

THE CICONES AND THE LOTUS EATERS


It took Odysseus ten years to reach home. When he and his contingent left Troy, they came to the Thracian city of Ismarus, home of the Cicones, which they sacked before being driven off. They had spared Maron, priest of Apollo, in their attack, and he in return gave them twelve jars of fragrant red wine, which was to prove its value later. They were driven southward by a storm to the land of the lotus eaters. Here their reception was friendly but no less dangerous, for whoever ate of the fruit of the lotus forgot everything and wanted only to stay where he was, eating lotus fruit. Odysseus got his men away, even those who had tasted the fruit, and sailed to the land of the Cyclopes.

THE CYCLOPES

The Cyclopes were one-eyed giants, herdsman, living each in his own cave. One of them was Polyphemus, son of Poseidon, whose cave Odysseus and twelve picked companions entered. In the cave were sheep and lambs, cheeses, and other provisions, to which they helped themselves while waiting for the return of the cave's owner. When Polyphemus returned with his flocks, he shut the entrance of the cave with a huge stone, and then caught sight of the visitors, two of whom he ate for his supper. He breakfasted on two more the next day and another two when he returned the second evening.

Now Odysseus had with him some of the wine of Maron, and with this he made Polyphemus drunk; he told him his name was Nobody (*Outis*), and the giant, in return for the excellent wine, promised that he would reward Nobody by eating him last. He then fell asleep. Odysseus sharpened a wooden stake and heated it in the fire; then he and his surviving men drove it into the solitary eye of the sleeping giant. As he cried out in agony the other Cyclopes came running to the cave's entrance, only to hear the cry "Nobody is killing me," so that they assumed that not much was wrong and left Polyphemus alone.

Next morning Polyphemus, now blind, removed the stone at the entrance and let his flocks out, feeling each animal as it passed. But Odysseus had tied his men each to the undersides of three sheep, and himself clung to the belly of the biggest ram; so he and his men escaped. As Odysseus sailed away, he shouted his real name to the Cyclopes, who hurled the top of a mountain at him and nearly wrecked the ship. Polyphemus had long before been warned of Odysseus, and as he recognized the name he prayed to his father Poseidon (*Odyssey* 9. 530–535):

 Grant that Odysseus may not return home, but if it is fated for him once more to see those he loves and reach his home and country, then let him arrive after many years, in distress, without his companions, upon another's ship, and may he find trouble in his house.

The prayer was heard.



The Blinding of Polyphemus. Proto-Attic vase from Eleusis, mid-seventh century B.C.; height of vase 56 in., of neck 15 in. Odysseus (painted in white) and his companions drive a long pole into the eye of the Cyclops, who holds the cup of wine that has made him drunk. This brutal scene is one of the earliest "free" vase-paintings after the Geometric period. (Eleusis, Museum. Photograph courtesy of Hirmer Verlag, München.)

AEOLUS AND THE LAESTRYGONIANS

Odysseus, reunited with the rest of his fleet, next reached the floating island of Aeolus, keeper of the winds, who lived with his six sons, who were married to his six daughters. After he had entertained Odysseus, Aeolus gave him as a parting gift a leather bag containing all the winds and showed him which one to release so as to reach home. Thus he sailed back to Ithaca and was within reach of land when he fell asleep. His men, believing that the bag contained gold that

Odysseus was keeping for himself, opened it, and all the winds rushed out and blew the ships back to Aeolus' island. Aeolus refused to help them any more, reasoning that they must be hated by the gods. Odysseus and his men sailed on to the land of the Laestrygonians. They sank all Odysseus' ships except his own and ate up the crews. So Polyphemus' curse was already working, and Odysseus sailed away with his solitary ship.

CIRCE

He reached the island of Aeaëa, the home of the witch Circe, daughter of the Sun. Odysseus divided his men into two groups; he stayed behind with the one while the other, twenty-three men in all, went to visit the ruler of the island.



