**Homer’s Odyssey Part 2**

*Translated by Robert Fitzgerald*

**The Meeting of Father and Son**

But there were two men in the mountain hut—

Odysseus and the swineherd. At first light

blowing their fire up, they cooked their breakfast

and sent their lads out, driving herds to root

in the tall timber.

935 When Telemachus came,

the wolfish troop of watchdogs only fawned on him

as he advanced. Odysseus heard them go

and heard the light crunch of a man’s footfall—

at which he turned quickly to say:

“Eumaeus,

940 here is one of your crew come back, or maybe

another friend: the dogs are out there snuffling

belly down; not one has even growled.

I can hear footsteps—”

But before he finished

his tall son stood at the door.

945 The swineherd

rose in surprise, letting a bowl and jug

tumble from his fingers. Going forward,

he kissed the young man’s head, his shining eyes

and both hands, while his own tears brimmed and fell.

Think of a man whose dear and only son,

950 born to him in exile, reared with labor,

has lived ten years abroad and now returns:

how would that man embrace his son! Just so

the herdsman clapped his arms around Telemachus

and covered him with kisses—for he knew

955 the lad had got away from death. He said:

“Light of my days, Telemachus,

you made it back! When you took ship for Pylos

I never thought to see you here again.

Come in, dear child, and let me feast my eyes;

960 here you are, home from the distant places!

How rarely, anyway, you visit us,

your own men, and your own woods and pastures!

Always in the town, a man would think

you loved the suitors’ company, those dogs!”

965 Telemachus with his clear candor said:

“I am with you, Uncle. See now, I have come

because I wanted to see you first, to hear from you

if Mother stayed at home—or is she married

off to someone, and Odysseus’ bed

970 left empty for some gloomy spider’s weaving?”

Gently the forester replied to this:

“At home indeed your mother is, poor lady

still in the women’s hall. Her nights and days

are wearied out with grieving.”

Stepping back

975 he took the bronze-shod lance, and the young prince

entered the cabin over the worn door stone.

Odysseus moved aside, yielding his couch,

but from across the room Telemachus checked him:

“Friend, sit down; we’ll find another chair

980 in our own hut. Here is the man to make one!”

The swineherd, when the quiet man sank down,

built a new pile of evergreens and fleeces—

a couch for the dear son of great Odysseus—

then gave them trenchers of good meat, left over

985 from the roast pork of yesterday, and heaped up

willow baskets full of bread, and mixed

an ivy bowl of honey-hearted wine.

Then he in turn sat down, facing Odysseus,

their hands went out upon the meat and drink

990 as they fell to, ridding themselves of hunger. . . .

. . . She tipped her golden wand upon the man,

making his cloak pure white, and the knit tunic

fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,

ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard

995 no longer gray upon his chin. And she

withdrew when she had done.

Then Lord Odysseus

reappeared—and his son was thunderstruck.

Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away

as though it were a god, and whispered:

“Stranger,

1000 you are no longer what you were just now!

Your cloak is new; even your skin! You are

one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!

Be kind to us, we’ll make you fair oblation

and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!”

1005 The noble and enduring man replied:

“No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.

I am that father whom your boyhood lacked

and suffered pain for lack of. I am he.”

Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks

as he embraced his son.

1010 Only Telemachus,

uncomprehending, wild

with incredulity, cried out:

“You cannot

be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits

conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!

1015 No man of woman born could work these wonders

by his own craft, unless a god came into it

with ease to turn him young or old at will.

I swear you were in rags and old,

and here you stand like one of the immortals!”

1020 Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear

and said:

“This is not princely, to be swept

away by wonder at your father’s presence.

No other Odysseus will ever come,

for he and I are one, the same; his bitter

1025 fortune and his wanderings are mine.

Twenty years gone, and I am back again

on my own island. . . .”

Then, throwing

his arms around this marvel of a father,

Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears

1030 rose from the wells of longing in both men,

and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering

as those of the great taloned hawk,

whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.

So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,

1035 and might have gone on weeping so till sundown. . . .

**The Beggar and the Faithful Dog**

While he spoke

an old hound, lying near, pricked up his ears

and lifted up his muzzle. This was Argos,

trained as a puppy by Odysseus,

1040 but never taken on a hunt before

his master sailed for Troy. The young men, afterward,

hunted wild goats with him, and hare, and deer,

but he had grown old in his master’s absence.

