THE ODYSSEY

of Homer

translated by Alexander Pope



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The Odyssey of Homer
Translated by Alexander Pope (1725–1726)
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BOOK I

MINERVA'S DESCENT TO ITHACA

ARGUMENT

The poem opens within forty eight days of the arrival of Ulysses in his dominions. He had now remained seven years in the Island of Calypso, when the gods assembled in council, proposed the method of his departure from thence and his return to his native country. For this purpose it is concluded to send Mercury to Calypso, and Pallas immediately descends to Ithaca. She holds a conference with Telemachus, in the shape of Mantes, king of Taphians; in which she advises him to take a journey in quest of his father Ulysses, to Pylos and Sparta, where Nestor and Menelaus yet reigned; then, after having visibly displayed her divinity, disappears. The suitors of Penelope make great entertainments, and riot in her palace till night. Phemius sings to them the return of the Grecians, till Penelope puts a stop to the song. Some words arise between the suitors and Telemachus, who summons the council to meet the day following.

NOW AT their native realms the Greeks arrived;
All who the wars of ten long years survived;
And 'scaped the perils of the gulfy main.
Ulysses, sole of all the victor train,
An exile from his dear paternal coast,
Deplored his absent queen and empire lost.
Calypso in her caves constrain'd his stay,
With sweet, reluctant, amorous delay;
In vain-for now the circling years disclose
The day predestined to reward his woes.
At length his Ithaca is given by fate,

Where yet new labours his arrival wait;
At length their rage the hostile powers restrain,
All but the ruthless monarch of the main.
But now the god, remote, a heavenly guest,
In Æthiopia graced the genial feast
(A race divided, whom with sloping rays
The rising and descending sun surveys);
There on the world's extremest verge revered
With hecatombs and prayer in pomp preferr'd,
Distant he lay: while in the bright abodes
Of high Olympus, Jove convened the gods:
The assembly thus the sire supreme address'd,
AEgysthus' fate revolving in his breast,
Whom young Orestes to the dreary coast
Of Pluto sent, a blood-polluted ghost.
"Perverse mankind! whose wills, created free,
Charge all their woes on absolute degree;
All to the dooming gods their guilt translate,
And follies are miscall'd the crimes of fate.
When to his lust AEgysthus gave the rein,
Did fate, or we, the adulterous act constrain?
Did fate, or we, when great Atrides died,
Urge the bold traitor to the regicide?
Hermes I sent, while yet his soul remain'd
Sincere from royal blood, and faith profaned;
To warn the wretch, that young Orestes, grown
To manly years, should re-assert the throne.
Yet, impotent of mind, and uncontroll'd,
He plunged into the gulf which Heaven foretold."
Here paused the god; and pensive thus replies
Minerva, graceful with her azure eyes:
"O thou! from whom the whole creation springs,
The source of power on earth derived to kings!
His death was equal to the direful deed;

So may the man of blood be doomed to bleed!
But grief and rage alternate wound my breast
For brave Ulysses, still by fate oppress'd.
Amidst an isle, around whose rocky shore
The forests murmur, and the surges roar,
The blameless hero from his wish'd-for home
A goddess guards in her enchanted dome;
(Atlas her sire, to whose far-piercing eye
The wonders of the deep expanded lie;
The eternal columns which on earth he rears
End in the starry vault, and prop the spheres).
By his fair daughter is the chief confined,
Who soothes to dear delight his anxious mind;
Successless all her soft caresses prove,
To banish from his breast his country's love;
To see the smoke from his loved palace rise,
While the dear isle in distant prospect lies,
With what contentment could he close his eyes!
And will Omnipotence neglect to save
The suffering virtue of the wise and brave?
Must he, whose altars on the Phrygian shore
With frequent rites, and pure, avow'd thy power,
Be doom'd the worst of human ills to prove,
Unbless'd, abandon'd to the wrath of Jove?"
"Daughter! what words have pass'd thy lips unweigh'd!
(Replied the Thunderer to the martial maid;)
Deem not unjustly by my doom oppress'd,
Of human race the wisest and the best.
Neptune, by prayer repentant rarely won,
Afflicts the chief, to avenge his giant son,
Whose visual orb Ulysses robb'd of light;
Great Polypheme, of more than mortal might?
Him young Thousa bore (the bright increase
Of Phorcys, dreaded in the sounds and seas);

