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The Debate in Ithaca

Book Two

The morning after the goddess's visit, Telemachus calls the men of Ithaca to assembly and, for the first time, speaks out against the Suitors who are eating his house bare. They jeer, an omen splits the sky, and a seer foretells their doom – but nothing is done. So the boy resolves to sail in secret and seek word of his father himself.

NAME

SET

Translation by E. V. Rieu, revised by D. C. H. Rieu.

BOOK TWO

The Debate in Ithaca

Ithaca, the morning after Athene's visit. Telemachus calls the island to assembly for the first time since Odysseus sailed.

WHAT HAPPENS

- Telemachus summons the assembly and publicly denounces the Suitors for devouring his household.
- Antinous throws the blame back on Penelope, revealing the trick of the shroud she has used to put off remarriage for years.
- Zeus sends an omen of two eagles; the seer Halitherses warns that Odysseus is near and the Suitors' doom is coming.
- The Suitors jeer at the warning. Telemachus demands a ship to go and seek news of his father.
- With Athene disguised as Mentor, he secretly gathers a crew and sails at nightfall, telling only the nurse Eurycleia.

WHO WE MEET

Telemachus

coming of age, speaking in public for the first time

Antinous & Eurymachus

the two ringleaders of the Suitors

Halitherses

the seer whose warning is ignored

Mentor

the old friend whose shape Athene borrows

Eurycleia

the loyal old nurse, sworn to secrecy

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 2 is Telemachus' first public act, his growing-up in miniature. It puts the Suitors' guilt and impiety on record before witnesses, and Penelope's shroud reveals her own cunning, the female counterpart to Odysseus' *mētis*.

Unprescribed: read for the story and its essay background, not examined in context.

The Debate In Ithaca

— THE ASSEMBLY CALLED

As soon as Dawn appeared, fresh and rosy-fingered, Odysseus' son got up from his bed and put his clothes on. He slung a sharp sword from his shoulder, bound a stout pair of sandals on his glistening feet and strode from his bedroom looking like a god. He at once gave
 5 orders to the clear-voiced criers to [call the long-haired Achaeans to Assembly](#). The heralds cried their summons and the people quickly gathered. When all had arrived and the Assembly was complete, Telemachus himself set out for the meeting-place, bronze spear in hand, escorted only by two hunting-dogs. Athene endowed him with
 10 such supernatural grace that all eyes were turned on him in admiration when he came up. The elders made way for him as he took his father's seat.

— AEGYPTIUS SPEAKS

[Aegyptius](#), an old lord bent with years and rich in wisdom, was the first to speak. His own soldier son Antiphus had sailed with godlike
 15 Odysseus in the big ships to Ilium the city of horses, only to be killed by [the savage Cyclops](#) in his cavern home when he made the last of his meals off Odysseus' men. And although he had three other sons, Eurynomus, who had joined with the Suitors, and two who worked steadily on their father's estate, Antiphus was always in his mind. His
 20 grief was inconsolable; and it was with tears for this lost son that he now rose to address the gathering:

'My fellow-countrymen, listen to what I have to say. Not once since the good Odysseus sailed have we been called to Assembly or Council meeting here. Who has summoned us now? Was it one of
 25 the young men or one of the older generation? And what is his pressing need? Perhaps he has heard of an army's approach, and wishes to tell us the early news he has received? Or is there some other matter of public concern that he intends to raise for discussion? "Good man!" I say in any case. Our blessing on him! May
 30 Zeus reward him with his heart's desire!'

His auspicious words delighted Odysseus' son. Eager to speak, he left his seat without further ado and took his stand in the middle of the Assembly. The herald Peisenor, a shrewd, experienced counsellor, [thrust the speaker's staff into his hand](#); and Telemachus, turning
 35 first to old Aegyptius, began:

— TELEMACHUS ACCUSES

'Venerable sir, you shall have the truth at once. The man who summoned this gathering is not far to seek. It was I – I am in great

LINES 5–6

[call the long-haired Achaeans to Assembly](#)

An **assembly** was a public meeting of all the free men of a community, where problems were aired and decisions made. ('Achaeans' is just one of Homer's standard words for the Greeks.)

