you up when you were a child, and by Telemachus who is the one hope of your house, do what I shall now ask you. I know that when you leave this limbo you will again hold your ship for the Aeaean island. Do not go thence leaving me unwaked and unburied behind you, or I may bring heaven's anger upon you; but burn me with whatever armour I have, build a barrow for me on the sea shore, that may tell people in days to come what a poor unlucky fellow I was, and plant over my grave the oar I used to row with when I was yet alive and with my messmates.' And I said, 'My poor fellow, I will do all that you have asked of me.'

"Thus, then, did we sit and hold sad talk with one another, I on the one side of the trench with my sword held over the blood, and the ghost of my comrade saying all this to me from the other side. Then came the ghost of my dead mother Anticlea, daughter to Autolycus. I had left her alive when I set out for Troy and was moved to tears when I saw her, but even so, for all my sorrow I would not let her come near the blood till I had asked my questions of Teiresias.

"Then came also the ghost of Theban Teiresias, with his golden sceptre in his hand. He knew me and said, 'Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, why, poor man, have you left the light of day and come down to visit the dead in this sad place? Stand back from the trench and withdraw your sword that I may drink of the blood and answer your questions truly.'

"So I drew back, and sheathed my sword, whereon when he had drank of the blood he began with his prophecy.

"You want to know,' said he, 'about your return home, but heaven will make this hard for you. I do not think that you will escape the eye of Neptune (Poseidon), who still nurses his bitter grudge against you for having blinded his son (Polyphemos). Still, after much suffering you may get home if you can restrain yourself and your companions when your ship reaches the Thrinacian island, where you will find the sheep and cattle belonging to the sun, who sees and gives ear to everything. If you leave these flocks unharmed and think of nothing but of getting home, you may yet after much hardship reach Ithaca; but if you harm them, then I forewarn you of the destruction both of your ship and of your men. Even though you may yourself escape, you will return in bad plight after losing all your men, in another man's ship, and you will find trouble in your house, which will be overrun by high-handed people, who are devouring your substance under the pretext of paying court and making presents to your wife.

"When you get home you will take your revenge on these suitors; and after you have killed them by force or fraud in your own house, you must take a well-made oar and carry it on and on, till you come to a country where the people have never heard of the sea and do not even mix salt with their food, nor do they know anything about ships, and oars that are as the wings of a ship. I will give you this certain token which cannot escape your notice. A wayfarer will meet you and will say it must be a winnowing shovel that you have got upon your shoulder; on this you must fix the oar in the ground and sacrifice a ram, a bull, and a boar to Neptune. Then go home and offer hecatombs to an the gods in heaven one after the other. As for yourself, death shall come to you from the sea, and your life shall ebb away very gently when you are full of years and peace of mind, and your people shall bless you. All that I have said will come true].'

"This,' I answered, 'must be as it may please heaven, but tell me and tell me and tell me true, I see my poor mother's ghost close by us; she is sitting by the blood without saying a word, and though I am her own son she does not remember me and speak to me; tell me, Sir, how I can make her know me.'

"That,' said he, 'I can soon do Any ghost that you let taste of the blood will talk with you like a reasonable being, but if you do not let them have any blood they will go away again.'

"On this the ghost of Teiresias went back to the house of Hades, for his prophecies had now been spoken, but I sat still where I was until my mother came up and tasted the blood. Then she knew me at once and spoke fondly to me, saying, 'My son, how did you come down to this abode of darkness while you are still alive? It is a hard thing for the living to see these places, for between us and them there are great and terrible waters, and there is Oceanus, which no man can cross on foot, but he must have a good ship to take him. Are you all this time trying to find your way home from Troy, and have you never yet got back to Ithaca nor seen your wife in your own house?'

"'Mother,' said I, 'I was forced to come here to consult the ghost of the Theban prophet Teiresias. I have never yet been near the Achaean land nor set foot on my native country, and I have had nothing but one long series of misfortunes from the very first day that I set out with Agamemnon for Ilium, the land of noble steeds, to fight the Trojans. But tell me, and tell me true, in what way did you die? Did you have a long illness, or did heaven vouchsafe you a gentle easy passage to eternity? Tell me also about my father, and the son whom I left behind me; is my property still in their hands, or has some one else got hold of it, who thinks that I shall not return to claim it? Tell me again what my wife intends doing, and in what mind she is; does she live with my son and guard my estate securely, or has she made the best match she could and married again?'

