

Unit Outline

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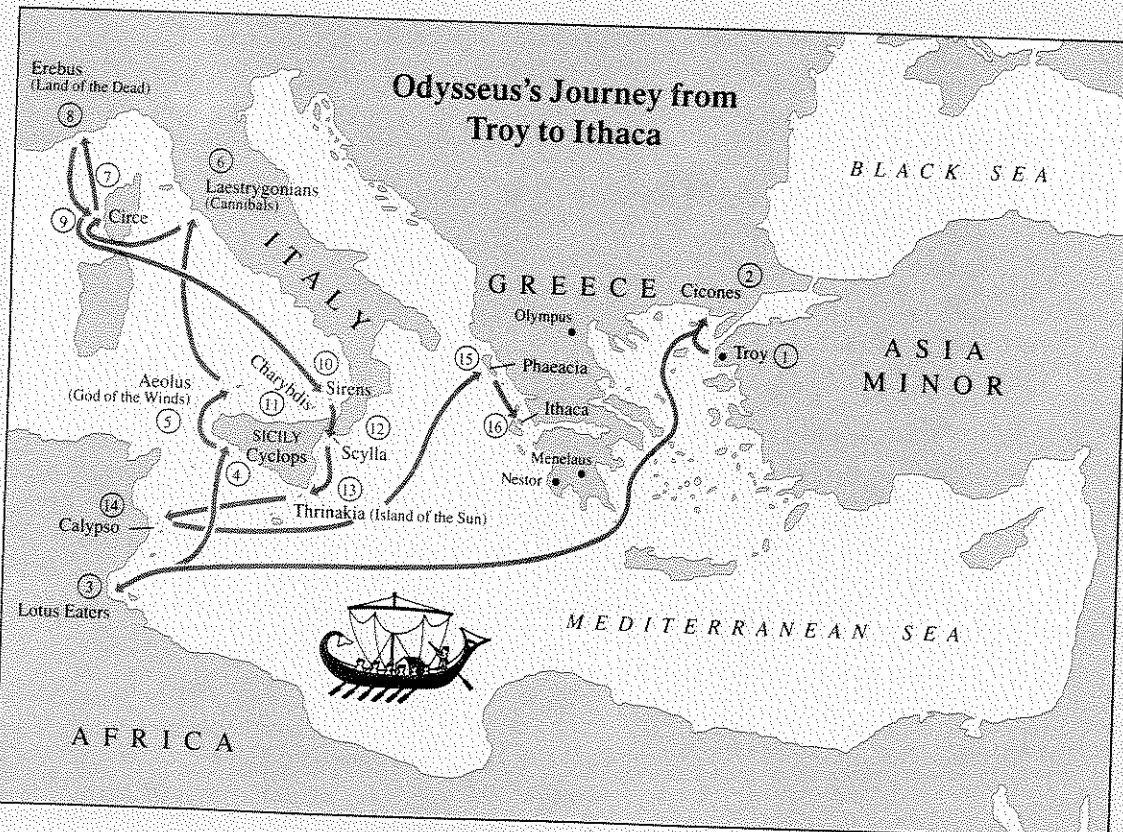
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rubbed with fine oils, and draped in clean tunics. Imagine the smell of meat being cooked over charcoal, the sounds of cheerful voices. Imagine wine being freely poured, the flickering reflections of the great cooking fires, and the torches that light the room. A certain anticipation hangs in the air. It is said that the blind minstrel Homer is in the city and that he has new stories about that long war in Troy. Will he appear and entertain tonight?

Characters in the *Odyssey*

The following cast of characters includes only those who take part in the sections of the *Odyssey* included in this book. Note that the Greeks in the *Odyssey* are often referred to as **Achaeans** (ə-kē'ənz) or **Argives** (är'gīvz). *Achaeans* is the most general term, which also includes the people in Ithaca, the island off the west coast of Greece where Odysseus ruled. The word *Achaeans* is taken from the name of an ancient part of northeastern Greece called Achaea. The name *Argives* usually refers to the Greeks who went to fight at Troy.

The People Home in Ithaca:

Antinous (än-tin'ō-əs): one of Penelope's leading suitors; an arrogant and mean young noble from Ithaca.

Argos (är'gäs'): Odysseus's old dog.

Eumeus (yoo-mē'əs): a swineherd, one of Odysseus's loyal servants.

Eurycleia (yoo-ri-kly'yē): Odysseus's old nurse.

Laertes (lā-ür'tēz): Odysseus's old father, who lives in the country.

Penelope (pə-nē'lē-pē): Odysseus's faithful wife.

Philoeteus (fī-loi'tē-əs): a cowherd, one of Odysseus's loyal servants.

The People and Places of Telemachus's Journey:

Helen: known as Helen of Troy, the beautiful wife of King Menelaus. Her elopement with Paris, a prince of Troy, started the Trojan War.

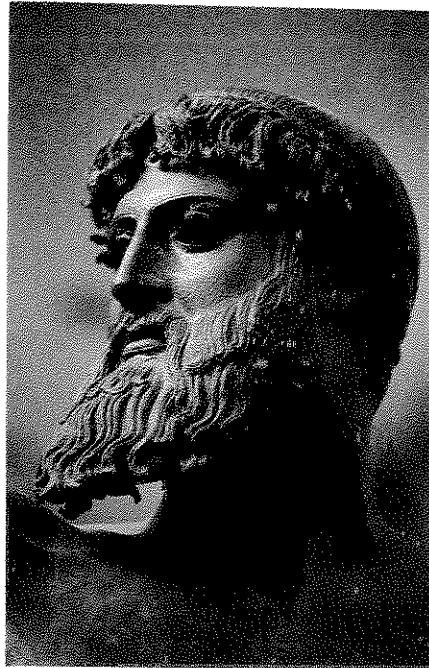
Menelaus (men'ē-lā'əs): brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, and king of **Lacedaemon** (lās'ē-dē'mōn), also known as **Sparta**.

Nestor: the wise king of **Pylos**, and a hero of the Trojan War.

The People and Places of Odysseus's Wanderings:

Aeaea (ē-ē'ə): home of Circe, the witch-goddess.

Alcinous (äl-sin'ō-əs): the king of Phaeacia, father of Nausicaa. Odysseus tells the story of his adventures to Alcinous's court.



Bust of Poseidon. Bronze.

The Athens Museum. Photo: Farrell Grehan, Photo Researchers



Hermes running. Attributed to the Tithonus Painter (475 B.C.). Vase.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Fletcher Fund

Calypso (kă-lip'sō): a beautiful goddess-nymph who lives on Ogygia. She keeps Odysseus for seven years.

Charybdis (kă-rĭb'dĭs): a female monster who sucks in water three times a day to form a deadly whirlpool. (Thought to be a real whirlpool in the Straits of Messina.)

Circe (sür'sē): the witch-goddess who turns Odysseus's men into swine.

Cyclops (sī'klōps): one of the **Cyclopes**, a race of brutish one-eyed giants who live solitary lives as shepherds, supposedly on the island now known as Sicily.

Erebus (er'ĕ-bĕs): the Land of the Dead.

Nausicaa (nô-sik'ā-ə): the beautiful young daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete of Phaeacia.

Ogygia (ō-gi'-jə): Calypso's island.

Phaeacia (fē-ā'shə): an island kingdom ruled by King Alcinous. The Phaeacians are shipbuilders and traders.

Polyphemus (pōl'ĕ-fĕ'mĕs): the Cyclops blinded by Odysseus; the son of the sea god Poseidon.

Scylla (sîl'ĕ): a female monster with six serpent heads, each head having a triple row of fangs. (Thought to be a dangerous rock in the Straits of Messina.)

Sirens: sea nymphs whose beautiful and mysterious music lures sailors to steer their ships toward the rocks.

Teiresias (tî-rĕ'sĕ-ăs): a famous blind prophet, from the city of Thebes. Odysseus meets him in the Land of the Dead.

The Gods:

Athena (ă-thĕ'nă): favorite daughter of Zeus; the great goddess of wisdom and of the arts of war and peace. She favored the Greeks during the Trojan War. She is often called Pallas Athena.

Hermes (hur'mĕz): the messenger god.

Olympus (ō-lĭm'pĕs): the mountain home of the gods.

Poseidon (pō-si'dĕn): brother of Zeus, god of the sea and earth. Called "Earth Shaker" because he is believed to cause earthquakes. Poseidon is an enemy of Odysseus.

Zeus (zoos): the most powerful god, whose home is on Olympus.

Part One: A Son Seeks a Father

Book 1: Athena Advises Telemachus

Homer opens with an invocation, or prayer, asking the Muse^o to help him sing his tale. Notice how the singer gives his listeners hints about how his story is to end.

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

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

We learn that Odysseus is alive, twenty years older than when he had left for the war in Troy. He is being kept prisoner on Ogygia, the island of the nymph Calypso, who wants him for herself.

Meanwhile, the gods on Mount Olympus are discussing Odysseus. His patroness there, the goddess Athena, begs her father, Zeus, to allow Odysseus to return safely to his home in Ithaca. But Odysseus has an enemy among the gods. The sea god, Poseidon, is angry at the hero for having blinded his son, the Cyclops called Polyphemus. Zeus agrees with Athena, and Hermes, the messenger god, is to be sent to Ogygia to command Calypso to free Odysseus.

Athena's next move is to make her way to Ithaca to help Odysseus's young son, Telemachus, cope with another problem. His home—the palace of Odysseus—is overrun by his mother's suitors. Those arrogant men have taken over Odysseus's house. They are partying on the boy's inheritance and are demanding that his mother, Penelope, take one of them as a husband.

Here we now have the main themes of the epic:

There were nine Muses, daughters of Zeus. They inspired people to produce music, poetry, dance, and all the other arts.

2. contending: fighting, arguing

1. A boy must struggle to become a man.
2. A soldier must struggle to get home from a war.
3. A king must struggle to reclaim a kingdom (*Ithaca*).

Now the goddess Athena arrives on the scene in Ithaca. Disguised as Mentor, an old family friend, she mingles with the mob of suitors and waits to talk to Telemachus:

Long before anyone else, the prince Telemachus
now caught sight of Athena—for he, too,
20 was sitting there, unhappy among the suitors,
a boy, daydreaming. What if his great father
came from the unknown world and drove these men
like dead leaves through the place, recovering
honor and lordship in his own domains?
25 Then he who dreamed in the crowd gazed out at Athena.

Straight to the door he came, ^{value}irked with himself
to think a visitor had been kept there waiting,
and took her right hand, grasping with his left
her tall bronze-bladed spear. Then he said warmly:

30 “Greetings, stranger! Welcome to our feast.
There will be time to tell your errand later.”

He led the way, and Pallas Athena followed
into the lofty hall. The boy reached up
and thrust her spear high in a polished rack
35 against a pillar, where tough spear on spear
of the old soldier, his father, stood in order.
Then, shaking out a splendid coverlet,
he seated her on a throne with footrest—all
finely carved—and drew his painted armchair
40 near her, at a distance from the rest.
To be amid the din, the suitors’ riot,
would ruin his guest’s appetite, he thought,
and he wished privacy to ask for news
about his father, gone for years.

As Telemachus and the goddess-in-disguise talk, the suitors are partying loudly all around them. Telemachus tells the goddess that the men are eating through all they have, courting his mother, and using his house as if it were theirs to wreck and plunder.

45 Pallas Athena was disturbed, and said:

“Ah, bitterly you need Odysseus, then!
High time he came back to engage these upstarts.
I wish we saw him standing helmeted
there in the doorway, holding shield and spear,



Athena (c. 460 B.C.). Stone.

Acropolis Museum, Athens
Photo: Art Resource

50 looking the way he did when I first knew him. . . .
If I were you,
I should take steps to make these men disperse.
Listen, now, and attend to what I say:
at daybreak call the islanders to assembly,
55 and speak your will, and call the gods to witness:
the suitors must go scattering to their homes.
Then here's a course for you, if you agree:
get a sound craft afloat with twenty oars
and go abroad for news of your lost father—
60 perhaps a traveler's tale, or rumored fame
issued from Zeus abroad in the world of men.
Talk to that noble sage^o at Pylos, Nestor,
then go to Menelaus, the red-haired king
at Sparta, last man home of all the Achaeans.
65 If you should learn your father is alive
and coming home, you could hold out a year.
Or if you learn that he is dead and gone,
then you can come back to your own dear country
and raise a mound for him, and burn his gear,
70 with all the funeral honors due the man,
and give your mother to another husband.

When you have done all this, or seen it done,
it will be time to ponder
concerning these contenders in your house—
75 how you should kill them, outright or by guile.^o
You need not bear this insolence^o of theirs,
you are a child no longer."

62. sage: wise person.

75. guile: slyness, trickery.

76. insolence: rudeness, lack of respect.

Book 2: Telemachus Confronts the Suitors

Frustrated in his attempts to control the suitors, who are older and more powerful than he is, Telemachus decides to follow Athena's advice. He tries in public to become his "father's son."

When primal Dawn spread on the eastern sky
her fingers of pink light, Odysseus's true son
80 stood up, drew on his tunic and his mantle,
slung on a sword belt and a new-edged sword,
tied his smooth feet into good rawhide sandals,
and left his room, a god's brilliance upon him.
He found the criers with clarion^o voices and told them
85 to muster the unshorn^o Achaeans in full assembly.
The call sang out, and the men came streaming in;
and when they filled the assembly ground, he entered,
spear in hand, with two quick hounds at heel;
Athena lavished on him a sunlit grace

84. clarion: clear and ringing.

85. unshorn: unshaven.

90 that held the eye of the multitude. Old men
made way for him as he took his father's chair.

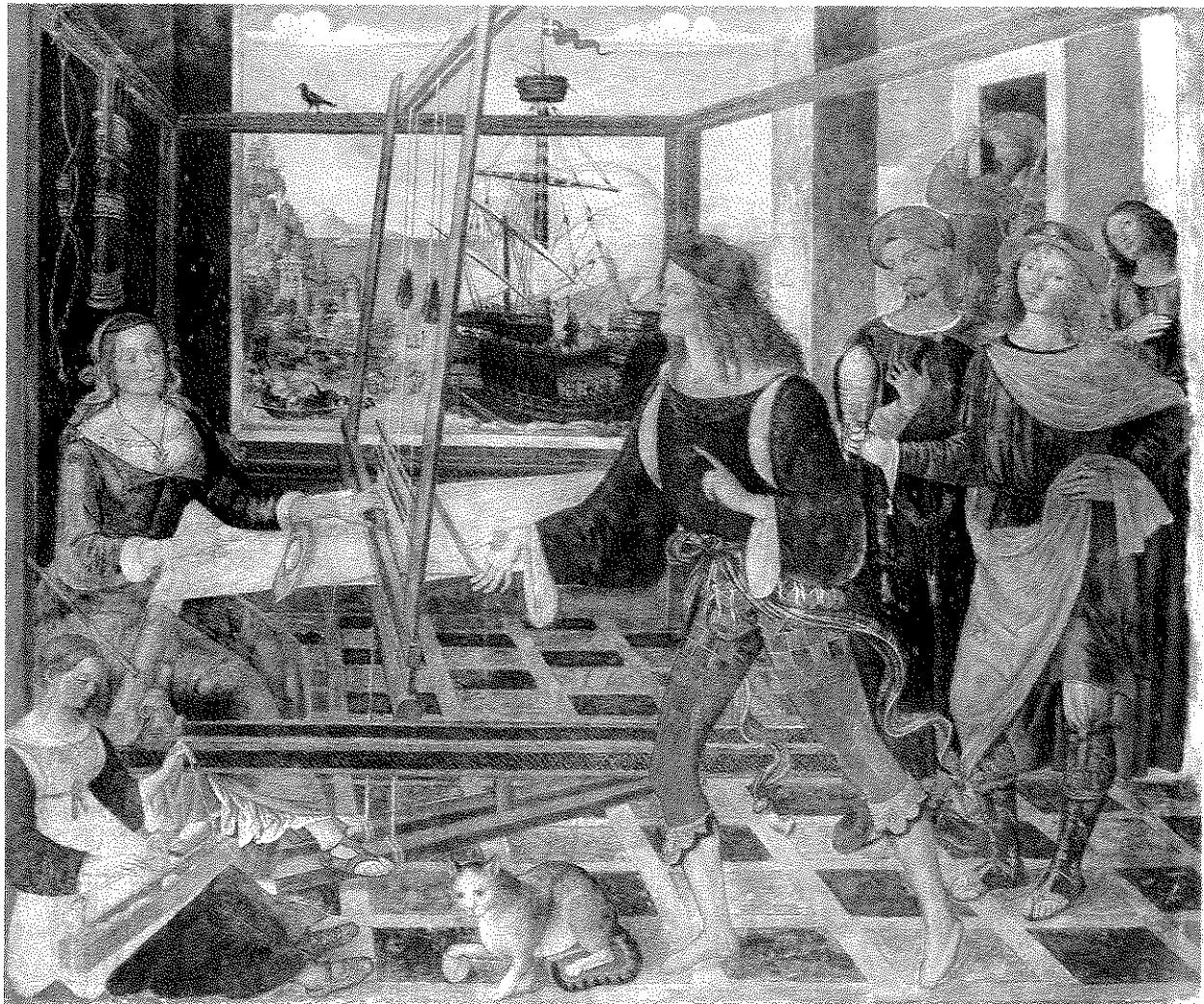
Telemachus complains of the way his family is treated by the suitors. He especially resents the way they treat his mother. The suitors answer through Antinous, the most arrogant suitor of them all. He demands that Penelope choose one of them in marriage, and he blames her for her trickery.

