Book i: Athena, upset that Odysseus alone of the Greeks still struggles to get home 10 years after the Trojan War, urges the gods to take action while Poseidon is away. She meanwhile heads to Ithaca, where disguised as Mentes, she convinces Telemachus to go on a journey to learn of his father.

1 Speak, Memory: In the Greek this is ennepe, Mousa (Tell me, Muse…). Lombardo used “speak” so that he could make an allusion to James Joyce’s great novel, Ulysses. That novel begins with a single page featuring two words: “Stately, plump” – the S on that first page takes up almost the whole page, and in the first edition of Lombardo’s translation, the S of “Speak” did likewise. I think he refers to the Muse as Memory to indicate the psychic role the Muses had for oral poets – Memory is key – when you are performing live, you cannot stop, but must keep going – Memory cannot fail you, and the Muses, as daughters of Memory, were associated with poets. By using “Memory” here, Lombardo makes explicit that connection.

Cunning hero: the word in Greek is polytropon (the man of “many turns,” – it’s a wrestling term – I think you get some of that spirit if you translate it as “that slippery guy.”

10 Hyperion the Sun: Hyperion is a brother of Cronus and was the first sun god. Usually, Helius has the job in Greek literature. Sometimes Apollo takes over the job.

13 all the others: All of the Greeks who made it home have done so by this point. Most had some trouble either getting home, or once they got there. Nestor, the old king of Pylos, is the only one who had no trouble at home or getting home. Menelaus was the last to get home before Odysseus, and he’s been home for 3 years now.

17 the nymph Calypso: Calypso is actually a goddess, and not a nymph. Admittedly, she is a minor goddess, but a goddess nonetheless.

25 Poseidon: the god of the sea hates Odysseus because Odysseus blinded Polyphemus, the Cyclops son of Poseidon – doesn’t matter that it was in self-defense. Despite the hatred, there is little that happens to Odysseus because of Poseidon’s direct action, other than the storm that zaps him at the end of Book v.

29 Ethiopians: the “blameless Ethiopians” are where the gods go when you need something to happen in the story and don’t want the gods around. The Greeks seem to have understood by this all dark-skinned Africans (so sub-Saharan Africa is meant).

33 Father of Gods and Men: a common term for Zeus, who has many mortal and immortal kids.

34f. Aegisthus, Agamemnon, Orestes: Aegisthus, Agamemnon’s cousin, kills Agamemnon because Agamemnon’s father, Atreus, killed his two brothers and served them to their dad, Thyestes, at a banquet. It is unclear whether Homer
knows that story, as here pure greed seems to be the motivation, and the gods went out of their way to give a warning to Aegisthus, who didn’t take it. Orestes avenged his father’s death, killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s wife, and Orestes’ mom.

43 quicksilver Hermes: quicksilver = mercury, the only metal that is liquid at room temperature – it was seen as slippery, defying convention (it was metal, but liquid) and moved quickly. Hermes is the messenger god, and speed and slipperiness are part of his character.

49 Athena... owl-grey eyes: the most common epithet for Athena refers to her as *glaukopis* (“grey-eyed,” or “owl-eyed” or “keen-eyed”).

59 the daughter of Atlas: Atlas, the son of Iapetus, is brother to Prometheus. He fought against Zeus in the Titanomachy and, as punishment, has to hold the sky up. Homer here seems to suggest greater brain power on the part of Atlas than is usually attributed to him.

63 Ithaca: this is an island off the W coast of Greece (location not certain) – it is Odysseus’ kingdom. It is a small and not particularly wealthy area – Odysseus brought only 12 ships to Troy (Agamemnon brought 150 or so).

68 Why is Odysseus so odious, Zeus? Athena argues her case like a lawyer might – she’s playing for Zeus to help Odysseus by shaming him with the idea that a good man is being mercilessly punished by Poseidon, and Zeus is letting it happen.

76 Polyphemus, the strongest of all the Cyclopes: in Hesiod, there are only three Cyclopes, but Homer has a whole community of Cyclopes. They are shepherds, and not blacksmiths (as they are in Hesiod) and are anti-social and rather irreverent of the gods.

77f. Thoosa... Phorcys: Phorcys is a primordial sea deity, mentioned in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. His daughter Thoosa is mentioned here – no other stories about her that I know of.

92 Ogygia: “Quail Island” – not identified with any particular place – in a sense the monstrous and other fanciful figures that Odysseus encounters live in a Never-Never Land.

100 Sparta... Pylos: this becomes the narrative of Books iii and iv. Telemachus visits Nestor, king of Pylos, in the southermmost part of Greece, and then visits Menelaus, king of Sparta. He visits both for information on his father. They can tell stories about Odysseus, but have no useful info on his current whereabouts.

102 win a name for himself: when we first see Telemachus, he’s something of a whiner. He’s 20 years old, but is still a kid – he must grow up so he makes a credible helper for Odysseus later in the work.

107: Bronze-tipped and massive: as a god, Athena has a gigantic weapon. The size of the weapon, along with the goddess, must change, as no-one comments on Mentes’ unnaturally large spear later on.

112: Mentes... Taphian: not much more is known about Mentes here. There is another Mentes in the *Iliad*, but he’s on the Trojan side. There Apollo takes his form, just as
Athena takes this Mentes’ form. Taphos is an island off the NW coast of Greece – it was a land known for pirates.

113: arrogant suitors: the suitors are arrogant – they show no respect for the home that gives them hospitality. This is a big no-no for the Greeks.

127: Telemachus: Odysseus’ son by Penelope was a baby when Odysseus left for the war – it’s now 20 years later – he’s never met his father.

147f. silver pitcher ... golden basin: there is no Tupperware ® in the ancient Greek world. For a poor island like Ithaca, it is amazing how much gold and silver they have for bowls, cups and the like.

165: Phemius...against his will: Phemius is the singer in the court of Odysseus. His job would be to sing at banquets. He doesn’t like the suitors, but he still has to do his job.

192: unvarnished truth: Athena, as Mentes, assures Telemachus that she will tell him the truth, but her story is a lie (it may be true in the picture it paints of Odysseus, but untrue in the particulars of the story).

198 Cyprus: Cyprus is just off the coast of Phoenicia (Lebanon). It’s quite a distance from Taphos. And for the Taphians to stop at Ithaca (less than a day’s journey) is a bit surprising.

Iron: the Odyssey was composed in the Iron Age (c. 750 BC), but refers to events in the Bronze Age (c. 1200 BC) – here we have one of those anachronisms.

201: Rheitron ... Naion: don’t know these places...

204: Laertes: Laertes is Odysseus’ father – he lives outside the town in the country as a poor farmer, though, in Odysseus’ absence, he should be in the palace ruling Ithaca.

232: My mother says that Odysseus is my father: in a period before DNA testing, you had to take your mom and dad’s word for it that you were their kid. This is a common trope.

241: Penelope: the wife of Odysseus, and Telemachus’ mom.

264: Doulichium, Sami, Zacynthus: islands in the vicinity of Ithaca, off the W coast of Greece.

268: But can’t stop it either: I’ve never understood this. How is it that she cannot just refuse? And if the suitors have the power to force her hand, how is it they have not done so yet?

277: Ephyre: Corinth, one of the major Greek cities in the mythic and historical period – it’s located on the Isthmus separating N from S Greece.

279: Ilus: grandson of Jason and Medea, and son of Mermerus. It is not clear that Odysseus actually met him – this may just be a cover story.

331: The sort of thing a host gives to a guest: hospitality usually extended (among the noble classes) to giving gifts. In the long run, it would all even out, as you’d give gifts to visitors, and when you were a visitor, you’d get a gift.