"My mother answered, 'Your wife still remains in your house, but she is in great distress of mind and spends her whole time in tears both night and day. No one as yet has got possession of your fine property, and Telemachus still holds your lands undisturbed. He has to entertain largely, as of course he must, considering his position as a magistrate, and how every one invites him; your father remains at his old place in the country and never goes near the town. He has no comfortable bed nor bedding; in the winter he sleeps on the floor in front of the fire with the men and goes about all in rags, but in summer, when the warm weather comes on again, he lies out in the vineyard on a bed of vine leaves thrown anyhow upon the ground. He grieves continually about your never having come home, and suffers more and more as he grows older. As for my own end it was in this wise: heaven did not take me swiftly and painlessly in my own house, nor was I attacked by any illness such as those that generally wear people out and kill them, but my longing to know what you were doing and the force of my affection for you—this it was that was the death of me.'

"Then I tried to find some way of embracing my mother's ghost. Thrice I sprang towards her and tried to clasp her in my arms, but each time she flitted from my embrace as it were a dream or phantom, and being touched to the quick I said to her, 'Mother, why do you not stay still when I would embrace you? If we could throw our arms around one another we might find sad comfort in the sharing of our sorrows even in the house of Hades; does Proserpine want to lay a still further load of grief upon me by mocking me with a phantom only?'

"'My son,' she answered, 'most ill-fated of all mankind, it is not Proserpine that is beguiling you, but all people are like this when they are dead. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together; these perish in the fierceness of consuming fire as soon as life has left the body, and the soul flits away as though it were a dream. Now, however, go back to the light of day as soon as you can, and note all these things that you may tell them to your wife hereafter.'

"Thus did we converse, and anon Proserpine sent up the ghosts of the wives and daughters of all the most famous men. They gathered in crowds about the blood, and I considered how I might question them severally. In the end I deemed that it would be best to draw the keen blade that hung by my sturdy thigh, and keep them from all drinking the blood at once. So they came up one after the other, and each one as I questioned her told me her race and lineage.

(. . . .)

"Then I saw Minos son of Jove with his golden sceptre in his hand sitting in judgement on the dead, and the ghosts were gathered sitting and standing round him in the spacious house of Hades, to learn his sentences upon them.

"After him I saw huge Orion in a meadow full of asphodel driving the ghosts of the wild beasts that he had killed upon the mountains, and he had a great bronze club in his hand, unbreakable for ever and ever.

"And I saw Tityus son of Gaia stretched upon the plain and covering some nine acres of ground. Two vultures on either side of him were digging their beaks into his liver, and he kept on trying to beat them off

with his hands, but could not; for he had violated Jove's mistress Leto as she was going through Panopeus on her way to Pytho.

"I saw also the dreadful fate of Tantalus, who stood in a lake that reached his chin; he was dying to quench his thirst, but could never reach the water, for whenever the poor creature stooped to drink, it dried up and vanished, so that there was nothing but dry ground—parched by the spite of heaven. There were tall trees, moreover, that shed their fruit over his head—pears, pomegranates, apples, sweet figs and juicy olives, but whenever the poor creature stretched out his hand to take some, the wind tossed the branches back again to the clouds.

"And I saw Sisyphus at his endless task raising his prodigious stone with both his hands. With hands and feet he' tried to roll it up to the top of the hill, but always, just before he could roll it over on to the other side, its weight would be too much for him, and the pitiless stone would come thundering down again on to the plain. Then he would begin trying to push it up hill again, and the sweat ran off him and the steam rose after him.

