

# The Odyssey

by Homer

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## Book I

In a council of the Gods, Minerva calls their attention to Ulysses, still a wanderer. They resolve to grant him a safe return to Ithaca. Minerva descends to encourage Telemachus, and in the form of Mentès directs him in what manner to proceed. Throughout this book the extravagance and profligacy of the suitors are occasionally suggested.

Muse make the man thy theme, for shrewdness famed  
And genius versatile, who far and wide  
A Wand'rer, after Ilium overthrown,  
Discover'd various cities, and the mind  
And manners learn'd of men, in lands remote.  
He num'rous woes on Ocean toss'd, endured,  
Anxious to save himself, and to conduct  
His followers to their home; yet all his care  
Preserved them not; they perish'd self-destroy'd  
By their own fault; infatuate! who devoured  
10 The oxen of the all-o'erseeing Sun,

And, punish'd for that crime, return'd no more.  
Daughter divine of Jove, these things record,  
As it may please thee, even in our ears.  
The rest, all those who had perdition 'scaped  
By war or on the Deep, dwelt now at home;  
Him only, of his country and his wife  
Alike desirous, in her hollow grots  
Calypso, Goddess beautiful, detained  
Wooing him to her arms. But when, at length,  
20 (Many a long year elapsed) the year arrived  
Of his return (by the decree of heav'n)  
To Ithaca, not even then had he,  
Although surrounded by his people, reach'd  
The period of his suff'rings and his toils.  
Yet all the Gods, with pity moved, beheld  
His woes, save Neptune; He alone with wrath  
Unceasing and implacable pursued  
Godlike Ulysses to his native shores.  
But Neptune, now, the Æthiopians fought,  
30 (The Æthiopians, utmost of mankind,  
These Eastward situate, those toward the West)  
Call'd to an hecatomb of bulls and lambs.  
There sitting, pleas'd he banqueted; the Gods  
In Jove's abode, meantime, assembled all,  
'Midst whom the Sire of heav'n and earth began.  
For he recall'd to mind Ægisthus slain  
By Agamemnon's celebrated son  
Orestes, and retracing in his thought

That dread event, the Immortals thus address'd.  
40 Alas! how prone are human-kind to blame  
The Pow'rs of Heav'n! From us, they say, proceed  
The ills which they endure, yet more than Fate  
Herself inflicts, by their own crimes incur.  
So now Ægisthus, by no force constrained  
Of Destiny, Atrides' wedded wife  
Took to himself, and him at his return  
Slew, not unwarn'd of his own dreadful end  
By us: for we commanded Hermes down  
The watchful Argicide, who bade him fear  
50 Alike, to slay the King, or woo the Queen.  
For that Atrides' son Orestes, soon  
As grown mature, and eager to assume  
His sway imperial, should avenge the deed.  
So Hermes spake, but his advice moved not  
Ægisthus, on whose head the whole arrear  
Of vengeance heap'd, at last, hath therefore fall'n.  
Whom answer'd then Pallas cærulean-eyed.  
Oh Jove, Saturnian Sire, o'er all supreme!  
And well he merited the death he found;  
60 So perish all, who shall, like him, offend.  
But with a bosom anguish-rent I view  
Ulysses, hapless Chief! who from his friends  
Remote, affliction hath long time endured  
In yonder woodland isle, the central boss  
Of Ocean. That retreat a Goddess holds,  
Daughter of sapient Atlas, who the abyss

Knows to its bottom, and the pillars high  
Himself upbears which sep'rate earth from heav'n.  
His daughter, there, the sorrowing Chief detains,  
70 And ever with smooth speech insidious seeks  
To wean his heart from Ithaca; meantime  
Ulysses, happy might he but behold  
The smoke ascending from his native land,  
Death covets. Canst thou not, Olympian Jove!  
At last relent? Hath not Ulysses oft  
With victims slain amid Achaia's fleet  
Thee gratified, while yet at Troy he fought?  
How hath he then so deep incensed thee, Jove?  
To whom, the cloud-assembler God replied.  
80 What word hath pass'd thy lips, Daughter below'd?  
Can I forget Ulysses? Him forget  
So noble, who in wisdom all mankind  
Excels, and who hath sacrific'd so oft  
To us whose dwelling is the boundless heav'n?  
Earth-circling Neptune-He it is whose wrath  
Pursues him ceaseless for the Cyclops' sake  
Polypheme, strongest of the giant race,  
Whom of his eye Ulysses hath deprived.  
For Him, Thoösa bore, Nymph of the sea  
90 From Phorcys sprung, by Ocean's mighty pow'r  
Impregnated in caverns of the Deep.  
E'er since that day, the Shaker of the shores,  
Although he slay him not, yet devious drives  
Ulysses from his native isle afar.

