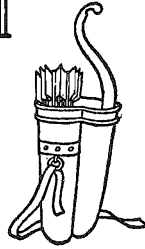


BOOK XI



- 'Now when we had gone down again to the sea and our vessel,
first of all we dragged the ship down into the bright water,
and in the black hull set the mast in place, and set sails,
and took the sheep and walked them aboard, and ourselves also
5 embarked, but sorrowful, and weeping big tears. Circe
of the lovely hair, the dread goddess who talks with mortals,
sent us an excellent companion, a following wind, filling
the sails, to carry from astern the ship with the dark prow.
We ourselves, over all the ship making fast the running gear,
10 sat still, and let the wind and the steersman hold her steady.
All day long her sails were filled as she went through the water,
and the sun set, and all the journeying-ways were darkened.
She made the limit, which is of the deep-running Ocean.
There lie the community and city of Kimmerian people,
15 hidden in fog and cloud, nor does Helios, the radiant
sun, ever break through the dark, to illuminate them with his shining,
neither when he climbs up into the starry heaven,
nor when he wheels to return again from heaven to earth,
but always a glum night is spread over wretched mortals.
20 Making this point, we ran the ship ashore, and took out
the sheep, and ourselves walked along by the stream of the Ocean
until we came to that place of which Circe had spoken.
There Perimedes and Eurylochos held the victims
fast, and I, drawing from beside my thigh my sharp sword,

The land of the dead—the ghost of Elpenor

25 dug a pit, of about a cubit in each direction,
and poured it full of drink offerings for all the dead, first
honey mixed with milk, and the second pouring was sweet wine,
and the third, water, and over it all I sprinkled white barley.
I promised many times to the strengthless heads of the perished
30 dead that, returning to Ithaka, I would slaughter a barren
cow, my best, in my palace, and pile the pyre with treasures,
and to Teiresias apart would dedicate an all-black
ram, the one conspicuous in all our sheep flocks.
Now when, with sacrifices and prayers, I had so entreated
35 the hordes of the dead, I took the sheep and cut their throats
over the pit, and the dark-clouding blood ran in, and the souls
of the perished dead gathered to the place, up out of Erebos,
brides, and young unmarried men, and long-suffering elders,
virgins, tender and with the sorrows of young hearts upon them,
40 and many fighting men killed in battle, stabbed with brazen
spears, still carrying their bloody armor upon them.
These came swarming around my pit from every direction
with inhuman clamor, and green fear took hold of me.
Then I encouraged my companions and told them, taking
45 the sheep that were lying by, slaughtered with the pitiless
bronze, to skin these, and burn them, and pray to the divinities,
to Hades the powerful, and to revered Persephone,
while I myself, drawing from beside my thigh my sharp sword,
crouched there, and would not let the strengthless heads of the perished
50 dead draw nearer to the blood, until I had questioned Teiresias.

‘But first there came the soul of my companion, Elpenor,
for he had not yet been buried under earth of the wide ways,
since we had left his body behind in Circe’s palace,
unburied and unwept, with this other errand before us.

55 I broke into tears at the sight of him, and my heart pitied him,
and so I spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words:
“Elpenor, how did you come here beneath the fog and the darkness?
You have come faster on foot than I could in my black ship.”

‘So I spoke, and he groaned aloud and spoke and answered:
60 “Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
the evil will of the spirit and the wild wine bewildered me.
I lay down on the roof of Circe’s palace, and never thought,
when I went down, to go by way of the long ladder,