LINE 13

[Aegyptius](#) An old lord who speaks first. One of his sons sailed to Troy with Odysseus and was later eaten by the Cyclops – so the losses of the war reach right into this room.

LINE 16

[the savage Cyclops](#) The **Cyclops** is a one-eyed giant called **Polyphemus**, who eats several of Odysseus' men. The full story comes in Book 9; Homer expects you to know it already.

LINE 34

[thrust the speaker's staff into his hand](#) In an assembly, only the man holding the **staff** (Greek *skeptron*) had the right to speak. Handing it over was a formal act.

distress. Of an army's approach I have heard nothing to tell you. Nor is it some other question of public concern that I propose to bring
 40 forward, but my own private business, the affliction, the double affliction, that has fallen on my house. In the first place I have lost my good father, who was once king among you here and gentle as a father to you all. But now there is a far greater calamity, one which will bring my house to utter ruin and rob me of any livelihood I have.
 45 A crowd of Suitors are pestering my mother with their unwanted attentions, and these Suitors are actually the sons of those who are your leaders here. Too cowardly to present themselves at her father's house, for **Icarius** to make terms for his daughter's hand with the claimant he prefers, they spend all day in and out of our house. **They**
 50 **slaughter our oxen**, our sheep, our fatted goats; they feast themselves and drink our sparkling wine – with never a thought for all the wealth that is being wasted. The truth is that there is no one like Odysseus in charge to purge the house of this blight. We are not able to defend it ourselves: we would prove miserably weak, quite
 55 untrained to fight. Yet I would willingly fight if I had the strength. For I tell you, the things they do are past all bearing.

The destruction of my house is an injustice which you, gentlemen, should resent not only on your own behalf but as a scandal to our neighbours who live round about. You should shrink from the wrath of
 60 the gods. Have you no fear that they may be outraged at your wickedness and turn on you? In the name of Olympian Zeus, in the name of **Themis**, who summons and dissolves the councils of men, I beg you, my friends, to leave me alone with my bitter grief – unless by any chance you think that my good father harmed the Achaeans
 65 out of malice, and you are trying to repay me with equal malice by the encouragement you give these men? If only it were you men of Ithaca who were devouring our treasure and our flocks, I think we should be better off. For in that case we should not have far to look for compensation. We should simply hound you up and down the
 70 town for the restitution of our goods till every item was repaid. As it is, you fill my heart with a pain for which I find no cure.'

As he spoke his passion rose; and at the end he burst into tears and flung the staff on the ground. A wave of pity swept through the gathering. Nobody made a move, nobody had the heart to give
 75 Telemachus a sharp reply, and the silence was unbroken till Antinous retorted:

— ANTINOUS ANSWERS

'**What a speech, Telemachus**, and what a temper! So you'd put us to shame, would you, and fix the blame on us? You are wrong. We Suitors plead "Not guilty". It is your own mother, that incomparable
 80 schemer, who is the culprit. Listen. For three whole years – in fact

LINE 48

Icarius Icarius is Penelope's father. By custom, a man wanting to marry her should go to him and arrange the match and the gifts. The Suitors ignore all that and just camp in Odysseus' house instead.

LINES 49–50

They slaughter our oxen Here's the Suitors' real crime: they're eating their way through Odysseus' wealth day after day. It's hospitality (*xenia*) flipped upside down – guests devouring their host instead of being looked after by him.

LINE 62

Themis Themis is the goddess of law and proper custom, the one who 'summons and dissolves' assemblies. Telemachus swears by her to stress that the rules are being broken.

LINE 77

What a speech, Telemachus This is **Antinous**, the more aggressive of the Suitors' two ringleaders, and the first of them to speak in the whole poem.

close on four – she has been leading us on, giving us all some grounds for hope, and in her private messages to each making promises that she has not the slightest intention of keeping.