Yet come-in full assembly his return  
Contrive we now, both means and prosp'rous end;  
So Neptune shall his wrath remit, whose pow'r  
In contest with the force of all the Gods  
Exerted single, can but strive in vain.  
100 To whom Minerva, Goddess azure-eyed.  
Oh Jupiter! above all Kings enthroned!  
If the Immortals ever-blest ordain  
That wise Ulysses to his home return,  
Dispatch we then Hermes the Argicide,  
Our messenger, hence to Ogygia's isle,  
Who shall inform Calypso, nymph divine,  
Of this our fixt resolve, that to his home  
Ulysses, toil-enduring Chief, repair.  
Myself will hence to Ithaca, meantime,  
110 His son to animate, and with new force  
Inspire, that (the Achaians all convened  
In council,) he may, instant, bid depart  
The suitors from his home, who, day by day,  
His num'rous flocks and fatted herds consume.  
And I will send him thence to Sparta forth,  
And into sandy Pylus, there to hear  
(If hear he may) some tidings of his Sire,  
And to procure himself a glorious name.  
This said, her golden sandals to her feet  
120 She bound, ambrosial, which o'er all the earth  
And o'er the moist flood waft her fleet as air,  
Then, seizing her strong spear pointed with brass,

In length and bulk, and weight a matchless beam,  
With which the Jove-born Goddess levels ranks  
Of Heroes, against whom her anger burns,  
From the Olympian summit down she flew,  
And on the threshold of Ulysses' hall  
In Ithaca, and within his vestibule  
Apparent stood; there, grasping her bright spear,  
130 *Mentes*<sup>u</sup> she seem'd, the hospitable Chief  
Of Taphos' isle-she found the haughty throng  
The suitors; they before the palace gate  
With iv'ry cubes sported, on num'rous hides  
Reclined of oxen which themselves had slain.  
The heralds and the busy menials there  
Minister'd to them; these their mantling cups  
With water slaked; with bibulous sponges those  
Made clean the tables, set the banquet on,  
And portioned out to each his plenteous share.  
140 Long ere the rest Telemachus himself  
Mark'd her, for sad amid them all he sat,  
Pourtraying in deep thought contemplative  
His noble Sire, and questioning if yet  
Perchance the Hero might return to chase  
From all his palace that imperious herd,  
To his own honour lord of his own home.  
Amid them musing thus, sudden he saw  
The Goddess, and sprang forth, for he abhorr'd  
To see a guest's admittance long delay'd;  
150 Approaching eager, her right hand he seized,

The brazen spear took from her, and in words  
With welcome wing'd Minerva thus address'd.  
Stranger, all hail! to share our cordial love  
Thou com'st; the banquet finish'd, thou shalt next  
Inform me wherefore thou hast here arrived.  
So saying, toward the spacious hall he moved,  
Follow'd by Pallas, and, arriving soon  
Beneath the lofty roof, placed her bright spear  
Within a pillar's cavity, long time  
160 The armoury where many a spear had stood,  
Bright weapons of his own illustrious Sire.  
Then, leading her toward a footstool'd throne  
Magnificent, which first he overspread  
With linen, there he seated her, apart  
From that rude throng, and for himself disposed  
A throne of various colours at her side,  
Lest, stunn'd with clamour of the lawless band,  
The new-arrived should loth perchance to eat,  
And that more free he might the stranger's ear  
170 With questions of his absent Sire address,  
And now a maiden charg'd with golden ew'r,  
And with an argent laver, pouring first  
Pure water on their hands, supplied them, next,  
With a resplendent table, which the chaste  
Directress of the stores furnish'd with bread  
And dainties, remnants of the last regale.  
Then, in his turn, the sewer<sup>21</sup> with sav'ry meats,  
Dish after dish, served them, of various kinds,