Whom Neptune eyed with bloom of beauty bless'd,
And in his cave the yielding nymph compress'd
For this the god constrains the Greek to roam,
A hopeless exile from his native home,
From death alone exempt—but cease to mourn;
Let all combine to achieve his wish'd return;
Neptune atoned, his wrath shall now refrain,
Or thwart the synod of the gods in vain."
"Father and king adored!" Minerva cried,
"Since all who in the Olympian bower reside
Now make the wandering Greek their public care,
Let Hermes to the Atlantic isle repair;
Bid him, arrived in bright Calypso's court,
The sanction of the assembled powers report:
That wise Ulysses to his native land
Must speed, obedient to their high command.
Meantime Telemachus, the blooming heir
Of sea-girt Ithaca, demands my care;
'Tis mine to form his green, unpractised years
In sage debates; surrounded with his peers,
To save the state, and timely to restrain
The bold intrusion of the suitor-train;
Who crowd his palace, and with lawless power
His herds and flocks in feastful rites devour.
To distant Sparta, and the spacious waste
Of Sandy Pyle, the royal youth shall haste.
There, warm with filial love, the cause inquire
That from his realm retards his god-like sire;
Delivering early to the voice of fame
The promise of a green immortal name."
She said: the sandals of celestial mould,
Fledged with ambrosial plumes, and rich with gold,
Surround her feet: with these sublime she sails
The aërial space, and mounts the winged gales;

O'er earth and ocean wide prepared to soar,
Her dreaded arm a beamy javelin bore,
Ponderous and vast: which, when her fury burns,
Proud tyrants humbles, and whole hosts o'erturns.
From high Olympus prone her flight she bends,
And in the realms of Ithaca descends,
Her lineaments divine, the grave disguise
Of Mentes' form conceal'd from human eyes
(Mentes, the monarch of the Taphian land);
A glittering spear waved awful in her hand.
There in the portal placed, the heaven-born maid
Enormous riot and misrule survey'd.
On hides of beeves, before the palace gate
(Sad spoils of luxury), the suitors sate.
With rival art, and ardour in their mien,
At chess they vie, to captivate the queen;
Divining of their loves. Attending nigh,
A menial train the flowing bowl supply.
Others, apart, the spacious hall prepare,
And form the costly feast with busy care.
There young Telemachus, his bloomy face
Glowing celestial sweet, with godlike grace
Amid the circle shines: but hope and fear
(Painful vicissitude!) his bosom tear.
Now, imaged in his mind, he sees restored
In peace and joy the people's rightful lord;
The proud oppressors fly the vengeful sword.
While his fond soul these fancied triumphs swell'd,
The stranger guest the royal youth beheld;
Grieved that a visitant so long should wait
Unmark'd, unhonour'd, at a monarch's gate;
Instant he flew with hospitable haste,
And the new friend with courteous air embraced.
"Stranger, whoe'er thou art, securely rest,

Affianced in my faith, a ready guest;
Approach the dome, the social banquet share,
And then the purpose of thy soul declare."
Thus affable and mild, the prince precedes,
And to the dome the unknown celestial leads.
The spear receiving from the hand, he placed
Against a column, fair with sculpture graced;
Where seemly ranged in peaceful order stood
Ulysses' arms now long disused to blood.
He led the goddess to the sovereign seat,
Her feet supported with a stool of state
(A purple carpet spread the pavement wide);
Then drew his seat, familiar, to her side;
Far from the suitor-train, a brutal crowd,
With insolence, and wine, elate and loud:
Where the free guest, unnoted, might relate,
If haply conscious, of his father's fate.
The golden ewer a maid obsequious brings,
Replenish'd from the cool, translucent springs;
With copious water the bright vase supplies
A silver laver of capacious size;
They wash. The tables in fair order spread,
They heap the glittering canisters with bread:
Viands of various kinds allure the taste,
Of choicest sort and savour, rich repast!
Delicious wines the attending herald brought;
The gold gave lustre to the purple draught.
Lured with the vapour of the fragrant feast,
In rush'd the suitors with voracious haste;
Marshall'd in order due, to each a sewer
Presents, to bathe his hands, a radiant ewer.
Luxurious then they feast. Observant round
Gay stripling youths the brimming goblets crown'd.
The rage of hunger quell'd, they all advance