Circe and Her Lovers in a Landscape, by Dosso Dossi (ca. 1479–1542). Oil on canvas, ca. 1525; $39\frac{1}{2} \times 53\frac{1}{2}$ in. Dossi was court painter to the dukes of Ferrara, where Ariosto composed his poem *Orlando Furioso*, whose Alcina is probably the origin of Dossi's Circe. She points to an inscribed tablet, and on the ground lies an open book of magic, whereas Homer's Circe used a wand and drugs to transform her victims. The exquisite landscape is populated by peaceful animals and birds, far different from Homer's wolves and lions and the swine into which she turned Odysseus' men. (Samuel H. Kress Collection, © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

They found Circe with various animals around her, and they themselves (except for Eurylochus, who brought the news back to Odysseus) became pigs when they ate her food, swine in appearance and sound, but still having human minds.⁹ As Odysseus went to rescue his men, he encountered the god Hermes, who told him how to counter Circe's charms and gave him as an antidote the magic herb *moly*, whose "root is black and flower as white as milk." So he ate Circe's food unharmed and threatened her with his sword when she tried to turn him into a pig. She recognized him and instead made love to him. She then set a feast before him, which he would not touch before he had made her change his men back into their human shape. Odysseus lived with Circe for a year and by her begot a son, Telegonus. At the end of a year Odysseus, urged on by his men, asked Circe to send him on his way home. She agreed, but told him that he first had to go to the Underworld and there learn the way home from the prophet Tiresias.

THE NEKUIA

Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, which tells of Odysseus' experiences in the Underworld, is generally referred to as the Book of the Dead or the *Nekuia*, the name of the rite by which ghosts were summoned and questioned. Odysseus' visit to the Underworld is a conquest of death, the most formidable struggle a hero has to face. The hero who can return from the house of Hades alive has achieved all that a mortal can achieve. The *Nekuia* of Odysseus is different in one important respect from its most famous imitation: in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas actually descends to the Underworld and himself passes through it (see pp. 339–348), whereas Odysseus goes to the entrance and there performs the ritual sacrifice that summons up the spirits of the dead. Passages that tell of Odysseus' journey from Aea to the Underworld, his performance of the rite, and his conversations with a number of the ghosts are translated at length at the beginning of Chapter 15; here we provide a summary of his visit.

Following Circe's directions, Odysseus sailed with his men to the western limit of the world. As he performed the ritual sacrifice at the entrance to the world of the dead, many ghosts came, among them Tiresias, who foretold the disasters that yet awaited Odysseus on his journey. He would reach home, but alone and after many years. At Ithaca he would find the arrogant suitors pressing Penelope hard and wasting his substance. But he would kill them all, and he would have still more travels ahead of him before death came.

From Tiresias, Odysseus also learned that the spirits with whom he wished to speak must be allowed to drink the blood of the sacrificial victim; the others he kept away by threatening them with his sword. Among the ghosts who appeared and spoke were those of Odysseus' mother, Anticlea, and of Agamemnon, Achilles, and Ajax, son of Telamon. Achilles said that "he would rather be

a slave to a poor man on earth than be king over all the souls of the dead." Ajax would not answer Odysseus a word, for he still was grieved by his loss in the contest for Achilles' arms.

Eventually Odysseus left the house of Hades for fear that the Gorgon's head (which turns all whom it beholds to stone) might appear. He rejoined his men and sailed back to Aeaea.

THE SIRENS, THE PLANCTAE, CHARYBDIS, AND SCYLLA

Circe sent him on his way after warning him of the dangers that lay ahead. First were the Sirens (said by Homer to be two in number, but by other authors to be more). To Homer they were human in form, but in popular tradition they were birdlike, with women's heads. From their island meadow they would lure passing sailors onto the rocks; all around them were the whitened bones of their victims. Odysseus sailed by them unharmed, stopping his men's ears with wax.



Odysseus and the Sirens. Athenian red-figure stamnos, ca. 450 B.C.; height 13³/₄ in. Odysseus, lashed to the mast, safely hears the song of the Sirens as his men row by, their ears plugged with wax. Two Sirens (winged creatures with human heads) stand on cliffs, while a third plunges headlong into the sea. The artist, by the dramatic angle of Odysseus' head, expresses the hero's longing to be free of his bonds, and the turned head of the oarsman on the right and the helmsman's gesture add further tension to the scene. (*British Museum, London. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees.*)

while he had himself bound to the ship's mast so that he could not yield to the irresistible beauty of the Sirens' song.