— THE SHROUD

And here's another example of her duplicity. On her loom in her
 85 house she set up a great web and began weaving a large and delicate piece of work. She said to us: "My lords, my Suitors, now that noble Odysseus is dead, restrain your ardour, do not urge on this marriage till I have done this work, so that the threads I have spun may not be altogether wasted. It is **a shroud for Lord Laertes**. When he
 90 succumbs to the dread hand of remorseless Death that stretches all men out at last, I must not risk the scandal there would be among my countrywomen here if one who had amassed such wealth were laid to rest without a shroud." That's what she said; and we magnanimously consented. So by day she used to weave at the great
 95 web, but every night had torches set beside it and **undid the work**. For three years she took us in by this trick. A fourth began, and the seasons were slipping by, when one of her women who knew all about it gave her mistress away. We caught her unravelling her beautiful work, and she was forced reluctantly to complete it.

100 Here is the Suitors' answer, Telemachus, and I want you and all the people to be quite clear about it. Send your mother away and make her marry the man whom her father chooses and whom she prefers. She must beware of trying our young men's patience much further and counting too much on **the matchless gifts that she owes to**
 105 **Athene**, her skill in fine handicraft, her excellent brain, and that genius she has for getting her way. In that respect I grant she has no equal, not even in story. For of all the Achaean beauties of former times, not Tyro, nor Alcmene, nor Mycene of the lovely diadem, had at her command such wits as she. Yet in the present case Penelope
 110 has misused those wits. For I assure you that so long as she maintains this attitude that the gods have guided her to adopt, the Suitors will continue to eat you out of house and home. She may be winning a great name for herself, but at what expense to you! So we will not return to our own estates, nor go anywhere else, until she
 115 makes her choice and marries one of us.'

— TELEMACHUS REFUSES

'Antinous,' the thoughtful Telemachus replied, 'it is quite impossible for me to cast out, against her will, the mother who bore me and who brought me up, with my father somewhere at the world's end, perhaps alive, perhaps dead. Think what I would have to pay Icarius if
 120 I were to send my mother back to him. I would suffer at his hands and the gods would send me further disasters, because my mother as she

LINE 89

a shroud for Lord Laertes Weaving was the proper work of the woman of the house. The cloth here is a **shroud** – a burial-sheet – for **Laertes**, Odysseus' elderly father. Nobody could object to Penelope weaving that, which is exactly why her excuse works so well.

LINE 95

undid the work This is Penelope's famous trick: every night she secretly unpicks the stretch of shroud she wove during the day, so it's never finished and the marriage can never be forced. She spins it out for three whole years.

LINES 104–105

the matchless gifts that she owes to Athene Penelope's cleverness and skill are seen as gifts from **Athene** herself, the goddess of wisdom and crafts. Even her enemies admit she has no equal.

left would call down on me **the Avenging Furies**. And I would incur the wrath of my countrymen. You may be sure that I will never give the word. If you feel angry about this then quit my palace and feast
 125 somewhere else, eating your own food in each other's houses. But if you think it a sounder scheme to destroy one man's estate and not make restitution, then eat your fill, while I pray that Zeus will bring a day of reckoning, when in this house I will destroy you, and not make restitution.'

— THE OMEN OF THE EAGLES

130 In answer to his words, Zeus the Thunderer **urged two eagles into flight** from the mountain-top. For a while they sailed down the wind with outstretched pinions, wing to wing. But as soon as they were directly over the meeting-place, where the sound of voices filled the air, they began to flap their wings and wheel about, glancing down at
 135 the faces of the crowd with looks foreboding death. Then with their talons they clawed at each other's cheeks and neck, and so swooped eastward over the house-tops of the busy town. The people stared at the birds in amazement, and asked themselves what was to come of it.