340f. He knew it had been a god, and like a god himself: Telemachus knows that Mentes was not really Mentes as he changed into a seabird and flew away. Realizing that a god had been talking with him, he has the confidence of a god.
himself. One would think, though, with all the assurances given him by Athena, he’d have more confidence later in the *Odyssey*.

**Book v**: Odysseus is where we left him, stuck on Calypso’s isle. The gods send Hermes and she lets Odysseus go.

2: **Tithonus**: the Trojan mortal Tithonus was Eos (Dawn’s) lover. She asked for immortality for him, but neglected to ask for immortal youth. It’s interesting that in the *Odyssey*, they are still a couple, as the usual account states that as soon as he grew grey, she was out of the relationship, though she continued to take care of him. He’d be quite grey at this point.

8: **It galled her that he was still in Calypso’s cave**: though this may be only a few days from Book i, it seems quite some time, as we’ve had three books, and a couple of hours of performance intervening.

10ff. **Kings …. Tyrannical butchers**: Athena’s point is that Odysseus, who was a good king, and observant of sacrifice to the gods, is not being treated right, so what incentive is there for any king to do right, if they get no better treatment than tyrants?

22: **white-bricked**: don’t know why Sparta is called *white-bricked*.

27f.: **You know how…**: this rather ruins the suspense for a modern audience – Zeus suggests that there is no real danger for Telemachus, as Athena won’t let anything bad happen.

32: **ringleted nymph**: again, Calypso is a goddess, even if she has hair is ringleted.

36f. **Scheria… our distant relatives**: Scheria’s location is not clear. The Phaeacians are idealized Cretans who were known as great sailors. Don’t know of any familial relationship between the gods and the Phaeacians.

45ff. **quicksilver messenger…beautiful sandals…the wand**: Hermes, the messenger god, is easily recognizable – he has winged sandals (the *talaria*), wears a traveler’s wide-brimmed cap (*petasus*) and carries the herald’s wand (the *caduceus*).

53: **Pieria**: this is in NE Greece, and is north of Olympus. So for him to go to Ithaca (off W coast of Greece) by way of Pieria seems to involve going out of his way (just like when flying from KC to Seattle, the plane will likely go to Indianapolis first).

55: **cormorant**: a sea bird – here we have a Homeric (extended) simile – Lombardo often dispenses with “like” or “as,” but goes italic and indents – visually it works; aurally, not sure – in his reading of these, his voice goes sort of mystical.

57: **flying low and planning the whitecaps**: he’s flying so low, he’s skimming the water – a rather nice image, like the Flash running over the water.

63: **arbor vitae**: a type of cypress, apparently

66: **she wove at her loom**: goddesses, like mortal women, are skilled in these sorts of home ec types of areas.

80: **knew him at sight**: why wouldn’t she? He isn’t in disguise, is he?

104: **none of us gods can oppose his will**: and yet Zeus has not stopped Poseidon for giving Odysseus grief all these years.
108: **they offended Athena**: Ajax Oileus raped Cassandra in Athena’s temple. Not sure what the other Greeks did. Odysseus seems not to have offended her.

118: **most jealous bastards**: this does not seem to be the case – Odysseus’ fate seems to be directed towards his getting home o.k. So she has to let him go – has nothing to do with the gods’ jealousy. The accounts that follow, of Dawn and Orion and Demeter and Iasion are mentioned here, but not really mentioned much elsewhere. In the case of Iasion, he is something of the “year god” who mates with the goddess and then dies. Once the planting is over, his usefulness is at an end.

143: “**I’ll do everything I can…**: Calypso doesn’t stop Odysseus from leaving – she tries to convince him to stay, but lets him go. She does not do everything she can to help, though. She gives him an axe, shows him a copse of trees and says he can build a raft if he wants to.

151ff. Calypso finds Odysseus where he spends every day – on the shore looking out to sea. Though they spend the night together, they are otherwise finished as a couple. He wants to go home.

177: **Unless you agree to swear a solemn oath**: Odysseus’ experience have taught him to be wary – he thinks this may be a trap that will get him killed.

184: **subterranean water of Styx**: the river Styx is what gods swear oaths by – there is a penalty of breaking the oath (10 years living as a mortal, is roughly it – what happens to Q in an episode of *Star Trek: the Next Generation*), but I know of no story in which this oath is broken.

191: **haloed goddess**: not sure that the Greek says “haloed” – I think though it does refer to a radiance that the gods possess when they are not hidden as mortals.

207: **You’d stay with me here, deathless…**: what is striking about this is that, in terms of the temporal story, Odysseus has already seen the Underworld – he knows it is a grey and cheerless place (sort of like Limbo). He knows that’s what he faces when he dies, but he still chooses to go home rather than to stay with Calypso – it’s pretty impressive.

217f.: **Penelope…would pale beside you**: Odysseus is very clever – he is careful not to offend the goddess when she is about to let him go.

**Book ix**: Books ix-xii are Odysseus’ tale of his perilous journey from Troy to landing on Calypso’s isle. Book ix deals with the Laistrygonians (a raid gone bad), the Lotus Eaters (early drug culture) and the Cyclops, Polyphemus.

1: **At evening**: this is on the second day in the Cyclops’ cave – Odysseus went with about a dozen men. 4 are already dead (2 the prior evening, and 2 in the morning). 2 more die here. The fact that the Cyclops eats people marks him as a monster.

4: **maybe some god told him to**: the sheep will prove useful in the escape. He hadn’t put the sheep in the cave with him the day before – so Odysseus (or Homer) tries to suggest a reason for the change.
11: **dark wine**: this isn’t just any wine, but concentrated wine. The Cyclops has never had any wine, and he drinks this neat – even as big as he is, he gets drunk pretty quickly.

33: **Noman is my name**: this pun makes more sense in Greek. He uses a form of no man (Metis) that you would use in a conditional sentence (if no one …), but tells it in a non-conditional sentence, so the Cyclops doesn’t get that he’s saying “No Man” with the purpose of tricking him. Metis is also the name of the goddess of wisdom, which is appropriate.

37: **That’s my gift to you**: Hosts are supposed to give gifts to their guests, but the Cyclops is not doing that – and this gift – I’ll kill you last is no gift.

42: **stake**: we earlier encountered this stake – it’s the size of a mast pole – not just some stick. The metaphors used here are striking. They spin the burning stake in his eye like people drilling a hole in wood, and the eye sizzles like water used to cool down hot metal that is being worked by a blacksmith. Both are very vivid.

78: **If no man is hurting you…**: here they use the conditional form – so they interpret what he is saying is not a name “Noman,” but the pronoun “no man” or “no one”. This is supposed to show how clever Odysseus is – but he hears that Poseidon is Polyphemus’ dad – why doesn’t he shut up later, when he knows that Polyphemus is still in the dark over his identity?

122: **Him and his nasty friends**: this particular line, written like this, makes me think of Gollum complaining about “nasssty hobbitses.” In speaking to his ram, there is a childlike quality about Polyphemus (admittedly, he’s a powerful and dangerous child, but a child nevertheless.

147: **and Zeus made you pay for it**: Polyphemus broke the laws of hospitality by not only not giving gifts to Odysseus and his men and giving them a nice feast, but by killing his “guests” and eating them. Zeus is the god who enforces hospitality rules, and Odysseus judges that his success was due to Zeus enforcing this punishment on Polyphemus.

168: **didn’t persuade my hero’s heart**: Greek heroes are very eristic (competition minded) and glory minded. And the Homeric heroes are the most eristic and glory minded. Odysseus cannot give up bragging, though it is the sensible thing to do. In later books, he is much more careful about the whole bragging thing.