The next danger was the two wandering rocks (Planctae) between which one ship only, the *Argo*, had ever safely passed. Odysseus avoided them by sailing close to two high cliffs; in the lower of these lived Charybdis (she is not described by Homer), who three times a day sucked in the water of the strait and spouted it upward again. To sail near that cliff was certain destruction, and Odysseus chose as the lesser evil the higher cliff where was the cave of Scylla, daughter of the sea deity Phorcys. Originally a sea-nymph, she had been changed through the jealousy of Poseidon's wife Amphitrite into a monster with a girdle of six dogs' heads and with twelve feet, by means of which she would snatch sailors from passing ships. From Odysseus' ship she snatched six men, whom she ate in her cave. Odysseus and the rest of the crew were unharmed.

THE CATTLE OF THE SUN

Last, Circe told Odysseus of the island of Thrinacia, where Helius (the Sun) pastured his herds of cattle and sheep; she strictly warned Odysseus not to touch a single one of the animals if he and his men wished ever to return to Ithaca. But Odysseus' men could not show such restraint after weeks of being detained by adverse winds, and while he was sleeping they killed some of the cattle for food. Helius complained to Zeus, and as a punishment for the sacrilege of killing the god's cattle Zeus raised a storm when the ship set sail and hurled a thunderbolt at it. The ship sank, and all the men were drowned except for Odysseus, who escaped, floating on the mast and part of the keel.

After the wreck, Odysseus drifted back to Charybdis, where he avoided death by clinging to a tree growing on the cliff until the whirlpool propelled his mast to the surface after sucking it down.

CALYPSO

Odysseus drifted over the sea to Ogygia, the island home of Calypso, daughter of Atlas, with whom he lived for seven years. Although she loved him and offered to make him immortal, he could not forget Penelope. Finally, after Hermes brought her the express orders of Zeus, Calypso helped Odysseus build a raft and sail away.

THE PHAEACIANS

Even now Odysseus was not free from disaster; Poseidon saw him as he approached Scheria (the island of the Phaeacians) and shattered the raft with a storm. After two days and two nights, helped by the sea-goddess Leucothea (formerly the mortal Ino, daughter of Cadmus) and by Athena, he reached land, naked, exhausted, and alone.

The king of the Phaeacians was Alcinoüs, and his daughter was Nausicaä. The day after Odysseus' landing Nausicaä went to wash clothes near the seashore and came face-to-face with Odysseus. She gave him her protection and brought him back to the palace. Here he was warmly entertained by Alcinoüs and his queen, Arete, and related the story of his adventures to them. The Phaeacians gave him rich gifts, and a day later they brought him back to Ithaca on one of their ships, in a deep sleep. So Odysseus reached Ithaca ten years after the fall of Troy, alone and on another's ship, as Polyphemus had prayed. Yet even now Poseidon did not relax his hostility; as the Phaeacians' ship was entering the harbor of Scheria on its return, he turned the ship and its crew to stone as a punishment upon the Phaeacians for conveying strangers over the seas, especially those who were the objects of Poseidon's hatred.

ITHACA

In Ithaca more than one hundred suitors (young noblemen from Ithaca and the nearby islands) were courting Penelope in the hope of taking Odysseus' place as her husband and as king of Ithaca (for Telemachus, Odysseus' son by Penelope, was considered still too young to succeed). They spent their days feasting at Odysseus' palace, wasting his possessions. Penelope, however, remained faithful to Odysseus, even though he seemed to be dead. She put the suitors off by promising to choose one of them when she should have finished weaving a magnificent cloak to be a burial garment for Odysseus' father, Laertes. For three years she wove the robe by day and undid her work by night, but in the fourth year her deception was uncovered, and a decision was now unavoidable.