The prophecy of Elpenor

- but blundered straight off the edge of the roof, so that my neck bone
65 was broken out of its sockets, and my soul went down to Hades'.
But now I pray you, by those you have yet to see, who are not here,
by your wife, and by your father, who reared you when you were little,
and by Telemachos whom you left alone in your palace;
for I know that after you leave this place and the house of Hades
70 you will put back with your well-made ship to the island, Aiaia;
there at that time, my lord, I ask that you remember me,
and do not go and leave me behind unwept, unburied,
when you leave, for fear I might become the gods' curse upon you;
but burn me there with all my armor that belongs to me,
75 and heap up a grave mound beside the beach of the gray sea,
for an unhappy man, so that those to come will know of me.
Do this for me, and on top of the grave mound plant the oar
with which I rowed when I was alive and among my companions."
- 'So he spoke, and I in turn spoke to him in answer:
80 "All this, my unhappy friend, I will do for you as you ask me."
'So we two stayed there exchanging our sad words, I on
one side holding my sword over the blood, while opposite
me the phantom of my companion talked long with me.
'Next there came to me the soul of my dead mother,
85 Antikleia, daughter of great-hearted Autolykos,
whom I had left alive when I went to sacred Ilion.
I broke into tears at the sight of her and my heart pitied her,
but even so, for all my thronging sorrow, I would not
let her draw near the blood until I had questioned Teiresias.
- 90 'Now came the soul of Teiresias the Theban, holding
a staff of gold, and he knew who I was, and spoke to me:
"Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
how is it then, unhappy man, you have left the sunlight
and come here, to look on dead men, and this place without pleasure?
95 Now draw back from the pit, and hold your sharp sword away from me,
so that I can drink of the blood and speak the truth to you."
'So he spoke, and I, holding away the sword with the silver
nails, pushed it back in the sheath, and the flawless prophet,
after he had drunk the blood, began speaking to me.
- 100 "Glorious Odysseus, what you are after is sweet homecoming,
but the god will make it hard for you. I think you will not
escape the Shaker of the Earth, who holds a grudge against you

about the last voyage of Odysseus

in his heart, and because you blinded his dear son, hates you.
 But even so and still you might come back, after much suffering,
 105 if you can contain your own desire, and contain your companions',
 at that time when you first put in your well-made vessel
 at the island Thrinakia, escaping the sea's blue water,
 and there discover pasturing the cattle and fat sheep
 of Helios, who sees all things, and listens to all things.
 110 Then, if you keep your mind on homecoming, and leave these unharmed,
 you might all make your way to Ithaka, after much suffering;
 but if you do harm them, then I testify to the destruction
 of your ship and your companions, but if you yourself get clear,
 you will come home in bad case, with the loss of all your companions,
 115 in someone else's ship, and find troubles in your household,
 insolent men, who are eating away your livelihood
 and courting your godlike wife and offering gifts to win her.
 You may punish the violences of these men, when you come home.
 But after you have killed these suitors in your own palace,
 120 either by treachery, or openly with the sharp bronze,
 then you must take up your well-shaped oar and go on a journey
 until you come where there are men living who know nothing
 of the sea, and who eat food that is not mixed with salt, who never
 have known ships whose cheeks are painted purple, who never
 125 have known well-shaped oars, which act for ships as wings do.
 And I will tell you a very clear proof, and you cannot miss it.
 When, as you walk, some other wayfarer happens to meet you,
 and says you carry a winnow-fan on your bright shoulder,
 then you must plant your well-shaped oar in the ground, and render
 130 ceremonies sacrifice to the lord Poseidon,
 one ram and one bull, and a mounter of sows, a boar pig,
 and make your way home again and render holy hecatombs
 to the immortal gods who hold the wide heaven, all
 of them in order. Death will come to you from the sea, in
 135 some altogether unwarlike way, and it will end you
 in the ebbing time of a sleek old age. Your people
 about you will be prosperous. All this is true that I tell you."
 'So he spoke, but I in turn said to him in answer:
 "All this, Teiresias, surely must be as the gods spun it.
 140 But come now, tell me this and give me an accurate answer.
 I see before me now the soul of my perished mother,

Antikleia his mother tells Odysseus

but she sits beside the blood in silence, and has not yet deigned
to look directly at her own son and speak a word to me.
Tell me, lord, what will make her know me, and know my presence?"