And golden cups beside the chargers placed,  
180 Which the attendant herald fill'd with wine.  
Ere long, in rush'd the suitors, and the thrones  
And couches occupied, on all whose hands  
The heralds pour'd pure water; then the maids  
Attended them with bread in baskets heap'd,  
And eager they assail'd the ready feast.  
At length, when neither thirst nor hunger more  
They felt unsatisfied, to new delights  
Their thoughts they turn'd, to song and sprightly dance,  
Enlivening sequel of the banquet's joys.  
190 An herald, then, to Phemius' hand consign'd  
His beauteous lyre; he through constraint regaled  
The suitors with his song, and while the chords  
He struck in prelude to his pleasant strains,  
Telemachus his head inclining nigh  
To Pallas' ear, lest others should his words  
Witness, the blue-eyed Goddess thus bespake.  
My inmate and my friend! far from my lips  
Be ev'ry word that might displease thine ear!  
The song—the harp, — what can they less than charm  
200 These wantons? who the bread unpurchased eat  
Of one whose bones on yonder continent  
Lie mould'ring, drench'd by all the show'rs of heaven,  
Or roll at random in the billowy deep.  
Ah! could they see him once to his own isle  
Restored, both gold and raiment they would wish  
Far less, and nimbleness of foot instead.



But He, alas! hath by a wretched fate,  
Past question perish'd, and what news soe'er  
We hear of his return, kindles no hope  
210 In us, convinced that he returns no more.  
But answer undissembling; tell me true;  
Who art thou? whence? where stands thy city? where  
Thy father's mansion? In what kind of ship  
Cam'st thou? Why steer'd the mariners their course  
To Ithaca, and of what land are they?  
For that on foot thou found'st us not, is sure.  
This also tell me, hast thou now arrived  
New to our isle, or wast thou heretofore  
My father's guest? Since many to our house  
220 Resorted in those happier days, for he  
Drew pow'rful to himself the hearts of all.  
Then Pallas thus, Goddess cærulean-eyed.  
I will with all simplicity of truth  
Thy questions satisfy. Behold in me  
Mentes, the offspring of a Chief renown'd  
In war, Anchialus; and I rule, myself,  
An island race, the Taphians oar-expert.  
With ship and mariners I now arrive,  
Seeking a people of another tongue  
230 Athwart the gloomy flood, in quest of brass  
For which I barter steel, ploughing the waves  
To Temesa. My ship beneath the woods  
Of Neïus, at yonder field that skirts  
Your city, in the haven Rhethrus rides.

We are hereditary guests; our Sires  
Were friends long since; as, when thou seest him next,  
The Hero old Laertes will avouch,  
Of whom, I learn, that he frequents no more  
The city now, but in sequester'd scenes  
240 Dwells sorrowful, and by an antient dame  
With food and drink supplied oft as he feels  
Refreshment needful to him, while he creeps  
Between the rows of his luxuriant vines.  
But I have come drawn hither by report,  
Which spake thy Sire arrived, though still it seems  
The adverse Gods his homeward course retard.  
For not yet breathless lies the noble Chief,  
But in some island of the boundless flood  
Resides a prisoner, by barbarous force  
250 Of some rude race detained reluctant there.  
And I will now foreshow thee what the Gods  
Teach me, and what, though neither augur skill'd  
Nor prophet, I yet trust shall come to pass.  
He shall not, henceforth, live an exile long  
From his own shores, no, not although in bands  
Of iron held, but will ere long contrive  
His own return; for in expedients, framed  
With wond'rous ingenuity, he abounds.  
But tell me true; art thou, in stature such,  
260 Son of himself Ulysses? for thy face  
And eyes bright-sparkling, strongly indicate  
Ulysses in thee. Frequent have we both