— HALITHERSES' WARNING

140 At last the old hero **Halitherses**, Mastor's son, spoke out. He knew more of bird-lore and soothsaying than any man of his generation, and had his countrymen's welfare at heart when he rose now to address them:

'People of Ithaca, hear what I have to say. And my pronouncement is
 145 meant particularly for the Suitors. A great calamity is about to engulf them. Odysseus is not going to be parted from his friends much longer. At this very moment he is close at hand, sowing the seeds of a bloody doom for the Suitors one and all, which means disaster to many others of us who live under the clear skies of Ithaca. Let us plan
 150 to stop these men, before it happens. Or rather, won't they stop of their own accord – which would be the better course? I am not unskilled in prophecy: I speak from ripe experience. Consider Odysseus. Has not everything happened as I warned that self-reliant
 155 **I said he would return home in the twentieth year**, after much suffering, having lost all his comrades, and that no one would know him when he came. And now all this is coming true!'

— EURYMACHUS SNEERS

It was Eurymachus, Polybus' son, who rose to reply. 'That's enough, old man!' he said. 'Run home and read omens to your children, or
 160 some disaster may happen to them. And leave me to interpret these

LINE 122

the Avenging Furies The **Furies** were terrifying goddesses who punished crimes within a family – above all children who wronged their parents. Throwing his mother out would bring their curse down on Telemachus.

LINES 130–131

urged two eagles into flight Zeus answers Telemachus' prayer by sending an **omen** – a sign, here in the shape of birds. Reading signs like this, especially the flight of birds, was how the Greeks tried to work out the gods' will.

LINE 140

Halitherses **Halitherses** is an old *seer* – a man skilled at reading omens and foretelling the future. He reads the two eagles as a warning of doom for the Suitors.

LINES 154–155

I said he would return home in the twentieth year The seer reminds everyone that his past predictions all came true. In Homer, prophecy is always reliable – ignoring it is a sure sign of a fool.

LINE 158

It was Eurymachus **Eurymachus** is the second of the two ringleaders – smoother and more calculating than Antinous. Here he sneers at the seer and his omen.

signs. I am better at that than you. After all, plenty of birds go about their business in the sunny air, but it isn't every one that is a bird of omen. As for Odysseus, he has met his fate abroad. If only you had shared his fate! We should then have been spared this tedious
 165 prophesying from your mouth, and you wouldn't be fuelling Telemachus' anger. No doubt you expect him at some time to make a gift to your household. But now I will make a prophecy, and this will come true. If you, his senior, with the lore of the ages at your disposal, misuse your eloquence to incite this young man to
 170 violence, in the first place it will be all the worse for him; and secondly for you, old man, there will be the extremely unpleasant consequence that we shall impose on you a fine it will break your heart to pay.

For Telemachus, here is my own advice: I give it openly, before you
 175 all. Let him tell his mother to return to her father's house, where they will make arrangements for her wedding and see that she has a generous dowry, as is only right for a much-loved daughter. Not till that is done can I see the sons of the Achaeans giving up their unwelcome suit. For we are afraid of no one at all – certainly not of
 180 Telemachus, for all his rhetoric. Nor, old man, do we pay the slightest attention to those prophecies that fall from your lips. They come to nothing and only make you even more hated. No; Telemachus must see his wealth ruthlessly consumed without hope of restitution, so long as Penelope keeps us kicking our heels in this matter of her
 185 marriage. Meanwhile we stay, and, instead of each seeking a suitable bride, we feed our hopes from day to day on the thought of the incomparable prize for which we are competing.'

— TELEMACHUS DEMANDS A SHIP

'Eurymachus,' the thoughtful Telemachus replied, 'and all you distinguished Suitors, I make no further appeal; I have said my say.
 190 The gods and the whole people here have heard my case. So now give me a fast ship and a crew of twenty to see me to my journey's end and back. For I am [going to Sparta and to sandy Pylos](#) to inquire after my long-lost father in the hope that someone may be able to tell me about him or that I may pick up one of those rumours from Zeus that
 195 so often turn out to be true. If I hear that he is alive and on his way back, then, harassed though I am, I will hold out for one more year. But if I learn that he is dead and gone, I shall come home, build him a mound with all the proper funeral rites, and give my mother in marriage to a new husband.'

