

The Iliad

The name means "The Tale of Troy" (called Ilium/Ilion). Yet the main subject, Homer says, is the "Wrath of Achilles". The poem moves between the Achaian (Greek) army, led by Agamemnon, and the Trojan forces under Priam and his sons; it shows the sway of fortunes, and also the conflicts between the gods which influence events. But the greatness of the epic lies in its intense humanity. It is divided into 24 books. At the beginning, already many years have passed since the Greeks first arrived to attack Troy. The poem begins with an invocation that was later imitated by Milton:

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus,
that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans.
Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades,
and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures,
for so were the counsels of Jove fulfilled
from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men,
and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.
And which of the gods was it that set them on to quarrel?
It was the son of Jove and Leto; for he was angry with the king
and sent a pestilence upon the host to plague the people,
because the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses his priest.

Books 1-8 tell how Agamemnon, obliged to return to her father a girl he has captured, forces the Greeks to let him take from Achilles a Trojan girl he has taken. Achilles is offended and withdraws from the fighting, spending the days sitting in his tent with his friend Patroklos. The fighting continues, with attacks from both sides, and at the centre of all stands the figure of Helen who comes down to see the battles from the walls of Troy, where the old men sit:

All grave old men, and soldiers they had been, but for age
Now left the wars; yet Councillors they were exceeding sage.
And as in well-grown woods, on trees, cold spiny grasshoppers
Sit chirping and send voices out that scarce can pierce our ears
For softness and their weak faint sounds, so talking on the tower
These seniors of the people sat, who, when they saw the power
Of beauty in the Queen ascend, even those cold-spirited peers,
Those wise and almost withered men found this heat in their years
That they were forced, tho whispering, to say: What man can blame
The Greeks and Trojans to endure, for so admired a Dame,
So many miseries, and so long?...
(From Chapman's Homer iii. 159-69)

The Iliad describes many battles, and keeps including the varied responses of the gods who try to interfere in various ways. The theme of destiny is always present. One of the most touching scenes in the poem comes in Book 6 as Hector's wife Andromache urges him not to go out to fight, convinced that he is doomed to die:

Hector hurried from the house when she had done speaking,
and went down the streets by the same way that he had come.

When he had gone through the city and had reached the Scaean gates through which he would go out on to the plain, his wife came running towards him, Andromache, daughter of great Eetion who ruled in Thebes under the wooded slopes of Mt. Placus, and was king of the Cilicians. His daughter had married Hector, and came to meet him with a nurse who carried his little child in her bosom- a mere babe. Hector's darling son, and lovely as a star. Hector smiled as he looked upon the boy, but he did not speak, Andromache stood by him weeping and taking his hand in her own.

"Dear husband," said she, "your valour will bring you to destruction; think on your infant son, and on my hapless self who ere long shall be your widow- for the Achaeans will set upon you in a body and kill you. It would be better for me, should I lose you, to lie dead and buried, for I shall have nothing left to comfort me when you are gone, only sorrow. I have neither father nor mother now. Achilles slew my father when he sacked Thebes. He slew him, but did not for very shame despoil him; when he had burned him in his wondrous armour, he raised a barrow over his ashes and the mountain nymphs, daughters of Jove, planted a grove of elms about his tomb. I had seven brothers but on the same day they all went within the house of Hades. Achilles killed them as they were with their sheep and cattle. My mother- who had been queen of all the land under Mt. Placus- he brought hither with the spoil, and freed her for a great sum, but the archer-queen Diana took her in the house of your father. Hector, who to me are father, mother, brother, and dear husband- have mercy upon me; stay here upon this wall; make not your child fatherless, and your wife a widow; as for the host, place them near the fig-tree, where the city can be best scaled, and the wall is weakest. Thrice have the bravest of them come thither and assailed it, under the two Ajaxes, Idomeneus, the sons of Atreus, and the brave son of Tydeus, either of their own bidding, or because some soothsayer had told them."