"After him I saw mighty Hercules, but it was his phantom only, for he is feasting ever with the immortal gods, and has lovely Hebe to wife, who is daughter of Jove and Juno. The ghosts were screaming round him like scared birds flying all whithers. He looked black as night with his bare bow in his hands and his arrow on the string, glaring around as though ever on the point of taking aim. About his breast there was a wondrous golden belt adorned in the most marvellous fashion with bears, wild boars, and lions with gleaming eyes; there was also war, battle, and death. The man who made that belt, do what he might, would never be able to make another like it. Hercules knew me at once when he saw me, and spoke piteously, saying, my poor Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, are you too leading the same sorry kind of life that I did when I was above ground? I was son of Jove, but I went through an infinity of suffering, for I became bondsman to one who was far beneath me—a low fellow who set me all manner of labours. He once sent me here to fetch the hell-hound—for he did not think he could find anything harder for me than this, but I got the hound out of Hades and brought him to him, for Mercury and Minerva helped me.'

"On this Hercules went down again into the house of Hades, but I stayed where I was in case some other of the mighty dead should come to me. And I should have seen still other of them that are gone before, whom I would fain have seen—Theseus and Pirithous glorious children of the gods, but so many thousands of ghosts came round me and uttered such appalling cries, that I was panic stricken lest Proserpine should send up from the house of Hades the head of that awful monster Gorgon. On this I hastened back to my ship and ordered my men to go on board at once and loose the hawsers; so they embarked and took their places, whereon the ship went down the stream of the river Oceanus. We had to row at first, but presently a fair wind sprang up.

The Odyssey: BOOK XII (Meeting with Circe)

"AFTER we were clear of the river Oceanus, and had got out into the open sea, we went on till we reached the Aeaean island where there is dawn and sunrise as in other places. We then drew our ship on to the sands and got out of her on to the shore, where we went to sleep and waited till day should break.

"Then, when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, I sent some men to Circe's house to fetch the body of Elpenor. We cut firewood from a wood where the headland jutted out into the sea, and after we had wept over him and lamented him we performed his funeral rites. When his body and armour had been burned to ashes, we raised a cairn, set a stone over it, and at the top of the cairn we fixed the oar that he had been used to row with.

"While we were doing all this, Circe, who knew that we had got back from the house of Hades, dressed herself and came to us as fast as she could; and her maid servants came with her bringing us bread, meat, and wine. Then she stood in the midst of us and said, 'You have done a bold thing in going down alive to the house of Hades, and you will have died twice, to other people's once; now, then, stay here for the rest of the day, feast your fill, and go on with your voyage at daybreak tomorrow morning. In the meantime I will tell Ulysses about your course, and will explain everything to him so as to prevent your suffering from misadventure either by land or sea.'

"We agreed to do as she had said, and feasted through the livelong day to the going down of the sun, but when the sun had set and it came on dark, the men laid themselves down to sleep by the stern cables of

the ship. Then Circe took me by the hand and bade me be seated away from the others, while she reclined by my side and asked me all about our adventures.

"So far so good,' said she, when I had ended my story, 'and now pay attention to what I am about to tell you—heaven itself, indeed, will recall it to your recollection. First you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If any one unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song. There is a great heap of dead men's bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. Therefore pass these Sirens by, and stop your men's ears with wax that none of them may hear; but if you like you can listen yourself, for you may get the men to bind you as you stand upright on a cross-piece half way up the mast, and they must lash the rope's ends to the mast itself, that you may have the pleasure of listening. If you beg and pray the men to unloose you, then they must bind you faster.

"When your crew have taken you past these Sirens, I cannot give you coherent directions as to which of two courses you are to take; I will lay the two alternatives before you, and you must consider them for yourself. On the one hand there are some overhanging rocks against which the deep blue waves of Amphitrite beat with terrific fury; the blessed gods call these rocks the Wanderers. Here not even a bird may pass, no, not even the timid doves that bring ambrosia to Father Jove, but the sheer rock always carries off one of them, and Father Jove has to send another to make up their number; no ship that ever yet came to these rocks has got away again, but the waves and whirlwinds of fire are freighted with wreckage and with the bodies of dead men. The only vessel that ever sailed and got through, was the famous Argo on her way from the house of Aetes, and she too would have gone against these great rocks, only that Juno piloted her past them for the love she bore to Jason.