"For three years now—and it will soon be four—
she has been breaking the hearts of the Achaeans,
holding out hope to all, and sending promises
95 to each man privately—but thinking otherwise.

Here is an instance of her trickery:
she had her great loom standing in the hall
and the fine warp of some vast fabric on it;
we were attending her, and she said to us:

Scene from the *Odyssey* by Bernar-
dino Pintoricchio (1509). Fresco.

The National Gallery, London. Photo: The
Granger Collection



- 100 ‘Young men, my suitors, now my lord is dead,
let me finish my weaving before I marry,
or else my thread will have been spun in vain.
It is a shroud^o I weave for Lord Laertes,
when cold death comes to lay him on his bier.^o
105 The country wives would hold me in dishonor
if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.’
We have men’s hearts; she touched them; we agreed.
So every day she wove on the great loom—
but every night by torchlight she unwove it;
110 and so for three years she deceived the Achaeans.
But when the seasons brought the fourth around,
one of her maids, who knew the secret, told us;
we found her unraveling the splendid shroud.
She had to finish then, although she hated it.
- 115 Now here is the suitors’ answer—
you and all the Achaeans, mark it well:
dismiss your mother from the house, or make her marry
the man her father names and she prefers.
Does she intend to keep us dangling forever?”

*In the face of this stalemate, Telemachus decides to sail away
in search of his father.*

- 120 The assembly broke up; everyone went home—
the suitors home to Odysseus’s house again.
But Telemachus walked down along the shore
and washed his hands in the foam of the gray sea,
then said this prayer:
- “O god of yesterday,
125 guest in our house, who told me to take ship
on the hazy sea for news of my lost father,
listen to me, be near me:
the Achaeans only wait, or hope to hinder me,
the damned insolent suitors most of all.”
- 130 Athena was nearby and came to him,
putting on Mentor’s figure and his tone,
the warm voice in a lucid flight of words:
- “You’ll never be fainthearted or a fool,
Telemachus, if you have your father’s spirit;
135 he finished what he cared to say,
and what he took in hand he brought to pass.
The sea routes will yield their distances
to his true son, Penelope’s true son—
I doubt another’s luck would hold so far.
- 140 The son is rare who measures with his father,
and one in a thousand is a better man,
but you will have the sap and wit

103. **shroud:** a cloth that is used to wrap up the dead body.
104. **bier (bir):** platform on which a coffin is placed.

and prudence—for you get that from Odysseus—to give you a fair chance of winning through.

- 145 So never mind the suitors and their ways, there is no judgment in them, neither do they know anything of death and the black terror close upon them—doom's day on them all. . . .”

Quietly, Telemachus goes home and again bears the mockery of the suitors. With the help of his old nurse, Eurycleia, he prepares for the journey in search of his father. Athena, still disguised as Mentor, borrows a ship and rounds up a crew, and off they sail in the night. Telemachus's only concern is a human one: he worries about his mother and begs the nurse not to tell her he has gone until some days have passed.

Book 3: The Visit to Nestor

At sunrise, Telemachus's ship arrives at Pylos, the land of King Nestor. Homer's listeners must have felt their interest quickening at the appearance of this familiar hero of the Trojan War days—we feel the same pleasure today when a favorite character from one book or movie suddenly turns up in another. Surrounded by his faithful sons and subjects, and dutifully offering prayers to the gods, Nestor stands in perfect contrast to Odysseus's family and their chaotic situation in Ithaca. Telemachus and Athena arrive during a religious ritual, in honor of the sea god Poseidon, the “blue-maned god who makes the islands tremble.”

On the shore

- 150 black bulls were being offered by the people to the blue-maned god who makes the islands tremble: nine congregations, each five hundred strong, led out nine bulls apiece to sacrifice, taking the tripes^o to eat, while on their altars 155 thighbones in fat lay burning for the god. Here they put in, furled sail, and beached the ship; but Telemachus hung back in disembarking, so that Athena turned and said:
- “Not the least shyness, now, Telemachus.
- 160 You came across the open sea for this—to find out where the great earth hides your father and what the doom was that he came upon. Go to old Nestor, master charioteer,^o so we may broach the storehouse of his mind.
- 165 Ask him with courtesy, and in his wisdom he will tell you history and no lies.”

But clear-headed Telemachus replied:

154. *tripes*: lining of the stomach.

163. *charioteer*: Nestor had driven those horse-drawn carts used in ancient times for war.

“Mentor, how can I do it, how approach him?
I have no practice in elaborate speeches, and
170 for a young man to interrogate an old man
seems disrespectful—”

But the gray-eyed goddess said:
“Reason and heart will give you words, Telemachus;
and a spirit will counsel others. I should say
the gods were never indifferent to your life.”

175 She went on quickly, and he followed her
to where the men of Pylos had their altars.
Nestor appeared enthroned among his sons,
while friends around them skewered the red beef
180 or held it scorching. When they saw the strangers
a hail went up, and all that crowd came forward
calling out invitations to the feast. . . .
Meanwhile the spits were taken off the fire,
portions of crisp meat for all. They feasted,
and when they had eaten and drunk their fill, at last
185 they heard from Nestor, prince of charioteers:

“Now is the time,” he said, “for a few questions,
now that our young guests have enjoyed their dinner.
Who are you, strangers? . . .”

Telemachus says he is Odysseus's son, and he asks for news of his lost father. Nestor is full of praise for the lost soldier, and he quickly recognizes the heroic qualities of the son. Notice how Nestor prepares us for the later entrance of the absent hero himself.

“Your father?

190 Well, I must say I marvel at the sight of you:
your manner of speech couldn't be more like his;
one would say No; no boy could speak so well.
And all that time at Ilion, he and I
were never at odds in council or assembly—
195 saw things the same way, had one mind between us
in all the good advice we gave the Argives. . . .
Who knows, your father might come home some day
alone or backed by troops, and have it out with them.
If gray-eyed Athena loved you
200 the way she did Odysseus in the old days,
in Troy country, where we all went through so much—
never have I seen the gods help any man
as openly as Athena did your father—
well, as I say, if she cared for you that way,
205 there would be those to quit this marriage game.”

But prudently Telemachus replied:

"I can't think what you say will ever happen, sir.
It is a dazzling hope. But not for me.
It could not be—even if the gods willed it."

210 At this gray-eyed Athena broke in, saying:

"What strange talk you permit yourself, Telemachus.
A god could save the man by simply wishing it—
from the farthest shore in the world."

Book 4: The Visit to Menelaus and Helen

Nestor sends Telemachus off to continue his search in Sparta. There, two more favorites of the Trojan War story, King Menelaus and his wife, Helen, now live peacefully. Like Homer's Greek audience, we remember throughout Telemachus's stay in Sparta that this Helen was the very cause of the Trojan War itself.

Telemachus is awed at Menelaus's palace, luminous with bronze, gold, amber, silver, and ivory. He does not reveal his identity to Menelaus or to Helen; Athena is still disguised as Mentor.

The old commander Menelaus begins to tell war stories. As he reminisces about Odysseus, the absent hero becomes more and more vivid. Remember that Menelaus does not realize here that he is talking to Odysseus's own son. Menelaus speaks:

"No soldier

215 took on so much, went through so much, as Odysseus.
That seems to have been his destiny, and this mine—
to feel each day the emptiness of his absence,
ignorant, even, whether he lived or died.
How his old father and his quiet wife,
220 Penelope, must miss him still!
And Telemachus, whom he left as a newborn child."

Now hearing these things said, the boy's heart rose
in a long pang for his father, and he wept,
holding his purple mantle with both hands
225 before his eyes. Menelaus knew him now,
and so fell silent with uncertainty
whether to let him speak and name his father
in his own time, or to inquire, and prompt him.
And while he pondered, Helen came
230 out of her scented chamber, a moving grace
like Artemis,²³¹ straight as a shaft of gold. . . .
Reclining in her light chair with its footrest,
Helen gazed at her husband and demanded:

"Menelaus, my lord, have we yet heard

231. Artemis (är'tə·mis): goddess of the hunt.



Helen and Priam, King of Troy.
Krater interior.

Tarquin Museum. Photo: Art Resource

- 235 our new guests introduce themselves? Shall I
dissemble^o what I feel? No, I must say it.
Never, anywhere, have I seen so great a likeness
in man or woman—but it is truly strange!
This boy must be the son of Odysseus,
240 Telemachus, the child he left at home
that year the Achaean host made war on Troy—
daring all for the wanton^o that I was."

Menelaus and Helen tell Telemachus they have heard that Odysseus is alive, that he is living with the nymph, Calypso, and that he longs for a way of returning home.

Having increased our suspense, Homer at this point takes us back to Ithaca where we learn that the suitors intend to ambush and kill Telemachus upon his return.

Now, with the themes of the epic established, we are ready to meet Odysseus in person.

Here we will imagine that Homer stops for the night. The listeners would now go off to various corners of the local nobleman's house—as Telemachus and his friends would have done after their evening of talk and feasting with Menelaus and Helen. The blind poet might well have taken a glass of wine before turning in. The people who had heard the bard's stories might have asked questions among themselves and looked forward to the next evening's installment.

236. *dissemble:* conceal.

242. *wanton:* immoral woman.

Responding to the Epic

Analyzing the Epic

Identifying Facts

1. Instead of beginning his epic with the adventures of Odysseus, Homer takes four books to describe the problems and travels of the hero's son, Telemachus. Describe the specific problems that exist in Ithaca with Odysseus gone.
2. What **actions** does Athena advise Telemachus to take? How does Athena use her divine powers to transform Telemachus from time to time?
3. According to Antinous, what trick has Penelope used to deceive the suitors?
4. What does Telemachus learn about his father from Menelaus?
5. How are Telemachus and Athena received by Nestor and his family? How does this contrast with the way the boy is treated in his own home, in Ithaca?

Interpreting Meanings

6. According to the poet's opening prayer to the Muse, why are all of Odysseus's companions going to die before they reach home? What do this and other details tell you about the importance of the gods in Homer's time?
7. We have heard several people talking about the absent hero, including the poet himself in his invocation to the Muse. Describe what we know so far about Odysseus's **character**. What are his main traits?
8. Describe the kind of person Telemachus is. What are his strengths and weaknesses?
9. We all know how hard it is to follow in someone else's footsteps. What are the specific problems that confront Telemachus—or anyone else who feels he must "wear his father's (or mother's) shoes"?
10. What women have you met so far in the epic? Based on what you've seen, describe the roles women seem to take in Homeric society.
11. What elements of the story thus far could be related to life as you know it? Consider the **characters**, their **conflicts**, and the steps taken to resolve the conflicts.
12. Suppose you were Telemachus and your father

had never returned from a long war, and your mother was pestered by men who wanted to marry her and who were sponging off her. How would you handle your problems?

13. Like all good storytellers, Homer knew he had to make his listeners feel **suspense**—he wanted them to wonder "What will happen next?" List at least three questions a listener would have at this point in the story; include questions about Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.

Analyzing Language and Vocabulary

Figures of Speech

In the following **figures of speech**, the poet compares one thing to something else, something quite different from it in all but a few important ways. Answer the questions after each figure of speech to show that you understand the comparison it is based on.

1. ". . . What if his great father
came from the unknown world and drove these
men
like dead leaves through the place . . ."
(Lines 21–23)
 - a. What are the dead leaves compared to?
 - b. What action do you see when you read this figure of speech?
2. "When primal Dawn spread on the eastern sky
her fingers of pink light . . ."
(Lines 78–79)
 - a. What aspect of the dawn is being compared to fingers of pink light?
 - b. **Personification** is a figure of speech in which something inanimate or not alive is spoken of as if it were a person. What is personified in these lines?
3. ". . . black bulls were being offered by the
people
to the blue-maned god who makes the islands
tremble."
(Lines 150–151)
 - a. The blue-maned god is Poseidon. What exactly is his "blue mane"?
 - b. What creature usually is spoken of as having a "mane"?

Part Two: The Wanderings of Odysseus

Book 5: Calypso, the Sweet Nymph

Again the story begins with the gods. Zeus, unable to resist the pleas of his favorite daughter, Athena, sends the messenger-god Hermes to Calypso's island to order Odysseus released. Notice the particularly beautiful epic simile—the extended comparison—that gives life to Hermes' swift voyage to Ogygia (lines 251–257), and notice the wonderful description of the nymph's lair. It is important to remember that although Calypso is not described as evil, her seductive charms—even her promises of immortality for Odysseus—threaten to lead the hero away from the straight and narrow path back to Penelope.

No words were lost on Hermes the Wayfinder
who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on,
245 ambrosial,^o golden, that carry him over water
or over endless land in a swish of the wind,
and took the wand with which he charms asleep—
or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men.
So wand in hand he paced into the air,
250 shot from Pieria^o down, down to sea level,
and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling
between the wave crests of the desolate sea
will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings;
no higher above the whitecaps Hermes flew
255 until the distant island lay ahead,
then rising shoreward from the violet ocean
he stepped up to the cave. Divine Calypso,
the mistress of the isle, was now at home.
Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing
260 scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke
and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low
in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving,
she passed her golden shuttle to and fro.
A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves
265 of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress.
Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—
horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued
beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea.
Around the smoothwalled cave a crooking vine
270 held purple clusters under ply of green;
and four springs, bubbling up near one another
shallow and clear, took channels here and there
through beds of violets and tender parsley.
Even a god who found this place

245. ambrosial: fit for the gods.

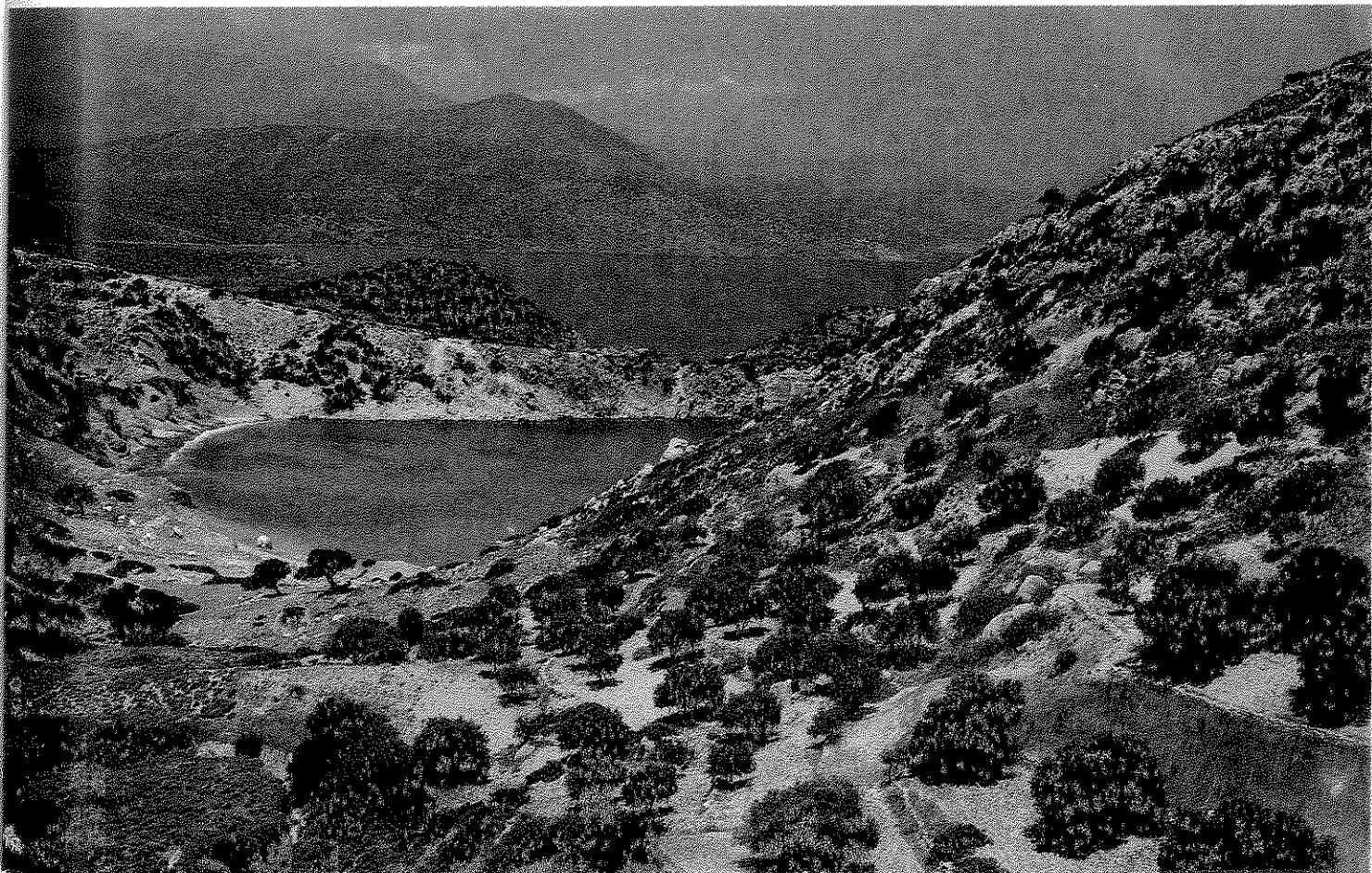
250. Pieria: a place in central Greece, a favorite spot of Hermes. It is not far from Olympus.

