

from the **Odyssey**

Homer

translated by Robert Fitzgerald

Part I

The Adventures of Odysseus

CHARACTERS

Alcinous (al SIHN oh uhs)—king of the Phaeacians, to whom Odysseus tells his story

Odysseus (oh DIHS ee uhs)—king of Ithaca

Calypso (kuh LIHP soh)—sea goddess who loves Odysseus

Circe (SUR see)—enchantress who helps Odysseus

Zeus (zoos)—king of the gods

Apollo (uh POL oh)—god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine

Agamemnon (ag uh MEHM non)—king and leader of Greek forces

Poseidon (poh SY duhn)—god of sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea

Athena (uh THEE nuh)—goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare

Polyphemus (pol ih FEE muhs)—the Cyclops who imprisons Odysseus

Laertes (lay UR teez)—Odysseus' father

Cronus (KROH nuhs)—Titan ruler of the universe; father of Zeus

Perimedes (pehr uh MEE deez)—member of Odysseus' crew

Eurylochus (yoo RIHL uh kuhs)—another member of the crew

Tiresias (ty REE see uhs)—blind prophet who advises Odysseus

Persephone (puhr SEHF uh nee)—wife of Hades

Telemachus (tuh LEHM uh kuhs)—Odysseus and Penelope's son

Sirens (SY ruhnh)—creatures whose songs lure sailors to their deaths

Scylla (SIHL uh)—sea monster of gray rock

Charybdis (kuh RIHB dihs)—enormous and dangerous whirlpool

Lampetia (lahm PEE shuh)—nymph

Hermes (HUR meez)—herald and messenger of the gods

Eumaeus (yoo MEE uhs)—old swineherd and friend of Odysseus

Antinous (ant IHN oh uhs)—leader among the suitors

Eurynome (yoo RIHN uh mee)—housekeeper for Penelope

Penelope (puh NEHL uh pee)—Odysseus' wife

Eurymachus (yoo RIH muh kuhs)—suitor

Amphinomus (am FIHN uh muhs)—suitor

SCAN FOR
MULTIMEDIA 

In the opening verses, Homer addresses the muse of epic poetry. He asks her help in telling the tale of Odysseus.

Sing in me, Muse,¹ and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,
the wanderer, harried for years on end,
after he **plundered** the stronghold
5 on the proud height of Troy.²

He saw the townlands
and learned the minds of many distant men,
and weathered many bitter nights and days
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them.
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—

NOTES

1. Muse (myooz) any one of the nine goddesses of the arts.

plundered (PLUHN duhrd) *v.* took something by force

2. Troy city in northwest Asia Minor; site of the Trojan War.

NOTES

3. **Helios** (HEE lee ohs) sun god.

4. **Zeus** (zoos) king of the gods.

5. **Laertes** (LAY ur teez)

6. **guile** (gyl) *n.* craftiness; cunning.

7. **Ithaca** (IHTH uh kuh) island off the west coast of Greece.

8. **Calypso** (kuh LIHP soh) sea goddess who loved Odysseus.

9. **Circe** (SUR see) of Aeaea (EE ee uh)

10. **Ilium** (IHL ee uhm) Troy.

11. **Cicones** (sih KOH neez)

children and fools, they killed and feasted on the cattle of Lord Helios,³ the Sun, and he who moves all day through heaven took from their eyes the dawn of their return. Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,⁴ tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

Sailing From Troy

Ten years after the Trojan War, Odysseus departs from the goddess Calypso's island. He arrives in Phaeacia, ruled by Alcinous. Alcinous offers a ship to Odysseus and asks him to tell of his adventures.

"I am Laertes"⁵ son, Odysseus.

Men hold me formidable for guile⁶ in peace and war: this fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim.

My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca⁷ under Mount Neion's wind-blown robe of leaves, in sight of other islands—Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca being most lofty in that coastal sea, and northwest, while the rest lie east and south. A rocky isle, but good for a boy's training; I shall not see on earth a place more dear, though I have been detained long by Calypso,⁸ loveliest among goddesses, who held me in her smooth caves to be her heart's delight, as Circe of Aeaea,⁹ the enchantress, desired me, and detained me in her hall. But in my heart I never gave consent. Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass his own home and his parents? In far lands he shall not, though he find a house of gold.

What of my sailing, then, from Troy?

What of those years of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? The wind that carried west from Ilium¹⁰ brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore, a strongpoint on the coast of Cicones.¹¹ I stormed that place and killed the men who fought. Plunder we took, and we enslaved the women, to make division, equal shares to all—but on the spot I told them: 'Back, and quickly!

Out to sea again!’ My men were mutinous,¹²
fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep
they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle,
50 feasting,—while **fugitives** went inland, running
to call to arms the main force of Cicones.
This was an army, trained to fight on horseback
or, where the ground required, on foot. They came
with dawn over that terrain like the leaves
55 and blades of spring. So doom appeared to us,
dark word of Zeus for us, our evil days.
My men stood up and made a fight of it—
backed on the ships, with lances kept in play,
from bright morning through the blaze of noon
60 holding our beach, although so far outnumbered;
but when the sun passed toward unyoking time,
then the Achaeans,¹³ one by one, gave way.
Six benches were left empty in every ship
that evening when we pulled away from death.
65 And this new grief we bore with us to sea:
our precious lives we had, but not our friends.
No ship made sail next day until some shipmate
had raised a cry, three times, for each poor ghost
unfleshed by the Cicones on that field.

The Lotus-Eaters

70 Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north
a storm against the ships, and driving veils
of squall moved down like night on land and sea.
The bows went plunging at the gust; sails
cracked and lashed out strips in the big wind.
75 We saw death in that fury, dropped the yards,
unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:¹⁴
then two long days and nights we lay offshore
worn out and sick at heart, tasting our grief,
until a third Dawn came with ringlets shining.
80 Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested,
letting the steersmen and the breeze take over.