— MENTOR RISES

200 Telemachus resumed his seat and [Mentor](#) rose to speak. Mentor was an old friend of Odysseus, to whom the king had entrusted his whole

LINE 192

[going to Sparta and to sandy Pylos](#)

Telemachus plans to visit **Nestor** at Pylos and **Menelaus** at Sparta – two veterans of the Trojan War who might have news of his father. This journey fills the next two books.

LINE 200

Mentor Mentor is an old friend of Odysseus, left in charge of the house while he's away. The name matters: Athene keeps taking his shape to guide Telemachus, and it's where we get our word 'mentor', meaning a trusted adviser.

household when he sailed, with orders to defer to the aged Laertes and keep everything safe and sound. He spoke now from the goodness of his heart.

205 ‘My fellow-citizens,’ he said, ‘kindness, generosity, and justice should no longer be the aims of any man who wields the royal sceptre – in fact he might just as well devote his days to tyranny and lawless deeds, since none of those whom the godlike Odysseus ruled with a father’s loving care give a thought to him today. Of course it is not for
210 me to pass judgement on the villainy of these black-hearted Suitors – it is their own skins they are risking when they squander Odysseus’ estate in the belief that he is gone for ever. No, it is the rest of you sitting there in silence that stir my indignation. They are few and you are many. Yet not a word have they had from you in
215 condemnation or restraint!’

— LEOCRITUS BREAKS IT UP

Up sprang Leocritus, Euenor’s son. ‘Mentor, you crazy fool,’ he shouted at him, ‘what are you saying, inciting the people to stop us? It’s expecting much of men to take up arms over a meal, even with the odds in their favour. Even if Odysseus of Ithaca himself came
220 back and took it into his head to drive us nobles from the palace because he found us dining in his hall, his wife would have no joy of his return, much as she may have missed him. Then and there he’d come to an ignominious end, fighting alone against so many. So what you suggest is out of the question. But enough of this. Break up
225 the meeting, and each man go back to his own estate, while Mentor and Halitherses, as old friends of his father, speed Telemachus on his way, though I have an idea that he will never bring this journey off, but will find himself sitting in Ithaca for many a long day, gathering news as best he can.’

— A PRAYER ON THE SHORE

230 The assembled people were quick to accept this dismissal and now scattered to their homes, while the Suitors made their way to King Odysseus’ palace. In the meantime Telemachus sought the solitude of the seashore, where he washed his hands in the grey surf and lifted them in prayer to Athene. ‘Hear, I beg you, you that in your
235 godhead came yesterday to my house. It was your command that I should sail across the misty seas to find out whether my long-lost father is ever coming back. But my countrymen, and above all those Suitors that besiege my mother, are thwarting me at every point.’

— ATHENE AS MENTOR

This was his prayer. Athene drew near to him, and assuming the form
240 and voice of Mentor, addressed him with winged words. ‘Telemachus,

you will be neither a coward nor a fool in the future, if your father's manly vigour has descended on you – and what a man he was in word and deed! This journey of yours will not prove futile or fruitless. It is only if you were not the true son of Odysseus and Penelope that I
245 would think your plans might come to nothing. Few sons, indeed, are like their fathers. Generally they are worse; but just a few are better. And since you are by no means lacking in Odysseus' resourcefulness, and since you will be no fool or coward in the future, you can hope to succeed in this undertaking. So forget the
250 Suitors now and dismiss their plots and machinations from your mind. They are fools, and there is no sense in them. Nor have they any inkling of the dark fate that is stalking so near and will strike them all down in a single day.

You, meanwhile, will soon be starting this journey you have set your
255 heart on. For am I not your father's friend, and ready to find you a fast ship and sail with you myself? Go home now and show yourself to the Suitors. Then get provisions ready and stow them all in containers, the wine in jars, and the barley-meal, that gives men strength, in strong skins. Meanwhile, I will soon collect a crew of volunteers in
260 the town. And there are plenty of ships, old and new, in sea-girt Ithaca. I myself will pick out the best for you, and we'll have her rigged in no time and launch her on the open sea.'