At this stage Odysseus returned. Helped by Athena, he gained entrance at the palace disguised as a beggar, after being recognized by his faithful old swineherd, Eumaeus, and by Telemachus. Telemachus had been on a journey to Pylos and Sparta and had learned from Nestor and Menelaüs that his father was still alive. Outside the palace, Odysseus' old hound, Argus, recognized his master after nineteen years' absence, and died.

At the palace Odysseus was insulted by the suitors and by another beggar, Irus, whom he knocked out in a fight. Still in disguise, he gave to Penelope an exact description of Odysseus and of a curious brooch he had worn. As a result, she confided in him her plan to give herself next day to the suitor who succeeded in stringing Odysseus' great bow and shooting an arrow straight through a row of twelve axe heads. Also at this time Odysseus was recognized by his old nurse, Euryclea, who knew him from a scar on his thigh, which he had received when hunting a boar with his grandfather, Autolycus. Thus the scene was set for Odysseus' triumphant return; his son and his faithful retainers knew the truth, and Penelope had fresh encouragement to prepare her for the eventual recognition.



The Return of Odysseus, by Pintoricchio (Bernardo Betti, 1454–1513). Fresco transferred to canvas, 1509, 60 in. × 50 in. To the left sits Penelope at her loom, with Euryclea beside her; above her head are the bow and quiver of Odysseus. Telemachus runs to greet his mother, and behind him are a young suitor (note the falcon on his wrist), the seer Theoclymenus, and Eumaeus. Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, is coming through the door on the right. In the background is the ship of the Phaeacians; to its left is Odysseus' boat being shattered by Poseidon, and, in the wooded landscape beyond, Odysseus meets Circe, while his men root around as pigs. This fresco was originally painted for a wall in a room of the Ducal Palace in Siena. (London: National Gallery. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees.)

THE BOW AND THE KILLING OF THE SUITORS

The trial of the bow took place next day. When none of the suitors could even so much as string it, Odysseus asked to be allowed to try. Effortlessly he achieved the task and shot the arrow through the axes. Next he shot the leading suitor, Antinoüs, and in the ensuing fight he and Telemachus and their two faithful servants killed all the other suitors. The scene where Odysseus strings the bow and reveals himself to the suitors is one of the most dramatic in all epic poetry (*Odyssey* 21. 404–423; 22. 1–8):

♣ But crafty Odysseus straightway took the great bow in his hands and looked at it on all sides, just as a man who is skilled at the lyre and at song easily stretches a string round a new peg, fitting the well-turned sheep's gut around the peg—