"Of these two rocks the one reaches heaven and its peak is lost in a dark cloud. This never leaves it, so that the top is never clear not even in summer and early autumn. No man though he had twenty hands and twenty feet could get a foothold on it and climb it, for it runs sheer up, as smooth as though it had been polished. In the middle of it there is a large cavern, looking West and turned towards Erebus; you must take your ship this way, but the cave is so high up that not even the stoutest archer could send an arrow into it. Inside it Scylla sits and yelps with a voice that you might take to be that of a young hound, but in truth she is a dreadful monster and no one—not even a god—could face her without being terror-struck. She has twelve mis-shapen feet, and six necks of the most prodigious length; and at the end of each neck she has a frightful head with three rows of teeth in each, all set very close together, so that they would crunch any one to death in a moment, and she sits deep within her shady cell thrusting out her heads and peering all round the rock, fishing for dolphins or dogfish or any larger monster that she can catch, of the thousands with which Amphitrite teems. No ship ever yet got past her without losing some men, for she shoots out all her heads at once, and carries off a man in each mouth.

"You will find the other rocks lie lower, but they are so close together that there is not more than a bowshot between them. [A large fig tree in full leaf grows upon it], and under it lies the sucking whirlpool of Charybdis. Three times in the day does she vomit forth her waters, and three times she sucks them down again; see that you be not there when she is sucking, for if you are, Neptune himself could not save you; you must hug the Scylla side and drive ship by as fast as you can, for you had better lose six men than your whole crew.'

"Is there no way,' said I, 'of escaping Charybdis, and at the same time keeping Scylla off when she is trying to harm my men?'

"You dare-devil,' replied the goddess, you are always wanting to fight somebody or something; you will not let yourself be beaten even by the immortals. For Scylla is not mortal; moreover she is savage, extreme, rude, cruel and invincible. There is no help for it; your best chance will be to get by her as fast as ever you can, for if you dawdle about her rock while you are putting on your armour, she may catch you with a second cast of her six heads, and snap up another half dozen of your men; so drive your ship past her at full speed, and roar out lustily to Crataeis who is Scylla's dam, bad luck to her; she will then stop her from making a second raid upon you.

"You will now come to the Thrinacian island, and here you will see many herds of cattle and flocks of sheep belonging to the sun-god—seven herds of cattle and seven flocks of sheep, with fifty head in each flock. They do not breed, nor do they become fewer in number, and they are tended by the goddesses

Phaethusa and Lampetie, who are children of the sun-god Hyperion by Neaera. Their mother when she had borne them and had done suckling them sent them to the Thrinacian island, which was a long way off, to live there and look after their father's flocks and herds. If you leave these flocks unharmed, and think of nothing but getting home, you may yet after much hardship reach Ithaca; but if you harm them, then I forewarn you of the destruction both of your ship and of your comrades; and even though you may yourself escape, you will return late, in bad plight, after losing all your men.'

"Here she ended, and dawn enthroned in gold began to show in heaven, whereon she returned inland. I then went on board and told my men to loose the ship from her moorings; so they at once got into her, took their places, and began to smite the grey sea with their oars. Presently the great and cunning goddess Circe befriended us with a fair wind that blew dead aft, and stayed steadily with us, keeping our sails well filled, so we did whatever wanted doing to the ship's gear, and let her go as wind and helmsman headed her.

"Then, being much troubled in mind, I said to my men, 'My friends, it is not right that one or two of us alone should know the prophecies that Circe has made me, I will therefore tell you about them, so that whether we live or die we may do so with our eyes open. First she said we were to keep clear of the Sirens, who sit and sing most beautifully in a field of flowers; but she said I might hear them myself so long as no one else did. Therefore, take me and bind me to the crosspiece half way up the mast; bind me as I stand upright, with a bond so fast that I cannot possibly break away, and lash the rope's ends to the mast itself. If I beg and pray you to set me free, then bind me more tightly still.'

"I had hardly finished telling everything to the men before we reached the island of the two Sirens, for the wind had been very favourable. Then all of a sudden it fell dead calm; there was not a breath of wind nor a ripple upon the water, so the men furled the sails and stowed them; then taking to their oars they whitened the water with the foam they raised in rowing. Meanwhile I took a large wheel of wax and cut it up small with my sword. Then I kneaded the wax in my strong hands till it became soft, which it soon did between the kneading and the rays of the sun-god son of Hyperion. Then I stopped the ears of all my men, and they bound me hands and feet to the mast as I stood upright on the crosspiece; but they went on rowing themselves. When we had got within earshot of the land, and the ship was going at a good rate, the Sirens saw that we were getting in shore and began with their singing.