I might have made it safely home, that time,
but as I came round Malea the current
took me out to sea, and from the north
85 a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth
we came to the coastline of the Lotus-Eaters,
who live upon that flower. We landed there
90 to take on water. All ships’ companies

NOTES

12. mutinous (MYOO tuh nuhs) *adj.*
rebellious.

fugitives (FYOO juh tihvz) *n.* group
of persons who have run away
from danger

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 53–57, mark
the words Odysseus uses to
describe the enemy army.

QUESTION: What is he expressing
about what he and his men felt?

CONCLUDE: How threatening did
the enemy appear to Odysseus?

13. Achaeans (uh KEE uhnz) Greeks;
here, Odysseus’ men.

14. lee *n.* area sheltered from the
wind.

15. Cyclopes (SY kloh peez) *n.* plural form of Cyclops (SY klops), race of giants with one eye in the middle of the forehead.

16. prodigious (proh DIHJ uhs) *adj.* enormous.

mustered alongside for the mid-day meal.
Then I sent out two picked men and a runner
to learn what race of men that land sustained.
They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus-Eaters,
95 who showed no will to do us harm, only
offering the sweet Lotus to our friends—
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus,
never cared to report, nor to return:
they longed to stay forever, browsing on
100 that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.
I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,
tied them down under their rowing benches,
and called the rest: 'All hands aboard;
come, clear the beach and no one taste
105 the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.'
Filing in to their places by the rowlocks
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,
and we moved out again on our sea faring.

The Cyclops

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,¹⁵
110 giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery
to the immortal gods, they neither plow
nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and
115 wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rains.
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,
no consultation or old tribal ways,
but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
120 indifferent to what the others do. . . .

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern
yawning above the water, screened with laurel,
and many rams and goats about the place
125 inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone
earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged
towering oak trees.

A prodigious¹⁶ man
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks
to graze afield—remote from all companions,
130 knowing none but savage ways, a brute
so huge, he seemed no man at all of those

who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather
a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.

We beached there, and I told the crew

135 to stand by and keep watch over the ship:

as for myself I took my twelve best fighters

and went ahead. I had a goatskin full

of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son,

Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's¹⁷

140 holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness

we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,

he gave me seven shining golden talents¹⁸

perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,

and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars

145 of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave

in Maron's household knew this drink; only

he, his wife, and the storeroom mistress knew;

and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored,

honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,

150 but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume

over the winebowl. No man turned away

when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals¹⁹ in a bag,

for in my bones I knew some towering brute

155 would be upon us soon—all outward power,

a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops

had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep,

so we looked round at everything inside:

160 a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens

crowded with lambs and kids,²⁰ each in its class:

firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'

or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.

And vessels full of whey²¹ were brimming there—

165 bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.

My men came pressing round me, pleading:

'Why not

take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,

throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?

We'll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say

170 put out again on good salt water!'

Ah,

how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished

to see the cave man, what he had to offer—

NOTES

17. Apollo (uh POL oh) god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine.

18. talents units of money in ancient Greece.

19. victuals (viht uhlz) *n.* food or other provisions.

20. kids young goats.

21. whey (hway) *n.* thin, watery part of milk separated from the thicker curds.

NOTES

22. boughs (bowz) *n.* tree branches.

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 178–180, mark the verb Odysseus uses to tell how he and his men moved away from Cyclops.

QUESTION: What kind of creature does that verb evoke?

CONCLUDE: What comparison does it suggest between Cyclops and Odysseus and his men?

23. withy (WIHTH ee) *adj.* made from tough, flexible twigs.

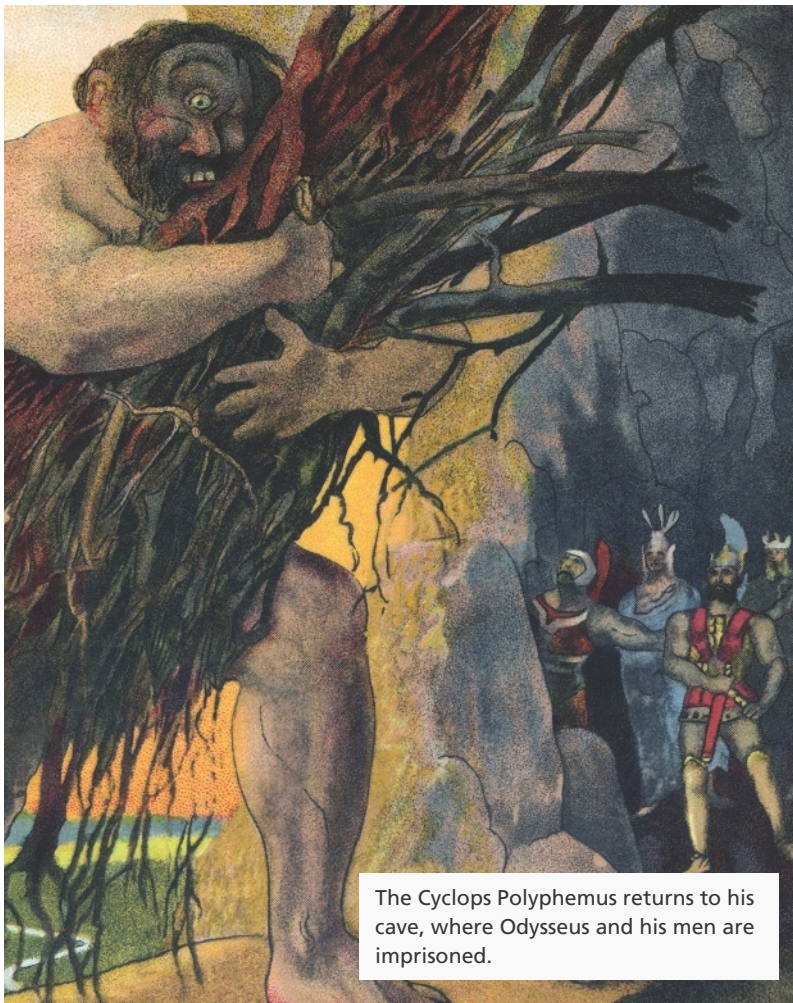
24. Agamemnon (ag uh MEHM non) king who led the Greek army during the Trojan War.