Athene, Daughter of Zeus, had spoken, and there was no loitering there for Telemachus when he heard the voice of the goddess. He set
265 off at once for home, though with an anxious heart. At the palace he found the high and mighty Suitors skinning goats and singeing fattened hogs in the courtyard.

— ANTINOUS MOCKS

Antinous, with a laugh, ran up to him, seized his hand and, loudly calling his name, said: 'Telemachus, my fiery young orator, enough
270 now of hard words and thoughts of violence. Let me see you eat and drink with us as usual. Our people will make all arrangements on your behalf for a ship and a picked crew to speed you on your way to sacred Pylos on your noble father's trail.'

But sagacious Telemachus replied: 'Antinous, it is out of the question
275 for a man to sit down to a quiet supper and take his ease with a rowdy mob like you. Isn't it enough that all this time, under pretext of your suit, you have been robbing me of my best, while I was still too young to understand? I tell you, now that I'm old enough to learn from others what happened and to feel my own strength at last, I will
280 do my best to send you all to perdition, whether I go to Pylos or stay here in Ithaca. And I shall not be thwarted over this journey of mine. I am going, if only as a passenger, since it seems to have suited you

better that I should not be allowed a ship or crew of my own.' With this, Telemachus calmly withdrew his hand from Antinous'.

285 The Suitors, who had been preparing a meal, greeted this speech with a storm of insults and derision. 'I do believe,' said one arrogant young man, 'that Telemachus wants to cut our throats! And he's off to sandy Pylos to get help. Perhaps he'll go as far as Sparta and back, since he's so thirsty for our blood. Or it may occur to him that the
290 fertile soil of Ephyre is worth a visit. He'll come home with a deadly poison, drop it in the wine-bowl, and kill us all off.'

And another insolent youth chimed in: 'Ah, but who knows? If he too takes to sea-faring, he may stray from home and be lost like Odysseus, far from his friends. And what a nuisance that would be for
295 us! All the extra trouble of dividing his property between us and presenting his house to his mother and her bridegroom!'

— THE STORE-ROOM

Telemachus let them talk, and went down to his father's store-room, a big and lofty chamber stacked with gold and bronze, and with chests full of clothing, and stores of fragrant oil. There too, packed
300 close along the wall, stood jars of mellow vintage wine, full of the true unblended juice, waiting for the day when Odysseus, after all his suffering, should find his way home again. There were locks to the closely fitting, double doors; and day and night the room and its treasures were in charge of the housekeeper, **Eurycleia**, daughter of
305 Ops, Peisenor's son, who had all her wits about her.

Calling her now to the store-room, Telemachus said: 'Listen, nurse dear, will you draw some flagons of wine for me? And let it be the choicest you have, next to the vintage you keep with such care for your unlucky king, always hoping that he may escape his fate and
310 return home. Fill twelve flagons and put their stoppers on. And pour out some barley-meal in strong leather bags – twenty measures, please, of mill-crushed grain. Not a word to anyone else! Get all the provisions together, and in the evening I will fetch them myself when my mother has gone upstairs for the night. I am off to Sparta
315 and sandy Pylos on the chance of finding out something about my dear father's return.'

— EURYCLEIA'S FEAR

At this his nurse, Eurycleia, gave a shriek and burst into tears and poured out winged words. 'Dear child, what on earth has put this idea into your head? Why must you go wandering all over the world, you
320 an only son, **the apple of your mother's eye**; and Odysseus, favourite of Zeus, dead and gone, far from his home in foreign parts? The moment your back is turned those men will be plotting mischief

LINE 304

Eurycleia **Eurycleia** is the old nurse who brought up first Odysseus and then Telemachus. She's completely loyal and trusted with the family's secrets – later, in Book 19, she's the one who recognises the disguised Odysseus by an old scar.