Treated as rubbish now, he lay at last

1045 upon a mass of dung before the gates—

manure of mules and cows, piled there until

field hands could spread it on the king’s estate.

Abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies,

old Argos lay.

But when he knew he heard

1050 Odysseus’ voice nearby, he did his best

to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears,

having no strength to move nearer his master.

And the man looked away,

wiping a salt tear from his cheek; but he

1055 hid this from Eumaeus. Then he said:

“I marvel that they leave this hound to lie

here on the dung pile;

he would have been a fine dog, from the look of him,

though I can’t say as to his power and speed

1060 when he was young. You find the same good build

in house dogs, table dogs landowners keep

all for style.”

And you replied, Eumaeus:

“A hunter owned him—but the man is dead

in some far place. If this old hound could show

1065 the form he had when Lord Odysseus left him,

going to Troy, you’d see him swift and strong.

He never shrank from any savage thing

he’d brought to bay in the deep woods; on the scent

no other dog kept up with him. Now misery

1070 has him in leash. His owner died abroad,

and here the women slaves will take no care of him.

You know how servants are: without a master

they have no will to labor, or excel.

For Zeus who views the wide world takes away

1075 half the manhood of a man, that day

he goes into captivity and slavery.”

Eumaeus crossed the court and went straight forward

into the megaron among the suitors;

but death and darkness in that instant closed

1080 the eyes of Argos, who had seen his master,

Odysseus, after twenty years. . . .

**BOOK 17**

The Test of the Great Bow

Now the queen reached the storeroom door and halted.

Here was an oaken sill, cut long ago

and sanded clean and bedded true. Foursquare

1085 the doorjambs and the shining doors were set

by the careful builder. Penelope untied the strap

around the curving handle, pushed her hook

into the slit, aimed at the bolts inside,

and shot them back. Then came a rasping sound

1090 as those bright doors the key had sprung gave way—

a bellow like a bull’s vaunt in a meadow—

followed by her light footfall entering

over the plank floor. Herb-scented robes

lay there in chests, but the lady’s milk-white arms

1095 went up to lift the bow down from a peg

in its own polished bow case.

Now Penelope

sank down, holding the weapon on her knees,

and drew her husband’s great bow out, and sobbed

and bit her lip and let the salt tears flow.

1100 Then back she went to face the crowded hall

tremendous bow in hand, and on her shoulder hung

the quiver spiked with coughing death. Behind, her

maids bore a basket full of ax heads, bronze

and iron implements for the master’s game.

1105 Thus in her beauty she approached the suitors,

and near a pillar of the solid roof

she paused, her shining veil across her cheeks,

her maids on either hand and still,

then spoke to the banqueters:

“My lords, hear me:

1110 suitors indeed, you recommended this house

to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband

being long gone, long out of mind. You found

no justification for yourselves—none

except your lust to marry me. Stand up,then:

1115 we now declare a contest for that prize.

Here is my lord Odysseus’ hunting bow.

Bend and string it if you can. Who sends an arrow

through iron ax-helve sockets, twelve in line?

I join my life with his, and leave this place, my home,

1120 my rich and beautiful bridal house, forever

to be remembered, though I dream it only.” . . .

Two men had meanwhile left the hall:

swineherd and cowherd, in companionship,

one downcast as the other. But Odysseus

1125 followed them outdoors, outside the court,

and coming up said gently:

“You, herdsman,

and you, too, swineherd, I could say a thing to you,

or should I keep it dark?

No, no; speak,

my heart tells me. Would you be men enough

1130 to stand by Odysseus if he came back?

Suppose he dropped out of a clear sky, as I did?

Suppose some god should bring him?

Would you bear arms for him, or for the suitors?”

The cowherd said:

“Ah, let the master come!

1135 Father Zeus, grant our old wish! Some courier

guide him back! Then judge what stuff is in me

and how I manage arms!”

Likewise Eumaeus

fell to praying all heaven for his return,

so that Odysseus, sure at least of these,

told them:

1140 “I am at home, for I am he.

I bore adversities, but in the twentieth year

I am ashore in my own land. I find

the two of you, alone among my people,

longed for my coming. Prayers I never heard

1145 except your own that I might come again.

So now what is in store for you I’ll tell you:

If Zeus brings down the suitors by my hand

I promise marriages to both, and cattle,

and houses built near mine. And you shall be

1150 brothers-in-arms of my Telemachus.