avenge (uh VEHNJ) *v.* to get revenge

no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.
We lit a fire, burnt an offering,
175 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence
around the embers, waiting. When he came
he had a load of dry boughs²² on his shoulder
to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it
with a great crash into that hollow cave,
180 and we all scattered fast to the far wall.
Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered
the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams
and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung
high overhead a slab of solid rock
185 to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,
with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred
the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it
over the doorsill. Next he took his seat
and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job
190 he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;
thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,
sieved out the curds to drip in withy²³ baskets,
and poured the whey to stand in bowls
cooling until he drank it for his supper.
195 When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,
heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from?
What brings you here by seaways—a fair traffic?
Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives
200 like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread
of that deep rumble and that mighty man.
But all the same I spoke up in reply:
‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course
205 by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;
homeward bound, but taking routes and ways
uncommon: so the will of Zeus would have it.
We served under Agamemnon,²⁴ son of Atreus—
the whole world knows what city
210 he laid waste, what armies he destroyed.
It was our luck to come here; here we stand,
beholden for your help, or any gifts
you give—as custom is to honor strangers.
We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care
215 for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will **avenge**
the unoffending guest.’



The Cyclops Polyphemus returns to his cave, where Odysseus and his men are imprisoned.

NOTES

He answered this
from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny,
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes
220 care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus
or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.

I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—
you or your friends—unless I had a whim²⁵ to.
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—
225 around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

He thought he’d find out, but I saw through this,
And answered with a ready lie:

‘My ship?
Poseidon²⁶ Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble,
broke it up on the rocks at your land’s end.
230 A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.
We are survivors, these good men and I.’

25. whim *n.* sudden thought or wish to do something.

26. Poseidon (poh SY duhn) god of the sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea.

dispatched (dihs PACHT) *v.* finished something quickly

27. brace *n.* pair.

28. cap a quiver (KWIHV uhr) close a case holding arrows.

29. din *n.* loud, continuous noise; uproar.

30. Athena (uh THEE nuh) goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare.

31. felled green and left to season chopped down and exposed to the weather to age the wood.

32. lugger *n.* small sailing vessel.

Neither reply nor pity came from him,
but in one stride he clutched at my companions
and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies
235 to beat their brain out, spattering the floor.
Then he dismembered them and made his meal,
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.
We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,
240 powerless, looking on at this, appalled;
but Cyclops went on filling up his belly
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.
My heart beat high now at the chance of action,
245 and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went
along his flank to stab him where the midriff
holds the liver. I had touched the spot
when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him
we perished there as well, for we could never
250 move his ponderous doorway slab aside.
So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose
lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
255 putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,
his chores being all **dispatched**, he caught
another brace²⁷ of men to make his breakfast,
and whisked away his great door slab
to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
260 reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.²⁸
There was a din²⁹ of whistling as the Cyclops
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.
And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,
if but Athena³⁰ granted what I prayed for.
265 Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—
an olive tree, felled green and left to season³¹
for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast
a lugger³² of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
270 a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:
so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I
chopped out a six foot section of this pole
and set it down before my men, who scraped it;
and when they had it smooth, I hewed again
275 to make a stake with pointed end. I held this
in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,

then hid it, well back in the cavern, under
one of the dung piles in profusion there.

Now came the time to toss for it: who **ventured**
280 along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust
and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild
sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,
the men I would have chosen won the toss—
four strong men, and I made five as captain.

285 At evening came the shepherd with his flock,
his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,
entered the cave: by some shepherding whim—
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.
He hefted his great boulder into place
290 and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes
in proper order, put the lambs to suck,
and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.
Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.
My moment was at hand, and I went forward
295 holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,
looking up, saying:

'Cyclops, try some wine.
Here's liquor to wash down your scraps of men.
Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried
under our planks. I meant it for an offering
300 if you would help us home. But you are mad,
unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,
will any other traveler come to see you?'

He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

305 'Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,
how are you called? I'll make a gift will please you.
Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow
out of grassland and loam in heaven's rain,
but here's a bit of nectar and ambrosia!³³
310 Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.
I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,
then I sang out in cordial tones:

'Cyclops,
you ask my honorable name? Remember
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.
315 My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
everyone calls me Nohbdy.'

NOTES

ventured (VEHN chuhrd) *v.* tried
something dangerous

33. nectar (NEHK tuhr) **and**
ambrosia (am BROH zhuh) drink
and food of the gods.

And he said:

'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,
320 his great head lolling to one side; and sleep
took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping,
he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike
deep in the embers, charring it again,
325 and cheered my men along with battle talk
to keep their courage up: no quitting now.
The pike of olive, green though it had been,
reddened and glowed as if about to catch.
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
330 gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops
as more than natural force nerved them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it
deep in his crater eye, and leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
335 in planking, having men below to swing
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored³⁴ that great eye socket
while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
340 hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—
the way they make soft iron hale and hard—:
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike.
345 The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,
and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face
he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye,
threw it away, and his wild hands went groping:
then he set up a howl for Cyclopes
350 who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.
Some heard him; and they came by divers³⁵ ways
to clump around outside and call:

'What ails you,

Polyphemus?³⁶ Why do you cry so sore
in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.
355 Sure no man's driving off your flock? No man
has tricked you, ruined you?'

34. **bored** *v.* made a hole in.

35. **divers** *adj.* several; various.

36. **Polyphemus** (pol ih FEE muhs)

Out of the cave
the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage³⁷ reply:

360 ‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain
given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’

So saying
they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
365 to see how like a charm the name deceived them.
Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide
for any silly beast or man who bolted—
370 hoping somehow I might be such a fool.
But I kept thinking how to win the game:
death sat there huge; how could we slip away?
I drew on all my wits, and ran through **tactics**,
reasoning as a man will for dear life,
375 until a trick came—and it pleased me well.
The Cyclops’ rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast
I tied them silently together, twining
cords of willow from the ogre’s bed;
380 then slung a man under each middle one
to ride there safely, shielded left and right.