- 145 'So I spoke, and he at once said to me in answer:
"Easily I will tell you and put it in your understanding.
Any one of the perished dead you allow to come up
to the blood will give you a true answer, but if you begrudge this
to any one, he will return to the place where he came from."
- 150 'So speaking, the soul of the lord Teiresias went back into
the house of Hades, once he had uttered his prophecies, while I
waited steadily where I was standing, until my mother
came and drank the dark-clouding blood, and at once she knew me,
and full of lamentation she spoke to me in winged words:
- 155 "My child, how did you come here beneath the fog and the darkness
and still alive? All this is hard for the living to look on,
for in between lie the great rivers and terrible waters
that flow, Ocean first of all, which there is no means of crossing
on foot, not unless one has a well-made ship. Are you
160 come now to this place from Troy, with your ship and your companions,
after wandering a long time, and have you not yet come
to Ithaka, and there seen your wife in your palace?"
'So she spoke, and I in turn said to her in answer:
"Mother, a duty brought me here to the house of Hades.
165 I had to consult the soul of Teiresias the Theban.
For I have not yet been near Achaian country, nor ever
set foot on our land, but always suffering I have wandered
since the time I first went along with great Agamemnon
to Ilion, land of good horses, and the battle against the Trojans.
170 But come now, tell me this, and give me an accurate answer.
What doom of death that lays men low has been your undoing?
Was it a long sickness, or did Artemis of the arrows
come upon you with her painless shafts, and destroy you?
And tell me of my father and son whom I left behind. Is
175 my inheritance still with them, or does some other
man hold them now, and thinks I will come no more? Tell me
about the wife I married, what she wants, what she is thinking,
and whether she stays fast by my son, and guards everything,
or if she has married the best man among the Achaians."
- 180 'So I spoke, and my queenly mother answered me quickly:

"All too much with enduring heart she does wait for you
there in your own palace, and always with her the wretched
nights and the days also waste her away with weeping.

185 No one yet holds your fine inheritance, but in freedom
Telemachos administers your allotted lands, and apports
the equal feasts, work that befits a man with authority
to judge, for all call him in. Your father remains, on the estate
where he is, and does not go to the city. There is no bed there
nor is there bed clothing nor blankets nor shining coverlets,
190 but in the winter time he sleeps in the house, where the thralls do,
in the dirt next to the fire, and with foul clothing upon him;
but when the summer comes and the blossoming time of harvest,
everywhere he has places to sleep on the ground, on fallen
leaves in piles along the rising ground of his orchard,
195 and there he lies, grieving, and the sorrow grows big within him
as he longs for your homecoming, and harsh old age is on him.
And so it was with me also and that was the reason I perished,
nor in my palace did the lady of arrows, well-aiming,
come upon me with her painless shafts, and destroy me,
200 nor was I visited by sickness, which beyond other
things takes the life out of the body with hateful weakness,
but, shining Odysseus, it was my longing for you, your cleverness
and your gentle ways, that took the sweet spirit of life from me."

205 'So she spoke, but I, pondering it in my heart, yet wished
to take the soul of my dead mother in my arms. Three times
I started toward her, and my heart was urgent to hold her,
and three times she fluttered out of my hands like a shadow
or a dream, and the sorrow sharpened at the heart within me,
and so I spoke to her and addressed her in winged words, saying:
210 "Mother, why will you not wait for me, when I am trying
to hold you, so that even in Hades' with our arms embracing
we can both take the satisfaction of dismal mourning?
Or are you nothing but an image that proud Persephone
sent my way, to make me grieve all the more for sorrow?"

215 'So I spoke, and my queenly mother answered me quickly:
"Oh my child, ill-fated beyond all other mortals,
this is not Persephone, daughter of Zeus, beguiling you,
but it is only what happens, when they die, to all mortals.
The sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together,

The queens of the past

220 and once the spirit has left the white bones, all the rest
of the body is made subject to the fire's strong fury,
but the soul flitters out like a dream and flies away. Therefore
you must strive back toward the light again with all speed; but remember
these things for your wife, so you may tell her hereafter."

225 'So we two were conversing back and forth, and the women
came to me. They were sent my way by proud Persephone.
These were all who had been the wives and daughters of princes,
and now they gathered in swarms around the dark blood. I then
thought about a way to question them, each by herself,
230 and as I thought, this was the plan that seemed best to me;
drawing out the long-edged sword from beside my big thigh,
I would not let them all drink the dark blood at the same time.
So they waited and came to me in order, and each one
told me about her origin, and I questioned all of them.