"'Come here,' they sang, 'renowned Ulysses, honour to the Achaean name, and listen to our two voices. No one ever sailed past us without staying to hear the enchanting sweetness of our song—and he who listens will go on his way not only charmed, but wiser, for we know all the ills that the gods laid upon the Argives and Trojans before Troy, and can tell you everything that is going to happen over the whole world.'

"They sang these words most musically, and as I longed to hear them further I made by frowning to my men that they should set me free; but they quickened their stroke, and Eurylochus and Perimedes bound me with still stronger bonds till we had got out of hearing of the Sirens' voices. Then my men took the wax from their ears and unbound me.

"Immediately after we had got past the island I saw a great wave from which spray was rising, and I heard a loud roaring sound. The men were so frightened that they loosed hold of their oars, for the whole sea resounded with the rushing of the waters, but the ship stayed where it was, for the men had left off rowing. I went round, therefore, and exhorted them man by man not to lose heart.

"'My friends,' said I, 'this is not the first time that we have been in danger, and we are in nothing like so bad a case as when the Cyclops shut us up in his cave; nevertheless, my courage and wise counsel saved us then, and we shall live to look back on all this as well. Now, therefore, let us all do as I say, trust in Jove and row on with might and main. As for you, coxswain, these are your orders; attend to them, for the ship is in your hands; turn her head away from these steaming rapids and hug the rock, or she will give you the slip and be over yonder before you know where you are, and you will be the death of us.'

"So they did as I told them; but I said nothing about the awful monster Scylla, for I knew the men would not go on rowing if I did, but would huddle together in the hold. In one thing only did I disobey Circe's strict instructions—I put on my armour. Then seizing two strong spears I took my stand on the ship's bows, for it was there that I expected first to see the monster of the rock, who was to do my men so much harm; but I could not make her out anywhere, though I strained my eyes with looking the gloomy rock all over and over

"Then we entered the Straits in great fear of mind, for on the one hand was Scylla, and on the other dread Charybdis kept sucking up the salt water. As she vomited it up, it was like the water in a cauldron

when it is boiling over upon a great fire, and the spray reached the top of the rocks on either side. When she began to suck again, we could see the water all inside whirling round and round, and it made a deafening sound as it broke against the rocks. We could see the bottom of the whirlpool all black with sand and mud, and the men were at their wit's ends for fear. While we were taken up with this, and were expecting each moment to be our last, Scylla pounced down suddenly upon us and snatched up my six best men. I was looking at once after both ship and men, and in a moment I saw their hands and feet ever so high above me, struggling in the air as Scylla was carrying them off, and I heard them call out my name in one last despairing cry. As a fisherman, seated, spear in hand, upon some jutting rock throws bait into the water to deceive the poor little fishes, and spears them with the ox's horn with which his spear is shod, throwing them gasping on to the land as he catches them one by one—even so did Scylla land these panting creatures on her rock and munch them up at the mouth of her den, while they screamed and stretched out their hands to me in their mortal agony. This was the most sickening sight that I saw throughout all my voyages.

"When we had passed the [Wandering] rocks, with Scylla and terrible Charybdis, we reached the noble island of the sun-god, where were the goodly cattle and sheep belonging to the sun Hyperion. While still at sea in my ship I could bear the cattle lowing as they came home to the yards, and the sheep bleating. Then I remembered what the blind Theban prophet Teiresias had told me, and how carefully Aeaean Circe had warned me to shun the island of the blessed sun-god. So being much troubled I said to the men, 'My men, I know you are hard pressed, but listen while I tell you the prophecy that Teiresias made me, and how carefully Aeaean Circe warned me to shun the island of the blessed sun-god, for it was here, she said, that our worst danger would lie. Head the ship, therefore, away from the island.'

But the sailors force him to land on to the island of the Sun whose cattle are sacred. There the sailors, hungry, kill the cattle despite previous warnings. The ship is wrecked, all die, only Odysseus survives by his skill, and arrives at the island of Calypso. So the story is brought in full circle.