Conversed together thus, thy Sire and I,  
Ere yet he went to Troy, the mark to which  
So many Princes of Achaia steer'd.  
Him since I saw not, nor Ulysses me.  
To whom Telemachus, discrete, replied.  
Stranger! I tell thee true; my mother's voice  
Affirms me his, but since no mortal knows  
270 His derivation, I affirm it not.  
Would I had been son of some happier Sire,  
Ordain'd in calm possession of his own  
To reach the verge of life. But now, report  
Proclaims me his, whom I of all mankind  
Unhappiest deem.-Thy question is resolved.  
Then answer thus Pallas blue-eyed return'd.  
From no ignoble race, in future days,  
The Gods shall prove thee sprung, whom so endow'd  
With ev'ry grace Penelope hath borne.  
280 But tell me true. What festival is this?  
This throng-whence are they? wherefore hast thou need  
Of such a multitude? Behold I here  
A banquet, or a nuptial? for these  
Meet not by contribution<sup>[3]</sup> to regale,  
With such brutality and din they hold  
Their riotous banquet! a wise man and good  
Arriving, now, among them, at the sight  
Of such enormities would much be wroth.  
To whom replied Telemachus discrete.  
290 Since, stranger! thou hast ask'd, learn also this.

While yet Ulysses, with his people dwelt,  
His presence warranted the hope that here  
Virtue should dwell and opulence; but heav'n  
Hath cast for us, at length, a diff'rent lot,  
And he is lost, as never man before.  
For I should less lament even his death,  
Had he among his friends at Ilium fall'n,  
Or in the arms of his companions died,  
Troy's siege accomplish'd. Then his tomb the Greeks  
300 Of ev'ry tribe had built, and for his son,  
He had immortal glory atchieved; but now,  
By harpies torn inglorious, beyond reach  
Of eye or ear he lies; and hath to me  
Grief only, and unceasing sighs bequeath'd.  
Nor mourn I for his sake alone; the Gods  
Have plann'd for me still many a woe beside;  
For all the rulers of the neighbour isles,  
Samos, Dulichium, and the forest-crown'd  
Zacynthus, others also, rulers here  
310 In craggy Ithaca, my mother seek  
In marriage, and my household stores consume.  
But neither she those nuptial rites abhorr'd,  
Refuses absolute, nor yet consents  
To end them; they my patrimony waste  
Meantime, and will not long spare even me.  
To whom, with deep commiseration pang'd,  
Pallas replied. Alas! great need hast thou  
Of thy long absent father to avenge

These num'rous wrongs; for could he now appear  
320 There, at yon portal, arm'd with helmet, shield,  
And grasping his two spears, such as when first  
I saw him drinking joyous at our board,  
From Ilus son of Mermeris, who dwelt  
In distant Ephyre, just then return'd,  
(For thither also had Ulysses gone  
In his swift bark, seeking some pois'nous drug  
Wherewith to taint his brazen arrows keen,  
Which drug through fear of the eternal Gods  
Ilus refused him, and my father free  
330 Gave to him, for he loved him past belief)  
Could now, Ulysses, clad in arms as then,  
Mix with these suitors, short his date of life  
To each, and bitter should his nuptials prove.  
But these events, whether he shall return  
To take just vengeance under his own roof,  
Or whether not, lie all in the Gods lap.  
Meantime I counsel thee, thyself to think  
By what means likeliest thou shalt expel  
These from thy doors. Now mark me: close attend.  
340 To-morrow, summoning the Grecian Chiefs  
To council, speak to them, and call the Gods  
To witness that solemnity. Bid go  
The suitors hence, each to his own abode.  
Thy mother-if her purpose be resolved  
On marriage, let her to the house return  
Of her own potent father, who, himself,