235 'There first I saw Tyro, gloriously descended,
and she told me she was the daughter of stately Salmoneus,
but said she was the wife of Kretheus, the son of Aiolos,
and she was in love with a river, godlike Enipeus, by far
the handsomest of all those rivers whose streams cross over
240 the earth, and she used to haunt Enipeus' beautiful waters;
taking his likeness, the god who circles the earth and shakes it
lay with her where the swirling river finds its outlet,
and a sea-blue wave curved into a hill of water reared up
about the two, to hide the god and the mortal woman;
245 and he broke her virgin zone and drifted a sleep upon her.
But when the god had finished with the act of lovemaking,
he took her by the hand and spoke to her and named her, saying:
"Be happy, lady, in this love, and when the year passes
you will bear glorious children, for the couplings of the immortals
250 are not without issue. You must look after them, and raise them.
Go home now and hold your peace and tell nobody
my name, but I tell it to you; I am the Earthshaker Poseidon."

'So he spoke and dived back into the heaving water
of the sea, but she conceived and bore Pelias and Neleus,
255 and both of these grew up to be strong henchmen of mighty
Zeus; Pelias lived, rich in sheepflocks, in the wide spaces
of Iolkos, while the other was king in sandy Pylos;
but this queen among women bore the rest of her children to Kretheus,

Aison and Pheres and Amythaon delighting in horses.

260 'After her I saw Antiope, who was the daughter
of Asopos, who claimed she had also lain in the embraces
of Zeus, and borne two sons to him, Amphion and Zethos.
These first established the foundations of seven-gated
Thebes, and built the bulwarks, since without bulwarks they could not
265 have lived, for all their strength, in Thebes of the wide spaces.

'After her I saw Amphitryon's wife, Alkmene,
who, after lying in love in the embraces of great Zeus,
brought forth Herakles, lion-hearted and bold of purpose.
And I saw Megara, daughter of high-spirited Kreion,
270 whom Amphitryon's bold and weariless son had married.

'I saw the beautiful Epikaste, Oidipodes' mother,
who in the ignorance of her mind had done a monstrous
thing when she married her own son. He killed his father
and married her, but the gods soon made it all known to mortals.
275 But he, for all his sorrows, in beloved Thebes continued
to be lord over the Kadmeians, all through the bitter designing
of the gods; while she went down to Hades of the gates, the strong one,
knotting a noose and hanging sheer from the high ceiling,
in the constraint of her sorrow, but left to him who survived her
280 all the sorrows that are brought to pass by a mother's furies.

'And I saw Chloris, surpassingly lovely, the one whom Neleus
married for her beauty, giving numberless gifts to win her.
She was the youngest daughter of Iasos' son Amphion,
who once ruled strongly over Orchomenos of the Minyai.
285 So she was queen of Pylos and she bore him glorious children,
Nestor and Chromios and proud Periklymenos. Also
she bore that marvel among mortals, majestic Pero,
whom all the heroes round about courted, but Neleus would not
give her to any, unless he could drive away the broad-faced
290 horn-curved cattle of strong Iphikles out of Phylake.
It was hard to do, and only the blameless seer Melampous
undertook it, but he was bound fast by the hard destiny
of the god, and the painful fetters on him, and the loutish oxherds.
But when the months and the days had come to an end, and the year
295 had gone full circle and come back with the seasons returning,
then strong Iphikles released him, when he had told him
all prophecies he knew; and the will of Zeus was accomplished.

Interlude—Alkinoös and Arete

'And I saw Leda, who had been the wife of Tyndareos,
and she had borne to Tyndareos two sons with strong hearts,
300 Kastor, breaker of horses, and the strong boxer, Polydeukes.
The life-giving earth holds both of them, yet they are still living,
and, even underneath the earth, enjoying the honor
of Zeus, they live still every other day; on the next day
they are dead, but they are given honor even as gods are.

305 'After her I saw Iphimedeia, wife of Aloeus,
but she told me how she had been joined in love with Poseidon
and borne two sons to him, but these in the end had not lived
long, Otos like a god, and the far-famed Ephialtes;
and these were the tallest men the grain-giving earth has brought forth
310 ever, and the handsomest by far, after famous Orion.
When they were only nine years old they measured nine cubits
across, but in height they grew to nine fathoms, and even made threats
against the immortal gods on Olympos, that they would carry
the turmoil of battle with all its many sorrows against them,
315 and were minded to pile Ossa on Olympos, and above Ossa
Pelion of the trembling leaves, to climb the sky. Surely
they would have carried it out if they had come to maturity,
but the son of Zeus whom Leto with ordered hair had borne him,
Apollo, killed them both, before ever the down gathered
320 below their temples, or on their chins the beards had blossomed.