And Hector answered, "Wife, I too have thought upon all this, but with what face should I look upon the Trojans, men or women, if I shirked battle like a coward? I cannot do it: I know nothing save to fight bravely in the forefront of the Trojan host and win renown alike for my father and myself. I know that the day will surely come when mighty Ilius shall be destroyed with Priam and his people, but I grieve for none of these- not even for Hecuba, nor King Priam, nor for my brothers who may fall in the dust before their foes- for none of these do I grieve as for yourself when the day shall come on which the Achaeans shall rob you for ever of your freedom, and bear you weeping away. It may be that you will have to ply the loom in Argos at the bidding of a mistress, or to fetch water, treated brutally by some cruel task-master; then will one say who sees you weeping, 'She was wife to Hector, the bravest warrior among the Trojans

during the war before Ilius.' On this your tears will break forth anew for him who would have put away the day of captivity from you. May I lie dead under the barrow that is heaped over my body ere I hear you cry as they carry you into bondage." He stretched his arms towards his child, but the boy cried and nestled in his nurse's bosom, scared at the sight of his father's armour, and at the horse-hair plume that nodded fiercely from his helmet. His father and mother laughed to see him, but Hector took the helmet from his head and laid it all gleaming on the ground. Then he took his darling child, kissed him, and dandled him in his arms, praying over him the while to Jove and to all the gods.

"Jove," he cried, "grant that this my child may be even as myself, chief among the Trojans; let him be not less excellent in strength, and let him rule Ilius with his might. Then may one say of him as he comes from battle, 'The son is far better than the father.' May he bring back the blood-stained spoils of him whom he has laid low, and let his mother's heart be glad." With this he laid the child again in the arms of his wife, who took him to her own soft bosom, smiling through her tears. As her husband watched her his heart yearned towards her and he caressed her fondly, saying, "My own wife, do not take these things too bitterly to heart. No one can hurry me down to Hades before my time, but if a man's hour is come, be he brave or be he coward, there is no escape for him when he has once been born. Go, then, within the house, and busy yourself with your daily duties, your loom, your distaff, and the ordering of your servants; for war is man's matter, and mine above all others of them that have been born in Ilius."

He took his plumed helmet from the ground, and his wife went back again to her house, weeping bitterly and often looking back towards him. When she reached her home she found her maidens within, and bade them all join in her lament; so they mourned Hector in his own house though he was yet alive, for they deemed that they should never see him return safe from battle, and from the furious hands of the Achaeans.

By the end of Book 8 the Greeks are in great disorder, many have died, they have been forced back and Zeus too seems to be their enemy.

In Book 9, Agamemnon calls an Assembly and accepts to apologize to Achilles and make amends, if only he will come back into the fighting. Only he can save them. Achilles rejects the offer, insisting that Agamemnon should be humiliated still more. He is wrong, but he persists. As a result, when the fighting resumes next day, the Trojans beat back the Greeks as far as the place where their ships lie on the shore, wounding Agamemnon, Odysseus, and many others. Zeus, meanwhile, has fallen asleep in Hera's arms (Book 14) and the gods sympathetic to the Greeks give what help they can, but when Zeus awakes (Book 15) he intervenes to give the Trojans the upper hand.

In Book 16 Patroklos comes weeping to Achilles and begs to be allowed to go and help the Greeks. At that moment the Trojans set fire to one of the Greek ships, Achilles agrees and Patroklos leads out Achilles' Myrmidons, the Trojans are driven back. But Apollo disarms Patroklos and Hector kills him. Patroklos had been wearing Achilles own armour; this Hector strips off, and Trojans and Greeks fight for control of the body (Book 17).

Achilles hears news of his friend's death, and his mother, the sea-spirit Thetis, comes to comfort him. She tells him that if he kills Hector, he will also die soon after. He only demands new armour. Thetis goes to Olympus and asks Hephaestus to make it; meanwhile Achilles frightens back the Trojans merely by walking in their sight while Athena screams in support. While Achilles mourns his friend and washes his body, the shield is made in heaven, richly decorated and described at great length. (Book 18)

First he shaped the shield so great and strong, adorning it all over
and binding it round with a gleaming circuit in three layers;
and the baldric was made of silver.
He made the shield in five thicknesses,
and with many a wonder did his cunning hand enrich it.
He wrought the earth, the heavens, and the sea;
the moon also at her full and the untiring sun,
with all the signs that glorify the face of heaven-
the Pleiades, the Hyads, huge Orion, and the Bear,
which men also call the Wain and which turns round ever in one place,
facing Orion, and alone never dips into the stream of Oceanus.
He wrought also two cities, fair to see and busy with the hum of men.
In the one were weddings and wedding-feasts, and they were
going about the city with brides whom they were escorting by
torchlight from their chambers. Loud rose the cry of Hymen,
and the youths danced to the music of flute and lyre,
while the women stood each at her house door to see them.

