Book 11 - Summary

* Odysseus travels to the Underworld and makes the offerings according to Kirkê’s instructions. The shades of the dead (shades = ghosts) gather to drink the blood (gross) and then talk to Odysseus.
* The first shade is Elpênor, freshly fallen from Kirkê’s roof. Odysseus's eyes bug out when he sees one of his crew members—he weeps and listens to the man's story.
* Elpênor begs for Odysseus to honor his death by building a burial mound (essentially a pile of rocks) for his dead body. Odysseus agrees, since it's the least he can do after totally having failed to notice that one of his crew members was missing.
* Odysseus then glimpses his mother's shade among the rest of the dead. This is news to him, since last he heard she was still alive. Not a good way to find out.
* Fortunately, he is soon distracted from his weeping by the arrival of Teirêsias (the dead blind prophet).
* Teirêsias drinks the blood of Odysseus's sacrifice and then speaks.
* His first words are a warning: don't eat Helios's cattle at Thrinakia. His next are to casually announce that Odysseus will survive alone.
* In other words, all of his companions will die. Great, that's probably something they're glad to hear.
* The good news is, Odysseus will make it home after all, but he'll find trouble there. He'll have to make the suitors pay for their insolence with … wait for it … blood.
* After defeating the suitors, Teirêsias continues, Odysseus had better go inland until he reaches an area of earth which has never known the sea. There, he has to pray to Poseidon in order to ensure himself a peaceful seaborne death in his old age, surrounded by all his folk.
* Okay, that's great, says Odysseus; but why is his mother here, and can he talk to her?
* Sure, says Teirêsias, as long as she drinks the blood of the sacrifice, too.
* One gory mess later, Odysseus's mother Antikleía tells him of the situation back home in Ithaka: Telémackhos is growing up but helpless against the suitors; Penelope is still loyal; and, oh yeah, she herself has died from loneliness.
* Her son tries three times to embrace her, but this doesn't work out too well, since Antikleía is dead.
* When she leaves, there's a long line of other dead people waiting to talk to him. The shades don't get too many visitors around these parts.
* Odysseus draws his sword to hold them back. (Except they're already dead, so we're not sure how effective that would be.) He lets them come and drink one at a time.
* Odysseus speaks first to a long line of princesses
* At this point, Odysseus pauses in his narrative. The Phaiákians are all "No way!"
* Queen Arête, clearly impressed by all these stories, decides that when they do finally send Odysseus on his way, it should be with lots of sparkly things (i.e., treasure).
* King Alkínoös then asks Odysseus if, while he was down in the underworld, he met any of his friends who died at Troy.
* He sure did!
* Back in the Underworld, Odysseus sees Agamemnon and hears the tragic story of his murder and his son Orestes's revenge.
* Agamemnon is understandably bitter against women and considers all of them treacherous. Oh, except for Penelope, whom he praises for her loyalty. (Nice save.)
* Then appear the spirits of Akhilleus and some other buddies of Odysseus's from the Trojan war.
* Odysseus praises Akhilleus for having earned so much honor and glory in his life; surely his death is like, the greatest death ever.
* Nope. Actually, Akhilleus says, being dead sucks. He'd rather be a poor country farmer who is alive than a glorious lord in the Underworld. Wise words.
* Before he goes, Odysseus also sees Minos, Orion, Tityos, Tántalos, Sisyphus, and Heraklês. These are all figures of Greek myth.
* When all the shades come crowding in to drink the blood, Odysseus freaks out and runs back to his ship.
* Everyone leaves the Underworld a little bit wiser and less a few sacrificial animals.