So three sheep could convey each man. I took
the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,
and hung myself under his kinky belly,
385 pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
390 and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
where dams with udders full called for a milking.
Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,
the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
but my men riding on the pectoral³⁸ fleece
395 the giant’s blind hands blundering never found.

NOTES

37. sage *adj.* wise.

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: Mark the verbs Odysseus uses to describe the actions of Cyclops in the sentence beginning on line 366.

QUESTION: What do these verbs suggest about Cyclops’ condition?

CONCLUDE: What does this reveal about Cyclops’ pain, anger, and remaining strength?

tactics (TAK tihks) *n.* military procedures

38. pectoral (PEHK tuh ruhl) *adj.*
located in or on the chest.



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The Cyclops fails to notice the men hidden under the ram.

Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,
weighted by wool and me with my meditations.
The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

‘Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest
400 in the night cave? You never linger so,
but graze before them all, and go afar
to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way
leading along the streams, until at evening
you run to be the first one in the fold.
405 Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving
over your Master’s eye? That carrion rogue³⁹
and his accurst companions burnt it out
when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
410 Oh, had you brain and voice to tell
where he may be now, dodging all my fury!
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall
his brains would strew the floor, and I should have
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.’

415 He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
I dropped and rolled clear of the ram’s belly,
going this way and that to untie the men.
With many glances back, we rounded up
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
420 and drove them down to where the good ship lay.

We saw, as we came near, our fellows’ faces
shining; then we saw them turn to grief
tallying those who had not fled from death.
I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,
425 and in a low voice told them: ‘Load this herd:
move fast, and put the ship’s head toward the breakers.’
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked
and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,
as far off shore as shouted words would carry,
430 I sent a few back to the adversary:
‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a cave man’s hands?
How do you like the beating that we gave you,
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
435 under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.
Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave

NOTES

39. carrion (KAR ee uhn) **rogue**
(rohgh) repulsive scoundrel.

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: Mark the punctuation in lines 448–454.

QUESTION: What does this punctuation indicate?

CONCLUDE: What does the poet accomplish by letting the reader hear the crew's own voices for the first time?

40. **weird** *n.* fate or destiny.

41. **Telemus** (tehl EH muhs)

42. **Eurymus** (yoo RIHM uhs)

43. **god of earthquake** Poseidon.

440 that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.
I got the longest boathook out and stood
fending us off, with furious nods to all
to put their backs into a racing stroke—
row, row, or perish. So the long oars bent
445 kicking the foam sternward, making head
until we drew away, and twice as far.
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!
Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’

450 ‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw
all but beached us.’

‘All but stove us in!’
‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he’ll get the range and lob a boulder.’

‘Aye

He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’
455 I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,
if ever mortal man inquire
how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him
Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:
460 Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:
‘Now comes the weird⁴⁰ upon me, spoken of old.
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,⁴¹
a son of Eurymus;⁴² great length of days
465 he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.
Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.
470 But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—
you put me down with wine, you blinded me.
Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,
praying the god of earthquake⁴³ to befriend you—
his son I am, for he by his avowal
475 fathered me, and, if he will, he may
heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.’

Few words I shouted in reply to him:

‘If I could take your life I would and take
480 your time away, and hurl you down to hell!
The god of earthquake could not heal you there!’

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness
toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

‘O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,
485 if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:
grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never
see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean,
who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny
intend that he shall see his roof again
490 among his family in his father land,
far be that day, and dark the years between.

Let him lose all companions, and return
under strange sail to bitter days at home.’
In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.
495 Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone
and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track.
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone
500 to bear us onward toward the island.

There

as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,
The trim ships drawn up side by side, and all
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,
505 and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.
Then we unloaded all the Cyclops’ flock
to make division, share and share alike,
only my fighters voted that my ram,
the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him
510 by the seaside and burnt his long thighbones
to Zeus beyond the storm cloud, Cronus⁴⁴ son,
who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering;
destruction for my ships he had in store
and death for those who sailed them, my companions.
515 Now all day long until the sun went down
we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine,
till after sunset in the gathering dark
we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

NOTES

44. Cronus (KROH nuhs) Titan who was ruler of the universe until he was overthrown by his son Zeus.

45. **offing** *n.* distant part of the sea visible from the shore.

46. **Aeolia** (ee OH lee uh) . . .
Aeolus (EE uh luhs)

47. **Laestrygonians** (lehhs trih GOH nee uhnz)

48. **singing nymph** . . . **hair** Circe.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose
520 touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders
to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines;
and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks
oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea.
So we moved out, sad in the vast offing,⁴⁵
525 having our precious lives, but not our friends.

The Land of the Dead

Odysseus and his men sail to Aeolia, where Aeolus,⁴⁶ king of the winds, sends Odysseus on his way with a gift: a sack containing all the winds except the favorable west wind. When they are near home, Odysseus' men open the sack, letting loose a storm that drives them back to Aeolia. Aeolus casts them out, having decided that they are detested by the gods. They sail for seven days and arrive in the land of the Laestrygonians,⁴⁷ a race of cannibals. These creatures destroy all of Odysseus' ships except the one he is sailing in.

Odysseus and his reduced crew escape and reach Aeaea, the island ruled by the sorceress-goddess Circe. She transforms half of the men into swine. Protected by a magic herb, Odysseus demands that Circe change his men back into human form. Before Odysseus departs from the island a year later, Circe informs him that in order to reach home he must journey to the land of the dead, Hades, and consult the blind prophet Tiresias.