LINE 320

the apple of your mother's eye Telemachus is an only son, so the whole future of Odysseus' household (his *oikos*) rests on him alone. If he's killed, the family line simply ends.

against you; and when they've done you to death, they'll share all this between them. Stay here at home where you belong. There's no call
 325 for you to go looking for trouble all over the barren seas.'

'Have no fears, nurse dear,' the prudent Telemachus replied. 'There's a god's hand in this. But you must swear to me that you won't tell my good mother for at least a dozen days, or till she misses me herself and finds I'm gone. We don't want tears to spoil her lovely cheeks.'

330 The old woman swore by all the gods that she would keep his secret, and when she had solemnly taken her oath she drew off the wine for him in flagons and ran the barley-meal into strong bags. Telemachus rejoined the company in the hall.

— ATHENE PREPARES THE SHIP

The bright-eyed goddess Athene now had another idea. Disguising
 335 herself as Telemachus, she went all through the town, picked out her twenty men and passed them each the word to forgather by the good ship at nightfall. The vessel itself she begged of Noemon son of Phronius, a prominent Ithacan, who willingly promised to give it to her.

340 The sun went down and all the ways grew dark. The goddess now ran the good ship into the water and stowed in her all the gear that big ships carry. This done, she moored her in the far corner of the harbour. When the good ship's company had gathered round, the goddess had an encouraging word for each of them.

345 The bright-eyed goddess Athene now had yet another idea. She made her way to godlike Odysseus' palace and lulled the Suitors there into a state of pleasant drowsiness, clouding their wits as they drank, and striking the wine-cups from their hands. Their eyelids heavy with sleep, they lingered no more at table, but went off to the
 350 town to their beds. Then bright-eyed Athene, assuming Mentor's form and voice once more, called Telemachus out of the palace to her side.

— AWAY BY NIGHT

'Telemachus,' she said, '[your well-greaved companions](#) are sitting at their oars, waiting for your word to start. Come; we do not want to
 355 delay the journey.' With this, Pallas Athene led the way swiftly, and Telemachus followed in the footsteps of the goddess. When they came down to the sea and reached the boat they found their long-haired crew waiting on the beach, and the noble Telemachus addressed them.

360 'My friends, follow me; we must get the stores on board. They are all stacked and ready at the palace. My mother knows nothing of this, nor do the servants, except one woman whom I took into my

LINE 353

[your well-greaved companions](#) 'Well-greaved' means wearing *greaves* – bronze guards strapped over the shins. It's one of Homer's stock epithets for the Greek fighters.

confidence.' He led off and the crew followed. They brought down all the stores and stowed them in their well-built ship, taking their
365 orders from Odysseus' son.

Telemachus then followed Athene on board. She took her seat on the afterdeck and he sat down beside her. The men cast the hawsers off, climbed in, and took their places at their oars. And now, out of the West, Athene of the flashing eyes called up for them a steady
370 following wind and sent it singing over the wine-dark sea. Telemachus shouted to the crew to rig the ship and they leapt to his orders. They hauled up the pine mast, placed it in its hollow box, made it fast with stays, and hoisted the white sail with plaited oxhide ropes. The sail billowed out in the wind, and a dark wave hissed
375 loudly round her keel, as the vessel gathered way and sped on her course through the seas.

When all was made fast in the swift black ship, they took out the mixing-bowls, filled them to the brim with wine and poured
380 libations to the immortal gods who live for ever, and above all to the Daughter of Zeus, the Lady of the gleaming eyes. And all night long and into the dawn the ship ploughed her way through the sea.

LINE 370

wine-dark sea 'Wine-dark' is one of Homer's most famous fixed phrases (a **formula**) for the sea. Ancient Greek had no ordinary word for 'blue'.

LINES 378–379

poured libations to the immortal gods A *libation* is wine poured out on the ground as an offering to a god. Before sailing on through the night, the crew pour one out, 'above all to the Daughter of Zeus' – Athene.