172f.: **Odysseus…son of Laertes… Ithaca**: just in case there was any doubt. This is Odysseus’ pride, but you’d think that he’d realize that Polyphemus, whom he should know is Poseidon’s kid, will call on dad to give Odysseus grief, and the sea god you don’t want as an enemy, if you’re sailing.

175: **Telemos Eurymides**: this prophet who lived with the Cyclopes for a while is otherwise not referred to – given the predilection of the Cyclopes to be inhospitable, how is it that he didn’t get eaten?

195ff.: **if he is fated to see his family again…having lost all companions/in anothers ship, and find trouble at home**: this is a strange prayer – it is what happens to Odysseus, but Poseidon, to whom the prayer is offered, does none of these things. Poseidon would kill Odysseus on the sea, if he could (Fate won’t allow it), but
Poseidon has little to do with the loss of Odysseus’ men, who die on land for the most part. And Poseidon gets quite angry when the Phaeacians give Odysseus a ride home. Poseidon has nothing to do with Odysseus’ home troubles. The prayer has these words because that is what happens to Odysseus, but Poseidon does none of this, and can’t really do most of it.

213f.: but the god did not accept/My sacrifice: Zeus did not ensure Odysseus’ getting home quickly. To some extent, he is being careful not to offend Poseidon – generally the gods let other gods do their hateful stuff against mortals, within limits. As far as the men – their deaths are largely their own fault (except for those who died because of the Cyclopes – their death falls primarily on Odysseus’ shoulders.

Book x: In this book, Odysseus and his crew meet the Laestrygonians, giants who kill all of Odysseus’ men, except Odysseus and the crew of his ship. From there Odysseus and his men travel to an island, Aeaea, where they encounter the sorceress, Circe.

19: Antiphates: the king of the Laestrygonians, a group of gigantic cannibals.
20: Artacia: the spring of the Laestrygonians. There was a spring called Artacia in Asia Minor, but that seems unlikely here. There is no indication that once Odysseus and his men leave Asia they get sent back there.
27: as huge as a mountain top: how is it that the daughter was normal human size, but mom and dad and most of the others are giant size? Given the reception they got with the gigantic Cyclopes, you can see why the men would freak out.
32: Laestrygonians: the Athenian historian, Thucydides, suggests that the Laestrygonians lived on Sicily. The actual location intended is not clear. And much of Odysseus’ travels take place in a “never-never land.”
34f.: Sons of the Earth/the Giants: given their size, Odysseus compares them to the Giants of old.
50: Aeaea: the location of this island is not known. The name of the island simply means “land.”
51: Circe: she is the sister of Aeetes (“Land Man”), king of the Colchians, and father of Medea. She plays a fairly important role in the Jason and the Argonauts story as she provides Jason and Medea refuge from her father in pursuit.
52: Helios: the sun god; Perse: one of the Oceanids (there are quite a few – Hesiod has a catalog of them in his Theogony)
59: Dawn combed her hair in the third day’s light: one of Homer’s transitional lines. He cannot keep saying, “when rosy-fingered Dawn…” – we earlier had her getting out of the bed of Tithonus, and here combing her hair. Dawn is sister to Helius and Selene.
86ff. so I could carry him: of course, when Odysseus is out, he sees a great stag which he kills by himself and then manages to carry back to the ship. I always think of the seen in The Adventures of Robin Hood with Errol Flynn, who marches into the
royal banquet and heaves a slain stag on the banquet table. Odysseus is a rather short guy (about 5 ft.) – he’s a good overall warrior and especially good at stuff like wrestling, but how a short guy goes around carrying a stag – you got me – of course, he has to keep up his heroic efforts.

119: Eurylochus: though Odysseus calls him brave heart later, Eurylochus, related to Odysseus by marriage, is something of a disappointment to him. It is not clear if this is a slip here, or if Odysseus is being ironic.

140f: Polites ... The one I loved and trusted most: this seems to be genuine. Polites makes only one further appearance, later in Book x, when he is the one who must remind Odysseus that they’ve been on Circe’s island for a year and the men are getting restless.

150: Pramnian wine: this is a wine that comes from the island of Lesbos, and was much prized in Greece and Rome.

157: They looked just like pigs: why do O’s men get turned into pigs, where other crews were turned into lions and the like?

190: All right, Eurylochus: I seem to recall that O’s tone here is pretty angry – the translation doesn’t give that impression. O seems almost understanding of Eurylochus’ feelings.

196f: Hermes...hint of a moustache: Hermes shows up awfully quickly. I saw a mini-series based on the Odyssey, where Hermes comes zipping in like a humming-bird. Paul Schaeffer’s Hermes in Disney’s Hercules is also quick moving. There is no prep for this as with other appearances of the gods. The moustache – his face has the first hint of whiskers, as Hermes is often depicted as a teenage boy in age.

217: Don’t turn her down: Odysseus might turn her down for a variety of reasons, but the most likely would be that he fears losing his male power. Hermes tells him to go to bed with Circe, but only after she’s agreed to let him retain his manliness. “I don’t avoid women, Mandrake, but I do deny them my essence.”

225: Moly: we don’t know what this magic flower is – I’m thinking it is a predecessor of Viagra.

242f.: as if I meant to kill her./The goddess shrieked: This is a goddess – what’s with the crying like a little girl? And divine personages cannot be killed (they can be injured). I see this as something of an inconsistency.

248ff.: No other man ...cannot be beguiled: Not sure how it follows that Odysseus’ superior mind power has anything to do with not being affected by the drug. The drug does not work on a person’s mind so much as causing his body to change.

251: Odysseus, the man of many wiles: Circe was unaware – but she must have known that Troy had fallen, and should have been more on the lookout. The term she uses is the same that we get in line 1 (polytropos).

256: So we may come to trust each other: strangest pick-up line ever!

261f.: so you can/Unman me when I am naked: Hermes warned him of this – it is also the # 1 concern of mortal men going to bed with goddesses and other women of power.
291f.: **silver pitcher...golden basin:** in the world of Homer, we don’t have people using wooden or ceramic bowls if they can use silver and gold instead.

295f.: **Set out bread and generous helpings...:** how is it that Circe, who lives alone with a few serving women, has all this stuff? It’s as if she’s expecting lots of company all the time.

320: **Younger than before, taller and far handsomer:** makes it almost worth being turned into pigs.

352: **winged words:** I guess that Eurylochus, even when he’s talking disrespectful stuff against Odysseus, speaks words that have some effect (the point of words being “winged”)

357f.: **It was this reckless Odysseus...:** though it is awfully presumptuous of Eurylochus to talk like this, what he says has some merit – it was Odysseus who convinced people to go to the Cyclops’ cave, and he was the one who didn’t want to leave until the Cyclops came home to give him a guest gift.

368: **Eurylochus did not stay behind:** Eurylochus is a coward, in other words.

388: **So we sat there day after day for a year:** This is a pretty long stay. Though our account here doesn’t say so, it is Polites who brings up the matter of going home to Odysseus.

412: **Hades...Persephone:** the original account had him actually travel to the Underworld. The account we get in Book xi suggests that he doesn’t travel to the Underworld, but only to the edge of the world, where ghosts can come to visit, but the account gets muddied.

413: **Theban Tiresias:** Tiresias, a prophet of the city of Thebes in the generations past (he’s Oedipus’ prophet), has a reputation of never being wrong.

