

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:  
165 "Mother, a duty brought me here to the house of Hades.  
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:

Homer  
Odyssey

- "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.  
No one yet holds your fine inheritance, but in freedom  
185 Telemachos administers your allotted lands, and apportions  
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."  
"So she spoke, but I, pondering it in my heart, yet wished  
205 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 flutters 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 Salmeoneus,  
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  
the earth, and she used to haunt Enipeus' beautiful waters;  
240 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."

255 "So he spoke and dived back into the heaving water  
of the sea, but she conceived and bore Pelias and Neleus,  
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,

*tell Odysseus their stories*

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

265 Thebes, and built the bulwarks, since without bulwarks they could not  
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.  
270 And I saw Megara, daughter of high-spirited Kreion,  
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.