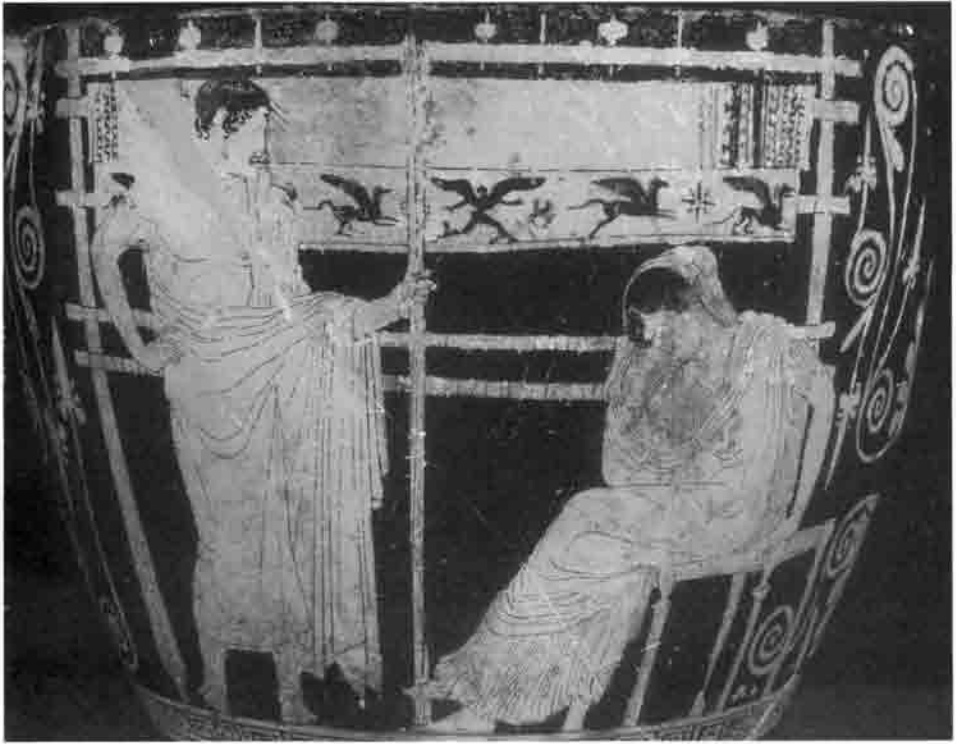
even so without effort did he string the great bow, did Odysseus. He took it in his right hand and made trial of the string, and it sang sweetly under his hand, in sound like a swallow. Then great sorrow seized the suitors, and in all of them their skin changed color. Zeus, giving a sign, thundered loudly. Then godlike, patient Odysseus rejoiced that the wily son of Cronus had sent him a sign. Then he chose a swift arrow, one that lay on the table beside him uncovered, while the others lay in the hollow quiver—and these the Achaeans would soon feel. This arrow, then, he took, and he drew back the string and the notched arrow, sitting where he was on his stool. And he shot the arrow aiming straight ahead, and of the hafted axes he missed none from the first to the last, and the arrow weighted with bronze sped straight through to the end. . . .

Then wily Odysseus stripped off his rags, and he leaped to the great threshold holding the bow and the quiver full of arrows, and he poured out the arrows in front of his feet. Then he spoke to the suitors: "This my labor inexorable has been completed. Now I shall aim at another target which no man has yet struck, if I can hit it and Apollo grants my prayer." He spoke and shot a death-dealing arrow straight at Antinoüs.

The suitors all were killed, and only the herald, Medon, and the bard, Phemius, were spared. Odysseus called Euryclea to identify the twelve servant-women who had insulted him and had been the lovers of the suitors. They were forced to cleanse the hall, and then they were mercilessly hanged, while the disloyal goatherd, Melanthius, was mutilated and killed. The consequences of the battle in the hall were grisly, a reminder that Odysseus was a warrior who had taken part in the sack of Troy and was merciless to his enemies.

TELEMACHUS

The portrait in the *Odyssey* of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus and Penelope, is a masterful depiction of the hero as a young man. His introduction in Book 1 establishes his character with sure and subtle brevity. Athena has come down from Olympus to inspire courage and action in Telemachus, still a boy at heart. We first meet him in the palace, helplessly witnessing the abusive arrogance of the suitors. He sits sad and despondent, daydreaming that his father had already returned and driven out the suitors and saved them from his insolence and disrespect. Amidst their drunken revels, he is the only one to notice Athena disguised as Mentès waiting at the threshold. He alone is gentleman enough to rise and greet her with a courtesy demanded by the sacred bond of guest-friendship. In a few lines, we know that Telemachus is a worthy son of his heroic father and we are prepared for his gratifying development. By the end of Book 1 he will have stood up to his mother, who is surprised by his manly effort to break loose from her overprotective apron strings. He will go on to have an odyssey of his own (appropriately a mini-odyssey, to be sure, in Books 3 and 4) to Pylos and Sparta to find out news of Odysseus from Nestor and Menelaüs and Helen. When Odysseus does return, it is Telemachus who can almost, but



Penelope at Her Loom and The Washing of Odysseus' Feet. Attic red-figure cup, ca. 440 B.C.; height 8 in., diameter 62 in. On the first side Penelope sits sadly at her room, while Telemachus talks with her. On the second side (see the opposite page) Euryclea (named Antiphata on the vase) looks up at Odysseus with her mouth open, as she recognizes him from the scar. To the right stands Eumaeus, evidently offering a gift to Odysseus, who wears the traveler's cap and carries the beggar's basket and stick. (*Chiusi: Museo Civico.*)

not quite yet, string his father's bow, although he would have done so if his father had allowed him a fourth try. At the climax of the poem, it is father and son, side by side, who wreak the just slaughter of the sinful suitors.