- 275 would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight:
so Hermes did; but when he had gazed his fill
he entered the wide cave. Now face to face
the magical Calypso recognized him,
as all immortal gods know one another
280 on sight—though seeming strangers, far from home.
But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus,
who sat apart, as a thousand times before,
and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. . . .

*Hermes tells Calypso that she must give up Odysseus forever.
'And now, one quarter of the way through the epic, we are directly introduced to Odysseus. Notice what this great warrior is doing when we first meet him.*

- 285 The strong god glittering left her as he spoke,
and now her ladyship, having given heed
to Zeus's mandate, went to find Odysseus

A view of the sea from one of the Greek islands.

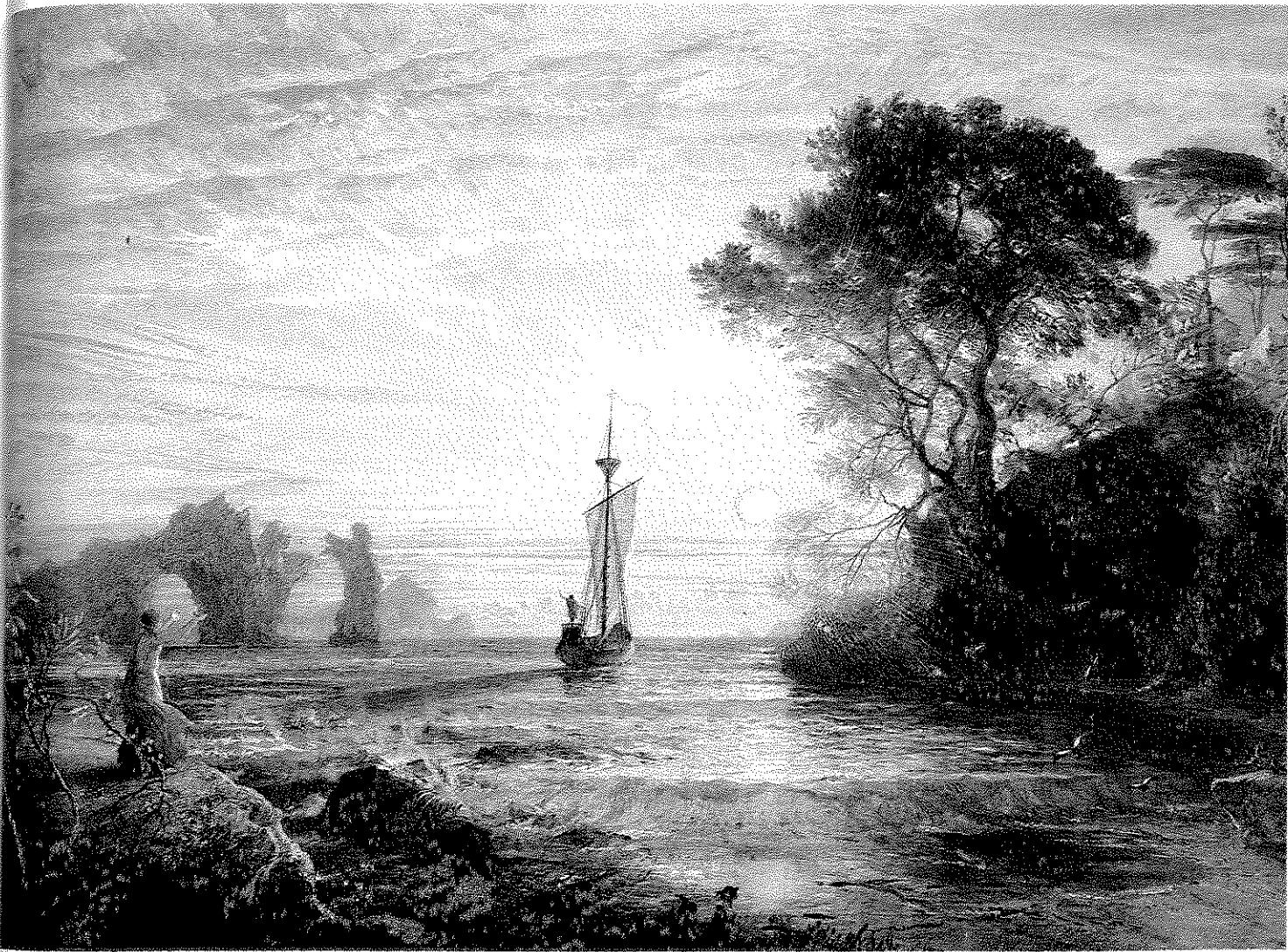


in his stone seat to seaward—tear on tear
brimming his eyes. The sweet days of his lifetime
290 were running out in anguish over his exile,
for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.
Though he fought shy of her and her desire,
he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.
But when day came he sat on the rocky shore
295 and broke his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
scanning the bare horizon of the sea.
Now she stood near him in her beauty, saying:
“O forlorn man, be still.
Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel
300 your life consumed here; I have pondered it,
and I shall help you go. . . .”

Calypso promises Odysseus a raft and provisions, to help him homeward without harm—provided the gods wish it. Now Odysseus and Calypso say goodbye.

Swiftly she turned and led him to her cave,
and they went in, the mortal and immortal.
He took the chair left empty now by Hermes,
305 where the divine Calypso placed before him
victuals and drink of men; then she sat down
facing Odysseus, while her serving maids
brought nectar and ambrosia³⁰⁸ to her side.
Then each one's hands went out on each one's feast
310 until they had had their pleasure; and she said:
“Son of Laertes, versatile Odysseus,
after these years with me, you still desire
your old home? Even so, I wish you well.
If you could see it all, before you go—
315 all the adversity you face at sea—
you would stay here, and guard this house, and be
immortal—though you wanted her forever,
that bride for whom you pine each day.
Can I be less desirable than she is?
320 Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals
compare with goddesses in grace and form?”
To this the strategist Odysseus answered:
“My lady goddess, there is no cause for anger.
My quiet Penelope—how well I know—
325 would seem a shade before your majesty,
death and old age being unknown to you,
while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day
I long for home, long for the sight of home.

^{308.} nectar and ambrosia: drink and food of the gods.



So Odysseus builds the raft and sets sail. But the sea god Poseidon, still angry at Odysseus, is by no means ready to allow an easy passage over his watery domain. He raises a storm and destroys the raft. It is only with the help of Athena and a sea nymph that Odysseus arrives, broken and battered, on the island of Scheria, home of the Phaeacians. There he hides himself in a pile of leaves and falls into a deep sleep.

330 A man in a distant field, no hearthfires near,
will hide a fresh brand^o in his bed of embers
to keep a spark alive for the next day;
so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself,
while over him Athena showered sleep
that his distress should end, and soon, soon.
335 In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.

Farewell to Calypso by Samuel Palmer (1848). Watercolor.

Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester

330. brand: a burning stick.

Book 6: The Princess Nausicaa

In this important episode, we meet the lovely teen-age princess, Nausicaa, and learn something about domestic life in those days. (Homer is not above telling us about doing laundry or taking baths.) We also learn here something about natural modesty and standards of moral behavior. The world of epic is the world of heroes, but it is also the world of everyday reality.

- Far gone in weariness, in oblivion,
the noble and enduring man slept on;
but Athena in the night went down the land
of the Phaeacians, entering their city. . . .
- 340 She took her way to a painted bedchamber
where a young girl lay fast asleep—so fine
in mould and feature that she seemed a goddess—
the daughter of Alcínous, Nausicaa.
On either side, as Graces^o might have slept,
345 her maids were sleeping. The bright doors were shut,
but like a sudden stir of wind, Athena
moved to the bedside of the girl, and grew
visible as the shipman Dymas's daughter,
a girl the princess's age, and her dear friend.
350 In this form gray-eyed Athena said to her:
“How so remiss, and yet thy mother's daughter?
leaving thy clothes uncared for, Nausicaa,
when soon thou must have store of marriage linen,
and put thy minstrelsy^o in wedding dress!
355 Beauty, in these, will make the folk admire,
and bring thy father and gentle mother joy.
Let us go washing in the shine of morning!
Beside thee will I drub,^o so wedding chests
will brim by evening. Maidenhood must end!
360 Have not the noblest born Phaeacians
paid court to thee, whose birth none can excel?
Go beg thy sovereign father, even at dawn,
to have the mule cart and the mules brought round
to take thy body-linen, gowns, and mantles.
365 Thou shouldst ride, for it becomes thee more,
the washing pools are found so far from home.”
On this word she departed, gray-eyed Athena,
to where the gods have their eternal dwelling—
as men say—in the fastness of Olympus.
370 Never a tremor of wind, or a splash of rain,
no errant snowflake comes to stain that heaven,
so calm, so vaporless, the world of light.
Here, where the gay gods live their days of pleasure,
the gray-eyed one withdrew, leaving the princess.

344. **Graces:** three sister goddesses who ruled over pleasure, charm, and beauty in human life.

354. **minstrelsy:** court singers and entertainers.

358. **drub:** beat the clothes on rocks, to get the dirt out.

375 And now Dawn took her own fair throne, awaking
the girl in the sweet gown, still charmed by dream.
Down through the rooms she went to tell her parents,
whom she found still at home: her mother seated
near the great hearth among her maids—and twirling
380 out of her distaff yarn dyed like the sea—;
her father at the door, bound for a council
of princes on petition of the gentry.
She went up close to him and softly said:
“My dear Papa, could you not send the mule cart
385 around for me—the gig with pretty wheels?
I must take all our things and get them washed
at the river pools; our linen is all soiled.
And you should wear fresh clothing, going to council
with counselors and first men of the realm.
390 Remember your five sons at home: though two
are married, we have still three bachelor sprigs;
they will have none but laundered clothes each time
they go to the dancing. See what I must think of!”
She had no word to say of her own wedding,
395 though her keen father saw her blush. Said he:
“No mules would I deny you, child, nor anything.
Go along, now; the grooms will bring your gig
with pretty wheels and the cargo box upon it.”
He spoke to the stableman, who soon brought round
400 the cart, low-wheeled and nimble;
harnessed the mules, and backed them in the traces.
Meanwhile the girl fetched all her soiled apparel
to bundle in the polished wagon box.
Her mother, for their luncheon, packed a hamper
405 with picnic fare, and filled a skin of wine,
and, when the princess had been handed up,
gave her a golden bottle of olive oil
for softening girls’ bodies, after bathing.
Nausicaa took the reins and raised her whip,
410 lashing the mules. What jingling! What a clatter!
But off they went in a ground-covering trot,
with princess, maids, and laundry drawn behind.
By the lower river where the wagon came
were washing pools, with water all year flowing
415 in limpid spillways that no grime withstood.
The girls unhitched the mules, and sent them down
along the eddying stream to crop sweet grass.
Then sliding out the cart’s tail board, they took
armloads of clothing to the dusky water,
420 and trod them in the pits, making a race of it.
All being drubbed, all blemish rinsed away,

- they spread them, piece by piece, along the beach
whose pebbles had been laundered by the sea;
then took a dip themselves, and, all anointed
425 with golden oil, ate lunch beside the river
while the bright burning sun dried out their linen.
Princess and maids delighted in that feast;
then, putting off their veils,
they ran and passed a ball to a rhythmic beat,
430 Nausicaa flashing first with her white arms. . . .
Soon it was time, she knew, for riding homeward—
mules to be harnessed, linen folded smooth—
but the gray-eyed goddess Athena made her tarry,^o
so that Odysseus might behold her beauty
and win her guidance to the town.
- 435 It happened
when the king's daughter threw her ball off line
and missed, and put it in the whirling stream—
at which they all gave such a shout, Odysseus
awoke and sat up, saying to himself:
440 "Now, by my life, mankind again! But who?
Savages, are they, strangers to courtesy?
Or gentle folk, who know and fear the gods?
That was a lusty cry of tall young girls—
most like the cry of nymphs, who haunt the peaks,
445 and springs of brooks, and inland grassy places.
Or am I amid people of human speech?
Up again, man; and let me see for myself!"
He pushed aside the bushes, breaking off
with his great hand a single branch of olive,
450 whose leaves might shield him in his nakedness;
so came out rustling, like a mountain lion,
rain-drenched, wind-buffeted, but in his might at ease,
with burning eyes—who prowls among the herds
or flocks, or after game, his hungry belly
455 taking him near stout homesteads for his prey.
Odysseus had this look, in his rough skin
advancing on the girls with pretty braids;
and he was driven on by hunger, too.
Streaked with brine, and swollen, he terrified them,
460 so that they fled, this way and that. Only
Alcinous's daughter stood her ground, being given
a bold heart by Athena, and steady knees.
She faced him, waiting. And Odysseus came,
debating inwardly what he should do:
465 embrace this beauty's knees in supplication?
or stand apart, and, using honeyed speech,
inquire the way to town, and beg some clothing?

433. *tarry*: linger, be late.

In his swift reckoning, he thought it best
to trust in words to please her—and keep away;
470 he might anger the girl, touching her knees.
So he began, and let the soft words fall:

“Mistress: please: are you divine, or mortal?
If one of those who dwell in the wide heaven,
you are most near to Artemis, I should say—
475 great Zeus’s daughter—in your grace and presence.
If you are one of earth’s inhabitants,
how blest your father, and your gentle mother,
blest all your kin. I know what happiness
must send the warm tears to their eyes, each time
480 they see their wondrous child go to the dancing!
But one man’s destiny is more than blest—
he who prevails, and takes you as his bride.
Never have I laid eyes on equal beauty
in man or woman. I am hushed indeed.
485 So fair, one time, I thought a young palm tree
at Delos near the altar of Apollo—
I had troops under me when I was there
on the sea route that later brought me grief—
but that slim palm tree filled my heart with wonder:
490 never came shoot from earth so beautiful.
So now, my lady, I stand in awe so great
I cannot take your knees.^o And yet my case is desperate:
twenty days, yesterday, in the wine-dark sea,
on the ever-lunging swell,^o under gale winds,
495 getting away from the Island of Ogygia.
And now the terror of Storm has left me stranded
upon this shore—with more blows yet to suffer,
I must believe, before the gods relent.
Mistress, do me a kindness!
500 After much weary toil, I come to you,
and you are the first soul I have seen—I know
no others here. Direct me to the town,
give me a rag that I can throw around me,
some cloth or wrapping that you brought along.
505 And may the gods accomplish your desire:
a home, a husband, and harmonious
converse with him—the best thing in the world
being a strong house held in serenity
where man and wife agree. Woe to their enemies,
510 joy to their friends! But all this they know best.”
Then she of the white arms, Nausicaa, replied:
“Stranger, there is no quirk or evil in you
that I can see. You know Zeus metes out fortune
to good and bad men as it pleases him.

492. The taking of the knees is an act of respect and humility and petition. By kneeling before a person and holding on to his or her knees, a petitioner shows that he or she means no harm but desires mercy or help.

494. ever-lunging swell: waves that plunge up and down.

515 Hardship he sent to you, and you must bear it.
But now that you have taken refuge here
you shall not lack for clothing, or any other
comfort due to a poor man in distress.
The town lies this way, and the men are called
520 Phaeacians, who own the land and city.
I am daughter to the Prince Alcinous,
by whom the power of our people stands.”
Turning, she called out to her maids-in-waiting:
“Stay with me! Does the sight of a man scare you?
525 Or do you take this one for an enemy?
Why, there’s no fool so brash, and never will be,
as to bring war or pillage^o to this coast,
for we are dear to the immortal gods,
living here, in the sea that rolls forever,
530 distant from other lands and other men.
No: this man is a castaway, poor fellow;
we must take care of him. Strangers and beggars
come from Zeus: a small gift, then, is friendly.
Give our new guest some food and drink, and take him
535 into the river, out of the wind, to bathe.”
They stood up now, and called to one another
to go on back. Quite soon they led Odysseus
under the river bank, as they were bidden;
and there laid out a tunic, and a cloak,
540 and gave him olive oil in the golden flask.
“Here,” they said, “go bathe in the flowing water.”
But heard now from that kingly man, Odysseus:
“Maids,” he said, “keep away a little; let me
wash the brine from my own back, and rub on
545 plenty of oil. It is long since my anointing.
I take no bath, however, where you can see me—
naked before young girls with pretty braids.”
They left him, then, and went to tell the princess.
And now Odysseus, dousing in the river,
550 scrubbed the coat of brine from back and shoulders
and rinsed the clot of sea-spume from his hair;
got himself all rubbed down, from head to foot,
then he put on the clothes the princess gave him.
—Athena lent a hand, making him seem
555 taller, and massive, too, with crisping hair
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth,
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
Hephaestus^o taught him, or Athena: one
560 whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished



527. *pillage*: violent looting or stealing.

559. *Hephaestus*: god of crafts.



— beauty over Odysseus's head and shoulders.
Then he went down to sit on the sea beach
in his new splendor. There the girl regarded him,
and after a time she said to the maids beside her:

- 565 "My gentlewomen, I have a thing to tell you.
The Olympian gods cannot be all averse
to this man's coming here among our islanders.
Uncouth he seemed, I thought so, too, before;
but now he looks like one of heaven's people.
570 I wish my husband could be fine as he
and glad to stay forever on Scheria!"