Shall furnish forth her matrimonial rites,  
And ample dow'r, such as it well becomes  
A darling daughter to receive, bestow.  
350 But hear me now; thyself I thus advise.  
The prime of all thy ships preparing, mann'd  
With twenty rowers, voyage hence to seek  
Intelligence of thy long-absent Sire.  
Some mortal may inform thee, or a word,<sup>[4]</sup>  
Perchance, by Jove directed (safest source  
Of notice to mankind) may reach thine ear.  
First voyaging to Pylus, there enquire  
Of noble Nestor; thence to Sparta tend,  
To question Menelaus amber-hair'd,  
360 Latest arrived of all the host of Greece.  
There should'st thou learn that still thy father lives,  
And hope of his return, although  
Distress'd, thou wilt be patient yet a year.  
But should'st thou there hear tidings that he breathes  
No longer, to thy native isle return'd,  
First heap his tomb; then with such pomp perform  
His funeral rites as his great name demands,  
And make thy mother's spousals, next, thy care.  
These duties satisfied, delib'rate last  
370 Whether thou shalt these troublers of thy house  
By stratagem, or by assault, destroy.  
For thou art now no child, nor longer may'st  
Sport like one. Hast thou not the proud report  
Heard, how Orestes hath renown acquired

With all mankind, his father's murderer  
Ægisthus slaying, the deceiver base  
Who slaughter'd Agamemnon? Oh my friend!  
(For with delight thy vig'rous growth I view,  
And just proportion) be thou also bold,  
380 And merit praise from ages yet to come.  
But I will to my vessel now repair,  
And to my mariners, whom, absent long,  
I may perchance have troubled. Weigh thou well  
My counsel; let not my advice be lost.  
To whom Telemachus discrete replied.  
Stranger! thy words bespeak thee much my friend,  
Who, as a father teaches his own son,  
Hast taught me, and I never will forget.  
But, though in haste thy voyage to pursue,  
390 Yet stay, that in the bath refreshing first  
Thy limbs now weary, thou may'st sprightlier seek  
Thy gallant bark, charged with some noble gift  
Of finish'd workmanship, which thou shalt keep  
As my memorial ever; such a boon  
As men confer on guests whom much they love.  
Then Pallas thus, Goddess cærulean-eyed.  
Retard me not, for go I must; the gift  
Which liberal thou desirest to bestow,  
Give me at my return, that I may bear  
400 The treasure home; and, in exchange, thyself  
Expect some gift equivalent from me.  
She spake, and as with eagle-wings upborne,

Vanish'd incontinent, but him inspired  
With daring fortitude, and on his heart  
Dearer remembrance of his Sire impress'd  
Than ever. Conscious of the wond'rous change,  
Amazed he stood, and, in his secret thought  
Revolving all, believed his guest a God.  
The youthful Hero to the suitors then  
410 Repair'd; they silent, listen'd to the song  
Of the illustrious Bard: he the return  
Deplorable of the Achaian host  
From Ilium by command of Pallas, sang.  
Penelope, Icarius' daughter, mark'd  
Meantime the song celestial, where she sat  
In the superior palace; down she came,  
By all the num'rous steps of her abode;  
Not sole, for two fair handmaids follow'd her.  
She then, divinest of her sex, arrived  
420 In presence of that lawless throng, beneath  
The portal of her stately mansion stood,  
Between her maidens, with her lucid veil  
Her lovely features mantling. There, profuse  
She wept, and thus the sacred bard bespake.  
Phemius! for many a sorrow-soothing strain  
Thou know'st beside, such as exploits record  
Of Gods and men, the poet's frequent theme;  
Give them of those a song, and let themselves  
Their wine drink noiseless; but this mournful strain  
430 Break off, unfriendly to my bosom's peace,



And which of all hearts nearest touches mine,  
With such regret my dearest Lord I mourn,  
Rememb'ring still an husband praised from side  
To side, and in the very heart of Greece.

Then answer thus Telemachus return'd.

My mother! wherefore should it give thee pain  
If the delightful bard that theme pursue  
To which he feels his mind impell'd? the bard  
Blame not, but rather Jove, who, as he wills,  
440 Materials for poetic art supplies.

No fault is his, if the disastrous fate  
He sing of the Achaians, for the song  
Wins ever from the hearers most applause  
That has been least in use. Of all who fought  
At Troy, Ulysses hath not lost, alone,  
His day of glad return; but many a Chief  
Hath perish'd also. Seek thou then again  
Thy own apartment, spindle ply and loom,  
And task thy maidens; management belongs  
450 To men of joys convivial, and of men  
Especially to me, chief ruler here.