We bore down on the ship at the sea's edge
and launched her on the salt immortal sea,
stepping our mast and spar in the black ship;
embarked the ram and ewe and went aboard
530 in tears, with bitter and sore dread upon us.
But now a breeze came up for us astern—
a canvas-bellying landbreeze, hale shipmate
sent by the singing nymph with sunbright hair;⁴⁸
so we made fast the braces, took our thwarts,
535 and let the wind and steersman work the ship
with full sail spread all day above our coursing,
till the sun dipped, and all the ways grew dark
upon the fathomless unresting sea.

By night
our ship ran onward toward the Ocean's bourne,
540 the realm and region of the Men of Winter,
hidden in mist and cloud. Never the flaming
eye of Helios lights on those men

at morning, when he climbs the sky of stars,
 nor in descending earthward out of heaven;
 545 ruinous night being rove over those wretches.
 We made the land, put ram and ewe ashore,
 and took our way along the Ocean stream
 to find the place foretold for us by Circe.
 There Perimedes and Eurylochus⁴⁹
 550 pinioned⁵⁰ the sacred beasts. With my drawn blade
 I spaded up the votive⁵¹ pit, and poured
 libations⁵² round it to the unnumbered dead:
 sweet milk and honey, then sweet wine, and last
 clear water; and I scattered barley down.
 555 Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead,
 vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them
 before she calved, at home in Ithaca,
 and burn the choice bits on the altar fire;
 as for Tiresias,⁵³ I swore to sacrifice
 560 a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock.
 Thus to assuage the nations of the dead
 I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe,
 letting their black blood stream into the wellpit.
 Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus,⁵⁴
 565 brides and young men, and men grown old in pain,
 and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief;
 many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads,
 battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear.
 From every side they came and sought the pit
 570 with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.
 But presently I gave command to my officers
 to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make
 burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—
 to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone.⁵⁵
 575 Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep
 the surging phantoms from the bloody pit
 till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

One shade came first—Elpenor, of our company,
 who lay unburied still on the wide earth
 580 as we had left him—dead in Circe's hall,
 untouched, unmourned, when other cares compelled us.
 Now when I saw him there I wept for pity
 and called out to him:

‘How is this, Elpenor,
 how could you journey to the western gloom
 585 swifter afoot than I in the black lugger?’
 He sighed, and answered:

NOTES

49. Perimedes (pehr uh MEE deez)
and Eurylochus (yoo RIHL
 uh kuhs)

50. pinioned (PIHN yuhnd) *v.*
 confined or shackled.

51. votive (VOHT ihv) *adj.* done to
 fulfill a vow or express thanks.

52. libations (ly BAY shuhnz) *n.*
 wine or other liquids poured
 upon the ground as a sacrifice
 or offering.

53. Tiresias (ty REE see uhs)

54. Erebus (EHR uh buhs) dark
 region under the earth
 through which the dead pass
 before entering realm of
 Hades.

55. Persephone (puhr SEHF uh nee)

56. **Telemachus** (tuh LEHM uh kuhs)

57. **cairn** (kairn) *n.* conical heap of stones built as a monument.

58. **Autolycus** (aw TOL ih kuhs)

59. **Thebes** (theebz)

- ‘Son of great Laertes,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
bad luck shadowed me, and no kindly power;
ignoble death I drank with so much wine.
- 590 I slept on Circe’s roof, then could not see
the long steep backward ladder, coming down,
and fell that height. My neckbone, buckled under,
snapped, and my spirit found this well of dark.
Now hear the grace I pray for, in the name
- 595 of those back in the world, not here—your wife
and father, he who gave you bread in childhood,
and your own child, your only son, Telemachus,⁵⁶
long ago left at home.
- When you make sail
and put these lodgings of dim Death behind,
- 600 you will moor ship, I know, upon Aeaea Island;
there, O my lord, remember me, I pray,
do not abandon me unwept, unburied,
to tempt the gods’ wrath, while you sail for home;
but fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,
- 605 and build a cairn⁵⁷ for me above the breakers—
an unknown sailor’s mark for men to come.
Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it
the oar I pulled in life with my companions.’
- He ceased and I replied:
- ‘Unhappy spirit,
- 610 I promise you the barrow and the burial.’
- So we conversed, and grimly, at a distance,
with my long sword between, guarding the blood,
while the faint image of the lad spoke on.
Now came the soul of Anticlea, dead,
- 615 my mother, daughter of Autolycus,⁵⁸
dead now, though living still when I took ship
for holy Troy. Seeing this ghost I grieved,
but held her off, through pang on pang of tears,
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.
- 620 Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes⁵⁹ came forward
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:
- ‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of landways and seaways,
why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,
- 625 to see the cold dead and the joyless region?
Stand clear, put up your sword;
let me but taste of blood, I shall speak true.’

At this I stepped aside, and in the scabbard
let my long sword ring home to the pommel silver,
630 as he bent down to the somber blood. Then spoke
the prince of those with gift of speech:

‘Great captain,
a fair wind and the honey lights of home
are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead;
the god who thunders on the land prepares it,
635 not to be shaken from your track, implacable,
in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded.
One narrow strait may take you through his blows:
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.
When you make landfall on Thrinacia first
640 and quit the violet sea, dark on the land
you’ll find the grazing herds of Helios
by whom all things are seen, all speech is known.
Avoid those kine,⁶⁰ hold fast to your intent,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
645 But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,
bereft of all companions, lost for years,
under strange sail shall you come home, to find
your own house filled with trouble: insolent men
650 eating your livestock as they court your lady.
Aye, you shall make those men atone in blood!
But after you have dealt out death—in open
combat or by stealth—to all the suitors,
go overland on foot, and take an oar,
655 until one day you come where men have lived
with meat unsalted, never known the sea,
nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows
and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.
The spot will soon be plain to you, and I
660 can tell you how: some passerby will say,
“What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?”
Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf
and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:
a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,
665 and carry out pure hecatombs⁶¹ at home
to all wide heaven’s lords, the undying gods,
to each in order. Then a seaborne death
soft as this hand of mist will come upon you
when you are wearied out with rich old age,
670 your country folk in blessed peace around you.
And all this shall be just as I foretell.’

NOTES

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 632–637, mark the words that describe Odysseus’ home and the words that describe what is in his future.