'I saw Phaidra and Prokris and Ariadne, the beautiful
daughter of malignant Minos. Theseus at one time
was bringing her from Crete to the high ground of sacred Athens,
but got no joy of her, since before that Artemis killed her
325 in sea-washed Dia, when Dionysos bore witness against her.

'I saw Maira, Klymene, and Eriphyle the hateful,
who accepted precious gold for the life of her own dear husband.
But I could not tell over the whole number of them nor name all
the women I saw who were the wives and daughters of heroes,
330 for before that the divine night would give out. It is time now
for my sleep, either joining my companions on board the fast ship,
or here; but you, and the gods, will see to my homeward journey.'

So he spoke, and all of them stayed stricken to silence,
held in thrall by the story all through the shadowy chambers.
335 Now it was white-armed Arete who began the discourse:
'Phaiakians, what do you think now of this man before you

admire Odysseus the storyteller

for beauty and stature, and for the mind well balanced within him?
 And again he is my own guest, but each one of you has some part
 in honoring him. Do not hurry to send him off, nor cut short
 340 his gifts, when he is in such need, for you all have many
 possessions, by the grace of the gods, stored up in your palaces.'

Then in turn the aged hero Echeneos spoke forth,
 who was the most advanced in age of all the Phaiakians:
 'Friends, our circumspect queen is not off the mark in her speaking,
 345 nor short of what we expect of her. Do then as she tells us.
 From now on the word and the act belong to Alkinoös.'

Then in turn Alkinoös spoke to him and answered:
 'Even so this word will be mine to say, as long as
 I am alive and king over the oar-loving Phaiakians.
 350 But let our guest, much though he longs for the homeward journey,
 still endure to wait till tomorrow, until I have raised all
 the contribution; but the men shall see to his convoy
 home, and I most of all; for mine is the power in this district.'

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him:
 355 'O great Alkinoös, pre-eminent among all people,
 if you urged me to stay here even for the length of a year,
 and still sped my conveyance home and gave me glorious
 presents, that would be what I wished, there would be much advantage
 in coming back with a fuller hand to my own dear country,
 360 and I would be more respected so and be more popular
 with all people who saw me make my return to Ithaka.'

Then Alkinoös answered him in turn and said to him:
 'Odysseus, we as we look upon you do not imagine
 that you are a deceptive or thievish man, the sort that the black earth
 365 breeds in great numbers, people who wander widely, making up
 lying stories, from which no one could learn anything. You have
 a grace upon your words, and there is sound sense within them,
 and expertly, as a singer would do, you have told the story
 of the dismal sorrows befallen yourself and all of the Argives.
 370 But come now, tell me this and give me an accurate answer:
 Did you see any of your godlike companions, who once with you
 went to Ilion and there met their destiny? Here is
 a night that is very long, it is endless. It is not time yet
 to sleep in the palace. But go on telling your wonderful story.
 375 I myself could hold out until the bright dawn, if only

The story resumed

you could bear to tell me, here in the palace, of your sufferings.'

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him:

'O great Alkinoös, pre-eminent among all people,
there is a time for many words, and a time for sleeping;

380 but if you insist on hearing me still, I would not begrudge you
the tale of these happenings and others yet more pitiful
to hear, the sorrows of my companions, who perished later,
who escaped onslaught and cry of battle, but perished
all for the sake of a vile woman, on the homeward journey.

385 'Now when chaste Persephone had scattered the female
souls of the women, driving them off in every direction,
there came the soul of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus,
grieving, and the souls of the other men, who died with him
and met their doom in the house of Aigisthos, were gathered around him.

390 He knew me at once, when he drank the dark blood, and fell to
lamentation loud and shrill, and the tears came springing,
and threw himself into my arms, meaning so to embrace me,
but there was no force there any longer, nor any juice left
now in his flexible limbs, as there had been in time past.