Here, let me show you something else, a sign

that I am he, that you can trust me, look:

this old scar from the tusk wound that I got

boar hunting on Parnassus—. . .”

Shifting his rags

1155 he bared the long gash. Both men looked, and knew

and threw their arms around the old soldier, weeping,

kissing his head and shoulders. He as well

took each man’s head and hands to kiss, then said—

to cut it short, else they might weep till dark—

1160 “Break off, no more of this.

Anyone at the door could see and tell them.

Drift back in, but separately at intervals

after me.

Now listen to your orders:

when the time comes, those gentlemen, to a man,

1165 will be dead against giving me bow or quiver.

Defy them. Eumaeus, bring the bow

and put it in my hands there at the door.

Tell the women to lock their own door tight.

Tell them if someone hears the shock of arms

1170 or groans of men, in hall or court, not one

must show her face, but keep still at her weaving.

Philoeteus, run to the outer gate and lock it.

Throw the crossbar and lash it.” . . .

And Odysseus took his time,

1175 turning the bow, tapping it, every inch,

for borings that termites might have made

while the master of the weapon was abroad.

The suitors were now watching him, and some

jested among themselves:

“A bow lover!”

“Dealer in old bows!”

1180 “Maybe he has one like it

at home!”

“Or has an itch to make one for himself.”

“See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!”

And one disdainful suitor added this:

“May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he bends it!”

1185 But the man skilled in all ways of contending,

satisfied by the great bow’s look and heft,

like a musician, like a harper, when

with quiet hand upon his instrument

he draws between his thumb and forefinger

1190 a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly

Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.

Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,

so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang

a swallow’s note.

In the hushed hall it smote the suitors

1195 and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered

overhead, one loud crack for a sign.

And Odysseus laughed within him that the son

of crooked-minded Cronus had flung that omen down.

He picked one ready arrow from his table

1200 where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still

in the quiver for the young men’s turn to come.

He knocked it, let it rest across the handgrip,

and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,

aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

Now flashed

1205 arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle

through every socket ring, and grazed not one,

to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

“Telemachus, the stranger

you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.

1210 I did not miss, neither did I take all day

stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,

not so contemptible as the young men say.

The hour has come to cook their lordships’ mutton—

supper by daylight. Other amusements later,

1215 with song and harping that adorn a feast.”

He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince

Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,

belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,

and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze

1220 stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.

**BOOK 22**

**Death at the Palace**

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the

islands

leapt and stood on the broad doorsill, his own bow in his

hand.

He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver

and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over.

1225 Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before,

if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.”

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for

Antinous

just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking

cup,

embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his

fingers,

1230 the wine was even at his lips, and did he dream of death?

How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends

who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe

indeed—

could dare to bring death’s pain on him and darkness on

his eyes?

Odysseus’ arrow hit him under the chin

1235 and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the wine cup fall

from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted

crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,

and one last kick upset his table

1240 knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.

Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay

the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,

everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned

the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,

not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and

1245 throw.

All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”

“Your own throat will be slit for this!”

“Our finest lad is down!

You killed the best on Ithaca.”

“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild

1250 shot,

an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend

they were already in the grip of death.

But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it

home from the land of Troy. You took my house to

1255 plunder,

twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared

bid for my wife while I was still alive.

Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide

heaven,

contempt for what men say of you hereafter.

1260 Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

As they all took this in, sickly green fear

pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered

looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.

Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:

1265 “If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,

all that you say these men have done is true.

Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.

But here he lies, the man who caused them all.

Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on

1270 to do these things. He cared less for a marriage

than for the power Cronion has denied him

as king of Ithaca. For that

he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.

He is dead now and has his portion. Spare

1275 your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make

restitution of wine and meat consumed,

and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen

with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.

Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger.”

1280 Odysseus glowered under his black brows

and said:

“Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,

all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold

put up by others, would I hold my hand.

There will be killing till the score is paid.

1285 You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,

or run for it, if you think you’ll escape death.

I doubt one man of you skins by.” . . .

At this moment that unmanning thundercloud,

the aegis, Athena’s shield,

took form aloft in the great hall.

1290 And the suitors mad with fear

at her great sign stampeded like stung cattle by a river

when the dread shimmering gadfly strikes in summer,

in the flowering season, in the long-drawn days.

