The Odyssey

The story of Odysseus begins with the goddess Athena’s appealing to Zeus to help Odysseus, who has been wandering for ten years on the seas, to find his way home to his family in Ithaca. While Odysseus has been gone, his son, Telemachus, has grown to manhood and his wife, Penelope, has been besieged by suitors wishing to marry her and gain Odysseus’ wealth. The suitors have taken up residence in her home and are constantly feasting on the family’s cattle, sheep, and goats. They dishonor Odysseus and his family. Athena then pleads with her father to interact on Odysseus’ behalf.

Book I: A Goddess Intervenes

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,
the wanderer, harried for years on end,
after he plundered the stronghold
on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands
and learned the minds of many distant men,
and weathered many bitter nights and days
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
But not by will nor valor could he save them,
for their own recklessness destroyed them all-
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Helios, the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.
Begin when all the rest who left behind them
headlong death in battle or at sea
had long ago returned, while he alone still hungered
for home and wife….

And when long years and seasons
wheeling brought around that point of time
ordained for him to make his passage homeward,
trials and dangers, even so, attended him
even in Ithaca, near those he loved.
Yet all the gods had pitied Lord Odysseus,
all but Poseidon, raging cold and rough
against the brave king till he came ashore
at last on his own land…
The grey-eyed goddess Athena replied to Zeus:

"O Majesty, O Father of us all,
that man is in the dust indeed, and justly.
So perish all who do what he had done.
But my own heart is broken for Odysseus,
the mastermind of war, so long a castaway
upon an island in the running …

But such desire is in him
merely to see the hearthsomke leaping upward
from his own island, that he longs to die.
Are you not moved by this, Lord of Olympos?

Had you no pleasure from Odysseus’ offerings
beside the Argive ships, on Troy’s wide seaboard?
O Zeus, what do you hold against him now?"

To this the summoner of cloud replied:

“My child, what strange remarks you let escape you.

Could I forget that kingly man, Odysseus?
There is no mortal half so wise; no mortal
gave so much to the lords of open sky.
Only the god who laps the land in water,
Poseidon, bears the fighter an old grudge
since he poked out the eye of Polyphêmos,
brawniest of the Cyclopes Who bore
that giant lout? Thoösa, daughter of Phorkys,
an offshore sea lord: for this nymph had lain
with Lord Poseidon in her hollow caves.

Naturally, the god, after the blinding—
mind you, he does not kill the man;
he only buffets him away from home.
But come now, we are all at leisure here,
let us take up this matter of his return,
that he may sail. Poseidon must relent
for being quarrelsome will get him nowhere,
one god, flouting the will of all the gods.”

The grey-eyed goddess Athena answered him:

“O Majesty, O Father of us all,
if it now please the blissful gods
that wise Odysseus reach his home again,
let the Wayfinder, Hermês, cross the sea
to the island of Ogygia; let him tell
our fixed intent to the nymph with pretty braids,
and let the steadfast man depart for home.
For my part, I shall visit Ithaca
to put more courage in the son, and rouse him
to call an assembly of the islanders, Akhaian\textsuperscript{1}
gentlemen with flowing hair.

75 He must warn off that wolf pack of the suitors
who prey upon his flocks and dusky cattle.
I’ll send him to the mainland then, to Sparta
by the sand beach of Pylos\textsuperscript{2}; let him find
news of his dear father where he may

80 and win his own renown about the world

She bent to tie her beautiful sandals on,
ambrosial, golden, that carry her over water
or over endless land like wings of the wind,
and took the great haft of her spear in hand—

85 that bronzeshod spear this child of Power can use
To break in wrath long battle lines of fighters.

\textsuperscript{1} In a general sense, “Greek”; more especially, descriptive of men living in a region not far from Ithaka.
\textsuperscript{2} A city and region of southern Greece ruled by Nestor, an aged king and counselor.