Ulysses and Nausicaa by Peter Paul Rubens (17th century). Oil.

Firenze Gallery. Photo: Art Resource

But have you given refreshment to our guest?"'

At this the maids, all gravely listening, hastened
to set out bread and wine before Odysseus,

575 and ah! how ravenously that patient man
took food and drink, his long fast at an end.

The princess Nausicaa now turned aside
to fold her linens; in the pretty cart
she stowed them, put the mule team under harness,

580 mounted the driver's seat, and then looked down
to say with cheerful prompting to Odysseus:

"Up with you now, friend; back to town we go;
and I shall send you in before my father
who is wondrous wise; there in our house with him

585 you'll meet the noblest of the Phaeacians.

You have good sense, I think; here's how to do it:
while we go through the countryside and farmland
stay with my maids, behind the wagon, walking
briskly enough to follow where I lead.

590 But near the town—well, there's a wall with towers
around the Isle, and beautiful ship basins
right and left of the causeway of approach;
seagoing craft are beached beside the road
each on its launching ways. The agora,⁹

595 with fieldstone benches bedded in the earth,
lies either side Poseidon's shrine—for there
men are at work on pitch-black hulls and rigging,
cables and sails, and tapering of oars.

The archer's craft is not for Phaeacians,

600 but ship designing, modes of oaring cutters
in which they love to cross the foaming sea.
From these fellows I will have no salty talk,
no gossip later. Plenty are insolent.

And some seadog might say, after we passed:

605 'Who is this handsome stranger trailing Nausicaa?
Where did she find him? Will he be her husband?
Or is she being hospitable to some rover
come off his ship from lands across the sea—
there being no lands nearer. A god, maybe?

610 a god from heaven, the answer to her prayer,
descending now—to make her his forever?
Better, if she's roamed and found a husband
somewhere else: none of our own will suit her,
though many come to court her, and those the best.'

615 This is the way they might make light of me.
And I myself should hold it shame
for any girl to flout⁹ her own dear parents,
taking up with a man, before her marriage."

594. *agora*: marketplace, or town square.

617. *flout*: scorn, insult.

Book 8: The Song of the Minstrel

Odysseus is received in Book 7 as an unknown guest by Nausicaa's father, King Alcinous, and by the Phaeacian court. To the ancient people of Greece and Asia Minor, all guests were god-sent and had to be treated with great care before they could be asked to identify themselves and state their business.

Alcinous orders a banquet for his mystery guest. When everything is prepared, Odysseus is seated in the guest's place of honor. The famous blind minstrel, Demodocus, is called. Odysseus gives the singer a gift of pork crisp with fat and requests a song about the wooden horse of Troy. In effect, he asks for a song about himself.

The minstrel stirred, murmuring to the god, and soon
620 clear words and notes came one by one, a vision
of the Achaeans in their graceful ships
drawing away from shore: the torches flung
and shelters flaring: Argive soldiers crouched
in the close dark around Odysseus: and
625 the horse, tall on the assembly ground of Troy. . . .
For Troy must perish, as ordained, that day
she harbored the great horse of timber; hidden
the flower of Achaea lay, and bore
slaughter and death upon the men of Troy.
630 He sang, then, of the town sacked^o by Achaeans
pouring down from the horse's hollow cave,
this way and that way raping the steep city . . .

The splendid minstrel sang it.

And Odysseus

let the bright molten tears run down his cheeks,
635 weeping the way a wife mourns for her lord
on the lost field where he has gone down fighting . . .

Here Alcinous notices Odysseus's tears and demands that his guest reveal his identity.

¶ “. . . Friend, you must not be
secretive any longer! Come, in fairness,
tell me the name you bore in that far country;
640 how were you known to family, and neighbors?
No man is nameless—no man, good or bad,
but gets a name in his first infancy,
none being born, unless a mother bears him!
Tell me your native land, your coast and city—”

At this moment of suspense, Homer might have put aside his harp until the next night.

630. sacked: all its goods taken by force.

Responding to the Epic

Analyzing the Epic

Identifying Facts

1. What **images** does Homer use to help his audience see and smell the fragrant place where the nymph Calypso lives?
2. What does Calypso offer Odysseus to tempt him to stay with her and abandon his quest? What is Odysseus's response?
3. What inspires Nausicaa to organize her washing expedition? What reason does she give her father?
4. In a macho culture like Odysseus's, a hero is by definition a "ladies' man." From the point of view of Homer's audience, Odysseus was not unfaithful to Penelope as long as he kept her in mind as his ultimate goal. Homer never tires of telling us that Odysseus would rather be with Penelope than with Calypso or Circe, who keep him against his will. Thus, to the Greeks, morality does not come into question in Odysseus's relationship with the "witches" in the story. But with Nausicaa it is something else. She is a real human girl ready for marriage. What is Odysseus's condition when Nausicaa sees him first? How does Odysseus use his famed wit to handle this situation and win Nausicaa's confidence?

Interpreting Meanings

5. When we first see Odysseus, he is weeping. Why? We rarely see a twentieth-century hero weeping. What would most people feel today about a hero who cries? What does Odysseus's crying tell us about the values of Homeric society as opposed to modern values?
6. Look back at Odysseus's first speech to Nausicaa, starting at line 472 on page 739. What do we learn about Odysseus's **character** from this speech? What is especially significant about his references to marriage?
7. Based on what she says and does, how would you describe Nausicaa's **character** traits? What does this portrait of Nausicaa reveal about the life and values of a teen-age girl in Homeric society?
8. Look at how Demodocus is treated at Alcinous's banquet. What does this tell us about the role

of poets and poetry in Homer's time? Do storytelling and music play a similar role in our society? (How would a contemporary ruler entertain honored guests?)

Analyzing Language and Vocabulary

Homeric Similes

The **Homeric simile** (sometimes called the **epic simile** or the **heroic simile**) is an extended comparison between something that the audience cannot have seen (such as the god Hermes skimming the waves) and something ordinary and domestic which they would have been familiar with (such as a sea gull fishing: see lines 251–257 on page 732).

1. Write out at least three Homeric similes that you find in these episodes. (Include their line numbers.)
2. Explain how each simile brings the audience into the story by comparing a strange or unfamiliar occurrence with something domestic or familiar.
3. Make up three Homeric similes of your own, in which you compare something strange or unfamiliar with something domestic and familiar. You might consider describing something like:

A space launch
The surface of Uranus
A view of a blood sample through a microscope

Writing About the Epic

A Creative Response

Writing a Journal Entry. Suppose you are Nausicaa. Describe your thoughts and feelings as you saw Odysseus come out of hiding and appear before you. Write as if you are writing in a journal. Use the first-person pronoun, "I," as if we were hearing Nausicaa's voice.

Book 9: The Lotus Eaters and the Cyclops

Alcinous's call to Odysseus to reveal his identity is Odysseus's cue to begin telling of the adventures that will literally make his name. Homer's greatest hero is himself a famous storyteller. (Perhaps all successful heroes must contain aspects of their creators.)

The adventures that follow are the ones for which the epic is most remembered. Imagine the excitement of the Phaeacians, having just heard Demodocus sing the story of the Trojan horse, when they discover the identity of their guest. Alcinous has just asked Odysseus to reveal his name:

645 Now this was the reply Odysseus made:

"I am Laertes' son, Odysseus.

Men hold me

formidable for guile in peace and war:
this fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim.
My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca
650 under Mount Neion's wind-blown robe of leaves,
in sight of other islands—Doulikhion,
Same, wooded Zakynthos—Ithaca
being most lofty in that coastal sea,
and northwest, while the rest lie east and south.
655 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,
loveliest among goddesses, who held me
in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight,
660 as Circe of Aeaea, 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
665 he shall not, though he find a house of gold. . . ."

εἴμι Ὀδυσσεὺς Λαερτιάδης, ὃς πᾶσι δόλοισι
ἀνθρώπουσι μέλα, καὶ μεν κλέος οὐρανὸν ἔκει.
ναιετάω δ' Ἰθάκην εὐδείλεον ἐν δ' ὅρος αὐτῆς,
Νύριτον ενοσίφυλλον ἀριπρεπές· ἀμφὶ δὲ νῆσοι
πολλὰ ναιετάοντι μάλα σχεδὸν ἀλλήλῃσι,
Δουνάκισιν τε Σάμην τε καὶ ἑλήσσα Ζάκυνθος.

The passage beginning "I am Laertes' son" in the original text.

Odysseus now tells of his voyage from Troy—how many of his men lost their lives during a foolish raid on the Cicones, how Zeus punished the survivors by raising the North Wind against their ships, how they were made to drift aimlessly from place to place, for nine days. Finally, they stopped at the land of the Lotus Eaters. (The people of Southern Europe used to make a drink from the fermented fruit of the lotus plant. The drink was supposed to produce feelings of laziness and dreaminess.) Odysseus is still speaking:

“Upon the tenth

we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters,
who live upon that flower. We landed there
to take on water. All ships' companies
670 mustered alongside for the midday 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,
who showed no will to do us harm, only
675 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
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.
680 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
the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’
685 Filing in to their places by the rowlocks
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,
and we moved out again on our seafaring.”

Salvation from the next adventure requires the special intelligence associated with Odysseus's name. Odysseus is the cleverest of the ancient Greek heroes because his divine guardian is the goddess of wisdom, Athena. As a result of this confrontation with the Cyclops named Polyphemus, the one-eyed monster son

The Cyclop (detail) by Odilon Redon (1898). Oil.

State Museum Collection Kroller-Muller,
Otterlo, The Netherlands



of the god Poseidon, Odysseus incurs the wrath of the sea god. Polyphemus might be said to represent the brute force and a negative singleness of purpose that any hero must overcome before he can reach home.

It is Odysseus's famed curiosity that leads him to the Cyclops's cave and that makes him insist on waiting for the barbaric giant.

- “We lit a fire, burnt an offering,
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence
690 around the embers, waiting. When he came
he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder
to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it
with a great crash into that hollow cave,
and we all scattered fast to the far wall.
695 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
to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,
700 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
he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;
705 thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,
sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,[°]
and poured the whey to stand in bowls
cooling until he drank it for his supper.
When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,
710 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

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

715 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
by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;
720 homeward bound, but taking routes and ways
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.
We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus—
the whole world knows what city
he laid waste, what armies he destroyed.
725 It was our luck to come here; here we stand,
beholden for your help, or any gifts

706. withy baskets: made from willow twigs.

you give—as custom is to honor strangers.
We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care
for the gods' courtesy; Zeus will avenge
the unoffending guest.'

730

from his brute chest, unmoved:

He answered this
‘You are a ninny,
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes
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 whim to.
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

735

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

‘My ship?

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

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
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.

745

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,

powerless, looking on at this, appalled;

750

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,
and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went
755 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
move his ponderous doorway slab aside.

760

So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose
lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,
770 his chores being all dispatched, he caught

- another brace of men to make his breakfast,
and whisked away his great door slab
to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.
- 775 There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.
And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,
if but Athena granted what I prayed for.
Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:
- 780 a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—
an olive tree, felled green and left to season
for Cyclops's hand. And it was like a mast
a lugger^o of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
a deep-seagoing craft—might carry:
- 785 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
to make a stake with pointed end. I held this
- 790 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
along with me? Whose hand could bear to thrust
- 795 and grind that spike in Cyclops's 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.
- At evening came the shepherd with his flock,
800 his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,
entered the cave: by some sheep-herding whim—
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.
He hefted his great boulder into place
and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes
- 805 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
holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,
looking up, saying:
- 810 ‘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
if you would help us home. But you are mad,
- 815 unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,
will any other traveler come to see you?’

783. lugger: a type of sailboat.



Ulysses receiving the wine that will later be given to Polyphemus. Krater.

Museo Boliano. Photo: Art Resource

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

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,
820 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!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.
825 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.
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
everyone calls me Nohbdy.’

830

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,

his great head lolling to one side; and sleep
835 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,
and cheered my men along with battle talk
840 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
gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops
845 as more than natural force nerved them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it
deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
in planking, having men below to swing
850 the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket
while blood ran out around the red hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy^o

855 one sees a white-hot axhead or an adze^o
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.
The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,
860 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
who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.
865 Some heard him; and they came by divers^o ways
to clump around outside and call:

‘What ails you,

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

870 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 sage reply:
‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
875 there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain

854. smithy: a blacksmith’s shop, where iron work is done.

855. adze: a tool like an ax, but with a longer, curved blade.

865. divers: diverse, various.

given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.'

So saying

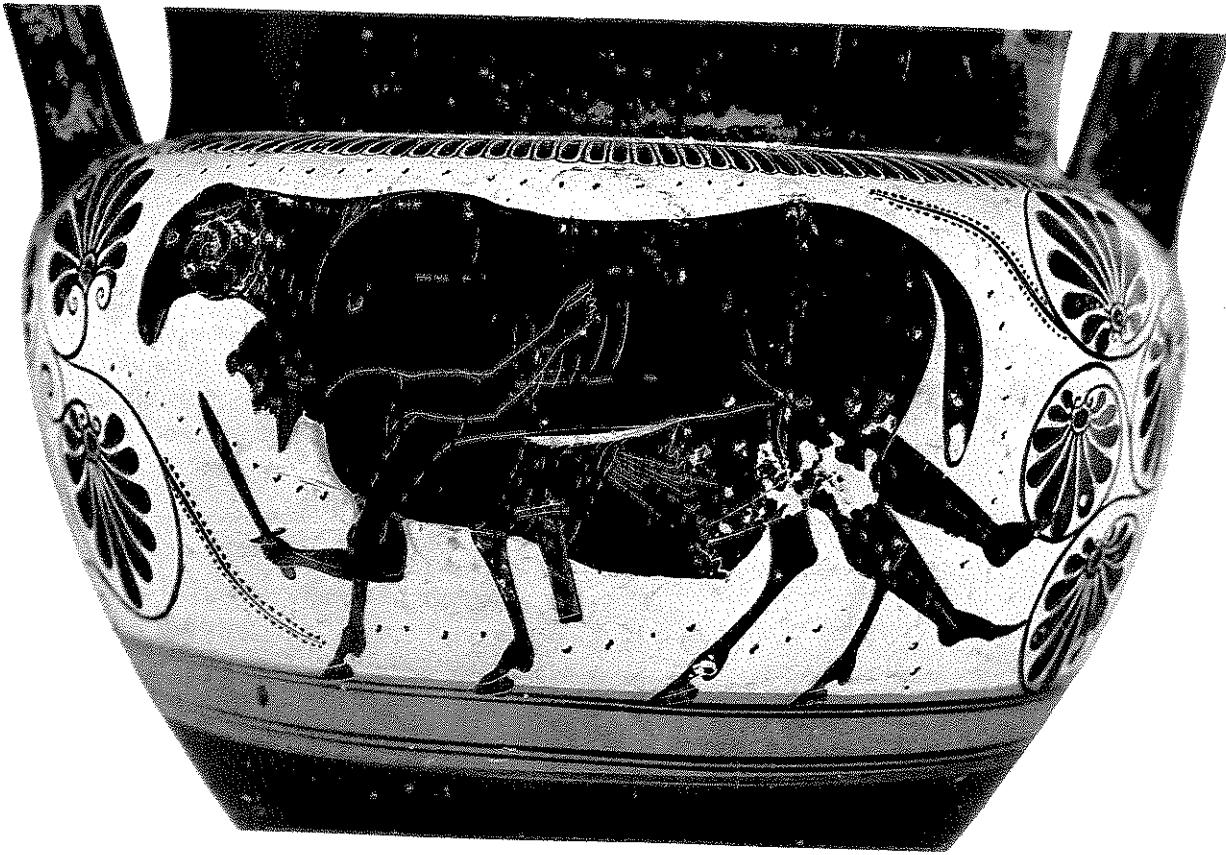
- they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.
880 Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide
for any silly beast or man who bolted—
hoping somehow I might be such a fool.
885 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,
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.
890 The Cyclops's 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;
then slung a man under each middle one
895 to ride there safely, shielded left and right.

Ulysses escaping from Polyphemus
(c. 510 B.C.). Krater.