PENELOPE

We have said earlier that Odysseus "remained faithful to Penelope," and the reunion with his wife is the goal of the epic. Penelope is not a passive figure: she is the equal of Odysseus in intelligence and loyalty, and she is resourceful in fending off the suitors and, equally significant, in choosing her time and method for the recognition of Odysseus. When she finally does recognize him the poet describes her "as fitting his heart" (*thymares*), that is, she is a perfect match for




the man who is the “man of many twists and turns” (*polytropos*, an epithet given him in the first line of the poem), the cleverest of the Greeks.


Penelope’s usual epithet is *periphron* (“circumspect”); that is, she is wary and resourceful, able to keep the suitors at bay by her intelligence. In her first meeting with Odysseus (in Book 19) she says “I spin out my stratagems,” and she tells him of the weaving and unravelling of the burial-garment for Laertes. She used her sexual power to weaken the suitors. When she appears before them she is repeatedly likened to Aphrodite and Artemis, and “the suitors’ knees went slack; she bewitched their spirits with lust, and all longed to lie beside her in bed” (*Odyssey* 18, 212–214). She gets them to give her gifts (observed with joy by Odysseus himself, who is in the hall disguised as a beggar), and, when it ap-

appears inevitable that she must choose one of them, she devises the test of the bow. Finally, she insists that the stranger (i.e., Odysseus, with whom, as we have seen earlier, she had conversed) be allowed to take part in the test. But before Odysseus actually strings the bow she is told by Telemachus (now for the first time asserting himself as his father's heir apparent and head of the household) to go upstairs. Thus she is absent during Odysseus' successful stringing of the bow, the battle in the hall and its cleansing, and the killing of the servants. The stage is set, as it were, for the climactic scene between Penelope and Odysseus, leading to recognition and reunion.

At their first meeting (in Book 19) she had asked the stranger who he was, and he had begun his reply by likening her to a king who rules over a just and prosperous city—in other words, he likens his wife to himself as king of Ithaca. Later (still not revealing how much she knows of his identity) she shares with him a dream in which an eagle kills her flock of twenty geese and he agrees with her that it is an omen of Odysseus' return. Penelope's words are fraught with psychological import. She begins with confidences about how her nights are filled with anxiety. She lies awake, miserable with indecision (525–534):

 Should I stay here by the side of my son and keep all my possessions safe, my property, my slaves, and my grand and lofty palace, respecting the bed of my husband and what people might say or should I go off with the best one of the Achaeans here who court me and offer lavish gifts? As for my son, as long as he was still young and immature, he would not allow me to leave the palace and marry a new husband but now that he is grown up and has reached maturity, he beseeches me to go away, so upset is he about his estate, which these Achaeans are swallowing up.

More Freudian is the insight offered by the dream that Penelope goes on to relate (535–553):

 Now I want you to listen to a dream of mine and interpret it for me. At my home there are twenty geese who come to eat corn from a water-trough and I love watching them. But down from a mountain swoops a huge eagle with hooked beak and he breaks their necks and kills them all. They lie strewn together about the house but he flies aloft into the divine upper air. I weep and wail, although it is only a dream and the Achaean women with lovely hair gather round me as I grieve bitterly because the eagle has killed my geese. He comes back and perched on a beam jutting from the roof speaks in a human voice and restrains my tears. "Take heart, daughter of renowned Icarus. This is not a dream but a reality, a good deed that will be accomplished. The geese are your suitors and I who am the eagle in your dream will come back as your husband, who will bring a sorry fate down upon all your suitors." Thus he spoke and honeyed sleep left me. Looking around, I saw my geese in the courtyard by the trough, pecking at the grain, exactly where they were before.

