

If only our queen will take you to her heart,
then there's hope that you will see your loved ones,
reach your high-roofed house, your native land at last."

And with that vow the bright-eyed goddess sped away,
over the barren sea, leaving welcome Scheria far behind,
and reaching Marathon and the spacious streets of Athens,
entered Erechtheus' sturdy halls, Athena's stronghold.
Now as Odysseus approached Alcinous' famous house
a rush of feelings stirred within his heart,
bringing him to a standstill,
even before he crossed the bronze threshold ...
A radiance strong as the moon or rising sun came flooding
through the high-roofed halls of generous King Alcinous.
Walls plated in bronze, crowned with a circling frieze
glazed as blue as lapis, ran to left and right
from outer gates to the deepest court recess.
Solid golden doors enclosed the palace.
Up from the bronze threshold silver doorposts rose
with silver lintel above, and golden handle hooks.
And dogs of gold and silver were stationed either side,
forged by the god of fire with all his cunning craft
to keep watch on generous King Alcinous' palace now,
his immortal guard-dogs, ageless, all their days.
Inside to left and right, in a long unbroken row
from farthest outer gate to the inmost chamber,
thrones stood backed against the wall, each draped
with a finely spun brocade, women's handsome work.
Here the Phaeacian lords would sit enthroned,
dining, drinking—the feast flowed on forever.
And young boys, molded of gold, set on pedestals
standing firm, were lifting torches high in their hands
to flare through the nights and light the feasters down the hall.
And Alcinous has some fifty serving-women in his house:
some, turning the handmill, grind the apple-yellow grain,
some weave at their webs or sit and spin their yarn,
fingers flickering quick as aspen leaves in the wind
and the densely woven woolens dripping oil droplets.

Just as Phaeacian men excel the world at sailing,
driving their swift ships on the open seas,
so the women excel at all the arts of weaving.
That is Athena's gift to them beyond all others—
a genius for lovely work, and a fine mind too.

Outside the courtyard, fronting the high gates,
a magnificent orchard stretches four acres deep
with a strong fence running round it side-to-side.
Here luxuriant trees are always in their prime,
pomegranates and pears, and apples glowing red,
succulent figs and olives swelling sleek and dark.
And the yield of all these trees will never flag or die,
neither in winter nor in summer, a harvest all year round
for the West Wind always breathing through will bring
some fruits to the bud and others warm to ripeness—
pear mellowing ripe on pear, apple on apple,
cluster of grapes on cluster, fig crowding fig.
And here is a teeming vineyard planted for the kings,
beyond it an open level bank where the vintage grapes
lie baking to raisins in the sun while pickers gather others;
some they trample down in vats, and here in the front rows
bunches of unripe grapes have hardly shed their blooms
while others under the sunlight slowly darken purple.
And there by the last rows are beds of greens,
bordered and plotted, greens of every kind,
glistening fresh, year in, year out. And last,
there are two springs, one rippling in channels
over the whole orchard—the other, flanking it,
rushes under the palace gates
to bubble up in front of the lofty roofs
where the city people come and draw their water.

Such
the gifts, the glories showered down by the gods
on King Alcinous' realm.

And there Odysseus stood,
gazing at all this bounty, a man who'd borne so much ...
Once he'd had his fill of marveling at it all,

he crossed the threshold quickly,
strode inside the palace. Here he found
the Phaeacian lords and captains tipping out
libations now to the guide and giant-killer Hermes,
the god to whom they would always pour the final cup
before they sought their beds. Odysseus went on
striding down the hall, the man of many struggles
shrouded still in the mist Athena drifted round him,
till he reached Arete and Alcinous the king. And then,
the moment he flung his arms around Arete's knees,
the godsent mist rolled back to reveal the great man.
And silence seized the feasters all along the hall—
seeing him right before their eyes, they marveled,
gazing on him now as Odysseus pleaded, "Queen,
Arete, daughter of godlike King Rhexenor!
Here after many trials I come to beg for mercy,
your husband's, yours, and all these feasters' here.
May the gods endow them with fortune all their lives,
may each hand down to his sons the riches in his house
and the pride of place the realm has granted *him*.
But as for myself, grant me a rapid convoy home
to my own native land. How far away I've been
from all my loved ones—how long I have suffered!"

Pleading so, the man sank down in the ashes,
just at the hearth beside the blazing fire,
while all the rest stayed hushed, stock-still.
At last the old revered Echeneus broke the spell,
the eldest lord in Phaeacia, finest speaker too,
a past master at all the island's ancient ways.
Impelled by kindness now, he rose and said,
"This is no way, Alcinous. How indecent, look,
our guest on the ground, in the ashes by the fire!
Your people are holding back, waiting for your signal.
Come, raise him up and seat the stranger now,
in a silver-studded chair,
and tell the heralds to mix more wine for all
so we can pour out cups to Zeus who loves the lightning,