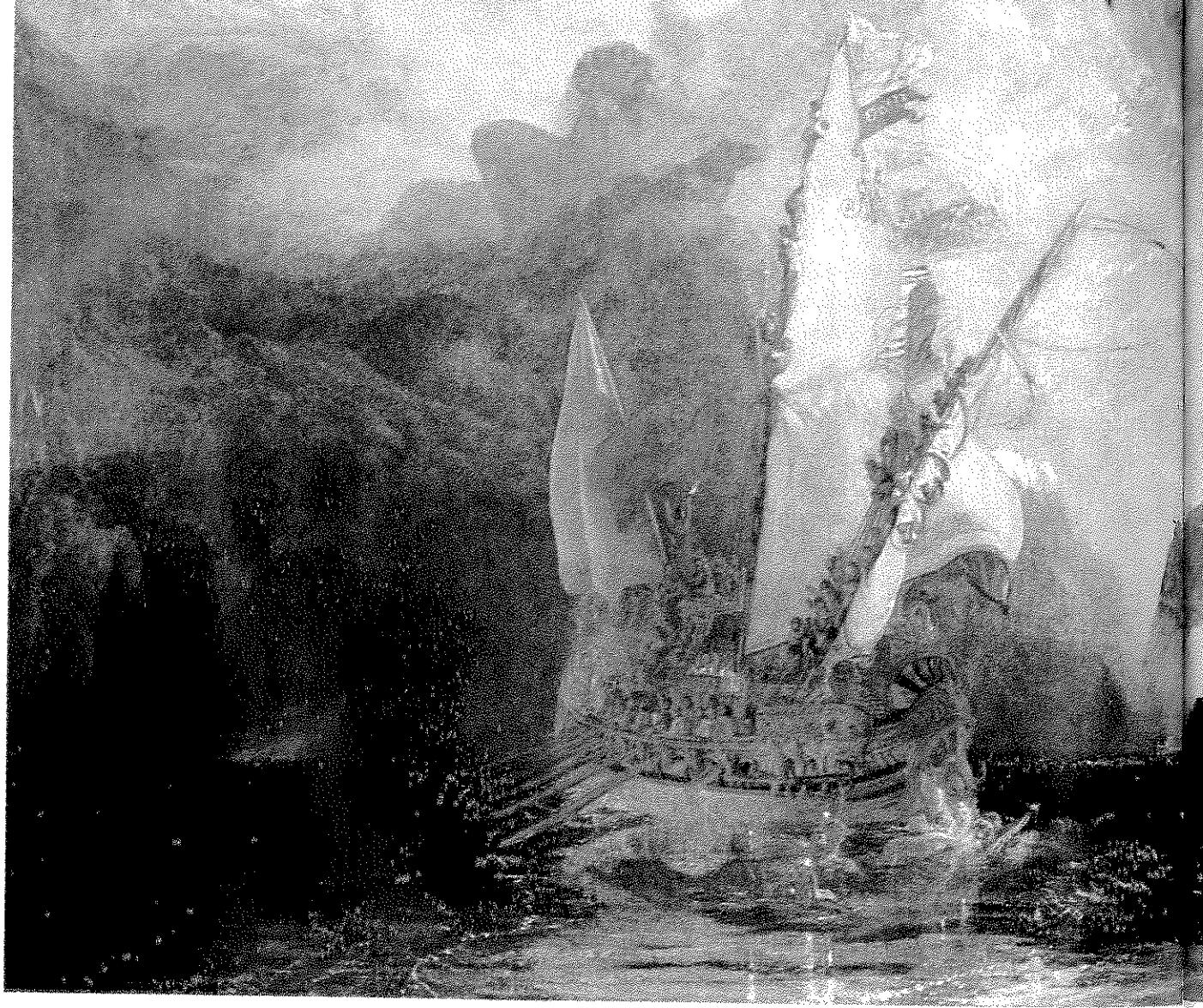
Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe



So three sheep could convey each man. I took
the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,
and hung myself under his kinky belly,
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
900 in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.
When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
905 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 pectoral fleece⁹
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.
910 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
in the night cave? You never linger so,
915 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.
Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving
920 over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue¹⁰
and his accurst companions burnt it out
when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
Oh, had you brain and voice to tell
925 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.’
He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
930 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,
and drove them down to where the good ship lay.
935 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, and in a low
voice told them: ‘Load this herd;
940 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,

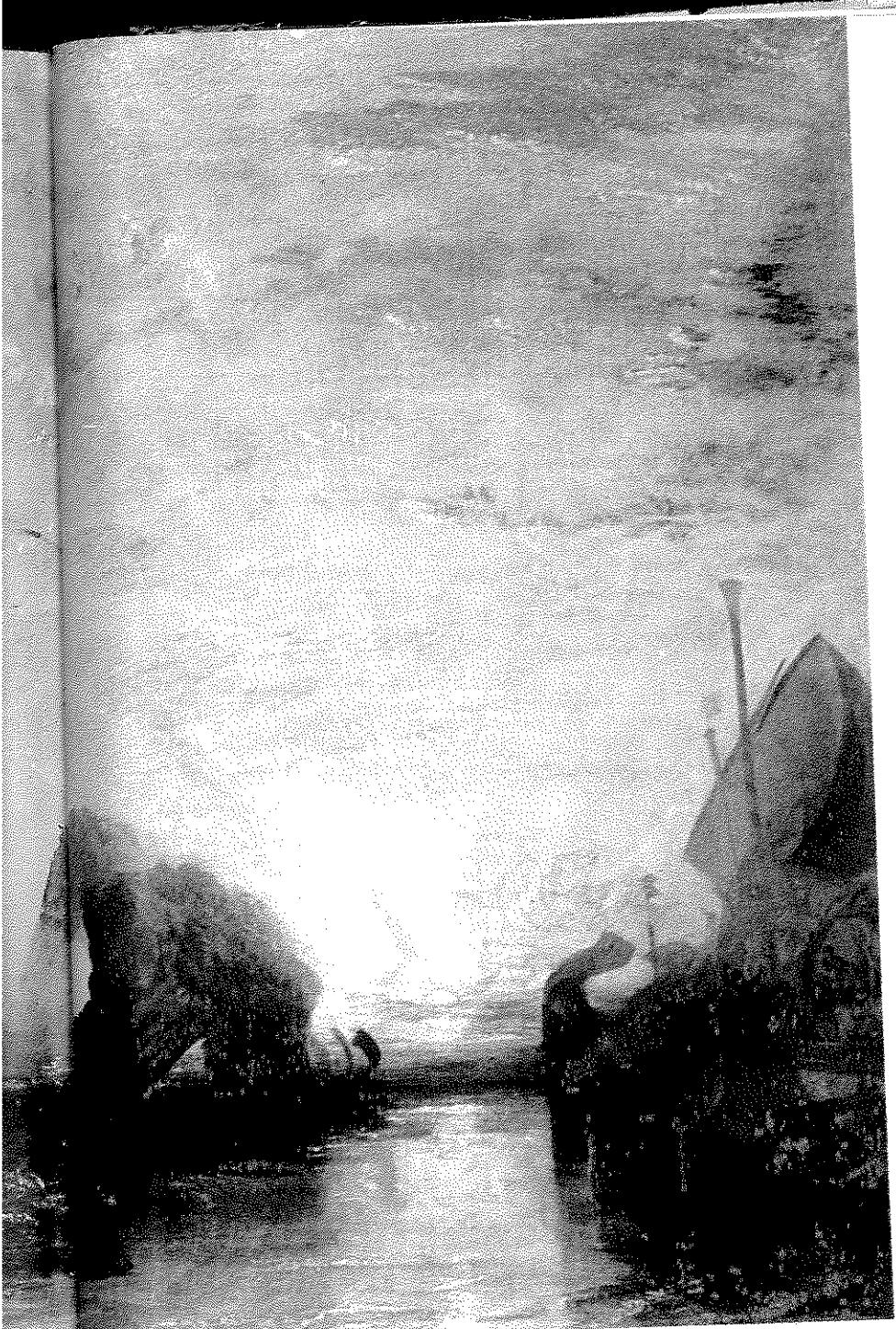
908. **pectoral fleece:** fleece on the animal's chest area.

920. **carrion rogue:** rotten tramp (carrion is decaying flesh).



as far off shore as shouted words would carry,
I sent a few back to the adversary:

- 945 'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a Caveman's hands?
How do you like the beating that we gave you,
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!'



Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus by
J.M.W. Turner (1829). Oil.

The National Gallery, London
Photo: The Granger Collection

- 950 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
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.
- 955 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
kicking the foam sternward, making head
960 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!'

'That tidal wave he made on the first throw
all but beached us.'

965

'All but stove us in!'

'Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he'll get the range and lob^o a boulder.'

967. lob: toss.

'Aye
He'll smash our timbers and our heads together!'

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
but let my anger flare and yelled:

970

'Cyclops,

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

975 At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

'Now comes the weird^o upon me, spoken of old.—
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,
a son of Euryalus; great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,

980 and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus's hands.

Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.

But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—

985 you put me down with wine, you blinded me.
Come back, Odysseus, and I'll treat you well,
praying the god of earthquake to befriend you—
his son I am, for he by his avowal

fathered me, and, if he will, he may

990 heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.'

976. weird: fate.

Few words I shouted in reply to him:

'If I could take your life I would and take
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!

995 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,
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:
1000 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
among his family in his fatherland,
1005 far be that day, and dark the years between.
Let him lose all companions, and return
under strange sail to bitter days at home.' "

Book 10: The Bag of Winds and the Witch Circe

Odysseus and his men land next on the island of Aeolia. There the wind king, Aeolus, does Odysseus a favor. He puts all the stormy winds in a bag so that they will not harm the Ithacans. The bull's hide bag containing the winds is wedged under Odysseus's afterdeck. During the voyage, the suspicious and curious sailors open the bag (thinking it contains treasure), and the evil winds roar up into hurricanes to plague the luckless Odysseus again.

After more of his men are killed and eaten by the gigantic cannibals called the Laestrygonians, Odysseus's ship lands on Aeaea, the home of the witch Circe. Here a party of twenty-two men, led by Eurylochus, goes off to explore the island. Odysseus is still speaking:

"In the wild wood they found an open glade,
around a smooth stone house—the hall of Circe—
1010 and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild
in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil.
None would attack—oh, it was strange, I tell you—
but switching their long tails they faced our men
like hounds, who look up when their master comes
1015 with tidbits for them—as he will—from table.
Humbly those wolves and lions with mighty paws
fawned on our men—who met their yellow eyes
and feared them.

In the entrance way they stayed
to listen there: inside her quiet house
they heard the goddess Circe.

1020 Low she sang
in her beguiling voice, while on her loom
she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright,
by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven.

- No one would speak, until Polites—most
 1025 faithful and likable of my officers, said:
 ‘Dear friends, no need for stealth: here’s a young weaver
 singing a pretty song to set the air
 a-tingle on these lawns and paven courts.
 Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her?’
- 1030 So reassured, they all cried out together,
 and she came swiftly to the shining doors
 to call them in. All but Eurylochus—
 who feared a snare—the innocents went after her.
 On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs,
 1035 while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley
 and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine,
 adding her own vile pinch, to make them lose
 desire or thought of our dear fatherland.
 Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them
 1040 with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty—
 bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all
 swinish now, though minds were still unchanged.
 So, squealing, in they went. And Circe tossed them
 acorns, mast,^o and cornel berries—fodder
 1045 for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth.
- Down to the ship Eurylochus came running
 to cry alarm, foul magic doomed his men!
 But working with dry lips to speak a word
 he could not, being so shaken; blinding tears
 1050 welled in his eyes; foreboding filled his heart.
 When we were frantic questioning him, at last
 we heard the tale: our friends were gone. . . .’

Odysseus leaves the ship and rushes to Circe’s hall. The god Hermes stops him to give him a plant that will act as an antidote to Circe’s power. (Homer calls it a molu; it might have been a kind of garlic.) Odysseus uses the molu and the witch, overcome by the plant’s magic, frees Odysseus’s men. Now, Circe, “loveliest of all immortals,” persuades Odysseus to stay, share her meat and wine, and restore his heart. After many seasons of feasting and other pleasures, Odysseus and his men beg Circe to help them get home:

- “‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
 Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
 1055 you shall not stay here longer against your will;
 but home you may not go
 unless you take a strange way round and come
 to the cold homes of Death and pale Persephone.^o
 You shall hear prophecy from the rapt^o shade

1044. *mast*: various kinds of nuts.

1058. *Persephone* (pər-sef’ə-nē): wife of Hades and Queen of the Underworld.
 1059. *rapt*: completely absorbed in his thoughts.

1060 of blind Teiresias of Thebes, forever charged with reason even among the dead; to him alone, of all the flitting ghosts, Persephone has given a mind undarkened.'

At this I felt a weight like stone within me,
1065 and, moaning, pressed my length against the bed,
with no desire to see the daylight more."

Book 11: The Land of the Dead

Odysseus is not alone among the ancient heroes who must descend to the Land of the Dead. The Sumerian hero Gilgamesh, the Greek heroes Theseus and Heracles, and many other heroes made similar journeys. It is as if the ancient myth-makers are telling us that the truly significant voyages in life involve journeys to the deepest parts of ourselves, and a confrontation with the darkest reality of all—death.

In the Land of the Dead, Odysseus seeks his destiny. The source of his information is Teiresias, the famous blind prophet from the city of Thebes, whose lack of external sight suggests the presence of true insight. Circe has told Odysseus exactly what rites he must perform to bring Teiresias up from the dead. Odysseus is speaking:

Ulysses descends into Hell. Fresco.

Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Photo: Art Resource



"Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead,
vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them
before she calved, at home in Ithaca,
1070 and burn the choice bits on the altar fire;
as for Teiresias, I swore to sacrifice
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,
1075 letting their black blood stream into the wellpit.
Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus,
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,
1080 battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear.
From every side they came and sought the pit
with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.
But presently I gave command to my officers
to flay^o those sheep the bronze cut down, and make
1085 burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—
to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone.
Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep
the surging phantoms from the bloody pit
till I should know the presence of Teiresias. . . .
1090 Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes came forward
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,
1095 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,
1100 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,
1105 not to be shaken from your track, implacable,^o
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 Thrinakia^o first
1110 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.

1084. **flay:** strip of skin.

1105. **implacable:** inflexible, not to be pacified.

1109. **Thrinakia** (thri·nā'kē·ə): island where the sun god Helios pastured his sacred cattle.

Avoid those kine,^o hold fast to your intent,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
1115 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
1120 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,
1125 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
1130 can tell you how: some passerby will say,
'What winnowing fan^o 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,
1135 and carry out pure hecatombs^o 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,
1140 your country folk in blessed peace around you.
And all this shall be just as I foretell.'

When he had done, I said at once,

'Teiresias,

my life runs on then as the gods have spun it.
But come, now, tell me this; make this thing clear:
1145 I see my mother's ghost among the dead
sitting in silence near the blood. Not once
has she glanced this way toward her son, nor spoken.
Tell me, my lord,
may she in some way come to know my presence?'

To this he answered:

'I shall make it clear
1150 in a few words and simply. Any dead man
whom you allow to enter where the blood is
will speak to you, and speak the truth; but those
deprived will grow remote again and fade.'
When he had prophesied, Teiresias's shade
1155 retired lordly to the halls of Death. . . ."

1113. *Kine* and *beeves* (see line 1115) are
old-fashioned plural words for cattle (cows
and oxen).

1131. *winnowing fan*: a device used to
separate wheat from chaff. (These people
would never have seen an oar.)

1135. *hecatombs*: sacrifices of one hundred
cattle.

Now Odysseus meets a familiar ghost, his mother Anticleia, who died of a broken heart when her son failed to return from Troy.

“I bit my lip,
rising perplexed, with longing to embrace her,
and tried three times, putting my arms around her,
1160 but she went sifting through my hands, impalpable
as shadows are, and wavering like a dream.
Now this embittered all the pain I bore,
and I cried in the darkness:

“O my mother,
will you not stay, be still, here in my arms,
1165 may we not, in this place of Death, as well,
hold one another, touch with love, and taste
salt tears’ relief, the twinge of welling tears?
Or is this all hallucination, sent
against me by the iron queen, Persephone,
to make me groan again?”

1170 My noble mother
answered quickly:

“O my child—alas,
most sorely tried of men—great Zeus’s daughter,
Persephone, knits no illusion for you.
All mortals meet this judgment when they die.
1175 No flesh and bone are here, none bound by sinew,
since the bright-hearted pyre^o consumed them down—
the white bones long exanimate^o—to ash;
dreamlike the soul flies, insubstantial.

You must crave sunlight soon.

1180 Note all things strange
seen here, to tell your lady in after days.””

The afterlife envisioned by Homer was not a happy place of rest. This society, which so relished the joys, accomplishments, and passions of the physical life, found little pleasure in an eternal life among mere shadows. After many more encounters in the Land of the Dead, Odysseus returns to Circe’s island for further instructions.

1176. **pyre:** a huge fire on which a body is burned in a funeral rite.

1177. **exanimate:** lifeless.

Book 12: The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis

The witch Circe is speaking. She warns Odysseus of the perils that await him—the forces that would prevent him from achieving his destiny.

"'Listen with care

to this, now, and a god will arm your mind.
Square in your ship's path are Sirens, crying
beauty to bewitch men coasting by;
1185 woe to the innocent who hears that sound!
He will not see his lady nor his children
in joy, crowding about him, home from sea;
the Sirens will sing his mind away
on their sweet meadow lolling. There are bones
1190 of dead men rotting in a pile beside them
and flayed skins shrivel around the spot.

Steer wide;
keep well to seaward; plug your oarsmen's ears
with beeswax kneaded soft; none of the rest
should hear that song.

But if you wish to listen,
1195 let the men tie you in the lugger, hand
and foot, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
so you may hear those harpies^o thrilling voices;
shout as you will, begging to be untied,
your crew must only twist more line around you
1200 and keep their stroke up, till the singers fade. . . .'"

The next peril lies between two headlands with sheer cliffs. Circe continues:

"'. . . That is the den of Scylla, where she yaps
abominably, a newborn whelp's^o cry,
though she is huge and monstrous. God or man,
no one could look on her in joy. Her legs—
1205 and there are twelve—are like great tentacles,
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks
are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
with triple serried^o rows of fangs and deep
gullets of black death. Half her length, she sways
1210 her heads in air, outside her horrid cleft,
hunting the sea around that promontory
for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game
thundering Amphitrite^o feeds in thousands.
And no ship's company can claim
1215 to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,
from every ship, one man for every gullet.