Alkinoos equips him with a ship and the second half of the epic begins the story of the "Return of the Warrior", his arrival in Ithaka disguised with divine help (*Book 13*), finding hospitality in the home of the swineherd Eumaeus to whom he tells a false story of his identity. Telemachus now (*Book 14*) returns from his journey, suspicious of the suitors who have laid a trap, while Odysseus makes the swineherd talk about his parents and the past memories of himself (*Book 15*).

In *Book 16* Telemachus comes to Eumaeus' hut and Odysseus reveals his identity to him. Telemachus, then Odysseus, set out for the palace, Odysseus again disguised as a beggar. As Odysseus enters the courtyard, the old dog Argos recognizes his master:

As they were thus talking, a dog that had been lying asleep
raised his head and pricked up his ears.
This was Argos, whom Ulysses had bred before setting out for Troy,
but he had never had any work out of him.
In the old days he used to be taken out by the young men
when they went hunting wild goats, or deer, or hares,
but now that his master was gone he was lying neglected
on the heaps of mule and cow dung that lay in front of the stable doors
till the men should come and draw it away to manure the great close;
and he was full of fleas.
As soon as he saw Ulysses standing there,
he dropped his ears and wagged his tail,
but he could not get close up to his master.
When Ulysses saw the dog on the other side of the yard,
he dashed a tear from his eyes without Eumaeus seeing it, and said:
"Eumaeus, what a noble hound that is over yonder on the manure heap:
his build is splendid; is he as fine a fellow as he looks,
or is he only one of those dogs that come begging about a table,
and are kept merely for show?"

"This hound," answered Eumaeus, "belonged to him who has died in a far country. If he were what he was when Ulysses left for Troy, he would soon show you what he could do. There was not a wild beast in the forest that could get away from him when he was once on its tracks. But now he has fallen on evil times, for his master is dead and gone, and the women take no care of him. . ."

As he spoke he went inside the buildings to the cloister where the suitors were, but Argos died as soon as he had recognized his master. (From Book 17).

The suitors welcome the old man with mockery, until he almost kills one. The tone now changes to foreboding as Odysseus observes them and plans his revenge (*Book 18*), while Penelope comes down into the hall and shows her faithfulness by her attitude. Later that evening, Penelope returns to the hall and talks with the old man, telling him of her ploy with the weaving done by day, undone by night (*Book 19*). Odysseus tells her a tale of an encounter with Odysseus. Penelope is deeply moved. He tells her that Odysseus will soon be back. His former nurse, Eurycleia, comes to wash his feet and recognizes the scar of an old wound on his leg; he forces her to keep the secret. Penelope tells him her plan to test the suitors with his bow and arrows.

The responses of people to the wretched-looking Odysseus show their moral character; bad people show no human pity for the unfortunate. The scenes of *Book 20* stress this theme of judgement, of the difference between the cruel and the noble. In *Book 21*, Penelope fetches Odysseus' great bow, while he makes himself known to Eumaeus and the cowman Philoetius. The suitors try in vain to string the great bow, but get very angry when Odysseus asks to try too. Telemachus sends Penelope away, as the tension rises. Once all the women are away, and the doors bolted, Odysseus calmly strings the bow and shoots an arrow through the upright axes.

The slaughter of *Book 22* comes as a shock; it is a great conflict, not at all one-sided, although Athena's help is considerable. When all the suitors are dead, the women servants who have slept with them have to clear up the mess before being executed. The house has been purified. Meanwhile, Penelope has slept. In *Book 23* Eurycleia wakes her and announces Odysseus' return. Penelope is too prudent to believe her tale at once. She goes down to the hall and sits in silence opposite Odysseus, examining him carefully. He arranges for music so that the families of the dead men will not suspect something:

The house re-echoed with the sound of men and women dancing, and the people outside said, "I suppose the queen is getting married at last. She ought to be ashamed of herself for not continuing to protect her husband's property until he comes home." This was what they said, but they did not know what it was that had been happening.

The upper servant Eurynome washed and anointed Ulysses in his own house and gave him a shirt and cloak, while Minerva made him look taller and stronger than before; she also made the hair grow thick on the top of his head, and flow down in curls like hyacinth blossoms; she glorified him about the head and shoulders just as a skilful workman who has studied art of all kinds under Vulcan or Minerva- and his work is full of beauty- enriches a piece of silver plate by gilding it. He came from the bath looking like one of the immortals, and sat down opposite his wife on the seat he had left.