Achilles now enters the combat, and all must run or die. Even the river he fills with the dead; when the river itself attacks him, it is overcome (Book 21). All the Trojans take refuge in the city, only Hector stands at the gates, waiting for Achilles. Priam and his mother beg him to come in, in vain. The fight begins, at last the gods join in the fight, Hector is killed and Achilles drags his body round the walls of Troy, while his parents lament. Achilles lays the body of Hector in the dust beside that of Patroklos, and they prepare the funeral of his friend. The Greeks prepare wood for the pyre, Achilles sacrifices animals and Trojan captives, and after Iris has summoned the winds, the pyre blazes all night. The next day there are funeral games (Book 23)

The last stage (Book 24) involves the body of Hector, preserved by the gods. Priam goes alone, by night, to Achilles to beg for his son's body. He enters the Greek camp unseen, thanks to the help of the god Hermes.

The old man went straight into the house
where Achilles, loved of the gods, was sitting.
There he found him with his men seated at a distance from him:

only two, the hero Automedon, and Alcimus of the race of Mars,
were busy in attendance about his person,
for he had but just done eating and drinking,
and the table was still there.

King Priam entered without their seeing him,
and going right up to Achilles he clasped his knees
and kissed the dread murderous hands
that had slain so many of his sons.

As when some cruel spite has befallen a man
that he should have killed some one in his own country,
and must fly to a great man's protection in a land of strangers,
and all marvel who see him,
even so did Achilles marvel as he beheld Priam.

The others looked one to another and marvelled also,
but Priam besought Achilles saying,

"Think of your father, O Achilles like unto the gods,
who is such even as I am, on the sad threshold of old age.

It may be that those who dwell near him harass him,
and there is none to keep war and ruin from him.

Yet when he hears of you being still alive, he is glad,
and his days are full of hope

that he shall see his dear son come home to him from Troy;
but I, wretched man that I am, had the bravest in all Troy for my sons,
and there is not one of them left.

I had fifty sons when the Achaeans came here;
nineteen of them were from a single womb,
and the others were borne to me by the women of my household.

The greater part of them has fierce Mars laid low,
and Hector, him who was alone left,
him who was the guardian of the city and ourselves,
him have you lately slain;

therefore I am now come to the ships of the Achaeans
to ransom his body from you with a great ransom.

Fear, O Achilles, the wrath of heaven; think on your own father
and have compassion upon me, who am the more pitiable,
for I have steeled myself

as no man yet has ever steeled himself before me,
and have raised to my lips the hand of him who slew my son."

Thus spoke Priam,
and the heart of Achilles yearned as he thought of his own father.
He took the old man's hand and moved him gently away.

The two wept bitterly-
Priam, as he lay at Achilles' feet, weeping for Hector,
and Achilles now for his father and now for Patroclus,
till the house was filled with their lamentation.

But when Achilles was now sated with grief
and had unburdened the bitterness of his sorrow,
he left his seat and raised the old man by the hand,

in pity for his white hair and beard;
then he said, "Unhappy man, you have indeed been greatly daring;
how could you venture to come alone to the ships of the Achaeans,
and enter the presence of him who has slain so many of your brave sons?
You must have iron courage: sit now upon this seat,
and for all our grief we will hide our sorrows in our hearts,
for weeping will not avail us.
The immortals know no care,
yet the lot they spin for man is full of sorrow;
on the floor of Jove's palace there stand two urns,
the one filled with evil gifts, and the other with good ones.
He for whom Jove the lord of thunder mixes the gifts he sends,
will meet now with good and now with evil fortune;
but he to whom Jove sends none but evil gifts
will be pointed at by the finger of scorn,
the hand of famine will pursue him to the ends of the world,
and he will go up and down the face of the earth,
respected neither by gods nor men.
Even so did it befall Peleus;
the gods endowed him with all good things from his birth upwards,
for he reigned over the Myrmidons
excelling all men in prosperity and wealth,
and mortal though he was they gave him a goddess for his bride.
But even on him too did heaven send misfortune,
for there is no race of royal children born to him in his house,
save one son who is doomed to die all untimely;
nor may I take care of him now that he is growing old,
for I must stay here at Troy to be the bane of you and your children.

Achilles accepts Priam's ransom, has Hector's body washed and laid on the cart, then offers Priam hospitality.

