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BOOK

DEATH IN THE GREAT HALL

TWENTY-TWO



Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the islands leapt and stood on the broad door sill, his own bow in his hand.

235 He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over. Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before, if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.”

240 He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup,

embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers: the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death? How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—

245 could dare to bring death's pain on him and darkness on his eyes?

Odysseus' arrow hit him under the chin and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

233 The epithet “wiliest fighter of the islands” emphasizes Odysseus' cleverness and skill at this important point in the story.

238 The god Apollo was, among other things, the supporter and protector of archers. The bow was his sacred weapon.

239–252 Why does Odysseus kill Antinous first? Why does he do it in such a sudden, terrible way?

WORDS **wiliest** (wī'lē-īst) *adj.* most crafty or sly; trickiest
TO **revelry** (rēv'el-rē) *n.* noisy merrymaking; festivity
KNOW **throng** (thrŏng) *n.* a large gathering; crowd



250 Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,
and one last kick upset his table
knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.

250 runnels: streams.

255 Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay
the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,
everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned
the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,
not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and
throw.

255–257 Earlier, in preparation for this confrontation, Odysseus and Telemachus removed all the weapons and shields that were hanging on the walls.

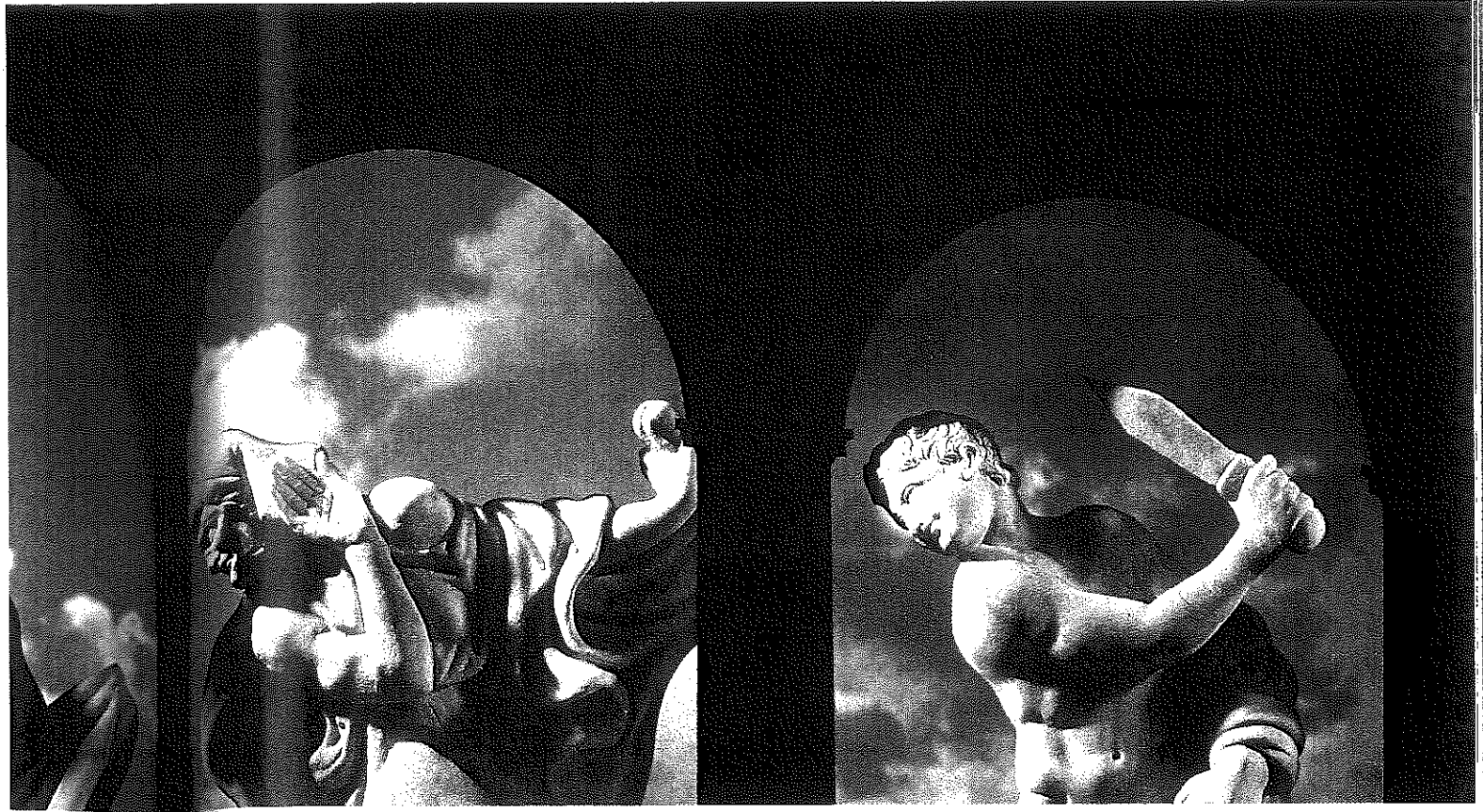
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”

260 “Your own throat will be slit for this!”

“Our finest lad is down!

You killed the best on Ithaca.”



“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild
shot,
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend
they were already in the grip of death.

265 But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it
home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder,
twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared
bid for my wife while I was still alive.

270 Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide
heaven,
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.
Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

As they all took this in, sickly green fear
pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered
275 looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.

266–272 At last Odysseus reveals his true identity and announces that he plans to kill all the suitors. What reasons does he give for killing them?

274 entrails: internal organs.

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