415: **To him alone Persephone....even after his death:** this idea is echoed elsewhere in Book xi. Odysseus sees his mother’s ghost, which passes him in a daze, until she has drunk some blood. And yet, in Book xxiv, Agamemnon’s ghost is chatting with other Trojan heroes, when the suitors’ ghosts arrive, and they have a chat – that suggests, at least among themselves, some intelligence.

430: **North Wind’s breath:** the place that they go to is past the Hyperboreans (in the far North). I like to think that the real place that inspires this edge of the world locale is Ireland, a land of mist and shadows. How Odysseus and his men get from the middle of the Mediterranean all the way to Ireland, or somewhere else on the Atlantic is unclear – the geography is not solid.

433: **Persephone’s groves:** this area of willows and poplars is an area that has a ghostly quality, I guess. In Book xi, I’m not sure we get the same description of place as we get here.

436: **Acheron...:** the five rivers of the Underworld are the river Acheron (“woe”), Pyrhiplegethon [or just Phlegethon] (“burning fire”), Cocytus (“wailing”), Styx (“hate”) and Lethe (“forgetfulness”). The last plays a prominent part in Plato’s account of the afterlife in his Republic, and in Vergil’s account, in Aeneid VI. Gods cannot violate an oath sworn on the waters of the river Styx (according to Hesiod),
and that river is the usual way people have of going into Hades’ kingdom, where they take a ferry piloted by Charon.

440: **ell-square pit**: an ell is the length from one’s fingers to one’s elbow (about 18”).

455f.: **draw your sharp sword…keeping the feeble death-heads from the blood**: this has never made any sense to me. The ghosts are all immaterial. When Odysseus tries to hug his mom in Book xi, he cannot, as she is immaterial, but they can drink blood, which suggests physicality, and they fear his weapons, which should have no effect on immaterial phantoms.

473: **Elpenor, the youngest**: I love Elpenor – why is this guy in the work? His death is not necessary, nor is the meeting with Odysseus in Book xi. And, in an heroic work, what a way to go – falling off the roof, because he was too drunk and startled to realize he was on the roof.

494f.: **She had passed us by/Without our ever noticing**: I’m not sure I ever noticed this particular line before. I recalled that she had tied up a ram for them to sacrifice, but not the fact that she somehow got there before them, without them noticing.

**Book xi**: Odysseus and his men sail to the edge of the world (the banks of the river Ocean which circles the globe) where they see the ghosts of the dead. Odysseus was sent there by Circe to consult with the prophet Tiresias. While he is there, he also meets his mother, the unfortunate Elpenor, and the ghosts of some of his Trojan War buddies.

8: Circe sent Odysseus on his way to the edge of the world, and, as Odysseus figures sent along a favorable wind to get them there quickly. They do, in fact, make record time.

15: **Cimmerians**: these people were made famous by Robert E. Howard, who wrote books about Conan the Cimmerian. The Cimmerians live somewhere in the northern wastes, a misty place that does not have a clear distinction between night and day, or clear and cloudy.

23: **Perimedes, Eurylochus**: Eurylochus is Odysseus’ relation by marriage, and is a rather cowardly figure, who is always challenging Odysseus’ decisions as something that will get some of them killed. He is noticeably quiet in this book. I don’t know anything about Perimedes, other than that he is one of Odysseus’ crew. There is another Perimedes back on Ithaca who is one of the suitors trying to get Penelope to wed.

24: **ell-square pit**: an ell is the length from the tip of the fingers to the elbow – about 18 in or so.

29: **barren heifer**: presumably, a barren heifer that hasn’t (and won’t) give birth is seen as a more appropriate sacrifice for the dead.

31: **great black ram**: this is singled out as an especially good offering. That Odysseus promises to give offerings to a dead man, Tiresias, suggests that there may have been some cult of the dead in Greece at one time. The Romans would often treat the ghosts of ancestors as still part of the family. I don’t recall that either sacrifice happens within the *Odyssey*. 
48: ghost of Elpenor: we saw the unfortunate boy (though he must be at least 26 or better – they’ve been at the war for 10 years and there are a couple more years since) who fell from Circe’s roof, as he had too much to drink and forgot where he was at the end of Book x.

50: since we were hard pressed: there is no indication that they know Elpenor died – they were rushing to get on the way, and probably didn’t notice he was missing until they were already under sail – at that point, they would have assumed that he overslept or something and was back on Circe’s island. Here, Odysseus suggests they did know he had died, but they were on the clock, so they didn’t get around to burying him. That seems rather strange, even for a “red shirt” like Elpenor.

53: how did you get to the undergloom: Odysseus, in making this statement, doesn’t seem to know that Elpenor is dead – how did you get here walking and beat us who were under sail? That suggests some vague sense that Elpenor was still alive, and somehow got to the shore of Ocean first.

63: Telemachus: he was an infant when Odysseus set sail for Troy. He is at the start of the work 20 years old. He would be about 13 or 14 at this point in Odysseus’ travels. Elpenor brings up family members to persuade Odysseus of his duty to his crew – burial when possible.

66: Isle of Aeaea: Aeaea means “land.” It is Circe’s island. Somehow (and I don’t know how), Elpenor knows that Odysseus will be returning to Aeaea before moving on.

68: Do not leave me unburied, unmourned: I’ve wondered, sometimes, whether this little encounter is aimed at showing Odysseus as a good and generous leader – Odysseus is moved by this statement, and does the right thing. This might be why Elpenor is included at all – he does nothing but die, and his only statement is this plea to Odysseus.

82: Anticleia…Autolycus: Odysseus’ mother is dead, but was alive when he left for Troy. Her father, Autolycus, is reputedly descended from Hermes. There are stories elsewhere of Autolycus that suggest he has trickster blood, which passes on to Odysseus. It is Autolycus who names Odysseus. His name means “giver and receiver of pain.”

88: He knew me and said: Tiresias is blind, but maybe not in the Underworld. Tiresias is the only one of the older ghosts who can speak (has intelligence) without drinking the blood. Presumably, Elpenor, newly dead, had some of his ability remaining.

94: So I may drink the blood and speak truth to you: though Tiresias still has his wits and the ability to talk, apparently he needs a taste of blood to get his full powers up and running. The blood drinking has to do with blood being seen as a conveyor of the life force – the ghosts regain their ability to talk when they drink blood.

99: I do not think you will elude the Earthshaker: the Earthshaker is Poseidon, whom Odysseus offended when he blinded Polyphemus in Book ix. But despite Tiresias’ statement, Poseidon does not cause Odysseus much trouble until he has left Calypso’s island – when Odysseus is sprung from Calypso’s isle by the other gods, Poseidon comes back from the Ethiopians to see that the gods have acted behind his
back, and he is upset and takes it out on Odysseus. Other than that, O’s troubles are not directly the work of Poseidon.

105: Thrinacia: the island where the Sun keeps his cattle and sheep. Some think that Homer or his sources may have had the isle of Malta in mind. Odysseus’ men will eat the cattle of the sun, and he will snuff out the day of their return.

112ff: even if you/Yourself escape... having lost all companions: this is a bizarre addition. Either Tiresias knows that Odysseus will be all alone, or he doesn’t. This seems to suggest that he does not know and that his men’s fate is not already fixed. Maybe Tiresias is putting the best face on it, knowing that this latter prophecy is the most likely to come true.

121: Who eat their food unsalted: the ancient Greeks got their salt from the sea – these people that Odysseus has to find do not know the sea and do not know about salt.

125: winnowing fan: the oar looks roughly like a winnowing fan (a stick with a broad end) by means of which you separate the wheat from the chaff. I could not find a picture of this – it would work like a winnowing fork, by which grain is shoveled into the air, where the wind blows the grain free from the chaff.