395 I broke into tears at the sight of him and my heart pitied him,
and so I spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words:

"Son of Atreus, most lordly and king of men, Agamemnon,
what doom of death that lays men low has been your undoing?
Was it with the ships, and did Poseidon, rousing a stormblast
400 of battering winds that none would wish for, prove your undoing?
Or was it on the dry land, did men embattled destroy you
as you tried to cut out cattle and fleecy sheep from their holdings,
or fighting against them for the sake of their city and women?"

'So I spoke, and he in turn said to me in answer:

405 "Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
not in the ships, nor did Poseidon, rousing a stormblast
of battering winds that none would wish for, prove my destruction,
nor on dry land did enemy men destroy me in battle;

Aigisthos, working out my death and destruction, invited
410 me to his house, and feasted me, and killed me there, with the help
of my sluttish wife, as one cuts down an ox at his manger.
So I died a most pitiful death, and my other companions
were killed around me without mercy, like pigs with shining
tusks, in the house of a man rich and very powerful,

The ghost of Agamemnon

- 415 for a wedding, or a festival, or a communal dinner.
You have been present in your time at the slaughter of many
men, killed singly, or in the strong encounters of battle;
but beyond all others you would have been sorry at heart
for this scene, how we lay sprawled by the mixing bowl and the loaded
420 tables, all over the palace, and the whole floor was steaming
with blood; and most pitiful was the voice I heard of Priam's
daughter *Kassandra*, killed by treacherous *Klytaimestra*
over me; but I lifted my hands and with them beat on
the ground as I died upon the sword, but the sluttish woman
425 turned away from me and was so hard that her hands would not
press shut my eyes and mouth though I was going to *Hades*.
So there is nothing more deadly or more vile than a woman
who stores her mind with acts that are of such sort, as this one
did when she thought of this act of dishonor, and plotted
430 the murder of her lawful husband. See, I had been thinking
that I would be welcome to my children and thralls of my household
when I came home, but she with thoughts surpassingly grisly
splashed the shame on herself and the rest of her sex, on women
still to come, even on the one whose acts are virtuous."
- 435 'So he spoke, and I again said to him in answer:
"Shame it is, how most terribly *Zeus* of the wide brows
from the beginning has been hateful to the seed of *Atreus*
through the schemes of women. Many of us died for the sake of *Helen*,
and when you were far, *Klytaimestra* plotted treason against you."
- 440 'So I spoke, and he in turn said to me in answer:
"So by this, do not be too easy even with your wife,
nor give her an entire account of all you are sure of.
Tell her part of it, but let the rest be hidden in silence.
And yet you, *Odysseus*, will never be murdered by your wife.
- 445 The daughter of *Ikarios*, circumspect *Penelope*,
is all too virtuous and her mind is stored with good thoughts.
Ah well. She was only a young wife when we left her
and went off to the fighting; and she had an infant child then
at her breast. That child now must sit with the men and be counted.
- 450 Happy he! For his dear father will come back, and see him,
and he will fold his father in his arms, as is right. My wife
never even let me feed my eyes with the sight of
my own son, but before that I myself was killed by her.

Interview with the ghost of Achilles

- And put away in your heart this other thing that I tell you.
455 When you bring your ship in to your own dear country, do it
secretly, not in the open. There is no trusting in women.
But come now, tell me this and give me an accurate answer;
tell me if you happened to hear that my son was still living,
whether perhaps in Orchomenos, or in sandy Pylos,
460 or perhaps with Menelaos in wide Sparta; for nowhere
upon the earth has there been any death of noble Orestes.”
‘So he spoke, and I again said to him in answer:
“Son of Atreus, why do you ask me that? I do not know
if he is alive or dead. It is bad to babble empty.”
465 ‘So we two stood there exchanging our sad words, grieving
both together and shedding the big tears. After this,
there came to us the soul of Peleus’ son, Achilles,
and the soul of Patroklos and the soul of stately Antilochos,
and the soul of Aias, who for beauty and stature was greatest
470 of all the Danaans, next to the stately son of Peleus.
The soul of swift-footed Achilles, scion of Aiakos, knew me,
and full of lamentation he spoke to me in winged words:
“Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
hard man, what made you think of this bigger endeavor, how could you
475 endure to come down here to Hades’ place, where the senseless
dead men dwell, mere imitations of perished mortals?”
‘So he spoke, and I again said to him in answer:
“Son of Peleus, far the greatest of the Achaians, Achilles,
I came for the need to consult Teiresias, if he might tell me
480 some plan by which I might come back to rocky Ithaka;
for I have not yet been near Achaian country, nor ever
set foot on my land, but always I have troubles. Achilles,
no man before has been more blessed than you, nor ever
will be. Before, when you were alive, we Argives honored you
485 as we did the gods, and now in this place you have great authority
over the dead. Do not grieve, even in death, Achilles.”
‘So I spoke, and he in turn said to me in answer:
“O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying.
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another
490 man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,
than be a king over all the perished dead. But come now,
tell me anything you have heard of my proud son, whether