The stranger in a brief answer assures Penelope that there is only one possible interpretation of her dream. Certain death lies in store for each and every

suitor. We wonder how Odysseus feels about Penelope's avowed affection for her geese and marvel at Homer's finely etched portrait of a complex woman, devoted to her husband but wary about her own future and not unflattered and unmoved by the attention and the gifts of a flock of suitors. Could she knowingly be leading this stranger on?

After the battle in the hall Penelope is wakened by Euryclea and refuses to admit that the stranger is Odysseus (we are not told whether she thinks he is). She comes down, and she and Odysseus sit opposite each other. When Telemachus reproves her for not embracing Odysseus she replies that if the stranger truly is Odysseus then "we will know it from each other even better, for we have signs which we know, hidden from others." Then she orders

NAMING ODYSSEUS


After Euryclea has recognized Odysseus from the scar on his thigh, Homer tells the story of the naming of Odysseus. His grandfather, Autolycus (father of Anticlea, the mother of Odysseus), was asked to name the infant, whom Euryclea had placed on his knees. "I shall call him *Odysseus*," he said, "because I have come being hateful [Greek, *odyssamenos*] to many men and women all over the fruitful earth." The Greek word is in the middle voice, that is, its subject can be either "an agent of rage or hatred but also its sufferer" (B. Knox's phrase). George Dimock suggests "man of pain," implying both the hero's sufferings and the suffering that he caused to others.

The anonymity or naming of Odysseus is an essential element in his story. In the first line of the *Odyssey* he is simply "[the] man": contrast the first line of the *Iliad*, where the hero, Achilles, is named. The conventions of heroic hospitality allowed hosts to ask their guest's name after he had eaten at their table: so Antinoüs asks, "Tell me the name that your mother and father call you by [at home]," and only then does Odysseus reply (*Odyssey* 9. 19), "I am Odysseus, son of Laertes." Odysseus controls the revelation of his name: for example, urged on by Athena, he chooses when to reveal himself to Telemachus in Book 16. Euryclea's discovery caught him by surprise, and his reaction was to threaten to kill her if she revealed it to others. The Cyclops asks his name and is told that it is *Outis* ("Nobody"). Arrived on Ithaca, Odysseus tells Athena that he is a Cretan. Penelope's first question at their first interview (19. 105) is, "Tell me, what people do you come from? Where are your city and your parents?," and Odysseus replies that he is a Cretan named *Aethon* ["shining," an epithet like that of the Cretan queen, *Phaedra*, "bright"]. Only after outwitting him with the test of the bed does Penelope finally achieve the self-revelation of the hero. Odysseus, "man of pain," is indeed both "Nobody" and the universal hero.

[Note: the Latin name for Odysseus is *Ulixes* or *Ulysses*, etymologically the same as the Greek name, with *Od-* shifting to *Ul-*, possibly (it has been suggested) influenced by a local dialect in Sicily or southern Italy.]


Euryclea to move the bed, which Odysseus himself had made, out of the marriage-chamber for him to sleep on outside.

Odysseus is furious that anyone would move his bed, for he had built it using a living olive tree as one of its supports and building the marriage-chamber around it. Thus he revealed the secret, and Penelope knew now that it was he.¹⁰ Then, and only then, did she give way and embrace the husband who had been away for twenty years. The poet again uses a simile for Penelope that identifies her with Odysseus (*Odyssey* 23. 232–240):

 He wept as he held the wife who matched his heart (*thymares*). Just as land is a welcome sight to shipwrecked sailors whose well-made ship Poseidon has shattered on the sea, battering it with wind and wave: few escape from the grey sea to reach land, and their skin is caked with brine, but they escape destruction and stand on land with joy—even so with joy did she look upon her husband, and her white arms would not let go of his neck.

In a sense Penelope *is* Odysseus, the sailor wrecked by Poseidon who reaches land. Thus by the similes of the king and the sailor, and by her resourceful patience and deliberate testing of the stranger, she gets him to reveal himself and proves herself to be his match.