145ff.: Whoever of the dead ... go back again: just saying no will send the dead away – but those who are allowed to drink the blood will speak.

153f.: how did you come .../While you are still alive? How is it that Anticleia knows that Odysseus is still alive? Apparently the dead look just as they did while alive, as Odysseus recognizes his mom, Elpenor, and his Trojan War buddies. And Odysseus seems to think he can hug his mom, which suggests that Anticleia’s ghost looks exactly like she did when he last saw her.

159: a long time at sea: at this point, they have not been gone that long, and it is unclear how the dead judge time. I find this statement of Anticleia very strange.

171f.: did Artemis...: Artemis was thought to shoot women, who died suddenly, with her bow; Apollo was thought to do the same for men.

175f.: has it passed to some other man: again, this is about a year and a half after Troy’s fall, two years at most – and yet Odysseus is talking about a much later situation, when there are suitors trying to get his wife to wed them.

181: best of the Achaeans: this term is used of Achilles exclusively in the Iliad. Here it is rather strange to hear Odysseus using it to refer to someone else in Ithaca (a very backwood sort of place).

186f.: Telemachus holds your lands/Unchallenged: In answer to Odysseus’ question, Anticleia notes that Telemachus is in charge. Telemachus would be 12-14 years old – he would not be in charge of anything. At this point, the suitors haven’t taken hold, but Laertes has already given up the kingdom – it is unclear who is keeping the place together, but I cannot believe it’s Telemachus, who at 20 is still sort of wimpy.

188: the island’s lawgiver: this surely cannot be – Telemachus is a kid. I think that the author is confusing 20 year old Telemachus with the boy Anticleia knows – it’s a slip.
And three times she drifted out of my arms: she is a ghost, which Odysseus forgets, or he doesn’t realize the immaterial nature of the dead.

Anticleia’s explanation is that when the body dies, the body is cremated and the soul flies free of the body, and it has neither sinews nor bones to keep it together. Not only is the body immaterial, but there is no apparent awareness (at least of the living among them) until the ghost has drunk blood. Among themselves, there seems to be some awareness – in Book xxiv, when the ghosts of the suitors end up in the Underworld, Agamemnon is aware of someone he knows among them and they have a conversation about what Odysseus has done.

[The shade of Agamemnon appears:] There is a big gap here. What happens immediately after Anticleia retires among the dead is that Odysseus uses the opportunity to get information about famous women, whose ghosts stand around the blood. This has been cut out in this text.

Those who died with him in Aegisthus’ house: Odysseus doesn’t know this at the time he sees the ghosts. This account varies from the most famous account, that contained in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. In that play, Agamemnon and Cassandra alone are killed by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the bath in Agamemnon’s palace. Here Agamemnon tells of being invited to a banquet at Aegisthus’ house. Aegisthus is a cousin of Agamemnon so there is no reason for him to be particularly suspicious, and Agamemnon and his entourage are killed at the banquet.

trying to touch me: apparently Agamemnon has forgotten that, as a ghost, he has no material being.

Did Poseidon sink your fleet at sea…?: Odysseus expects Agamemnon to have died at sea, as did several of the heroes. And his own history attests to Poseidon’s hatred.

Or were you killed by enemy forces on land as you raided…?: on the way home, some of the Greek heroes did use the opportunity to raise additional booties by attacking coastal towns. Odysseus and his men did so as well. In one of those towns, he received a super concentrated wine which he used to get the Cyclops drunk in Book ix.

Slaughtered me like a bull…: the metaphor here is suggestive. A bull would be slain in thanksgiving and would serve to provide the meat at the banquet. But to be slain in such a way suggests a very wrong way of doing things – the king treated like an animal, and a guest killed by his host. The metaphor is continued when he compares his men being killed like swine for a wedding banquet.

Cassandra: Cassandra was a Trojan princess who had the gift of prophecy, but Apollo, jilted by her, made it such that no one believed her. She had the misfortune of being raped in the Temple of Athena at Troy by Ajax Oileus, who was killed on his way home by Athena. She was made a slave/bedmate of Agamemnon, who brought her back to Mycenae. For Clytemnestra, this was the final straw, and she herself killed Cassandra.

But that bitch…turned her back on me: Clytemnestra does not show the slain Agamemnon due respect, but turns away from him.
As killing her own husband: in Homer’s account, Aegisthus seems to do the killing, and Clytemnestra is merely a conspirator in the matter. But it is possible that he may also know of an account where Clytemnestra takes a direct active role.

by my children: Agamemnon and Clytemnestra have three of four kids: the daughters Electra, Chrysothemis, and Iphigenia, and the son, Orestes. Homer does not seem to know the account of Agamemnon sacrificing Iphigenia to get favorable winds to go to Troy. The son, Orestes, was staying with a neighboring king when the murder took place, so he didn’t see his father alive. Orestes would return and take vengeance, but that is about 4 years in the future beyond the scene here. So he does not know of Orestes’ revenge yet.

Through the will of women: here we have a misogynistic statement in a poem that is not particularly misogynistic. Helen here is clearly much hated, though it is interesting that when she appears in Book iv, she is treated with great respect.

don’t go easy on your own wife either: though Agamemnon later states that Penelope would not do such a thing, what happened to him has left him with one lesson to be learned, even by Odysseus – trust no woman. The poem as a whole has many instances of trustworthy women: Nausicaa, Penelope, Eurycleia, and even Circe and Calypso are trustworthy to an extent. This may be why he is careful not to let Penelope in on his plans when he comes back to Ithaca in disguise.

Icarius’ daughter: Icarius, Penelope’s father, was of the royal family of Sparta, and apparently is still alive at the time of the Odyssey, as Telemachus tries to persuade her mother, if she is convinced that Odysseus is gone, to go home to her father, from which the suitors must court her. The idea, in that case, being that the costs of the suitors would be on the old man in a wealthy kingdom, than on him. Penelope is pretty devoted to her father in the legends, and is torn between going with Odysseus to Ithaca or staying with her father in Sparta. It makes it rather puzzling that she hasn’t returned to Sparta.

far too prudent: the adjective used most often of Penelope is periphron (“circumspect,” “careful”). It is her carefulness that makes her a great spouse for the trickster, Odysseus.

who must now be counted as a man: I’m not sure when manhood started, but Telemachus is 13 or so at this point in the narrative – that is too young for him to undertake manly duties. I’m pretty sure that boys would not be expected to undertake their adult roles (at least not the wealthy) until they were at least 16 years old.

But my wife did not let me/Even fill my eyes with the sight of my son.: Mentioning Odysseus’ son reminds Agamemnon of his son, whom he did not see on his return. It is unclear what happened to Orestes, but it is likely that he was sent away by Clytemnestra, who did not want her son killed by Aegisthus (who would have to kill him as a witness and a danger). Agamemnon would have to have come home, and then gone out to dinner at Aegisthus, though it is peculiar that he’d keep Cassandra with him in that instance.
306f. **Beach your ship secretly...any more:** Agamemnon is still harping on the “don’t trust your wife” theme. Odysseus does not have a ship at the end – he’s dropped off by the Phaeacians (and he sleeps through the actual landing – wakes up on the beach – this guy is a serious snoozer).

309ff. **If you’ve heard anything...:** Agamemnon wants to hear about his son, as Achilles does later. Odysseus, of course, would likely know nothing, having come to no recognizable port of Greece. He is still in hiding. In the later accounts, he is staying in a city called Phocis, in NCentral Greece, where he is being raised by the king. His great ally in getting revenge, and future brother-in-law, is Pylades, the Phocian king’s son.