The opposite point seems more a tongue of land
you'd touch with a good bowshot, at the narrows.
A great wild fig, a shaggy mass of leaves,
1220 grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below
to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times

1197. **harpies:** monstrous winged women,
greedy for victims.

1202. **whelp's:** puppy's.

1208. **serried:** dense, compact.

1213. **Amphitrite** (am·fi·trīt'ē): goddess of
the sea, wife of Poseidon.

from dawn to dusk she spews it up
and sucks it down again three times, a whirling
maelstrom;^o if you come upon her then
1225 the god who makes earth tremble could not save you.
No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship
through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn
six men than lose them all, and the ship, too. . . .

Then you will coast Thrinakia, the island
1230 where Helios's cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks
of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven,
with fifty beasts in each.

No lambs are dropped,
or calves, and these fat cattle never die. . . .

Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts
1235 intent upon your course for home,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
for ship and crew.'"

The Ithacans set off. But Odysseus never reveals to them Circe's last prophecy—that he will be the only survivor of their long journey. Odysseus is still speaking to Alcinous's court:

"The crew being now silent before me, I
addressed them, sore at heart:

1240 '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,
1245 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
1250 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,
1255 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.

1224. maelstrom; whirlpool.

The crew were on their feet

- 1260 briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,
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—
1265 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^o
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
1270 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. . . .

1268. *plumb*: perfectly vertical.

Ulysses and the Sirens (c. 475 B.C.).
Attic red vase.

The British Museum



The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water
1275 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,
and passed more line about, to hold me still.

1280 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
the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;
then set me free.

1285 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.
Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking
1290 wild alongside till the ship lost way,
with no oarblades to drive her through the water.

Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern,
trying to put heart into them, standing over
every oarsman, saying gently,

'Friends,
1295 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
to find a way out for us?

Now I say
1300 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 oarshafts in your hands, and lay back
hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.
1305 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^o and the smoke;
steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we
1310 fetch up in the smother,^o and you drown us.'

That was all, and it brought them round to action.
But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.
They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,

1308. combers: waves.

1310. smother: turmoil.

1315 to roll for cover under the decking. Circe's bidding against arms had slipped my mind, so I tied on my cuirass^o and took up two heavy spears, then made my way along to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there,
1320 the monster of the gray rock, harboring torment for my friends. I strained my eyes upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,

in travail,^o sobbing, gaining on the current, 1325 we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire gorge^o of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron seething over intense fire, when the mixture suddenly heaves and rises.

1330 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, heard
the rock bellowing all around, and dark
sand raged on the bottom far below.
1335 My men all blanched^o against the gloom, our eyes were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,
whisking six of my best men from the ship.

1340 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.

A man surf-casting on a point of rock
1345 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

were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.
1350 She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den, in the dire grapple,^o reaching still for me—and deathly pity ran me through at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered, questing the passes of the strange sea.

We rowed on.

1355 The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too, and Scylla dropped astern.

1317. cuirass (kwi·ras'): armor for the breast and back.

1324. travail: agony, pain.

1327. gorge: throat and jaws.

1336. blanched: grew pale.

1351. dire grapple: terrible fight.

Then we were coasting

the noble island of the god, where grazed
those cattle with wide brows, and bounteous flocks
of Helios, lord of noon, who rides high heaven.

- 1360 From the black ship, far still at sea, I heard
the lowing of the cattle winding home
and sheep bleating; and heard, too, in my heart
the words of blind Teiresias of Thebes
and Circe of Aeaea: both forbade me
1365 the island of the world's delight, the Sun. . . ."

Because they are dying of starvation, Odysseus's men disobey his orders, and shortly after they land, they eat the sacred cattle of the sun god, Helios. When they set sail again, they are punished by death—a thunderbolt from Zeus destroys their boat and all the men drown. Only Odysseus survives. He makes his way to Calypso's island, where we met him originally in Book 5. Odysseus the storyteller has brought us up to date. He can now rest.

Responding to the Epic

Analyzing the Epic

Identifying Facts

1. Describe the **internal conflict** Odysseus and his men encounter in the land of the Lotus Eaters.
2. Describe three strategies that the wily Odysseus uses to outwit the Cyclops Polyphemus. What mistake does the hero make near the end of the Cyclops adventure?
3. What curse concludes the Cyclops adventure—**foreshadowing** trouble ahead for Odysseus?
4. What are Circe's powers? How does Circe first treat Odysseus and his men?
5. Homer's audience would have known who Teiresias was and they would have known that the prophet could not possibly be wrong. Summarize all that Odysseus finds out from Teiresias about his own future.
6. What does Odysseus's mother tell him about death and the soul?
7. Describe the threats posed by the Sirens and by Scylla and Charybdis. How does Odysseus survive these perils?
8. What happens to his men?

Interpreting Meanings

9. What **simile** does Homer use to help his audience see what happens when Scylla whisks six men from Odysseus's ship? What do Odysseus's feelings here tell you about his **character**?
10. It is important to remember, as we listen to Odysseus's adventures, that the *Odyssey* was used as part of Greek children's education for centuries after the poem was written down. How could the adventure with the Lotus Eaters teach them about the temptation to "forget" one's troubles by dropping out? How could the Cyclops adventure be used to teach the dangers of violence and of curiosity?
11. Explain what we can learn about the deceptive nature of beauty from the Circe episode.
12. Odysseus considers the Cyclopes to be barbarians. Describe Polyphemus's home and his way of life, especially his attitude toward the treatment of guests. Explain how the Cyclopes and their society contrast with what we have seen on Ithaca and on Pylos and Sparta.

13. Recall that Books 9–12 of the *Odyssey* are a long narration delivered by Odysseus at the Phaeacian court of King Alcinous. As he tells his adventures, do you ever sense that Odysseus is boastful or arrogant, or do you think he is just being confident? What incidents support your evaluation of his **character**?
14. Books 9–12 of the *Odyssey* tell of Odysseus's most famous adventures; in fact, this is all that many readers know of the *Odyssey*. Why do you think these particular adventures continue to fascinate people? How did you feel about these favorite parts of the *Odyssey*?

Writing About the Epic

A Creative Response

1. **Personifying a Force of Nature.** Homer describes a whirlpool and a dangerous rock as if they were living monsters. In this sense, Scylla and Charybdis are **personified**: they are inanimate (non-living), but the poet describes them as if they have life. In a paragraph, personify some other violent force of nature. Use details that suggest that the force is a monster with destructive intentions. You might describe one of these forces:

A volcano
A tornado
A tidal wave
Thunder and lightning
Snow

Include details that tell how the monster looks; what it sounds like; what it hunts for; and what happens to people it captures.

2. **Narrating the Fulfillment of a Prophecy.** In lines 1122–1141, the prophet Teiresias tells Odysseus about his future. Several writers after Homer have tried to imagine exactly what this mysterious prophecy means. Write your own story based on this prophecy. Tell **what** Odysseus did, **where** he went, and **when** it happened. In your story be sure to include all the details contained in the prophecy.

A Critical Response

3. **Comparing Stories.** The story of Odysseus versus the Cyclops has parallels in other stories told throughout the ages. In a paragraph, compare this story to another one you have read. Before

you write, fill out a chart like the following, to help you see the ways in which the stories are alike and different:

	Odyssey	Other story
A small person vs. a giant		
Intelligence vs. brute strength		
A surprise upset victory		

Analyzing Language and Vocabulary

The Prefixes *Poly-* and *Mono-*

One of the most useful of the many Greek prefixes adapted into the English language is the prefix *poly-*. We find it used in the *Odyssey* in the name given to the monster Cyclops, Polyphemus. The prefix can mean “many or more than one,” “excessive,” or “of many kinds or parts.” Use a dictionary to answer the following questions:

1. What word uses *poly-* to name a kind of fabric manufactured from several resins?
2. What word uses *poly-* to describe a person who has more than one husband or wife at the same time?
3. Why do you think a growth in the nasal passage or colon is called a *polyp*?
4. What word uses *poly-* to name a belief in many gods?

Use a dictionary to write out the definition of each italicized word in the following sentences:

1. The Lower East Side is a *polyglot* neighborhood.
2. Hawaii is part of *Polynesia*.
3. The geometry teacher drew a *polygon* on the chalkboard.

The prefix *mono-* is opposite in meaning to *poly-*; it means “one,” “alone,” or “single.” Use a dictionary to answer these questions:

1. What word uses *mono-* to name the worship of one God?
2. Why is the infection called *mononucleosis* so named?
3. What word uses *mono-* to describe people who have only one spouse at a time?

Part Three: The Return of the Hero

In Book 13, Odysseus, laden with gifts, is returned in secret to Ithaca in one of the magically swift Phaeacian ships. In Ithaca, Athena herself appears to the hero. She advises him how to proceed and disguises him as a beggar. Notice that this new hero of the postwar age of disillusionment will achieve success not only by physical power but also by guile and wisdom.

In Book 14, Odysseus, in his beggar disguise, finds his way to the house of his old and trusty swineherd, Eumeus. Eumeus is the very image of faithfulness in a servant—a quality much prized by Homer's society. The introduction of the so-called servant class as important actors is unusual in epic poetry, and it indicates Homer's originality. Odysseus is simply but politely entertained in the swineherd's hut, but he remains disguised from Eumeus.

In Book 15, we go back to Telemachus, who is still with Menelaus and Helen. The plots of the father and the son are

*Ulysses disguised as a beggar.
Attic red figure vase.*

Etruscan Museum, Chiusi. Photo: Art Resource



now about to be brought together. Athena appears to the boy and advises him to return home. She warns him that the evil suitors plan to ambush him. Telemachus boards ship for home, lands secretly on Ithaca, and heads toward the cottage of the swineherd. As father and son were moved closer and closer together, the suspense in the audience must have become great. Now Homer is ready for what could be the most dramatic moment in the epic.

Book 16: The Meeting of Father and Son

But there were two men in the mountain hut—
Odysseus and the swineherd. At first light
blowing their fire up, they cooked their breakfast
and sent their lads out, driving herds to root
in the tall timber.

1370 When Telemachus came,
the wolvish troop of watchdogs only fawned on him
as he advanced. Odysseus heard them go
and heard the light crunch of a man's footfall—
at which he turned quickly to say:

"Eumaeus,

1375 here is one of your crew come back, or maybe
another friend: the dogs are out there snuffling
belly down; not one has even growled.
I can hear footsteps—"

But before he finished
his tall son stood at the door.

The swineherd

1380 rose in surprise, letting a bowl and jug
tumble from his fingers. Going forward,
he kissed the young man's head, his shining eyes
and both hands, while his own tears brimmed and fell.
Think of a man whose dear and only son,
1385 born to him in exile, reared with labor,
has lived ten years abroad and now returns:
how would that man embrace his son! Just so
the herdsman clapped his arms around Telemachus
and covered him with kisses—for he knew
1390 the lad had got away from death. He said:

"Light of my days, Telemachus,
you made it back! When you took ship for Pylos
I never thought to see you here again.
Come in, dear child, and let me feast my eyes;
1395 here you are, home from the distant places!
How rarely, anyway, you visit us,

your own men, and your own woods and pastures!
Always in the town, a man would think
you loved the suitors' company, those dogs!"

1400 Telemachus with his clear candor said:

"I am with you, Uncle.^o See now, I have come
because I wanted to see you first, to hear from you
if Mother stayed at home—or is she married
off to someone, and Odysseus's bed

1405 left empty for some gloomy spider's weaving?"

Gently the forester replied to this:

"At home indeed your mother is, poor lady
still in the women's hall. Her nights and days
are wearied out with grieving."

Stepping back

1410 he took the bronze-shod lance, and the young prince
entered the cabin over the worn door stone.

Odysseus moved aside, yielding his couch,
but from across the room Telemachus checked him:
"Friend, sit down; we'll find another chair

1415 in our own hut. Here is the man to make one!"

The swineherd, when the quiet man sank down,
built a new pile of evergreens and fleeces—
a couch for the dear son of great Odysseus—
then gave them trenchers^o of good meat, left over

1420 from the roast pork of yesterday, and heaped up
willow baskets full of bread, and mixed
an ivy bowl of honey-hearted wine.

Then he in turn sat down, facing Odysseus,
their hands went out upon the meat and drink

1425 as they fell to, ridding themselves of hunger . . .

1401. Uncle: here, an affectionate greeting.

1419. trenchers: wooden platters.

Not realizing that the stranger is his father, Telemachus agrees to protect him as best he can. But he tells the beggar that he cannot stay in the palace hall because he will be abused by the drunken suitors.

The swineherd is sent to Penelope with news of her son's return. And now it seems that even Athena cannot stand the suspense any longer. She turns to Odysseus, in beggar's rags:

She tipped her golden wand upon the man,
making his cloak pure white, and the knit tunic
fresh around him. Lithe^o and young she made him,
ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard

1430 no longer gray upon his chin. And she
withdrew when she had done. . .

1428. Lithe: limber.

Then Lord Odysseus

reappeared—and his son was thunderstruck.
Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away
as though it were a god, and whispered:

"Stranger,

1435 you are no longer what you were just now!
Your cloak is new; even your skin! You are
one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!
Be kind to us, we'll make you fair oblation^o
and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!"

1440 The noble and enduring man replied:

"No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.
I am that father whom your boyhood lacked
and suffered pain for lack of. I am he."

Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks
as he embraced his son.

Only Telemachus,

1445 uncomprehending, wild
with incredulity,^o cried out:

"You cannot

be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits
conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!
1450 No man of woman born could work these wonders
by his own craft, unless a god came into it
with ease to turn him young or old at will.
I swear you were in rags and old,
and here you stand like one of the immortals!"

1455 Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear
and said:

"This is not princely, to be swept
away by wonder at your father's presence.
No other Odysseus will ever come,
for he and I are one, the same; his bitter
1460 fortune and his wanderings are mine.
Twenty years gone, and I am back again
on my own island. . . ."

Then, throwing

his arms around this marvel of a father,
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears
1465 rose from the wells of longing in both men,
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering
as those of the great taloned hawk,
whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.
So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,
1470 and might have gone on weeping so till sundown. . . .

1438. *oblation*: offering of a sacrifice.

1447. *incredulity*: disbelief.

Responding to the Epic

Analyzing the Epic

Identifying Facts

1. After twenty years, Odysseus finally returns in secret to Ithaca. Once there, whom does he visit and how is he disguised?
2. What **images** in this little episode help us feel as if we were there by appealing to our senses of sight, hearing, and even taste?
3. How does Athena transform Odysseus just before he reveals his identity to Telemachus?

Interpreting Meanings

4. We feel **irony** when a situation seems inappropriate or just the reverse of what we expected. Why is it ironic that Odysseus should return to his kingdom dressed in beggar's rags?
5. **Dramatic irony** in particular refers to a situation in which the readers (or the audience) know more than the characters in the story (or play)

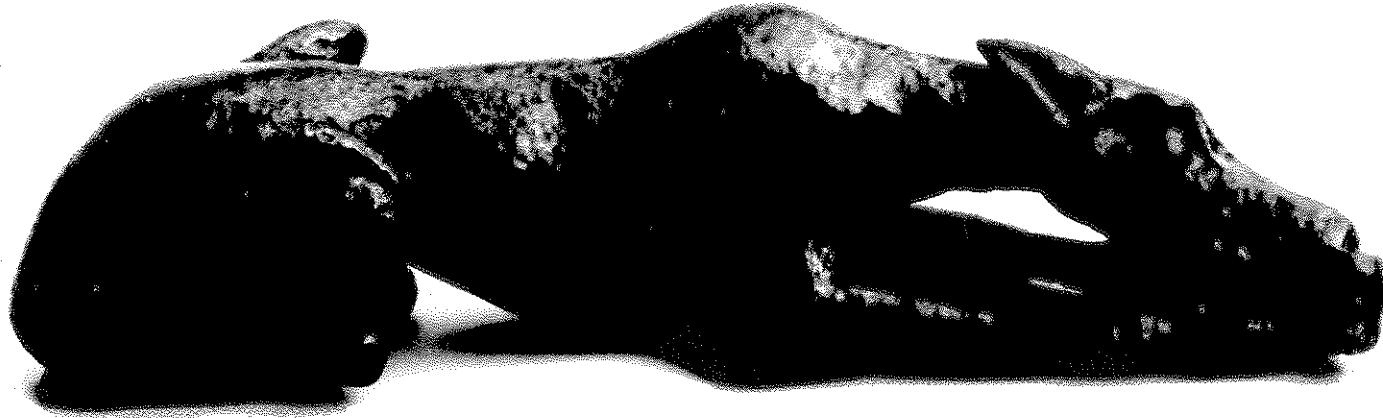
know. Where do we get a sense of great dramatic irony in this episode in the swineherd's hut?

6. It is rare in ancient epics for heroic characters to have much to do with ordinary people, but in the *Odyssey*, servants play important roles. How do Odysseus and Telemachus treat Eumeus? What might Homer be trying to teach us through that treatment?
7. What **simile** describes the feelings of Odysseus and his son as they embrace after twenty years? How would you describe exactly what the father and his son are feeling here?
8. Do you know of any other stories or any movies or TV shows in which the hero (or heroine) appears in a disguise? What do these heroes (or heroines) usually learn while they are in the disguise?
9. Suppose Odysseus were a modern general who finally got home after an absence of twenty years. How do you think he would have approached his old home—if he had had to face the problems that exist in Ithaca?