or not he went along to war to fight as a champion;
and tell me anything you have heard about stately Peleus,
495 whether he still keeps his position among the Myrmidon
hordes, or whether in Hellas and Phthia they have diminished
his state, because old age constrains his hands and feet, and I
am no longer there under the light of the sun to help him,
not the man I used to be once, when in the wide Troad
500 I killed the best of their people, fighting for the Argives. If only
for a little while I could come like that to the house of my father,
my force and my invincible hands would terrify such men
as use force on him and keep him away from his rightful honors.”
‘So he spoke, and I again said to him in answer:
505 “I have no report to give you of stately Peleus,
but as for your beloved son Neoptolemos, I will
tell you, since you ask me to do it, all the true story;
for I myself, in the hollow hull of a balanced ship, brought him
over from Skyros, to join the strong-greaved Achaians. Whenever
510 we, around the city of Troy, talked over our counsels,
he would always speak first, and never blunder. In speaking
only godlike Nestor and I were better than he was.
And when we Achaians fought in the Trojan plain, he never
would hang back where there were plenty of other men, nor stay with
515 the masses, but run far out in front, giving way to no man
for fury, and many were those he killed in the terrible fighting.
I could not tell over the number of all nor name all
the people he killed as he fought for the Argives, but what a great man
was one, the son of Telephos he slew with the brazen
520 spear, the hero Eurypylos, and many Keteian
companions were killed about him, by reason of womanish presents.
Next to great Memnon, this was the finest man I ever
saw. Again, when we who were best of the Argives entered
the horse that Epeios made, and all the command was given
525 to me, to keep close hidden inside, or sally out from it,
the other leaders of the Danaans and men of counsel
were wiping their tears away and the limbs were shaking under
each man of them; but never at any time did I see him
losing his handsome color and going pale, or wiping
530 the tears off his face, but rather he implored me to let him
sally out of the horse; he kept feeling for his sword hilt

The angry ghost of Aias

and spear weighted with bronze, full of evil thoughts for the Trojans. But after we had sacked the sheer citadel of Priam, with his fair share and a princely prize of his own, he boarded
535 his ship, unscathed; he had not been hit by thrown and piercing bronze, nor stabbed in close-up combat, as often happens in fighting. The War God rages at all, and favors no man.”

‘So I spoke, and the soul of the swift-footed scion of Aiakos stalked away in long strides across the meadow of asphodel,
540 happy for what I had said of his son, and how he was famous.

‘Now the rest of the souls of the perished dead stood near me grieving, and each one spoke to me and told of his sorrows. Only the soul of Telamonian Aias stood off
545 at a distance from me, angry still over that decision I won against him, when beside the ships we disputed our cases for the arms of Achilleus. His queenly mother set them as prize, and the sons of the Trojans, with Pallas Athene, judged; and I wish I had never won in a contest like this, so high a head has gone under the ground for the sake of that armor,
550 Aias, who for beauty and for achievement surpassed all the Danaans next to the stately son of Peleus.

So I spoke to him now in words of conciliation:
“Aias, son of stately Telamon, could you then never
555 even in death forget your anger against me, because of that cursed armor? The gods made it to pain the Achaians, so great a bulwark were you, who were lost to them. We Achaians grieved for your death as incessantly as for Achilleus the son of Peleus at his death, and there is no other to blame, but Zeus; he, in his terrible hate for the army
560 of Danaan spearmen, visited this destruction upon you. Come nearer, my lord, so you can hear what I say and listen to my story; suppress your anger and lordly spirit.”