312: **For Orestes has not yet perished:** he can know this, as the ghost has not yet arrived. He also knows, at this point, that Aegisthus has not yet been killed.

316: **it is not good to speak words empty as wind:** these are the opposite of “winged words” that hit their target. In other words, anything he might say would be wild speculation and what good is that?

319ff: **the ghost of Achilles...of Patroclus...Antilochus...Ajax:** here Odysseus sees some of his Trojan War buddies who have died. It is noteworthy that he doesn’t meet any of the guys who died in the 11 ships of his that were destroyed prior to this point in the narrative. He also does not see any Trojan heroes, though they would likely be there too. Achilles was the hero of the Iliad, there called “the best of the Achaeans.” He was killed by Paris, who shot him with an arrow. Homer knows nothing of the invulnerable Achilles, but for the heel. That legend is later, or comes from a different source than Homer knew. Homer does not say where he got shot, but it is not likely that Homer thinks Achilles got it in the heel. Patroclus is Achilles’ best friend. He is older than Achilles by a few years, and was sent to Troy with Achilles as a sobering influence on Achilles. He dies in Iliad XVI after doing great things on the battlefield. Hector kills him, and Achilles then returns to the war to kill Hector and any Trojans that get in his way. Antilochus is Nestor’s son, and one of the heroes who gets some battle scenes in the Iliad. He is killed outside the Iliad’s narrative, by Memnon, leader of the Ethiopians, who are allied with Troy. Achilles then kills Memnon. Ajax – this Ajax is Ajax, son of Telamon, a big guy called the “bulwark of the Achaeans.” He is not to be confused with Ajax, son of Oileus, who is a sneaky sort of warrior. Both die before they get home. Ajax commits suicide after he is not given Achilles’ armor (Athena manages to make sure her favorite, Odysseus, gets the armor), which was supposed to go to the best Greek warrior after Achilles died. That he is hanging around with Achilles may indicate that the two are reconciled. Ajax Oileus is killed by Athena for raping Cassandra in Athena’s temple the night that Troy is taken.

322: **Aeacus’:** Aeacus is the father of Peleus, and Achilles’ granddad.

323: **his words had wings:** this motif again – Achilles speaks well and to the point.

331: **by far the mightiest of the Achaeans:** again, the idea that he was their best warrior at Troy.
332: **consult Tiresias:** the other ghosts also asked him why he had come, alive, to the place of shades – apparently they didn’t see (or didn’t recognize him prior to drinking blood) him when he met with Tiresias. Even his mom asked him, and she was hovering near the blood pool while he spoke with Tiresias.

340f: **You should not/Lament your death at all, Achilles:** for Odysseus, the fact that Achilles is shown deference in the land of the dead (though I’m not sure he could have seen enough to draw that conclusion) is a sign that life (death too) has been good to Achilles. Achilles in the *Iliad* has to make a choice – long uneventful life, or short life with glory. Ultimately, his need to avenge his friend, and his feeling of loss at his friend’s death, convince him to rejoin the battle. For Odysseus, who is having a difficult time getting home, may envy what he sees as Achilles’ glory even in death.

343ff: **Don’t try to sell me on death…slaving away for some poor dirt farmer:** Achilles’ words are amazing – he says that he would rather be the slave of a farmer who can barely feed himself (and so cannot really feed his slaves) than be king of the dead. Though there is no punishment evident for Achilles or the other heroes who have died, there is no joy in this existence. That he chooses someone whose life would be harder than any other human’s as his ‘druthers suggests that even the worst life has some moments of joy. The dead have none of that.

347: **tell me about that boy of mine:** Achilles had a son while he was hiding out on the island of Scyros. That son, Neoptolemus, was brought to Troy to take his father’s place in the last few weeks of the war. His son’s name: “new war” might be taken to mean “reinforcement.” Like Agamemnon, he is interested in what his descendants are doing.

354: **And I’m not there for him….**: Achilles expresses the same concern in *Iliad* XXIV – he tells Priam that he is not there for his father, who is old and needs him, but is instead making life hell for Priam at Troy. We don’t see Peleus in this work – he is still alive. Neoptolemus will provide some protection for his granddad. Peleus’ situation seems to be similar to that of Laertes, Odysseus’ old father – he is not in any danger, but has himself given up the joys of life because of his deep depression at his son’s absence.

362ff. **I have heard nothing of flawless Peleus/But as for your son…:** He takes a different tone here than he did with Agamemnon. There he seemed a bit impatient with Agamemnon’s thinking he knew something about his home situation, but here he does not speak harshly or judgmentally. He does quickly dispense with the Peleus portion of the question, but deftly gets to talking about Neoptolemus, whom he did see at Troy. We find out that Odysseus was the one who was sent to get Neoptolemus, and that he watched Neoptolemus be in the front ranks of fighters. He also kept his cool in the wooden horse. In Book iv, we hear a story of how Helen mimicked the voices of the Greek heroes near the horse, apparently to trick them into speaking out and revealing their location – Menelaus, in that book, suggests that Odysseus was the only one who kept his cool. Here Odysseus adds Neoptolemus, who is not yet married.
375ff. **Telephus’ son, Eurypylus...Ceteian:** there was more than one Eurypylus at Troy. A different Eurypylus, from Thrace, fought on the Trojan side. The other Eurypylus was the son of Telephus and led the Mysians (from Asia Minor) in battle on the side of Troy. Apparently, his mom bribed him with some gold trinkets to go to war. His men are called **Ceteian** because the river Ceteia runs through Mysia. According to Odysseus, he was the 2nd most handsome warrior the Greeks fought, the other being Memnon, the Ethiopian. Achilles killed Memnon, and Neoptolemus took out the 2nd most handsome Trojan ally.

382: **Epeius:** he was the man who built the horse, but it was Odysseus’ plan to build it as a means of getting inside Troy. The horse was so large that 30 men could fit inside, and part of the gate would have to be dismantled so the horse could be brought inside. In Vergil’s *Aeneid*, a Greek spy named Sinon convinces the Trojans by pretending that the horse was built as a peace offering to Athena, whom the Greeks had offended and scared into going home. Odysseus says that he controlled the trapdoor, but another tradition put Epeius in that position – he had made the latch such that only he could open it.

385f: **were wiping away tears from their eyes...** In Odysseus’ account, the Greeks in the horse are fretting and worrying – if they are caught they’ll easily be killed. This does not match up with Menelas’ account of the same scene in Book iv – where it was Helen’s great ability as an impressionist that caused them trouble.

394: **He never took a hit from a spear or a sword:** which indicates what sort of warrior he was.

398f.: **went off with huge strides...filled with joy:** Achilles is a proud poppa, and strides of with great joy through the fields of asphodel (called by the poet, William Carlos Williams, “that greeny flower”). It is interesting that there is asphodel here, as in Taoism there is a suggestion that asphodel may have the power of conferring immortality on a person.

402ff.: **Only the ghost of Telamonian Ajax:** Ajax felt that he was cheated out of the arms that were due him. As a result he went crazy and tried to kill the Greek leaders, but was thwarted by Athena. When he recovered his wits, he committed suicide out of shame. He still hates Odysseus. Ajax is generally portrayed as a big, dumb lug with great battle prowess. In a battle of wits with Odysseus and Athena, he was doomed to lose. Odysseus here expresses regret. He tries to make amends. He apologizes, sort of – he regrets the incident. Greek heroes are a lot like politicians – they don’t do outright apologies well. His regret, though, is to be taken as genuine. Odysseus suggests that they might have spoken, but he found other stuff to see (426f.).

