

## Ithaka

*While one moon is waning and another is on the rise  
He will return home. . . .*

*Odyssey XIV, 162-165*

Late September, I'm in the orchard digging a hole  
against the morning chill to plant another peach  
when I imagine you, a weathered ghost, walk up  
for all the world like that cunning sailor come home to find  
his ancient father working a fire-hardened stick  
into the ground with crippled hands, bending over  
the opened earth, knowing he won't live to see the sapling  
bear fruit but planting it nonetheless,  
with care for the roots, heeling-in the rocky soil,  
flooding the small basin. Imagine you like him  
after the tears of recognition, the tears of joy,  
the warm embraces and all-too-hurried remembrances,  
shouldering the fir-tree oar that got you back  
from the war (past the sirens, whirlpools and wandering rocks)  
then walking inland on your wobbly sea-legs until you come,  
as the shade of Tiresias inside the Gates of Hell  
told you to, to the heart of the island so far from the sea  
the men there laugh at you, mistaking your oar  
for a swabby's bad imitation of some farmland implement —  
a winnowing paddle or threshing flail or something —  
*whereupon*, knowing it's the right time and place,  
you use it to dig a hole, insert it blade up,  
pack the soil around it, say a few words to he  
who kept you so long at sea and she who rescued you,  
then head back into the onshore wind  
for the tapestry's final stitches: house and household,  
wife and family, housecleaning to be done.