As soon as they had had enough to eat and drink,
Priam, descendant of Dardanus,
marvelled at the strength and beauty of Achilles
for he was as a god to see, and Achilles marvelled at Priam
as he listened to him and looked upon his noble presence.
When they had gazed their fill Priam spoke first.
"And now, O king," he said, "take me to my couch
that we may lie down and enjoy the blessed boon of sleep.
Never once have my eyes been closed
from the day your hands took the life of my son;
I have grovelled without ceasing in the mire of my stable-yard,
making moan and brooding over my countless sorrows.
Now, moreover, I have eaten bread and drunk wine;
hitherto I have tasted nothing."
As he spoke Achilles told his men and the women-servants
to set beds in the room that was in the gatehouse,
and make them with good red rugs,

and spread coverlets on the top of them
with woollen cloaks for Priam and Idaeus to wear.
So the maids went out carrying a torch
and got the two beds ready in all haste.
Then Achilles said laughingly to Priam, "Dear sir, you shall lie outside,
lest some counsellor
of those who in due course keep coming to advise with me
should see you here in the darkness of the flying night,
and tell it to Agamemnon.
This might cause delay in the delivery of the body.
And now tell me and tell me true, for how many days
would you celebrate the funeral rites of noble Hector?
Tell me, that I may hold aloof from war and restrain the host."
And Priam answered,
"Since, then, you suffer me to bury my noble son with all due rites,
do thus, Achilles, and I shall be grateful.
You know how we are pent up within our city;
it is far for us to fetch wood from the mountain,
and the people live in fear.
Nine days, therefore, will we mourn Hector in my house;
on the tenth day we will bury him
and there shall be a public feast in his honour;
on the eleventh we will build a mound over his ashes,
and on the twelfth, if there be need, we will fight."
Achilles answered, "All, King Priam, shall be as you have said.
I will stay our fighting for as long a time as you have named."

For ten days the fighting is suspended while the Trojans prepare the pyre, cremate the body, and bury Hector's ashes. There the *Iliad* ends.

The Odyssey

The spirit of the *Iliad* is heroic, most of its action is violent fighting and slaughter. The *Odyssey* is quite different, 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 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 in Ithaca is invaded by suitors wanting to become her husband. Telemachus sets out, and goes to visit Helen and Menelaus now reunited, to see if they have news. But nothing clear can be known.

Only in Book 5 does 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 he is brought by the goddess Athena to her home, the court of Alkinoos her father, who makes him welcome. The next day they play and enjoy themselves together, then during the evening he hears the minstrel sing a song of the wooden horse and the fall of Troy (Book 8) and he weeps.

And then,
when they'd had their heart's fill of food and drink,
quick-witted Odysseus said to Demodocus the singer of tales:

“Demodocus, to you I give high praise,
more so than to all other mortal men, 610
whether it was that child of Zeus, the Muse,
who taught you, or Apollo. For you sing
so well and with such true expressiveness
about the destiny of the Achaeans,
everything they did and suffered, the work [490]
they had to do—as if you yourself were there
or heard the story from a man who was.
Come, change the subject now, and sing about
the building of that wooden horse, the one
Epeius made with guidance from Athena. 620
Lord Odysseus then, with his trickery,
had it brought to the citadel, filled with men,
those who ransacked Troy. If, at my request,
you will recite the details of this story,
I'll tell all men how, of his own free will,
god gives poetic power to your song.”

Odysseus spoke. And the minstrel, inspired by god, [500]
began to sing to them, taking up the story
at the point where Argives, having burned their huts
and gone on board their well-oared ships, were sailing off, 630
while those warriors led by glorious Odysseus
were at Troy's meeting ground, hidden in the horse.⁷
Trojans had dragged the horse all by themselves
inside their citadel. It stood there, while Trojans
sat and talked around it, confused what they should do.
There were three different options people favoured—
to split the hollow wood apart with pitiless bronze,
or drag it to the heights and throw it from the rocks,
or let it stay there as a great offering to the gods,
something to assuage their anger. And that, indeed, 640 [510]
is what they finally did, for it was their fate
to be wiped out once they had within their city walls
a gigantic wooden horse in which lay hidden
all the finest Argives, bringing into Troy
death and destruction. Then Demodocus sang
how Achaea's sons left their hollow hiding place,

poured from the horse, and then destroyed the city.
He sang about the various ways those warriors
laid waste that lofty city and how Odysseus,
like Ares, god of war, and godlike Menelaus
went to the home of Deiphobus, where, he said,
Odysseus battled in the most horrendous fight,
from which he then emerged at last victorious,
thanks to assistance from Athena's mighty heart.