Book 17: The Beggar and the Faithful Dog

Telemachus returns to the family compound and is greeted tearfully by his mother and his old nurse, Eurycleia. A soothsayer tells Penelope that Odysseus is alive and is already in Ithaca. The suspense builds, as Odysseus, once again disguised as a beggar, finally returns to his home accompanied only by the swineherd. He has been away for twenty years. Only one creature recognizes him.

An old hound, lying near, pricked up his ears
and lifted up his muzzle. This was Argos,
trained as a puppy by Odysseus,
but never taken on a hunt before
1475 his master sailed for Troy. The young men, afterward,
hunted wild goats with him, and hare, and deer,
but he had grown old in his master's absence.
Treated as rubbish now, he lay at last
upon a mass of dung before the gates—



1480 manure of mules and cows, piled there until
fieldhands could spread it on the king's estate.
Abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies,
old Argos lay.

But when he knew he heard
Odysseus's voice nearby, he did his best
1485 to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears,
having no strength to move nearer his master.
And the man looked away,
wiping a salt tear from his cheek; but he
hid this from Eumeus. Then he said:

Hound gnawing a bone
(Greek, 2nd century B.C.). Bronze.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

1490 "I marvel that they leave this hound to lie
here on the dung pile;
he would have been a fine dog, from the look of him,
though I can't say as to his power and speed
when he was young. You find the same good build
1495 in house dogs, table dogs landowners keep
all for style."

And you replied, Eumaeus:
"A hunter owned him—but the man is dead
in some far place. If this old hound could show
the form he had when Lord Odysseus left him,
1500 going to Troy, you'd see him swift and strong.
He never shrank from any savage thing
he'd brought to bay in the deep woods; on the scent
no other dog kept up with him. Now misery
has him in leash. His owner died abroad,
1505 and here the women slaves will take no care of him.
You know how servants are: without a master
they have no will to labor, or excel.
For Zeus who views the wide world takes away
half the manhood of a man, that day
1510 he goes into captivity and slavery."

Eumaeus crossed the court and went straight forward
into the megaron^o among the suitors;
but death and darkness in that instant closed
the eyes of Argos, who had seen his master,
1515 Odysseus, after twenty years.

1512. megaron: the great hall, or central room.

In the hall, the beggar is taunted by the suitors, but Penelope supports him. She has heard that the ragged stranger claims to have news of her husband. Unaware of who this beggar is, she invites him to visit her later in the night to talk about Odysseus.

In Book 18, Penelope appears among the suitors and chastises Telemachus for allowing the stranger to be abused. She certainly must have warmed her husband's heart by doing this and by further singing the praises of her lost Odysseus.

Book 19: Penelope, the Beggar, and the Nurse

After the suitors depart for the night and after Odysseus and Telemachus discuss their strategy, the wily hero goes as appointed to Penelope with the idea of testing her and her maids. (Remember that some of the maids have not been loyal to the

household and have worked with the suitors against them.) The faithful wife receives her disguised husband. We can imagine the tension Homer's audience must have felt. Would Odysseus be recognized?

Willing hands

brought a smooth bench, and dropped a fleece upon it.
Here the adventurer and king sat down;
then carefully, Penelope began:

- 1520 "Friend, let me ask you first of all:
who are you, where do you come from, of what nation
and parents were you born?"

And he replied:

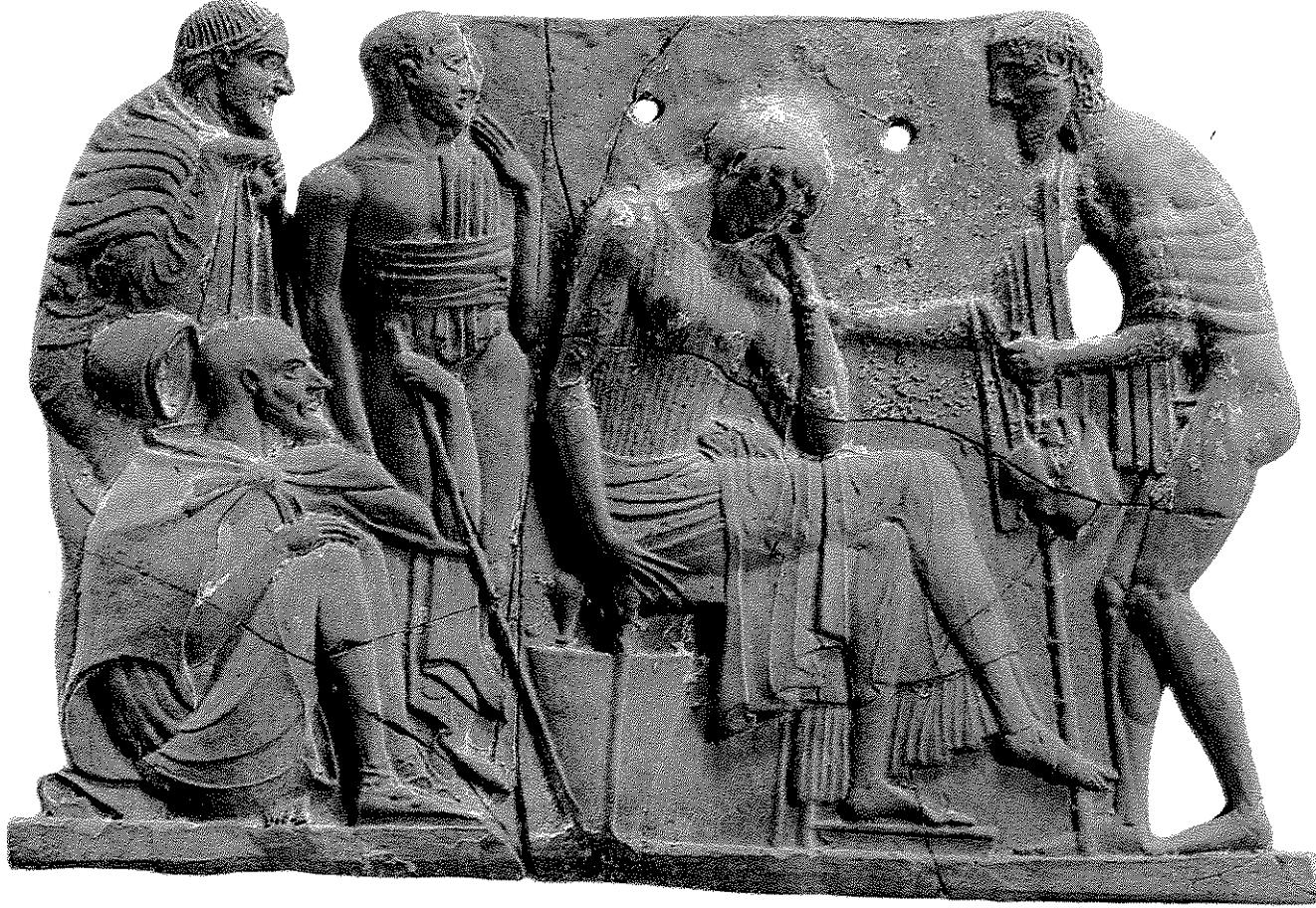
- "My lady, never a man in the wide world
should have a fault to find with you. Your name
1525 has gone out under heaven like the sweet
honor of some god-fearing king, who rules
in equity over the strong: his black lands bear
both wheat and barley, fruit trees laden bright,
new lambs at lambing time—and the deep sea
1530 gives great hauls of fish by his good strategy,
so that his folk fare well.

O my dear lady,

- this being so, let it suffice to ask me
of other matters—not my blood, my homeland.
Do not enforce me to recall my pain.
1535 My heart is sore; but I must not be found
sitting in tears here, in another's house:
it is not well forever to be grieving.
One of the maids might say—or you might think—
I had got maudlin over cups of wine."

And Penelope replied:

- 1540 "Stranger, my looks,
my face, my carriage, were soon lost or faded
when the Achaeans crossed the sea to Troy,
Odysseus my lord among the rest.
If he returned, if he were here to care for me,
1545 I might be happily renowned!
But grief instead heaven sent me—years of pain.
Sons of the noblest families on the islands,
Doulikhion, Same, wooded Zakynthos,
with native Ithacans, are here to court me,
1550 against my wish; and they consume this house.



Can I give proper heed to guest or suppliant
or herald on the realm's affairs?

How could I?

wasted with longing for Odysseus, while here
they press for marriage. . .

- I555 And now, as matters stand at last,
I have no strength left to evade a marriage,
cannot find any further way; my parents
urge it upon me, and my son
will not stand by while they eat up his property.
- I560 He comprehends it, being a man full grown,
able to oversee the kind of house
Zeus would endow with honor.

But you too
confide in me, tell me your ancestry.
You were not born of mythic oak or stone."

Return of Ulysses (5th century B.C.).
Terracotta relief.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Fletcher Fund

Here the beggar spins a yarn about his origins, pretending that he has met Odysseus on his travels. He cannot resist praising

the "lost" hero, and he does so successfully enough to bring tears to Penelope's eyes. We can be sure that this does not displease the beggar.

- 1565 Now all these lies he made appear so truthful
she wept as she sat listening. The skin
of her pale face grew moist the way pure snow
softens and glistens on the mountains, thawed
by Southwind after powdering from the West,
1570 and, as the snow melts, mountain streams run full:
so her white cheeks were wetted by these tears
shed for her lord—and he close by her side.
Imagine how his heart ached for his lady,
his wife in tears; and yet he never blinked;
1575 his eyes might have been made of horn or iron
for all that she could see. He had this trick—
wept, if he willed to, inwardly.

Well, then,

as soon as her relieving tears were shed
she spoke once more:

"I think that I shall say, friend,

- 1580 give me some proof, if it is really true
that you were host in that place to my husband
with his brave men, as you declare. Come, tell me
the quality of his clothing, how he looked,
and some particular of his company."

- 1585 Odysseus answered, and his mind ranged far:

"Lady, so long a time now lies between,
it is hard to speak of it. Here is the twentieth year
since that man left the island of my father.
But I shall tell what memory calls to mind.

- 1590 A purple cloak, and fleecy, he had on—
a double thick one. Then, he wore a brooch
made of pure gold with twin tubes for the prongs,
and on the face a work of art: a hunting dog
pinning a spotted fawn in agony

- 1595 between his forepaws—wonderful to see
how being gold, and nothing more, he bit
the golden deer convulsed, with wild hooves flying.
Odysseus's shirt I noticed, too—a fine
closefitting tunic like dry onion skin,
1600 so soft it was, and shiny. . . ."

Now hearing these details—minutely true—
she felt more strangely moved, and tears flowed
until she had tasted her salt grief again.

The story-telling beggar reveals that he has heard Odysseus is alive and is even now sailing for home. Penelope calls for the old nurse and asks her to wash the guest's feet—a sign of respect and honor. What follows is a scene of great emotional suspense. Eurycleia speaks to the supposed beggar:

1605 "My heart within me stirs,
mindful of something. Listen to what I say:
strangers have come here, many through the years,
but no one ever came, I swear, who seemed
so like Odysseus—body, voice, and limbs—
as you do."

Ready for this, Odysseus answered:

1610 "Old woman, that is what they say. All who have seen
the two of us remark how like we are,
as you yourself have said, and rightly, too."

Then he kept still, while the old nurse filled up
her basin glittering in firelight; she poured
cold water in, then hot.

1615 But Lord Odysseus
whirled suddenly from the fire to face the dark.
The scar: he had forgotten that. She must not
handle his scarred thigh, or the game was up.
But when she bared her lord's leg, bending near,
she knew the groove at once.

1620 An old wound
a boar's white tusk inflicted, on Parnassus^o
years ago. . . .

1625 This was the scar the old nurse recognized;
she traced it under her spread hands, then let go,
and into the basin fell the lower leg
making the bronze clang, sloshing the water out.
Then joy and anguish seized her heart; her eyes
filled up with tears; her throat closed, and she whispered,
with hand held out to touch his chin:

1630 "Oh yes!
*You are Odysseus! Ah, dear child! I could not
see you until now—not till I knew
my master's very body with my hands!"*

1621. *Parnassus*: a mountain in central Greece.

Quickly, Odysseus swears Eurycleia to secrecy. Meanwhile, Athena has cast a spell on Penelope so that she has taken no notice of this recognition scene. Penelope adds to the suspense by deciding on a test for the suitors on the next day. Without realizing it, she now has given Odysseus a way to defeat the suitors.

Responding to the Epic

Analyzing the Epic

Identifying Facts

1. What is Argos's condition when Odysseus sees him? In telling us how Odysseus's dog is kept, what is Homer also telling us about conditions in Ithaca?
2. Odysseus continues to maintain his disguise by telling "lying tales"—even to his wife. What yarn does the "beggar" tell Penelope? How does he describe Odysseus (and why do you think he adds these details)?
3. Clever as he is, Odysseus slips up when Eurykleia bathes his feet. By what hidden sign does she recognize him?

Interpreting Meanings

4. What do we learn about the **character** of Penelope in her interview with the "beggar"?
5. What do we learn about the **character** of Odysseus in his interview with his wife?
6. Why do you think Odysseus continues to keep his identity hidden from his wife?
7. How is Penelope's interview with the "beggar" **ironic**?
8. The scene between Odysseus and Penelope is one of the most famous scenes in literature. Some readers have suggested that Penelope actually knows the identity of the beggar by now but is not revealing it. What do you think about this interpretation? Support your answer with specific reference to the epic.
9. The *Odyssey* is centuries and centuries old. Are the human feelings revealed by the people in the *Odyssey* still important to people today? Are the needs of people still exactly the same today? Explain.

Analyzing Language and Vocabulary

The Epithet

An **epithet** is an adjective or phrase used to characterize someone. Good King Wenceslaus, Katherine the Great, The Brat Pack, Land of the Free—these epithets are used to characterize a king, a queen, a group of actors, and a country. The word *epithet* means "put on" or "added."

Homer uses many epithets as formulas to characterize places and people. Penelope, for example, is frequently referred to as "faithful Penelope," and we are instantly reminded of her outstanding character trait.

The following questions focus on some of Homer's famous epithets.

1. Odysseus is called "versatile Odysseus," "wily Odysseus," "the strategist," and "the noble and enduring man." What does each italicized word mean?
2. Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld, is called "the iron queen." What does the word *iron* suggest about the realm she rules over and her own character? (Think of how different she would seem if she were called "the golden queen.")
3. Telemachus is called "clear-headed Telemachus." How would you define "clear-headed"?
4. One of Homer's most famous epithets is the formula description "the wine-dark sea." Many scholars and even scientists have argued about this description. Since wine is either red or white or yellowish, and the sea is none of these hues, the description is puzzling. Some say that the ancient Greeks diluted their wine with water and that the alkaline in the water changed the color of the wine from red to blue. Others think the sea was covered with red-colored marine algae. Still others even suggest that the Greeks were color blind. But Robert Fitzgerald, the great translator of the *Odyssey*, thought about the question when he was on a ship sailing into the Aegean Sea:

"The contrast of the bare arid baked land against the sea gave the sea such a richness of hue that I felt as though we were sailing through a bowl of dye. The depth of hue of the water was like the depth of hue of a good red wine."

How would you explain Homer's "wine-dark sea"?

Book 21: The Test of the Great Bow

Like many unwilling princesses of myth, fairy tale, and legend, Penelope proposes an impossible task for those who wish to marry her. By so doing, she causes the bloody events that lead to the restoration of her true husband. The test will involve Odysseus's huge bow, which no one could string except Odysseus himself. Odysseus had left his bow home in Ithaca twenty years ago.

- Now the queen reached the storeroom door and halted.
Here was an oaken sill, cut long ago
1635 and sanded clean and bedded true. Foursquare
the doorjambs and the shining doors were set
by the careful builder. Penelope untied the strap
around the curving handle, pushed her hook
into the slit, aimed at the bolts inside
1640 and shot them back. Then came a rasping sound
as those bright doors the key had sprung gave way—
a bellow like a bull's vaunt^o in a meadow—
followed by her light footfall entering
over the plank floor. Herb-scented robes
1645 lay there in chests, but the lady's milkwhite arms
went up to lift the bow down from a peg
in its own polished bowcase.

Now Penelope

sank down, holding the weapon on her knees,
and drew her husband's great bow out, and sobbed
1650 and bit her lip and let the salt tears flow.
Then back she went to face the crowded hall
tremendous bow in hand, and on her shoulder hung
the quiver spiked with coughing death. Behind her
maids bore a basket full of axheads, bronze
1655 and iron implements for the master's game.
Thus in her beauty she approached the suitors,
and near a pillar of the solid roof
she paused, her shining veil across her cheeks,
her maids on either hand and still,
then spoke to the banqueters:

- 1660 "My lords, hear me:
suitors indeed, you recommended this house
to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband
being long gone, long out of mind. You found
no justification for yourselves—none
1665 except your lust to marry me. Stand up, then:
we now declare a contest for that prize.
Here is my lord Odysseus's hunting bow.

O R T
C H A P T E R
T H E
E L E M E N T S
O F
T H E
E P I C

1642. *vaunt*: boast.

- Bend and string it if you can. Who sends an arrow
through iron ax-helve sockets,^o twelve in line?
1670 I join my life with his, and leave this place, my home,
my rich and beautiful bridal house, forever
to be remembered, though I dream it only."