And form to measured airs the mazy dance;
To Phemius was consign'd the chorded lyre,
Whose hand reluctant touch'd the warbling wire;
Phemius, whose voice divine could sweetest sing
High strains responsive to the vocal string.
Meanwhile, in whispers to his heavenly guest
His indignation thus the prince express'd:
"Indulge my rising grief, whilst these (my friend)
With song and dance the pompous revel end.
Light is the dance, and doubly sweet the lays,
When for the dear delight another pays.
His treasured stores those cormarants consume,
Whose bones, defrauded of a regal tomb
And common turf, lie naked on the plain,
Or doom'd to welter in the whelming main.
Should he return, that troop so blithe and bold,
With purple robes inwrought, and stiff with gold,
Precipitant in fear would wing their flight,
And curse their cumbrous pride's unwieldy weight.
But ah, I dream!-the appointed hour is fled.
And hope, too long with vain delusion fed,
Deaf to the rumour of fallacious fame,
Gives to the roll of death his glorious name!
With venial freedom let me now demand
Thy name, thy lineage, and paternal land;
Sincere from whence began thy course, recite,
And to what ship I owe the friendly freight?
Now first to me this visit dost thou deign,
Or number'd in my father's social train?
All who deserved his choice he made his own,
And, curious much to know, he far was known."
"My birth I boast (the blue-eyed virgin cries)
From great Anchialus, renown'd and wise;
Mentes my name; I rule the Taphian race,

Whose bounds the deep circumfluent waves embrace;
A duteous people, and industrious isle,
To naval arts inured, and stormy toil.
Freighted with iron from my native land,
I steer my voyage to the Brutian strand
To gain by commerce, for the labour'd mass,
A just proportion of refulgent brass.
Far from your capital my ship resides
At Reitorus, and secure at anchor rides;
Where waving groves on airy Neign grow,
Supremely tall and shade the deeps below.
Thence to revisit your imperial dome,
An old hereditary guest I come;
Your father's friend. Laertes can relate
Our faith unspotted, and its early date;
Who, press'd with heart-corroding grief and years,
To the gay court a rural shed prefers,
Where, sole of all his train, a matron sage
Supports with homely fond his drooping age,
With feeble steps from marshalling his vines
Returning sad, when toilsome day declines.
"With friendly speed, induced by erring fame,
To hail Ulysses' safe return I came;
But still the frown of some celestial power
With envious joy retards the blissful hour.
Let not your soul be sunk in sad despair;
He lives, he breathes this heavenly vital air,
Among a savage race, whose shelfy bounds
With ceaseless roar the foaming deep surrounds.
The thoughts which roll within my ravish'd breast,
To me, no seer, the inspiring gods suggest;
Nor skill'd nor studious, with prophetic eye
To judge the winged omens of the sky.
Yet hear this certain speech, nor deem it vain;

Though adamantine bonds the chief restrain,
The dire restraint his wisdom will defeat,
And soon restore him to his regal seat.
But generous youth! sincere and free declare,
Are you, of manly growth, his royal heir?
For sure Ulysses in your look appears,
The same his features, if the same his years.
Such was that face, on which I dwelt with joy
Ere Greece assembled stemm'd the tides to Troy;
But, parting then for that detested shore,
Our eyes, unhappy never greeted more."
"To prove a genuine birth (the prince replies)
On female truth assenting faith relies.
Thus manifest of right, I build my claim
Sure-founded on a fair maternal fame,
Ulysses' son: but happier he, whom fate
Hath placed beneath the storms which toss the great!
Happier the son, whose hoary sire is bless'd
With humble affluence, and domestic rest!
Happier than I, to future empire born,
But doom'd a father's wretch'd fate to mourn!"
To whom, with aspect mild, the guest divine:
"Oh true descendant of a sceptred line!
The gods a glorious fate from anguish free
To chaste Penelope's increase decree.
But say, yon jovial troops so gaily dress'd,
Is this a bridal or a friendly feast?
Or from their deed I rightlier may divine,
Unseemly flown with insolence and wine?
Unwelcome revellers, whose lawless joy
Pains the sage ear, and hurts the sober eye."
"Magnificence of old (the prince replied)
Beneath our roof with virtue could reside;
Unblamed abundance crowned the royal board,

What time this dome revered her prudent lord;
Who now (so Heaven decrees) is doom'd to mourn,
Bitter constraint, erroneous and forlorn.
Better the chief, on Ilion's hostile plain,
Had fall'n surrounded with his warlike train;
Or safe return'd, the race of glory pass'd,
New to his friends' embrace, and breathed his last!
Then grateful Greece with streaming eyes would raise,
Historic marbles to record his praise;
His praise, eternal on the faithful stone,
Had with transmissive honour graced his son.
Now snatch'd by harpies to the dreary coast.
Sunk is the hero, and his glory lost;
Vanish'd at once! unheard of, and unknown!
And I his heir in misery alone.
Nor for a dear lost father only flow
The filial tears, but woe succeeds to woe
To tempt the spouseless queen with amorous wiles
Resort the nobles from the neighbouring isles;
From Samos, circled with the Ionian main,
Dulichium, and Zacynthas' sylvan reign;
Ev'n with presumptuous hope her bed to ascend,
The lords of Ithaca their right pretend.
She seems attentive to their pleaded vows,
Her heart detesting what her ear allows.
They, vain expectants of the bridal hour,
My stores in riotous expense devour.
In feast and dance the mirthful months employ,
And meditate my doom to crown their joy."
With tender pity touch'd, the goddess cried:
"Soon may kind Heaven a sure relief provide,
Soon may your sire discharge the vengeance due,
And all your wrongs the proud oppressors rue!
Oh! in that portal should the chief appear,