QUESTION: What do these contrasting words express?

CONCLUDE: What can you conclude about Odysseus’ goal and what will happen before he reaches it?

60. kine (kyn) *n.* cattle.

61. hecatombs (HEHK uh tohmz)
n. large-scale sacrifices to the gods in ancient Greece; often, the slaughter of 100 cattle at one time.



This nineteenth-century painting by John William Waterhouse shows the Sirens as bird-women, which echoes ancient Greek portrayals of these figures.

The Sirens

Odysseus returns to Circe's island. The goddess reveals his course to him and gives advice on how to avoid the dangers he will face: the Sirens, who lure sailors to their destruction; the Wandering Rocks, sea rocks that destroy even birds in flight; the perils of the sea monster Scylla and, nearby, the whirlpool Charybdis;⁶² and the cattle of the sun god, which Tiresias has warned Odysseus not to harm.

62. **Charybdis** (kuh RIHB dihs)

As Circe spoke, Dawn mounted her golden throne,
and on the first rays Circe left me, taking
her way like a great goddess up the island.
675 I made straight for the ship, roused up the men
to get aboard and cast off at the stern.
They scrambled to their places by the rowlocks
and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea.
But soon an offshore breeze blew to our liking—
680 a canvas-bellying breeze, a lusty shipmate
sent by the singing nymph with sunbright hair.
So we made fast the braces, and we rested,
letting the wind and steersman work the ship.
The crew being now silent before me, I
685 addressed them, sore at heart:



'Dear friends,
 more than one man, or two, should know those things
 Circe foresaw for us and shared with me,
 so let me tell her forecast: then we die
 with our eyes open, if we are going to die,
 690 or know what death we baffle if we can. Sirens
 weaving a haunting song over the sea
 we are to shun, she said, and their green shore
 all sweet with clover; yet she urged that I
 alone should listen to their song. Therefore
 695 you are to tie me up, tight as a splint,
 erect along the mast, lashed to the mast,
 and if I shout and beg to be untied,
 take more turns of the rope to muffle me.'

I rather dwelt on this part of the forecast,
 700 while our good ship made time, bound outward down
 the wind for the strange island of Sirens.

Then all at once the wind fell, and a calm
 came over all the sea, as though some power
 lulled the swell.

The crew were on their feet
 705 briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: In lines 719–744, mark the end words of the lines of several stanzas of the Sirens' song.

QUESTION: What do you notice about these words in relation to each other?

CONCLUDE: How does this contribute to a sense of the Sirens' music?

63. Argos' old soldiery soldiers from Argos, a city in ancient Greece.

each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades
and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved
a massive cake of beeswax into bits
and rolled them in my hands until they softened—
710 no long task, for a burning heat came down
from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward
I carried wax along the line, and laid it
thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
715 and took themselves again to rowing. Soon,
as we came smartly within hailing distance,
the two Sirens, noting our fast ship
off their point, made ready, and they sang:

720 *This way, oh turn your bows,
Achaëa's glory,
As all the world allows—
Moor and be merry.*

725 *Sweet coupled airs we sing.
No lonely seafarer
Holds clear of entering
Our green mirror.*

730 *Pleased by each purling note
Like honey twining
From her throat and my throat,
Who lies a-pining?*

735 *Sea rovers here take joy
Voyaging onward,
As from our song of Troy
Graybeard and rower-boy
Goeth more learnèd.*

*All feats on that great field
In the long warfare,
Dark days the bright gods willed,
Wounds you bore there,*

740 *Argos' old soldiery⁶³
On Troy beach teeming,
Charmed out of time we see.
No life on earth can be
Hid from our dreaming.*

745 The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water
made me crave to listen, and I tried to say
'Untie me!' to the crew, jerking my brows;

but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes
 got to his feet, he and Eurylochus,
 750 and passed more line about, to hold me still.
 So all rowed on, until the Sirens
 dropped under the sea rim, and their singing
 dwindled away.

My faithful company
 rested on their oars now, peeling off
 755 the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;
 then set me free.

Scylla and Charybdis

But scarcely had that island
 faded in blue air than I saw smoke
 and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—
 a sound the men heard, and it terrified them.
 760 Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking
 wild alongside till the ship lost way,
 with no oar blades to drive her through the water.
 Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern,
 trying to put heart into them, standing over
 765 every oarsman, saying gently,

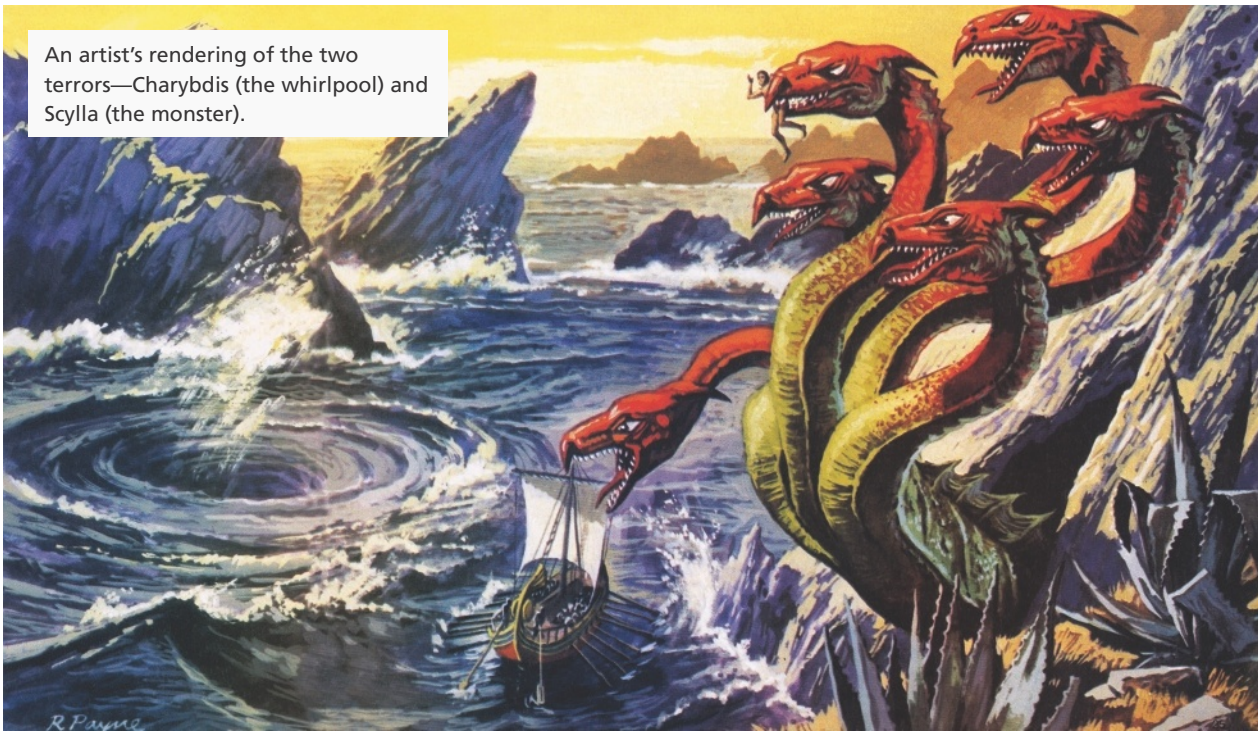
‘Friends,
 have we never been in danger before this?
 More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops
 penned us in his cave? What power he had!
 Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits
 770 to find a way out for us?