"My dear," said he, "heaven has endowed you with a heart more unyielding than woman ever yet had. No other woman could bear to keep away from her husband when he had come back to her after twenty years of absence, and after having gone through so much. But come, nurse, get a bed ready for me; I will sleep alone, for this woman has a heart as hard as iron."

"My dear," answered Penelope, "I have no wish to set myself up, nor to depreciate you; but I am not struck by your appearance, for I very well remember what kind of a man you were when you set sail from Ithaca. Nevertheless, Euryclea, take his bed outside the bed chamber that he himself built. Bring the bed

outside this room, and put bedding upon it with fleeces, good coverlets, and blankets."

She said this to try him, but Ulysses was very angry and said, "Wife, I am much displeased at what you have just been saying. Who has been taking my bed from the place in which I left it? He must have found it a hard task, no matter how skilled a workman he was, unless some god came and helped him to shift it. There is no man living, however strong and in his prime, who could move it from its place, for it is a marvellous curiosity which I made with my very own hands.

"There was a young olive growing within the precincts of the house, in full vigour, and about as thick as a bearing-post. I built my room round this with strong walls of stone and a roof to cover them, and I made the doors strong and well-fitting. Then I cut off the top boughs of the olive tree and left the stump standing. This I dressed roughly from the root upwards and then worked with carpenter's tools well and skilfully, straightening my work by drawing a line on the wood, and making it into a bed-prop. I then bored a hole down the middle, and made it the centre-post of my bed, at which I worked till I had finished it, inlaying it with gold and silver; after this I stretched a hide of crimson leather from one side of it to the other. So you see I know all about it, and I desire to learn whether it is still there, or whether any one has been removing it by cutting down the olive tree at its roots."

When she heard the sure proofs Ulysses now gave her, she fairly broke down. She flew weeping to his side, flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him. "Do not be angry with me Ulysses," she cried, "you, who are the wisest of mankind. We have suffered, both of us. Heaven has denied us the happiness of spending our youth, and of growing old, together; do not then be aggrieved or take it amiss that I did not embrace you thus as soon as I saw you. I have been shuddering all the time through fear that someone might come here and deceive me with a lying story; for there are many very wicked people going about. Jove's daughter Helen would never have yielded herself to a man from a foreign country, if she had known that the sons of Achaeans would come after her and bring her back. Heaven put it in her heart to do wrong, and she gave no thought to that sin, which has been the source of all our sorrows. Now, however, that you have convinced me by showing that you know all about our bed (which no human being has ever seen but you and I and a single maid servant, the daughter of Actor, who was given me by my father on my marriage, and who keeps the doors of our room) hard of belief though I have been I can mistrust no longer."

Then Ulysses in his turn melted, and wept as he clasped his dear and faithful wife to his bosom. As the sight of land is welcome to men who are swimming towards the shore, when Neptune has wrecked their ship with the fury of his winds and waves- a few alone reach the land, and these, covered with brine, are thankful when they find themselves on firm ground and out of danger- even so was her husband welcome to her as she looked upon him, and she could not tear her two fair arms from about his neck. Indeed they would have gone on indulging their sorrow till rosy-fingered morn appeared, had not Minerva determined otherwise, and held night back in the far west, while she would not suffer Dawn to leave Oceanus, nor to yoke the two steeds Lampus and Phaethon that bear her onward to break the day upon mankind.

Book 24 (which many think was not written by Homer, but it is necessary to end the story) begins with the arrival of the souls of the suitors in the Underworld, where they are welcomed by the soul of Agamemnon, stressing the contrast between his return and that of Odysseus. Odysseus sets out to visit his father, Laertes, and finds him working in the orchard, dressed in rags. He pretends not to know who he is, and again tells of having met Odysseus some years before. Laertes shows his sorrow, and Odysseus identifies himself, proving his identity by remembering details from his childhood. Meanwhile the Assembly has met to discuss the deaths. The truth is told but the majority demand revenge and march out. At the farmhouse, the family and friends arm themselves with courage. Fighting begins, but is stopped by Athena. Zeus too intervenes to restore peace under the rule of Odysseus.