433f. **And then Orion loomed up before me...**: Here I have some questions: how does Odysseus recognize Orion? He would be from a previous generation, and he does not speak with Odysseus. How is it that there are animal ghosts here too? We have Orion chasing these ghostly animals with a bronze club – but weapons would be material, and how could a ghost carry them? How could ghostly animals be afraid (they can’t die again)? And how is it that this is going on at the end of the world,
where the ghosts have come forth from the Underworld to drink the blood? On the last question, Homer seems to have had two ideas about the trip – in one version, Odysseus travels to the Underworld itself, where he sees ghosts engaged in a variety of activities; in the other, he travels to the end of the world where ghosts can come for a visit and talk (but they aren’t doing anything else). Homer mixes the two versions. Having Orion hunting (he is known as a hunter) suggests that the dead do stuff they did while alive, which suggests that death would not be so bad, though Achilles would not agree. Perhaps the best way to view this is to think of the energy ribbon in *Star Trek: Generations* – you get to do all the stuff you wanted, but because it is some spirit world, the thrill of daily life is missing – it’s too easy, and therefore ultimately boring and meaningless. This is the Orion the constellation is named after – he was a hunter and lover of Dawn; as a hunter, he was a friend of Artemis, who was angry at his romantic activities and killed him, either with her bow, or by sending the scorpion to kill him.

437ff: **Tityos...Tantalus...Sisyphus:** Tityus was a Titan who was punished in Tartarus by having his liver eaten out by vultures (which might be where the artists got the vulture idea for their Prometheus); Tantalus tried to feed his chopped up son to the gods at a banquet he was throwing – they found out, reconstructed the kid, and sentenced him to this punishment of eternal thirst and hunger; Sisyphus, a trickster figure sometimes associated with Odysseus (another big liar), tricked death and got a second life, and was given the punishment of pushing a boulder up a cliff, which would roll down as soon as he got to the top – that way, he wouldn’t get away again. The existential philosopher, Sartre, wrote an essay on Sisyphus as an example of existential man. These three would be three of the big sinners in the Underworld. Homer’s Underworld does not seem to have everyone judged. The worst are given a fitting punishment, but others, good or bad, live a grey existence. Homer leaves out the figure of Ixion, who was strapped to a wheel that kept spinning and was set aflame. In some versions, that sinner was cast into the upper atmosphere, which may be why he’s not here.

463: **mighty Heracles:** Heracles was given a poisonous tunic that stuck to his skin. Unable to stand the pain, he ordered a friend to set him atop a pyre and set the pyre alight. The mortal Heracles died, but the immortal part of him went to Olympus where he married Hebe, the Barbie of the Greek gods – given Heracles’ less than stunning intellectual powers, it was a match made in heaven.

470ff. Heracles has his bow (he usually has a bow, or a big club in art) and is aiming to shoot it – like Orion, he’s on the prowl for some monster to fight and slay. His baldric is very strange – I don’t think we get mention of this elsewhere. The degree of detail seems a bit peculiar, given that we’re talking about a ghost here. And wouldn’t the ghost of Heracles have the tunic on? Not clear what we’re to make of this, other than it’s a nice set piece.

481ff. **Son of Laertes...** we’ve seen this line a few times. How is it that Heracles knows Odysseus? He is from the generation before Odysseus. It is unlikely that he would
have met Odysseus, and if he did meet him, it would be as a boy. Heracles did
know Laertes, who was one of the Argonauts. Maybe it’s the family resemblance.

487: **Enslaved to a man who was far less than I**: he is referring to Eurystheus, the king
of Mycenae, and Heracles’ distant cousin. Hera, angry at Zeus, engineered for
Eurystheus to get this position, and to cause Heracles to have to do 12 labors for
him.

491ff. **That hound**: the hound of hell is Cerberus, the retrieval of whom was Heracles #
12 labor.

498: **Theseus and Pirithous**: Theseus was king of Athens and friend of Heracles.
Theseus’ best friend was Pirithous. In one account, they went to the Underworld to
kidnap Persephone so Pirithous could marry her. They got caught and were set in
chairs where they lost all memory and desire. Heracles freed Theseus but not
Pirithous. The Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs took place at the marriage of
Pirithous (this was prior to the whole “panty raid to the Underworld” adventure).
Theseus is best known for the Minotaur adventure.

500ff. **The nations of the dead ... with an eerie cry**: apparently, Odysseus has
overstayed his welcome and Persephone has stirred up the ghosts to come howling
at him. He runs back to the ship and they set sail quickly. This has always smacked
to me of being a device to end this book of wonders. Vergil ends his trip to the
Underworld by saying they have a limited time and must be gone by the end of the
time. Homer does not do this, so we get him getting the bum’s rush to end the
book.

**Book xii** -- Odysseus’ men do not listen to his advice to leave the cattle of the sun
alone, and Zeus, at Helius’ urging, zaps Odysseus’ ship. All men die, except for
Odysseus who makes it alone to Calypso’s island.

2ff. **Scylla and Charybdis**: Odysseus had been told about Scylla, a monster that lurks in
a cave and reaches out with six tentacles to grab men from Odysseus’ ship and
consume them. Charybdis is a great whirlpool. Scylla and Charybdis are on
opposite sides of a strait through which Odysseus must travel. He does not tell his
men about the monsters, knowing that he will lose some men in either case.

45: **Theban Tiresias**: in Book xi, Tiresias had also warned him about offending the sun
god.

50: **Circe’s**: Circe had also warned Odysseus. Why she didn’t speak to all of the men is
unclear. They don’t seem to accept Odysseus’ account – well, they sort of accept it.
She had told him to avoid landing there so there would be no temptation. As it
turns out they have plenty of provisions for a normal stay over – but the wind dies
down and they are stuck there after they run out of food.

57: **Eurylochus**: Eurylochus had chastised Odysseus before – he refused to go with the
crew to Circe because of what happened with the Cyclops. Here he suggests that
Odysseus is tougher than the rest, and he may be able to withstand all this sea
travel, but the men must rest and eat on land.
68ff. **How could we survive…:** Eurylochus’ argument is that it is getting dark and they may run aground in the darkness. The argument is a good one, but the West Wind is ordinarily a favorable wind, so its choice as one of the winds that may destroy them is puzzling.

74ff. Odysseus gives in because all of the men agree with Eurylochus. It is rather surprising just how ready the troops are to agree with an underling rather than with their captain.

82: **They swore an oath:** of course, they do not keep the oath. Well, they keep it as long as they have sufficient food, but break it as soon as they are hungry.

115ff: **I washed my hands... close my eyelids in sleep:** What’s this all about? At other points, Odysseus falls asleep when his men most need him. This is another such time. Even accepting his great weariness, the inconvenience of his naps is troubling.

125f.: **we will build a rich temple:** Eurylochus and the other men try to make a deal with the sun god. They’ll eat some of the cattle now as they are in need, but will make it up to the god later. Such deals are not the way human-god relations work. Humans ultimately have nothing with which to bargain, especially as in this case where they make the promise of payback for stealing from the sun god. Praying for success in battle is one thing, but asking for divine approbation of stealing from them – well, the gods don’t play that.

137f.: **tender leaves/From a high-crowned oak in lieu of white barley:** I’m not sure if this is an additional problem or not. For the Romans, such substitutes would be seen as offensive and likely be a deal-breaker. I don’t know if the Greeks felt that way as well. They have to substitute barley here and water for wine later. Not a great start to a sacrifice.

155: **Lampetie:** a nymph on the island who tells Helius what happened.

164: **I will sink into Hades:** Helius makes a pretty big threat here – he threatens to turn the world dark (which presumably includes Mt. Olympus). Such a threat gets Zeus’ attention and he takes vengeance on Helius’ behalf.