Now I say
 by hook or crook this peril too shall be
 something that we remember.

Heads up, lads!
 We must obey the orders as I give them.
 Get the oar shafts in your hands, and lay back
 775 hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.
 Zeus help us pull away before we founder.
 You at the tiller, listen, and take in
 all that I say—the rudders are your duty;
 keep her out of the combers and the smoke;⁶⁴
 780 steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we
 fetch up in the smother, and you drown us.’

64. the combers and the smoke
 large waves that break on the
 beach and the ocean spray.

An artist's rendering of the two terrors—Charybdis (the whirlpool) and Scylla (the monster).



NOTES

65. **Scylla** (SIHL uh)

66. **cuirass** (kwih RAS) *n.* armor for the upper body.

67. **travail** (truh VAYL) *n.* very hard work.

68. **gorge** (gawrj) *n.* throat or gullet.

69. **maelstrom** (MAYL struhm) *n.* large, violent whirlpool.

That was all, and it brought them round to action.
But as I sent them on toward Scylla,⁶⁵ I
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.

785 They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,
to roll for cover under the decking. Circe's
bidding against arms had slipped my mind,
so I tied on my cuirass⁶⁶ and took up
790 to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there,
the monster of the gray rock, harboring
torment for my friends. I strained my eyes
upon the cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere
could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,
795 in travail,⁶⁷ sobbing, gaining on the current,
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port
and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire
gorge⁶⁸ of the salt seatide. By heaven! when she
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron
800 seething over intense fire, when the mixture
suddenly heaves and rises.

The shot spume
soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.
But when she swallowed the sea water down
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom,⁶⁹ heard
805 the rock bellowing all around, and dark

sand raged on the bottom far below.
My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes
were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear
of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,
810 whisking six of my best men from the ship.
I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen
and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling
high overhead. Voices came down to me
in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

815 A man surfcasting on a point of rock
for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod
to drop the sinker and the bait far out,
will hook a fish and rip it from the surface
to dangle wriggling through the air:

so these
820 were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den,
in the dire grapple, reaching still for me—
and deathly pity ran me through
at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered,
825 questing the passes of the strange sea.

We rowed on.
The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,
and Scylla dropped astern.

The Cattle of the Sun God

In the small hours of the third watch, when stars
that shone out in the first dusk of evening
830 had gone down to their setting, a giant wind
blew from heaven, and clouds driven by Zeus
shrouded land and sea in a night of storm;
so, just as Dawn with fingertips of rose
touched the windy world, we dragged our ship
835 to cover in a grotto, a sea cave
where nymphs had chairs of rock and sanded floors.
I mustered all the crew and said:

‘Old shipmates,
our stores are in the ship’s hold, food and drink;
the cattle here are not for our provision,
840 or we pay dearly for it.

NOTES

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: Mark the words in lines 815–820 that describe a sports activity.

QUESTION: Why does Homer liken this activity to Scylla’s actions?

CONCLUDE: What does this comparison suggest about Scylla’s power?

70. Olympus (oh LIHM puhs) Mount Olympus, home of the gods.

71. Lord of Noon Helios.

Fierce the god is
who cherishes these heifers and these sheep:
Helios; and no man avoids his eye.'

To this my fighters nodded. Yes. But now
we had a month of onshore gales, blowing
845 day in, day out—south winds, or south by east.
As long as bread and good red wine remained
to keep the men up, and appease their craving,
they would not touch the cattle. But in the end,
when all the barley in the ship was gone,
850 hunger drove them to scour the wild shore
with angling hooks, for fishes and sea fowl,
whatever fell into their hands; and lean days
wore their bellies thin.

The storms continued.
So one day I withdrew to the interior
855 to pray the gods in solitude, for hope
that one might show me some way of salvation.
Slipping away, I struck across the island
to a sheltered spot, out of the driving gale.
I washed my hands there, and made supplication
860 to the gods who own Olympus,⁷⁰ all the gods—
but they, for answer, only closed my eyes
under slow drops of sleep.

Now on the shore Eurylochus
made his insidious plea:

'Comrades,' he said,
'You've gone through everything; listen to what I say.
865 All deaths are hateful to us, mortal wretches,
but famine is the most pitiful, the worst
end that a man can come to.

