**Bk XI:385-464 Odysseus tells his tale: The Ghost of Agamemnon**

          ‘When sacred [Persephone](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Persephone) had dispersed the female spirits, the ghost of [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Agamemnon), son of [Atreus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Atreus), came sorrowing, and other ghosts were gathered round him, those who met their fate alongside him, murdered in [Aegisthus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Aegisthus)’ palace. Drinking the black blood he knew me, and wept loudly, shedding great tears, stretching his hands out in his eagerness to touch me. But all his power and strength was gone, all that vigour his body one possessed.

          I wept when I saw him, and pitied him, and spoke to him with winged words: “Agamemnon, king of men, glorious son of Atreus, what pitiless stroke of fate destroyed you? Did [Poseidon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Poseidon) stir the cruel winds to a raging tempest, and swamp your ships? Or perhaps you were attacked in enemy country, while you were driving off their cattle and fine flocks, or fighting to take their city and its women?”

          He answered my words swiftly: “[Odysseus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Odysseus) of many resources, scion of [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Zeus), son of [Laertes](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Laertes), Poseidon stirred no cruel winds to raging tempest, nor swamped my ships, nor was I attacked in enemy country. Aegisthus it was who engineered my fate, inviting me to his palace for a feast, murdering me with my accursed wife’s help, as you might kill an ox in its stall. I died wretchedly, and round me my companions were slaughtered ruthlessly, like white-tusked swine for a wedding banquet in the hall of some rich and powerful man, or at a communal meal, or a great drinking session. You yourself have witnessed the killing of men, in single combat or in the thick of the fight, but you would have felt the deepest pity at that sight, the floor swimming with blood where our corpses lay, by the mixing bowl and the heavily-laden tables. But the most pitiful cry of all came from [Cassandra](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexBCDE.htm#Cassandra), [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Priam)’s daughter, whom treacherous [Clytemnestra](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexBCDE.htm#Clytaemnestra) killed as she clung to me. Brought low by Aegisthus’ sword I tried to lift my arms in dying, but bitch that she was my wife turned away, and though I was going to [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades)’ Halls she disdained even to close my eyelids or my mouth. Truly there is nothing more terrible or shameless than a woman who can contemplate such acts, planning and executing a husband’s murder. I had thought to be welcomed by my house and children, but she with her mind intent on that final horror has brought shame on herself and all future women, even those who are virtuous.”

          To this I answered: “Indeed, from the very beginning, Zeus the Thunderer has tormented the race of Atreus, through women’s machinations! So many men died for [Helen](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Helen)’s sake while Clytemnestra plotted in your absence.” I spoke, and he made answer swiftly: “So don’t be too open with your own wife, don’t tell her every thought in your mind, reveal a part, keep the rest to yourself. Not that death will come to you from wise [Penelope](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Penelope), [Icarius](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Icarius)’ daughter, she who is so tender-hearted, and circumspect. A newly wedded bride she was when we left for the war, with a baby son at her breast who must be a man now and prospering. His loving father will see him when he returns, and he will kiss his father as is right and proper. But that wife of mine did not even allow me to set eyes on my son before she killed me. Let me say this too, and take my words to heart, don’t bring your ship to anchor openly, when you reach home, but do it secretly, since women can no longer be trusted.

          Come tell me, in truth, have you heard if my son is still alive, maybe in [Orchomenus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Orchomenus) or sandy [Pylos](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Pylos), or in [Menelaus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Menelaus)’ broad [Sparta](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Sparta): that my noble [Orestes](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Orestes) is not yet dead?” To this I answered: “Son of Atreus, why ask this of me? I cannot tell if he is dead or living, and it is wrong to utter empty words.”’