169f. **Calypso, Hermes the Guide:** Calypso must have told Odysseus all this at some point during his seven year sojourn on her island. When Hermes told her is unclear. I’d almost guess that Odysseus wondered what happened, and Calypso asked Hermes on one of his visits, and then gave the info to Odysseus. Given that they ate some of the Sun’s cattle – how is it that Odysseus wonders how this trouble came?

175ff. **some portents:** these are pretty serious portents – the cooking beef starts mooing. But then Homer has Odysseus say that the men continued to eat for about 6 days before a wind came and they could get away. Even after the mooing food, they continued to eat – that’s pretty darn strange.

185: **When we left the island behind…** as soon as they get away from land, the sky goes dark and storms are brewing. This would seem to be an argument for not getting too far from land.
210ff.: Odysseus holds on to a fig tree that hangs from the cliff face near Scylla. Apparently he is out of her sight. Still, it is remarkable that he holds on for so long (several hours) before letting go. When he does let go, there is a piece of the mast which he is able to use as a personal flotation device and get to Calypso’s isle.

Book xxiii

1: **Penelope, ever cautious:** the regular epithet for Penelope is *periphron*, which might be translated as cautious. It means that she looks carefully before taking action, and so retains a certain suspicion in dealing with others. This quality makes her the perfect mate for Odysseus.

5f.: **But this story/Can’t be true...**: Eurykleia, Odysseus’ old nurse, who recognized him a few books back and became his ally has reported to Penelope that her husband has come home, won the contest of the bow, and killed all the suitors. It is unclear if Penelope is truly skeptical, or whether she is simply playing the skeptical card for her own reasons.

17f.: **The scar he got from the tusk of that boar...**: Eurykleia saw this when she washed Odysseus’ feet earlier in the *Odyssey*. The washing of the feet of a traveler would be a sign of hospitality, and Penelope called for someone to wash his feet. He chose to have Eurykleia do the job. She recognized this scar on his inner thigh that he got when, as a teenager, he hunted a boar with his maternal grandfather, Autolycus.

22: **you can torture me to my death:** in Greek society (at least later Greek society), slaves could not give evidence in a law court. If they were required to do so (in the case of murder or some such crime), they would be tortured as they gave testimony. The idea was that a slave’s natural tendency was to lie, so only torture could get him/her to tell the truth. Eurycleia here may be referring to that, or simply stating that she won’t change her testimony, even if she were to be tortured.

30: **Should she hold back...**: here we see Penelope’s *periphron* nature at work – she does not automatically accept her husband, but remains skeptical. Some think that she does recognize her husband, but holds back to teach him a lesson for deceiving her.

38ff.: **She sat a long time in silence:** she studies Odysseus, and recognizes the features, but the beggar’s clothing seem to put her off.

54: **There are secrets between us no one else knows:** this is the approach she has decided on – she will test him on something that only her husband would know.

63ff.: **When someone kills just one man...**: There were no prisons in the ancient world. There were jails where people would be held pending trial, or pending execution, but generally matters were handled in other ways. In the case of murder, one option was for the killer to pay the victim’s family an appropriate sum. If they accepted the sum, the matter was closed. Or, the murderer would go into exile. For Odysseus, though he is the king, the fact that he has killed so many of the sons of the top families in Ithaca gives him no easy out.
73ff. **this is what I think we should do...**: the plan is to play for time. Telemachus and some other youths and the faithful maids will all dress up and throw a little party. People passing by will think that a wedding is going on, and will think nothing of it for a day or two, which will give Odysseus time to do something about the situation. I have to say, this seems very strange to me. 1) There was no concern about people hearing the sounds of battle and the screams of men and women when Odysseus was killing all the suitors; 2) How is it that you have people able to hear anything from the palace complex – they aren’t just passing by a house with a small yard in front?

84: **the Olympian**: when no other designation is given, the Olympian is Zeus. Zeus as king of the gods presumably is on the side of the rightful king. He is also the guardian of * xenia*, the guest-host relationship, which the suitors have violated.

92: **Fickle woman**: I can’t see how anyone would blame Penelope for marrying again. They might find fault with her choice among the losers who were her suitors, but Odysseus was long missing, and even the ancient Greeks would accept the assumption on the part of a wife that her husband was dead. Throughout the work, prior to knowing that his father was home, Telemachus was always saying that he was dead.

97: **Eurynome**: I know nothing of this woman, other than her name. If she is really the housekeeper, it seems she didn’t keep on top of the slave girls well, as many were shacking up with the suitors.

101ff.: Odysseus’ hair is made to seem like hyacinths, and he is compared to a beautiful piece of sculpture made by a master craftsman. It’s a very nice image. The gods have the power to improve someone’s appearance, or the reverse.

123ff.: **Nurse, bring the bed out...**: this is the test – only Odysseus knows that one of the bedposts is a living tree trunk. The bed was made, and the house built around it.

126: **She was testing her husband**: is she testing to make sure he is Odysseus, or having some fun at his expense? It does seem she knows by now.

151: **At this, Penelope finally let go**: this seems to suggest that the test was designed to prove, beyond any doubt, Odysseus’ identity.

162ff.: **My heart has been cold with fear...**: Penelope’s fear is that a stranger would trick her. She seems to have gone along with the beggar’s plan of the contest with the bow, and she didn’t know him then, but now she’s extremely cautious. It seems somewhat inconsistent.

166ff. **Not even Helen...**: her argument here is peculiar. She suggests that Helen would not have done what she did, had she realized what would happen, but then goes on to say that a god made her do it. In a sense that is true – Aphrodite “made” her fall in love with Paris, but to some extent, Aphrodite is an external representation of one’s own yearnings, so she really did want to run away with Paris. As Helen is portrayed somewhat favorably in Book iv, it is unclear how Homer expects us to think of Helen.

173: **Actor’s daughter**: that is Eurycleia.
179ff. The metaphor of the shipwrecked sailor: what is peculiar about this is that the metaphor is used of Penelope, though the reality of the shipwrecked sailor applies to her husband.

188f.: had not Athena stepped in...: this extended night also happens when Zeus is sleeping with Alcmena and fathering Heracles. Here it seems to be so they can have some time to talk after making love.

192: Lampus and Phaethon: both names suggest light. Phaethon is usually a human who is the son of Helius, the sun god, who tries to drive the sun chariot and loses control and dies. Here that name is used of one of Helius’ horses.

222: a ram, a bull, and a boar in its prime: sacrificing a bull would be a big thing in Greece. This triple sacrifice was an important sacrifice even in Rome, which had more land for beef to graze – this particular grouping even had a name: suovetaurilia.

226ff. And death shall come ...from the sea/As gentle as this touch....: this is what Tiresias told Odysseus, but it runs counter to later tradition where he is killed by Telegonus, his son by Circe, who leads an expedition against Ithaca.

299f.: She roused the slumbering, golden Dawn...: once the couple have had enough time together, Athena gets Dawn to do her job. I wonder, in a time before mechanical time -- time was determined by the placement of the sun or moon – whether some nights just felt longer or shorter to people. With machines like clocks, it would be noted that Dawn occurred at noon or something, but without such mechanism, the day starts whenever Dawn gets going.

316ff. You don’t need to tell me...: Odysseus realizes that the suitors families will want revenge when they hear what he has done. It doesn’t matter that he is in the right – the blood bond trumps the law here. They’ll want revenge.

322ff.: the cowherd...the swineherd: the cowherd is Philoetius, and the swineherd is Eumaeus. They remained faithful to Odysseus, while the goatherd, Melanthion, sided with the suitors.