Will you fight it?
Come, we'll cut out the noblest of these cattle
for sacrifice to the gods who own the sky;
870 and once at home, in the old country of Ithaca,
if ever that day comes—
we'll build a costly temple and adorn it
with every beauty for the Lord of Noon.⁷¹
But if he flares up over his heifers lost,
875 wishing our ship destroyed, and if the gods
make cause with him, why, then I say: Better
open your lungs to a big sea once for all
than waste to skin and bones on a lonely island!'

Thus Eurylochos; and they murmured 'Aye!'
 880 trooping away at once to round up heifers.
 Now, that day tranquil cattle with broad brows
 were grazing near, and soon the men drew up
 around their chosen beasts in ceremony.
 They plucked the leaves that shone on a tall oak—
 885 having no barley meal—to strew the victims,
 performed the prayers and ritual, knifed the kine
 and flayed each carcass, cutting thighbones free
 to wrap in double folds of fat. These offerings,
 with strips of meat, were laid upon the fire.
 890 Then, as they had no wine, they made libation
 with clear spring water, broiling the entrails first;
 and when the bones were burnt and tripe shared,
 they spitted the carved meat.

Just then my slumber
 left me in a rush, my eyes opened,
 895 and I went down the seaward path. No sooner
 had I caught sight of our black hull, than savory
 odors of burnt fat eddied around me;
 grief took hold of me, and I cried aloud:

'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,
 900 you made me sleep away this day of mischief!
 O cruel drowsing, in the evil hour!
 Here they sat, and a great work they contrived.'⁷²
 Lampetia⁷³ in her long gown meanwhile
 had borne swift word to the Overlord of Noon:
 905 'They have killed your kine.'

And the Lord Helios
 burst into angry speech amid the immortals:

'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,
 punish Odysseus' men! So overweening,
 now they have killed my peaceful kine, my joy
 910 at morning when I climbed the sky of stars,
 and evening, when I bore westward from heaven.
 Restitution or penalty they shall pay—
 and pay in full—or I go down forever
 to light the dead men in the underworld.'

915 Then Zeus who drives the stormcloud made reply:
 'Peace, Helios: shine on among the gods,
 shine over mortals in the fields of grain.
 Let me throw down one white-hot bolt, and make
 splinters of their ship in the winedark sea.'

NOTES

72. contrived v. thought up; devised.

73. Lampetia (lam PEE shuh) a nymph.

NOTES

74. Hermes (HUR meez) *n.* god who serves as herald and messenger of the other gods.

75. beeves (beevz) *n.* alternate plural form of "beef."

76. petrels (PEH truhlz) *n.* small, dark sea birds.

920 —Calypso later told me of this exchange,
as she declared that Hermes⁷⁴ had told her.
Well, when I reached the sea cave and the ship,
I faced each man, and had it out; but where
could any remedy be found? There was none.

925 The silken beeves⁷⁵ of Hellos were dead.
The gods, moreover, made queer signs appear:
cowhides began to crawl, and beef, both raw
and roasted, lowed like kine upon the spits.

Now six full days my gallant crew could feast
930 upon the prime beef they had marked for slaughter
from Hellos' herd; and Zeus, the son of Cronus,
added one fine morning.

All the gales

had ceased, blown out, and with an offshore breeze
we launched again, stepping the mast and sail,
935 to make for the open sea. Astern of us
the island coastline faded, and no land
showed anywhere, but only sea and heaven,
when Zeus Cronion piled a thunderhead
above the ship, while gloom spread on the ocean.
940 We held our course, but briefly. Then the squall
struck whining from the west, with gale force, breaking
both forestays, and the mast came toppling aft
along the ship's length, so the running rigging
showered into the bilge.

On the afterdeck

945 the mast had hit the steersman a slant blow
bashing the skull in, knocking him overside,
as the brave soul fled the body, like a diver.
With crack on crack of thunder, Zeus let fly
a bolt against the ship, a direct hit,
950 so that she bucked, in reeking fumes of sulphur,
and all the men were flung into the sea.
They came up 'round the wreck, bobbing awhile
like petrels⁷⁶ on the waves.

No more seafaring

homeward for these, no sweet day of return;
955 the god had turned his face from them.

I clambered

fore and aft my hulk until a comber
split her, keel from ribs, and the big timber
floated free; the mast, too, broke away.

A backstay floated dangling from it, stout
 960 rawhide rope, and I used this for lashing
 mast and keel together. These I straddled,
 riding the frightful storm.

Nor had I yet
 seen the worst of it: for now the west wind
 dropped, and a southeast gale came on—one more
 965 twist of the knife—taking me north again,
 straight for Charybdis. All that night I drifted,
 and in the sunrise, sure enough, I lay
 off Scylla mountain and Charybdis deep.
 There, as the whirlpool drank the tide, a billow
 970 tossed me, and I sprang for the great fig tree,
 catching on like a bat under a bough.
 Nowhere had I to stand, no way of climbing,
 The root and bole⁷⁷ being far below, and far
 above my head the branches and their leaves,
 975 massed, overshadowing Charybdis pool.
 But I clung grimly, thinking my mast and keel
 would come back to the surface when she spouted.

And ah! how long, with what desire, I waited!
 till, at the twilight hour, when one who hears
 980 and judges pleas in the marketplace all day
 between contentious men, goes home to supper,
 the long poles at last reared from the sea.

Now I let go with hands and feet, plunging
 straight into the foam beside the timbers,
 985 pulled astride, and rowed hard with my hands
 to pass by Scylla. Never could I have passed her
 had not the Father of gods and men,⁷⁸ this time,
 kept me from her eyes. Once through the strait,
 nine days I drifted in the open sea
 990 before I made shore, buoyed up by the gods,
 upon Ogygia⁷⁹ Isle. The dangerous nymph
 Calypso lives and sings there, in her beauty,
 and she received me, loved me.

But why tell
 the same tale that I told last night in hall
 995 to you and to your lady? Those adventures
 made a long evening, and I do not hold
 with tiresome repetition of a story."

NOTES

77. **bole** (bohl) *n.* tree trunk.

78. **Father . . . men** Zeus.

79. **Ogygia** (o JIHJ ee uh)

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