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That was the tale the celebrated minstrel sang.
Odysseus was moved to weep—below his eyes
his face grew wet with tears. Just as a woman cries,
when she prostrates herself on her dear husband
who has just been killed in front of his own city
and his people, trying to save his children
and the citizens from the day they meet their doom—
as he dies, she sees him gasping his last breath,
embraces him, and screams out her laments,
while at her back her enemies keep beating her,
with spears across her spine and shoulders,
then lead her off, cheeks ravaged by her grief,
into a life of bondage, misery, and pain—
that's how Odysseus let tears of pity fall
from his eyes then. But he concealed those tears
from all of them except Alcinous, who,
as he sat there beside him, was the only one
who noticed and could hear his heavy sighs.
So he spoke out at once, addressing his Phaeacians,
lovers of the sea.

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“Listen to me,
you Phaeacian counsellors and leaders.
Let Demodocus cease from playing now
his clear-toned lyre, for the song he sings
does not please all his listeners alike.
Since our godlike minstrel was first moved to sing,
as we were dining, our guest has been in pain,
his mournful sighs have never stopped. His heart,
I think, must surely overflow with grief.
Then let our singer end his song, so all of us,
both hosts and guest, can enjoy our feasting.
Things will be much better. We've done all this—
the farewell dinner and the friendship gifts,
offered up with love—in honour of our guest.
To any man with some intelligence,
a stranger coming as a suppliant
brings the same delight a brother does.
And you, our guest, should no longer hide
behind those cunning thoughts of yours and skirt

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the things I ask you. It's better to be frank.
 Tell me your name, what they call you at home— [550]
 your mother and your father and the others,
 those in the town and in the countryside.
 There's no one in the world, mean or noble,
 who goes without a name once he's been born.
 Parents give one to each of us at birth.
 Tell me your country and your people, 700
 your city, too, so ships can take you there,
 using what they know to chart their passage.
 Phaeacians have no pilots, no steering oar,
 like other boats, for their ships on their own
 can read men's hearts and thoughts—they know
 all men's cities, their rich estates, as well, [560]
 and quickly skim across wide tracts of sea,
 concealed in mist and clouds, without a fear
 of shipwrecks or disaster. Still, my father,
 Nausithous, once told me this story— 710
 he used to say we made Poseidon angry
 because we carried everyone in safety.
 He claimed that one day, as a well-built ship
 with a Phaeacian crew was sailing back
 from such a trip, over the misty sea,
 Poseidon would destroy it and then place
 a massive ring of mountains round our city.
 That's what the old man said. It's up to god [570]
 to make that happen or leave it undone,
 whatever he finds pleasing to his heart. 720
 So come, tell me this, and speak the truth—
 Where have you travelled in your wanderings?
 What men's countries have you visited?
 Tell me of people and their well-built towns,
 whether they are cruel, unjust, and savage,
 or welcome strangers and fear god in their hearts.
 Tell us why you weep, your heart full of pain,
 to hear the fate of Argives and Danaans,
 and of Troy. Gods made these things happen.
 They spun out that destructive thread for men, 730
 to weave a song for those as yet unborn. [580]
 Was someone in your family killed at Troy—
 a good and loyal man, a son-in-law,
 your wife's father, one of those we truly love
 after our flesh and blood? A companion?
 A fine and worthy man dear to your heart?
 For a companion who's a heart's true friend
 is every bit as dear as one's own brother."
 Resourceful Odysseus then replied to Alcinous:

“Lord Alcinous, most renowned of men,

it is indeed a truly splendid thing
 to listen to a singer such as this,
 whose voice is like a god's. For I say
 there's nothing gives one more delight
 than when joy grips entire groups of men
 who sit in proper order in a hall
 feasting and listening to a singer,
 with tables standing there beside them 10
 laden with bread and meat, as the steward
 draws wine out of the mixing bowl, moves round, [10]
 and fills the cups. To my mind this seems
 the finest thing there is. But your heart
 wants to ask about my grievous sorrows,
 so I can weep and groan more than before.
 What shall I tell you first? Where do I stop?
 For the heavenly gods have given me
 so much distress. Well, I will make a start
 by telling you my name. Once you know that, 20
 if I escape the painful day of death,
 then later I can welcome you as guests,
 though I live in a palace far away.
 I am Odysseus, son of Laertes,
 well known to all for my deceptive skills—
 my fame extends all the way to heaven. [20]
 I live in Ithaca, a land of sunshine.
 From far away one sees a mountain there,
 thick with whispering trees, Mount Neriton,
 and many islands lying around it 30
 close together—Dulichium, Same,
 forested Zacynthus. Ithaca itself,
 low in the sea, furthest from the mainland,
 lies to the west—while those other islands
 are a separate group, closer to the Dawn
 and rising Sun. It's a rugged island,
 but nurtures fine young men. And in my view,
 nothing one can see is ever sweeter
 than a glimpse of one's own native land.
 When Calypso, that lovely goddess, tried 40
 to keep me with her in her hollow caves,
 longing for me to be her husband, [30]
 or when, in the same way, the cunning witch
 Aeaean Circe held me in her home
 filled with keen desire I'd marry her,
 they never won the heart here in my chest.
 That's how true it is there's nothing sweeter
 than a man's own country and his parents,
 even if he's living in a wealthy home,
 but in a foreign land away from those 50
 who gave him life. But come, I'll tell you

of the miserable journey back which Zeus
arranged for me when I returned from Troy.¹

Books 9-12 are therefore the story of Odysseus's "Odyssey" from Troy to Calypso's island, told by him in "flashback" to Alkinoos: they 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 it was 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 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 prophetic Tiresias on the way home. There he meets Agamemnon and hears of the 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). Then they travel on past Scylla and Charybdis, past the Sirens whose song entices, and on to the island of the Sun whose cattle are sacred. There the sailors, hungry, kill the cattle. The ship is wrecked, all die, only Odysseus survives by his skill, and arrives at the island of Calypso.

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 Ithaca 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 finally reveals his identity to him, on the orders of the goddess Athena.

Athena
touched Odysseus with her golden wand. To start with,
she placed a well-washed cloak around his body,
then made him taller and restored his youthful looks.
His skin grew dark once more, his countenance filled out, 220
and the beard around his chin turned black again.
Once she'd done this, Athena left. But Odysseus
returned into the hut. His dear son was amazed.
He turned his eyes away, afraid it was a god,
and spoke to him—his words had wings: [180]

"Stranger,
you look different to me than you did before—

you're wearing different clothes, your skin has changed.
You're one of the gods who hold wide heaven.
If so, be gracious, so we can give you
pleasing offerings, well-crafted gifts of gold. 230
But spare us."

Long-suffering lord Odysseus
then answered him and said:

"I'm not one of the gods.
Why do you compare me to immortals?
But I am your father, on whose account
you grieve and suffer so much trouble,
having to endure men's acts of violence."

He spoke, then kissed his son. A tear ran down his cheek [190]
onto the ground—till then he'd held himself in check.
But Telemachus, who could not yet believe
it was his father, spoke to him again, saying: 240

"You cannot be Odysseus, my father.
No. Some spirit has cast a spell on me,
to make me lament and grieve even more.
There's no way a mortal man could plan this
with his own wits, unless some god himself
came by, who could, if he so desired,
make him young or old quite easily.
Not long ago you wore filthy clothing
and were an old man. But now you're like
the gods who hold wide heaven." 250 [200]

Then resourceful Odysseus answered him and said:

"Telemachus, it's not appropriate for you
to be overly surprised your father
is back home or to be too astonished.
You can rest assured—no other Odysseus
will ever be arriving. I am here.
I've endured a lot in many wanderings,
and now, in the twentieth year, I've come back
to my native land. This present business,
you should know, is forager Athena's work. 260
She's made me look like this—it's what she wants,
and she has power—in one moment,
like a beggar, and in another one,
a young man with fine clothes around his body. [210]
It's easy for the gods who hold wide heaven
to glorify or else debase a man."

Once he'd said this, he sat down, and Telemachus
embraced his noble father, cried out, and shed tears.
A desire to lament arose in both of them—
they wailed aloud, as insistently as birds,
like sea eagles or hawks with curving talons
whose young have been carried off by country folk
before they're fully fledged. That's how both men then
let tears of pity fall from underneath their eyelids.

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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" Odysseus 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 that 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.