The poet describes the end of Odysseus' labors with tact and delicacy. At the same time he allows Odysseus to recall his adventures (*Odyssey* 23. 300–343):

 So when they (Odysseus and Penelope) had taken their delight in the joys of love, they took delight in words and spoke to each other. She, goddesslike among women, told of all she had endured in the hall as she watched the unseemly mob of suitors, who to win her slaughtered many oxen and fine sheep and drank many casks of wine. In his turn godlike Odysseus told all, the cares he had brought upon men and the grievous sufferings that he had endured. She delighted in his tale, and sleep did not fall upon her eyes until he had finished his tale.

He told first how he had subdued the Cicones and how he had come to the fertile land of the lotus-eating men. He told of the Cyclops' deeds and how he avenged his valiant companions, whom the Cyclops had pitilessly devoured. He told how he came to Aeolus, who received him kindly and sent him onward, yet it was not yet destined for him to come to his own dear land, for a storm again snatched him and bore him over the fish-full sea, groaning deeply. He told how he came to Telepolus and the Laestrygonians, who destroyed his ships and his well-greaved companions. He told of the deceit and wiles of Circe, and he told how he came to the dank house of Hades to consult the soul of Theban Tiresias, sailing on his well-benched ship. There he saw his companions and his mother, who bore him and nourished him when he was a baby.


He told how he heard the song of the clear-voiced Sirens, and how he came to the wandering rocks of the Planctae, and to terrible Charybdis and Scylla, whom no man before had escaped alive. He told how his companions had slain the cattle of Helios, and how Zeus, who thunders in the high heavens, had struck his swift ship with a smoky thunderbolt and killed all his companions, and only

he escaped evil death. He told how he came to the island Ogygia and the nymph Calypso, who kept him there in her hollow cave, desiring him to be her husband. She fed him and promised to make him immortal and ageless all his days, yet she did not persuade the heart in his breast. He told how, after many sufferings, he reached the Phaeacians, who honored him like a god and sent him with a ship to his own dear homeland with ample gifts of bronze and gold and clothing.

This was the last tale he told, when sweet sleep came upon him, sleep that relaxes the limbs and releases the cares of the spirit.

THE END OF THE ODYSSEY

The last book of the *Odyssey* begins with Hermes escorting the souls of the dead suitors to the House of Hades, where they converse with the souls of Agamemnon and Achilles. The ghost of Amphimedon (one of the leading suitors) tells Agamemnon's ghost of Penelope's weaving and the test of the bow and the slaughter of the suitors. Agamemnon's ghost replies (*Odyssey* 24. 192–200):

 Happy son of Laertes, wily Odysseus! You married a wife of great excellence (*arete*)! How virtuous was the mind of peerless Penelope, daughter of Icarius! How well she kept the memory of Odysseus, her wedded husband! Therefore the fame of her virtue will never fade, and the immortals will fashion a lovely song for mortals to sing in honor of Penelope, the wife who kept her counsel. She did not contrive crimes like the daughter of Tyndareus, who murdered her wedded husband.

Penelope is repeatedly contrasted with Clytemnestra in the *Odyssey*, most eloquently by Agamemnon himself.¹¹ Meanwhile Odysseus leaves the palace to find his father, Laertes, who is living as a farmer, away from the city. At first he conceals his identity from the old man, but soon he reveals himself. As they are sharing a meal in Laertes' farmhouse, news comes that the relatives of the suitors are approaching to avenge their deaths. Once again Odysseus must fight, helped by Athena, and Laertes, miraculously energized by the goddess, kills Eupheithes, father of Antinoös. At this point Athena orders the men to stop fighting and Zeus casts a thunderbolt at her feet to confirm her command. She makes peace between Odysseus and the suitors' families, and so the epic ends.

ODYSSEUS AND ATHENA

Odysseus was especially helped by the goddess Athena, whose own attributes of wisdom and courage complement his gifts. The relationship of goddess and hero is brilliantly depicted by the poet in a scene after Odysseus, asleep, has been put ashore on Ithaca by the Phaeacians and wakes up, not knowing where he is. Athena, disguised as a young shepherd, has told him that he is on Ithaca (*Odyssey* 13. 250–255, 287–301):