Each hand tremendous with a brazen spear,
In radiant panoply his limbs incased
(For so of old my father's court he graced,
When social mirth unbent his serious soul,
O'er the full banquet, and the sprightly bowl);
He then from Ephyre, the fair domain
Of Ilus, sprung from Jason's royal strain,
Measured a length of seas, a toilsome length, in vain.
For, voyaging to learn the direful art
To taint with deadly drugs the barbed dart;
Observant of the gods, and sternly just,
Ilus refused to impart the baneful trust;
With friendlier zeal my father's soul was fired,
The drugs he knew, and gave the boon desired.
Appear'd he now with such heroic port,
As then conspicuous at the Taphian court;
Soon should yon boasters cease their haughty strife,
Or each atone his guilty love with life.
But of his wish'd return the care resign,
Be future vengeance to the powers divine.
My sentence hear: with stern distaste avow'd,
To their own districts drive the suitor-crowd;
When next the morning warms the purple east,
Convoke the peerage, and the gods attest;
The sorrows of your inmost soul relate;
And form sure plans to save the sinking state.
Should second love a pleasing flame inspire,
And the chaste queen connubial rights require;
Dismiss'd with honour, let her hence repair
To great Icarius, whose paternal care
Will guide her passion, and reward her choice
With wealthy dower, and bridal gifts of price.
Then let this dictate of my love prevail:
Instant, to foreign realms prepare to sail,

To learn your father's fortunes; Fame may prove,
Or omen'd voice (the messenger of Jove),
Propitious to the search. Direct your toil
Through the wide ocean first to sandy Pyle;
Of Nestor, hoary sage, his doom demand:
Thence speed your voyage to the Spartan strand;
For young Atrides to the Achaian coast
Arrived the last of all the victor host.
If yet Ulysses views the light, forbear,
Till the fleet hours restore the circling year.
But if his soul hath wing'd the destined flight,
Inhabitant of deep disastrous night;
Homeward with pious speed repass the main,
To the pale shade funereal rites ordain,
Plant the fair column o'er the vacant grave,
A hero's honours let the hero have.
With decent grief the royal dead deplored,
For the chaste queen select an equal lord.
Then let revenge your daring mind employ,
By fraud or force the suitor train destroy,
And starting into manhood, scorn the boy.
Hast thou not heard how young Orestes, fired
With great revenge, immortal praise acquired?
His virgin-sword AEgysthus' veins imbrued;
The murderer fell, and blood atoned for blood.
O greatly bless'd with every blooming grace!
With equal steps the paths of glory trace;
Join to that royal youth's your rival name,
And shine eternal in the sphere of fame.
But my associates now my stay deplore,
Impatient on the hoarse-resounding shore.
Thou, heedful of advice, secure proceed;
My praise the precept is, be thine the deed.
"The counsel of my friend (the youth rejoin'd)

Imprints conviction on my grateful mind.
So fathers speak (persuasive speech and mild)
Their sage experience to the favourite child.
But, since to part, for sweet refection due,
The genial viands let my train renew;
And the rich pledge of plighted faith receive,
Worthy the heir of Ithaca to give."
"Defer the promised boon (the goddess cries,
Celestial azure brightening in her eyes),
And let me now regain the Reithrian port;
From Temese return'd, your royal court
I shall revisit, and that pledge receive;
And gifts, memorial of our friendship, leave."
Abrupt, with eagle-speed she cut the sky;
Instant invisible to mortal eye.
Then first he recognized the ethereal guest;
Wonder and joy alternate fire his breast;
Heroic thoughts, infused, his heart dilate;
Revolving much his father's doubtful fate.
At length, composed, he join'd the suitor-throng;
Hush'd in attention to the warbled song.
His tender theme the charming lyrist chose.
Minerva's anger, and the dreadful woes
Which voyaging from Troy the victors bore,
While storms vindictive intercept the store.
The shrilling airs the vaulted roof rebounds,
Reflecting to the queen the silver sounds.
With grief renew'd the weeping fair descends;
Their sovereign's step a virgin train attends:
A veil, of richest texture wrought, she wears,
And silent to the joyous hall repairs.
There from the portal, with her mild command,
Thus gently checks the minstrel's tuneful hand:
"Phemius! let acts of gods, and heroes old,