‘So I spoke. He gave no answer, but went off after the other souls of the perished dead men, into the darkness.
565 There, despite his anger, he might have spoken, or I might have spoken to him, but the heart in my inward breast wanted still to see the souls of the other perished dead men.

‘There I saw Minos, the glorious son of Zeus, seated, holding a golden scepter and issuing judgments among
570 the dead, who all around the great lord argued their cases,

Heroes in torment—Herakles

some sitting and some standing, by the wide-gated house of Hades.

575 'After him I was aware of gigantic Orion
in the meadow of asphodel, rounding up and driving together
wild animals he himself had killed in the lonely mountains,
holding in his hands a brazen club, forever unbroken.

580 'And I saw Tityos, Earth's glorious son, lying
in the plain, and sprawled over nine acres. Two vultures,
sitting one on either side, were tearing his liver,
plunging inside the caul. With his hands he could not beat them
away. He had manhandled Leto, the honored consort
of Zeus, as she went through spacious Panopeus, toward Pytho.

585 'And I saw Tantalos also, suffering hard pains, standing
in lake water that came up to his chin, and thirsty
as he was, he tried to drink, but could capture nothing;
for every time the old man, trying to drink, stooped over,
the water would drain away and disappear, and the black earth
showed at his feet, and the divinity dried it away. Over
his head trees with lofty branches had fruit like a shower descending,
pear trees and pomegranate trees and apple trees with fruit shining,
590 and figs that were sweet and olives ripened well, but each time
the old man would straighten up and reach with his hands for them,
the wind would toss them away toward the clouds overhanging.

600 'Also I saw Sisyphos. He was suffering strong pains,
and with both arms embracing the monstrous stone, struggling
595 with hands and feet alike, he would try to push the stone upward
to the crest of the hill, but when it was on the point of going
over the top, the force of gravity turned it backward,
and the pitiless stone rolled back down to the level. He then
tried once more to push it up, straining hard, and sweat ran
all down his body, and over his head a cloud of dust rose.

605 'After him I was aware of powerful Herakles;
his image, that is, but he himself among the immortal
gods enjoys their festivals, married to sweet-stepping
Hebe, child of great Zeus and Hera of the golden sandals.
All around him was a clamor of the dead as of birds scattering
scared in every direction; but he came on, like dark night,
holding his bow bare with an arrow laid on the bowstring,
and forever looking, as one who shot, with terrible glances.
There was a terrible belt crossed over his chest, and a golden

Return to Circe's island

- 610 baldrick, with marvelous works of art that figured upon it,
bears, and lions with glaring eyes, and boars of the forests,
the battles and the quarrels, the murders and the manslaughters.
May he who artfully designed them, and artfully put them
upon that baldrick, never again do any designing.
- 615 He recognized me at once as soon as his eyes had seen me,
and full of lamentation he spoke to me in winged words:
"Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
unhappy man, are you too leading some wretched destiny
such as I too pursued when I went still in the sunlight?
- 620 For I was son of Kronian Zeus, but I had an endless
spell of misery. I was made bondman to one who was far worse
than I, and he loaded my difficult labors on me. One time
he sent me here to fetch the dog back, and thought there could be
no other labor to be devised more difficult than that
- 625 one, but I brought the dog up and led him from the realm of Hades,
and Hermes saw me on my way, with Pallas Athene."
So he spoke, and went back into the realm of Hades,
but I stayed fast in place where I was, to see if some other
one of the generation of heroes who died before me
- 630 would come; and I might have seen men earlier still, whom I wanted
to see, Perithoös and Theseus, gods' glorious children;
but before that the hordes of the dead men gathered about me
with inhuman clamor, and green fear took hold of me
with the thought that proud Persephone might send up against me
- 635 some gorgonish head of a terrible monster up out of Hades'.
So, going back on board my ship, I told my companions
also to go aboard, and to cast off the stern cables;
and quickly they went aboard the ship and sat to the oarlocks,
and the swell of the current carried her down the Ocean river
- 640 with rowing at first, but after that on a fair wind following.