She heard astonish'd; and the prudent speech  
Reposing of her son deep in her heart,  
Again with her attendant maidens sought  
Her upper chamber. There arrived, she wept  
Her lost Ulysses, till Minerva bathed  
Her weary lids in dewy sleep profound.  
Then echoed through the palace dark-bedimm'd

With evening shades the suitors boist'rous roar,  
460 For each the royal bed burn'd to partake,  
Whom thus Telemachus discrete address'd.  
All ye my mother's suitors, though addict  
To contumacious wrangling fierce, suspend  
Your clamour, for a course to me it seems  
More decent far, when such a bard as this,  
Godlike, for sweetness, sings, to hear his song.  
To-morrow meet we in full council all,  
That I may plainly warn you to depart  
From this our mansion. Seek ye where ye may  
470 Your feasts; consume your own; alternate feed  
Each at the other's cost; but if it seem  
Wisest in your account and best, to eat  
Voracious thus the patrimonial goods  
Of one man, rend'ring no account of all,<sup>[5]</sup>  
Bite to the roots; but know that I will cry  
Ceaseless to the eternal Gods, in hope  
That Jove, for retribution of the wrong,  
Shall doom you, where ye have intruded, there  
To bleed, and of your blood ask no account.  
480 He ended, and each gnaw'd his lip, aghast  
At his undaunted hardiness of speech.  
Then thus Antinoüs spake, Eupithes' son.  
Telemachus! the Gods, methinks, themselves  
Teach thee sublimity, and to pronounce  
Thy matter fearless. Ah forbid it, Jove!  
That one so eloquent should with the weight

Of kingly cares in Ithaca be charged,  
A realm, by claim hereditary, thine.  
Then prudent thus Telemachus replied.  
490 Although my speech Antinoüs may, perchance,  
Provoke thee, know that I am not averse  
From kingly cares, if Jove appoint me such.  
Seems it to thee a burthen to be fear'd  
By men above all others? trust me, no,  
There is no ill in royalty; the man  
So station'd, waits not long ere he obtain  
Riches and honour. But I grant that Kings  
Of the Achaians may no few be found  
In sea-girt Ithaca both young and old,  
500 Of whom since great Ulysses is no more,  
Reign whoso may; but King, myself, I am  
In my own house, and over all my own  
Domestics, by Ulysses gained for me.  
To whom Eurymachus replied, the son  
Of Polybus. What Grecian Chief shall reign  
In sea-girt Ithaca, must be referr'd  
To the Gods' will, Telemachus! meantime  
Thou hast unquestionable right to keep  
Thy own, and to command in thy own house.  
510 May never that man on her shores arrive,  
While an inhabitant shall yet be left  
In Ithaca, who shall by violence wrest  
Thine from thee. But permit me, noble Sir!  
To ask thee of thy guest. Whence came the man?

What country claims him? Where are to be found  
His kindred and his patrimonial fields?  
Brings he glad tidings of thy Sire's approach  
Homeward? or came he to receive a debt  
Due to himself? How swift he disappear'd!  
520 Nor opportunity to know him gave  
To those who wish'd it; for his face and air  
Him speak not of Plebeian birth obscure.  
Whom answered thus Telemachus discrete.  
Eurymachus! my father comes no more.  
I can no longer now tidings believe,  
If such arrive; nor he'd I more the song  
Of sooth-sayers whom my mother may consult.  
But this my guest hath known in other days  
My father, and he came from Taphos, son  
530 Of brave Anchialus, Mentis by name,  
And Chief of the sea-practis'd Taphian race.  
So spake Telemachus, but in his heart  
Knew well his guest a Goddess from the skies.  
Then they to dance and heart-enlivening song  
Turn'd joyous, waiting the approach of eve,  
And dusky evening found them joyous still.  
Then each, to his own house retiring, sought  
Needful repose. Meantime Telemachus  
To his own lofty chamber, built in view  
540 Of the wide hall, retired; but with a heart  
In various musings occupied intense.  
Sage Euryclea, bearing in each hand