**Based on the attitude that Agamemnon and Odysseus have towards** [**Clytemnestra**](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexBCDE.htm#Clytaemnestra) **what can you infer about the view of women?**

**Bk XI:465-540 Odysseus tells his tale: The Spirit of Achilles**

          ‘So we stood, exchanging words of sadness, grieving and shedding tears. And now the spirit of [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Achilles) son of [Peleus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Peleus) appeared, and the spirits of [Patroclus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Patroclus) and peerless [Antilochus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Antilochus), and [Ajax](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Ajaxgreater) who for beauty and stature was supreme among the [Danaans](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexBCDE.htm#Danaans), save only for Peleus’ flawless son. And the ghost of swift-footed Achilles, grandson of [Aeacus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Aeacus), knew me, and spoke through the tears: “[Odysseus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Odysseus) of many resources, scion of [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Zeus), son of [Laertes](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Laertes), what could your resolute mind devise that exceeds this: to dare to descend to [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades), where live the heedless dead, the disembodied ghosts of men?”

          So he spoke, and I replied: “Achilles, son of Peleus, greatest of [Achaean](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Achaeans) warriors, I came to find [Teiresias](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Teiresias), to see if he would show me the way to reach rocky [Ithaca](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Ithaca). I have not yet touched [Achaea](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Achaea), not set foot in my own land, but have suffered endless troubles, yet no man has been more blessed than you, Achilles, nor will be in time to come, since we [Argives](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Argives) considered you a god while you lived, and now you rule, a power, among the un-living. Do not grieve, then, Achilles, at your death.”

          These words he answered, swiftly: “Glorious Odysseus: don’t try to reconcile me to my dying. I’d rather serve as another man’s labourer, as a poor peasant without land, and be alive on Earth, than be lord of all the lifeless dead. Give me news of my son, instead. Did he follow me to war, and become a leader? Tell me, too, what you know of noble Peleus. Is he honoured still among the [Myrmidons](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Myrmidons), or because old age ties him hand and foot do [Hellas](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Hellas) and [Phthia](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Phthie) fail to honour him. I am no longer up there in the sunlight to help him with that strength I had on [Troy](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Trojans)’s wide plain, where I killed the flower of their host to defend the Argives. If I could only return strong to my father’s house, for a single hour, I would give those who abuse him and his honour cause to regret the power of my invincible hands.”

          To this I answered: “Truly, I have heard nothing of faultless Peleus, but I can tell you all about [Neoptolemus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Neoptolemus), your resolute son, since you command me. I myself brought him from [Scyros](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Scyros), in my well-made hollow ship, to join the bronze-greaved ranks of the Acheans. When we debated our plans before Troy he was always first to speak and his words were eloquent: only godlike [Nestor](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Nestor) and I were more so. And when we fought with our bronze spears on the plains of Troy, he never lagged behind in the crowded ranks but always advanced far in the lead, yielding to no one in skill. Many were the men he killed in mortal combat. I could not count or name them, all those victims of his, killed as he fought for the Argives, but what a warrior that hero [Eurypylus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexBCDE.htm#Eurypylus), son of [Telephus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexRSTWZ.htm#Telephus) was, who fell to his sword, and Eurypylus’ Mysian comrades slain around him, all because of a [woman](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Astyoche)’s desire for gain.

Next to noble [Memnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexFGHILMN.htm#Memnon), he was the handsomest man I ever saw. Then again, when we Argive leaders climbed into the Horse that [Epeius](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexBCDE.htm#Epeius) made, and it fell to me to open the hatch of our well-made hiding place, or keep it closed, the other Danaan generals and counsellors kept on wiping the tears from their eyes and their limbs trembled, but he begged me endlessly to let him leap from the Horse, toying with his sword hilt and his heavy bronze spear, eager to wreak havoc on the Trojans. And when we had sacked [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexOP.htm#Priam)’s high city, he took ship with his share of the spoils and a noble [prize](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Andromache), and never a wound, untouched by the sharp spears, unmarked by close combat, something rare in battle, since [Ares](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/OdindexA.htm#Ares), the God of War, is indiscriminate in his fury.”

When I had spoken, the spirit of Achilles, Aeacus’ grandson, went away with great strides through the field of asphodel, rejoicing at my news of his son’s greatness.’

**How have Achilles’ thoughts on death changed since he was a living warrior?**