What ancient bards in hall and bower have told,
Attemper'd to the lyre, your voice employ;
Such the pleased ear will drink with silent joy.
But, oh! forbear that dear disastrous name,
To sorrow sacred, and secure of fame;
My bleeding bosom sickens at the sound,
And every piercing note inflicts a wound."
"Why, dearest object of my duteous love,
(Replied the prince,) will you the bard reprove?
Oft, Jove's ethereal rays (resistless fire)
The chanter's soul and raptured song inspire
Instinct divine? nor blame severe his choice,
Warbling the Grecian woes with heart and voice;
For novel lays attract our ravish'd ears;
But old, the mind with inattention hears:
Patient permit the sadly pleasing strain;
Familiar now with grief, your tears refrain,
And in the public woe forget your own;
You weep not for a perish'd lord alone.
What Greeks new wandering in the Stygian gloom,
Wish your Ulysses shared an equal doom!
Your widow'd hours, apart, with female toil
And various labours of the loom beguile;
There rule, from palace-cares remote and free;
That care to man belongs, and most to me."
Mature beyond his years, the queen admires
His sage reply, and with her train retires.
Then swelling sorrows burst their former bounds,
With echoing grief afresh the dome resounds;
Till Pallas, piteous of her plaintive cries,
In slumber closed her silver-streaming eyes.
Meantime, rekindled at the royal charms,
Tumultuous love each beating bosom warms;
Intemperate rage a wordy war began;

But bold Telemachus assumed the man.
"Instant (he cried) your female discord end,
Ye deedless boasters! and the song attend;
Obey that sweet compulsion, nor profane
With dissonance the smooth melodious strain.
Pacific now prolong the jovial feast;
But when the dawn reveals the rosy east,
I, to the peers assembled, shall propose
The firm resolve, I here in few disclose;
No longer live the cankers of my court;
All to your several states with speed resort;
Waste in wild riot what your land allows,
There ply the early feast, and late carouse.
But if, to honour lost, 'tis still decreed
For you my bowl shall flow, my flock shall bleed;
Judge and revenge my right, impartial Jove!
By him and all the immortal thrones above
(A sacred oath), each proud oppressor slain,
Shall with inglorious gore this marble stain."
Awed by the prince, thus haughty, bold, and young,
Rage gnaw'd the lip, and wonder chain'd the tongue.
Silence at length the gay Antinous broke,
Constrain'd a smile, and thus ambiguous spoke:
"What god to your untutor'd youth affords
This headlong torrent of amazing words?
May Jove delay thy reign, and cumber late
So bright a genius with the toils of state!"
"Those toils (Telemachus serene replies)
Have charms, with all their weight, t'allure the wise.
Fast by the throne obsequious fame resides,
And wealth incessant rolls her golden tides.
Nor let Antinous rage, if strong desire
Of wealth and fame a youthful bosom fire:
Elect by Jove, his delegate of sway,

With joyous pride the summons I'd obey.
Whene'er Ulysses roams the realm of night,
Should factious power dispute my lineal right,
Some other Greeks a fairer claim may plead;
To your pretence their title would precede.
At least, the sceptre lost, I still should reign
Sole o'er my vassals, and domestic train."
To this Eurymachus: "To Heaven alone
Refer the choice to fill the vacant throne.
Your patrimonial stores in peace possess;
Undoubted, all your filial claim confess:
Your private right should impious power invade,
The peers of Ithaca would arm in aid.
But say, that stranger guest who late withdrew,
What and from whence? his name and lineage shew.
His grave demeanour and majestic grace
Speak him descended of no vulgar race:
Did he some loan of ancient right require,
Or came forerunner of your sceptr'd sire?"
"Oh son of Polybus!" the prince replies,
"No more my sire will glad these longing eyes;
The queen's fond hope inventive rumour cheers,
Or vain diviners' dreams divert her fears.
That stranger-guest the Taphian realm obeys,
A realm defended with encircling seas.
Mentes, an ever-honour'd name, of old
High in Ulysses' social list enroll'd."
Thus he, though conscious of the ethereal guest,
Answer'd evasive of the sly request.
Meantime the lyre rejoins the sprightly lay;
Love-dittied airs, and dance, conclude the day
But when the star of eve with golden light
Adorn'd the matron brow of sable night,
The mirthful train dispersing quit the court,