After them the attackers wheeled, as terrible as falcons

from eyries in the mountains veering over and diving

1295 down

with talons wide unsheathed on flights of birds,

who cower down the sky in chutes and bursts along the

valley—

but the pouncing falcons grip their prey, no frantic wing

avails,

and farmers love to watch those beaked hunters.

1300 So these now fell upon the suitors in that hall,

turning, turning to strike and strike again,

while torn men moaned at death, and blood ran smoking

over the whole floor. . . .

**BOOK 22**

**Odysseus and Penelope**

Crossing the doorsill she sat down at once

1305 in firelight, against the nearest wall,

across the room from the lord Odysseus.

There

leaning against a pillar, sat the man

and never lifted up his eyes, but only waited

for what his wife would say when she had seen him.

1310 And she, for a long time, sat deathly still

in wonderment—for sometimes as she gazed

she found him—yes, clearly—like her husband,

but sometimes blood and rags were all she saw.

Telemachus’s voice came to her ears:

“Mother,

1315 cruel mother, do you feel nothing,

drawing yourself apart this way from Father?

Will you not sit with him and talk and question him?

What other woman could remain so cold?

Who shuns her lord, and he come back to her

1320 from wars and wandering, after twenty years?

Your heart is hard as flint and never changes!”

Penelope answered:

“I am stunned, child.

I cannot speak to him. I cannot question him.

I cannot keep my eyes upon his face.

1325 If really he is Odysseus, truly home,

beyond all doubt we two shall know each other

better than you or anyone. There are

secret signs we know, we two.”

A smile

came now to the lips of the patient hero, Odysseus,

1330 who turned to Telemachus and said:

“Peace: let your mother test me at her leisure.

Before long she will see and know me best.

These tatters, dirt—all that I’m caked with now—

make her look hard at me and doubt me still. . . .”

1335 Greathearted Odysseus, home at last,

was being bathed now by Eurynome

and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again

in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena

lent him beauty, head to foot. She made him

1340 taller, and massive, too, with crisping hair

in curls like petals of wild hyacinth

but all red-golden. Think of gold infused

on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art

Hephaestus taught him, or Athena: one

1345 whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished

beauty over Odysseus’ head and shoulders.

He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,

facing his silent wife, and said:

“Strange woman,

the immortals of Olympus made you hard,

1350 harder than any. Who else in the world

would keep aloof as you do from her husband

if he returned to her from years of trouble,

cast on his own land in the twentieth year?

Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.

Her heart is iron in her breast.”

1355 Penelope

spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

“Strange man,

if man you are... This is no pride on my part

nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.

I know so well how you—how he—appeared

1360 boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . . .

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.

Place it outside the bedchamber my lord

built with his own hands. Pile the big bed

with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen.”

1365 With this she tried him to the breaking point,

and he turned on her in a flash, raging:

“Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!

Who dared to move my bed?

No builder had the skill for that—unless

1370 a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal

in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.

There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,

built into that bed—my handiwork

and no one else’s!

An old trunk of olive

1375 grew like a pillar on the building plot,

and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,

lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,

gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.

Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,

1380 hewed and shaped the stump from the roots up

into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve

as model for the rest, I planed them all,

inlaid them all with silver, gold, and ivory,

and stretched a bed between—a pliant web

of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.

1385 There’s our sign!

I know no more. Could someone else’s hand

have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?”

Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees

grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.

1390 With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,

throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,

murmuring:

“Do not rage at me,Odysseus!

No one ever matched your caution! Think

what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us

1395 life together in our prime and flowering years,

kept us from crossing into age together.

Forgive me, don’t be angry. I could not

welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself

long ago against the frauds of men,

1400 impostors who might come—and all those many

whose underhanded ways bring evil on! . . .

But here and now, what sign could be so clear

as this of our own bed?

No other man has ever laid eyes on it—

1405 only my own slave, Actoris, that my father

sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.

You make my stiff heart know that I am yours.”

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache

of longing mounted, and he wept at last,

1410 his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,

longed for as the sun-warmed earth is longed for by a swimmer

spent in rough water where his ship went down

under Poseidon’s blows, gale winds and tons of sea.

Few men can keep alive through a big surf

1415 to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches

in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:

and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,

her white arms round him pressed, as though forever. . . .