Many of the suitors boldly try the bow, but not a man can even bend it enough to string it.

- Two men had meanwhile left the hall:
swineherd and cowherd, in companionship,
1675 one downcast as the other. But Odysseus
followed them outdoors, outside the court,
and coming up said gently:

"You, herdsman,
and you, too, swineherd, I could say a thing to you,
or should I keep it dark?

- No, no; speak,
1680 my heart tells me. Would you be men enough
to stand by Odysseus if he came back?
Suppose he dropped out of a clear sky, as I did?
Suppose some god should bring him?
Would you bear arms for him, or for the suitors?"

The cowherd said:

- 1685 "Ah, let the master come!
Father Zeus, grant our old wish! Some courier
guide him back! Then judge what stuff is in me
and how I manage arms!"

- Likewise Eumeus
fell to praying all heaven for his return,
1690 so that Odysseus, sure at least of these,
told them:

- "I am at home, for I am he.
I bore adversities, but in the twentieth year
I am ashore in my own land. I find
the two of you, alone among my people,
1695 longed for my coming. Prayers I never heard
except your own that I might come again.
So now what is in store for you I'll tell you:
If Zeus brings down the suitors by my hand
I promise marriages to both, and cattle,
1700 and houses built near mine. And you shall be
brothers-in-arms of my Telemachus.
Here, let me show you something else, a sign
that I am he, that you can trust me, look:

1669. An ax-helve is the ax handle. The socket is a hollowed-out place lined with iron at the end of the handle. The ax slides into the socket and is secured. Shooting an arrow through a line of ax-helve sockets would be an "impossible task"—something worthy of a folk hero like Daniel Boone or the Lone Ranger, or Odysseus.

this old scar from the tusk wound that I got
boar hunting on Parnassus—” . . .

- 1705 Shifting his rags
he bared the long gash. Both men looked, and knew
and threw their arms around the old soldier, weeping,
kissing his head and shoulders. He as well
took each man's head and hands to kiss, then said—
1710 to cut it short, else they might weep till dark—

"Break off, no more of this.
Anyone at the door could see and tell them.
Drift back in, but separately at intervals
after me.

Now listen to your orders:

- 1715 when the time comes, those gentlemen, to a man,
will be dead against giving me bow or quiver.
Defy them. Eumaeus, bring the bow
and put it in my hands there at the door.
Tell the women to lock their own door tight.
1720 Tell them if someone hears the shock of arms
or groans of men, in hall or court, not one
must show her face, but keep still at her weaving.
Philoeteus, run to the outer gate and lock it.
Throw the crossbar and lash it.”

Now Odysseus, still in his beggar's clothes, asks to try the bow. The suitors refuse to allow a mere beggar to try where they have failed, but Penelope insists that the stranger be given his chance. The suspense is very great—by this act, Penelope has accepted her husband as a suitor.

Eumaeus, the swineherd, hands Odysseus the bow and tells the nurse to retire with Penelope and the maids to the family chambers (the harem) and to bolt the doors. Odysseus had earlier told Telemachus to remove the suitors' weapons from the great hall. Now he takes the bow . . .

- 1725 And Odysseus took his time,
turning the bow, tapping it, every inch,
for borings that termites might have made
while the master of the weapon was abroad.
The suitors were now watching him, and some
jested among themselves:

1730 "A bow lover!"

"Dealer in old bows!"

"Maybe he has one like it

"Or has an itch to make one for himself."

"See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!"

And one disdainful suitor added this:

1735 "May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he bends
it!"

But the man skilled in all ways of contending,
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,
like a musician, like a harper, when
with quiet hand upon his instrument

1740 he draws between his thumb and forefinger
a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,
so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang
a swallow's note.

1745 In the hushed hall it smote the suitors
and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered
overhead, one loud crack for a sign.

And Odysseus laughed within him that the son
of crooked-minded Cronus^o had flung that omen down.

1750 He picked one ready arrow from his table
where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still
in the quiver for the young men's turn to come.
He nocked^o it, let it rest across the handgrip,
and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,
aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

1755 Now flashed
arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle
through every socket ring, and grazed not one,
to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

"Telemachus, the stranger

1760 you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.
I did not miss, neither did I take all day
stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,
not so contemptible as the young men say.
The hour has come to cook their lordships' mutton—
1765 supper by daylight. Other amusements later,
with song and harping that adorn a feast."
He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince
Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,
belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,
and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze
1770 stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.

1749. **Cronus:** father of Zeus. His epithet is
"crooked-minded" because of his schemes
to destroy his children.

1753. **nocked:** fit to the bowstring.

Book 22: Death at the Palace

The climax of the story is here. Odysseus is ready to claim his rightful kingdom. But first he must deal with more than a hundred young and hostile suitors. The first one he turns to is Antinous. Antinous has been, all through the story, the meanest of the suitors and their ringleader. He had hit Odysseus with a stool when the hero appeared in the hall as a beggar, and he had ridiculed the disguised king by calling him a bleary vagabond, a pest, and a tramp.

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

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

1775 "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."

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,

1780 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—could dare to bring death's pain on him and darkness on his eyes?

1777. Odysseus prays to Apollo because this particular day is one of the god's feast days. Apollo is also the god of archery.



Ulysses slaying Penelope's suitors
(c. 440 B.C.). Attic red figure vase.

Staatliche Museen, Berlin
Photo: The Granger Collection

1785 Odysseus's arrow hit him under the chin
and punched up to the feathers through his throat.
Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted
crimson runnels,^o a river of mortal red,
1790 and one last kick upset his table
knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.
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
1795 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.
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:
“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”
“Your own throat will be slit for this!”
“Our finest lad is down!
You killed the best on Ithaca.”
1800 “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.
But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:
1805 “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.
Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide
heaven,
1810 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,^o and their eyes flickered
looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.
1815 Eurydamachus alone could speak. He said:
“If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,
all that you say these men have done is true.
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.
But here he lies, the man who caused them all.
1820 Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on
to do these things. He cared less for a marriage
than for the power Cronion^o has denied him
as king of Ithaca. For that
he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.

1789. runnels: streams.

1813. entrails: guts.

1822. Cronion: another name for Zeus,
meaning “son of Cronus.”

1825 He is dead now and has his portion. Spare
your own people. As for ourselves, we'll make
restitution of wine and meat consumed,
and add, each one, a tithe^o of twenty oxen
with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.
1830 Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger."

Odysseus glowered under his black brows
and said:

"Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,
all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold
put up by others, would I hold my hand.
1835 There will be killing till the score is paid.
You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way
out,
or run for it, if you think you'll escape death.
I doubt one man of you skins by." . . .

Telemachus joins his father in the fight. They are helped by the swineherd and cowherd. Now the suitors, trapped in the hall without weapons, are struck right and left by arrows, and many of them lie dying on the floor.

At this moment that unmanning thunder cloud,
1840 the aegis, Athena's shield,
took form aloft in the great hall.

And the suitors mad with fear
at her great sign stampeded like stung cattle by a river
when the dread shimmering gadfly strikes in summer,
in the flowering season, in the long-drawn days.

1845 After them the attackers wheeled, as terrible as eagles
from eyries^o in the mountains veering over and diving
down
with talons wide unsheathed on flights of birds,
who cower down the sky in chutes and bursts along the
valley—
but the pouncing eagles grip their prey, no frantic wing
avails,
1850 and farmers love to watch those beakèd hunters.
So these now fell upon the suitors in that hall,
turning, turning to strike and strike again,
while torn men moaned at death, and blood ran smoking
over the whole floor.

Odysseus now calls forth the maids who have betrayed his household by associating with the suitors. He orders them to clean up the house and dispose of the dead. He then "pays" them by hanging them in the courtyard.

1828. tithe: tax.

1846. eyries (er'ës): nests built in very high places.

Book 23: Odysseus and Penelope

Eurykleia runs to Penelope to announce the return of Odysseus and the defeat of the suitors. The faithful wife—the perfect mate for the wily Odysseus—suspects a trick from the gods and decides to test her would-be husband. She succeeds in teasing him to distraction.

- 1855 Crossing the door sill she sat down at once
in firelight, against the nearest wall,
across the room from the lord Odysseus.

There

leaning against a pillar, sat the man
and never lifted up his eyes, but only waited
1860 for what his wife would say when she had seen him.
And she, for a long time, sat deathly still
in wonderment—for sometimes as she gazed
she found him—yes, clearly—like her husband,
but sometimes blood and rags were all she saw.

Telemachus's voice came to her ears:

- 1865 “Mother,
cruel mother, do you feel nothing,
drawing yourself apart this way from Father?
Will you not sit with him and talk and question him?
What other woman could remain so cold?
1870 Who shuns her lord, and he come back to her
from wars and wandering, after twenty years?
Your heart is hard as flint and never changes!”

Penelope answered:

“I am stunned, child.

- I cannot speak to him. I cannot question him.
1875 I cannot keep my eyes upon his face.
If really he is Odysseus, truly home,
beyond all doubt we two shall know each other
better than you or anyone. There are
secret signs we know, we two.”

A smile

- 1880 came now to the lips of the patient hero, Odysseus,
who turned to Telemachus and said:

“Peace: let your mother test me at her leisure.
Before long she will see and know me best.
These tatters, dirt—all that I’m caked with now—
1885 make her look hard at me and doubt me still. . . .”

Odysseus orders Telemachus, the swineherd, and the cowherd to bathe and put on fresh clothing . . .

- Greathearted Odysseus, home at last,
was being bathed now by Eurynome
and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again
in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena
1890 lent him beauty, head to foot. She made him
taller, and massive, too, with crisping hair
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
1895 Hephaestus taught him, or Athena: one
whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished
beauty over Odysseus's head and shoulders.
He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,
facing his silent wife, and said:

- 1900 "Strange woman,
the immortals of Olympus made you hard,
harder than any. Who else in the world
would keep aloof as you do from her husband
if he returned to her from years of trouble,
cast on his own land in the twentieth year?"
1905 Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
Her heart is iron in her breast."

Penelope
spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

- 1910 "Strange man,
if man you are . . . This is no pride on my part
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.
I know so well how you—how he—appeared
boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . . .
1915 Make up his bed for him, Eurykleia.
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed
with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen."

With this she tried him to the breaking point,
and he turned on her in a flash raging:

- 1920 "Woman, by heaven you've stung me now!
Who dared to move my bed?
No builder had the skill for that—unless
a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal
in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,
built into that bed—my handiwork
and no one else's!"



Mirror with the head of a woman
(4th century B.C.). Bronze.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Rogers Fund

An old trunk of olive

- 1925 grew like a pillar on the building plot,
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.
- 1930 Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,
hewed and shaped the stump from the roots up
into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve
as model for the rest, I planed them all,
inlaid them all with silver, gold, and ivory,
- 1935 and stretched a bed between—a pliant web
of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.
- There's our sign!
- I know no more. Could someone else's hand
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?"
- Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees
1940 grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.
With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,
murmuring:
- "Do not rage at me, Odysseus!"
- No one ever matched your caution! Think
1945 what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us
life together in our prime and flowering years,
kept us from crossing into age together.
Forgive me, don't be angry. I could not
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself
1950 long ago against the frauds of men,
impostors who might come—and all those many
whose underhanded ways bring evil on! . . .
But here and now, what sign could be so clear
as this of our own bed?
- 1955 No other man has ever laid eyes on it—
only my own slave, Actoris, that my father
sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.
You make my stiff heart know that I am yours."
- Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
1960 of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
longed for as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by a
swimmer
spent in rough water where his ship went down
under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
- 1965 Few men can keep alive through a big surf
to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
her white arms round him pressed as though forever.

Book 24: Odysseus and His Father

The ghosts of the suitors drift away through dank places to where the Dead dwell at the world's end.

Odysseus has one more duty. He must go to old Laertes, his grieving father, who lives alone outside of town. A natural storyteller to the end, Odysseus cannot resist teasing his father. He pretends to be a traveler, who had entertained Odysseus five years ago. As Laertes hears his son spoken of, the old man's eyes fill with tears . . .

- 1970 A cloud of pain had fallen on Laertes.
Scooping up handfuls of the sunburnt dust
he sifted it over his gray head, and groaned,
and the groan went to the son's heart. A twinge
prickling up through his nostrils warned Odysseus
1975 he could not watch this any longer.
He leaped and threw his arms around his father,
kissed him, and said:

“Oh, Father, I am he!
Twenty years gone, and here I've come again
to my own land!

- 1980 Hold back your tears! No grieving!
I bring good news—though still we cannot rest.
I killed the suitors to the last man!
Outrage and injury have been avenged!”
Laertes turned and found his voice to murmur:
1985 “If you are Odysseus, my son, come back,
give me some proof, a sign to make me sure.”

His son replied:

- “The scar then, first of all.
Look, here the wild boar's flashing tusk
wounded me on Parnassus; do you see it? . . .
Again—more proof—let's say the trees you gave me
1990 on this revetted^o plot of orchard once.
I was a small boy at your heels, wheedling
amid the young trees, while you named each one.
You gave me thirteen pear, ten apple trees,
and forty fig trees. Fifty rows of vines
1995 were promised too, each one to bear in turn.
Bunches of every hue would hang there ripening,
weighed down by the god of summer days.”
The old man's knees failed him, his heart grew faint,
recalling all that Odysseus calmly told.

1990. ^orevetted: walled in.

2000 He clutched his son. Odysseus held him swooning
until he got his breath back and his spirit
and spoke again:

“Zeus, Father! Gods above!—
you still hold pure Olympus, if the suitors
paid for their crimes indeed, and paid in blood!”

2005 . . . They went home, the two together,
into the stone farmhouse. There Telemachus
and the two herdsmen were already carving
roast young pork, and mixing amber wine.

2010 During these preparations the Sikel woman^o
bathed Laertes and anointed him,
and dressed him in a new cloak. Then Athena,
standing by, filled out his limbs again,
gave girth and stature to the old field captain
fresh from the bathing place. His son looked on
2015 in wonder at the godlike bloom upon him,
and called out happily:

“Oh, Father,
surely one of the gods who are young forever
has made you magnificent before my eyes!”

The families of the dead suitors arrive with revenge in their hearts. A blood feud seems inevitable, and a battle has already begun, when Pallas Athena, directed by Zeus, ends once and for all, the power struggle in Ithaca.

“Now hold!”

2020 she cried, “Break off this bitter skirmish;
end your bloodshed, Ithacans, and make peace.”

Their faces paled with dread before Athena,
and swords dropped from their hands unnerved, to lie
strewing the ground, at the great voice of the goddess.

2025 Those from the town turned fleeing for their lives.
But with a cry to freeze their hearts
and ruffling like an eagle on the pounce,
the lord Odysseus reared himself to follow—
at which the son of Cronus dropped a thunderbolt
smoking at his daughter’s feet.

Athena

2030 cast a gray glance at her friend and said:

“Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
command yourself. Call off this battle now,
or Zeus who views the wide world may be angry.”

2009. The Sikel woman is Laertes' servant.
Sikel might refer to Sicily.

He yielded to her, and his heart was glad.
Both parties later swore to terms of peace
set by their arbiter, Athena, daughter
of Zeus who bears the stormcloud as a shield—
2040 though still she kept the form and voice of Mentor.



Statuette of Zeus (Etruscan,
c. 480 B.C.). Bronze.

The J. Paul Getty Museum

Responding to the Epic

Analyzing the Epic

Identifying Facts

- Just before he steps forward to try the bow, Odysseus reveals his true identity to two other people. Who are they, and why does he reveal himself to them?
- As the epic reaches its **climax**, two signs are sent from Olympus to indicate the gods' approval of Odysseus. What are they?
- List at least five **images** and **similes** that help you picture some of the most tense or most horrifying moments in the battle.
- The tables are turned on the wily Odysseus near the end of the story. How does Penelope test Odysseus after the battle? What characteristic of their marriage bed suggests the strength and endurance of their love?
- What proofs does Odysseus give his father, Laertes, that it is indeed he, Odysseus, who has returned to Ithaca? How does Athena now transform old Laertes?
- What is Athena's role at the **resolution** of the epic?

Interpreting Meanings

- In setting up the test of the bow for the suitors, how is Penelope really saying that she is looking for Odysseus?
- When Odysseus takes the bow in his hands at line 1736 (page 785), a **simile** compares him to a musician or harper. At what other points in the story has Odysseus been associated with singers of tales? What is significant about this simile and its use at the climactic moment of the *Odyssey*?
- Is Odysseus's revenge on the suitors and maids excessive? Discuss this question from Odysseus's point of view (remember he was the rightful king) and from your own modern point of view.
- When Odysseus was held by Calypso on her island, he told the nymph that he wanted to get home to see his wife. Calypso wondered what it was about Penelope that drew Odysseus homeward (see page 734). Now that you have met Penelope, how would you answer Calypso?

- What important Greek value do you think is expressed in Odysseus's last action—his visit to Laertes? Do we share this value today?

Writing About the Epic

A Creative Response

- Setting the Epic in Modern Times.** Write a proposal in which you suggest ways that the *Odyssey* could be made into a movie set in contemporary times. In your proposal, which will be directed to the people who will produce the movie, you will have to explain how you would modernize the *Odyssey*. Use the following chart to organize your ideas. Write two or three paragraphs:

1200 b.c.	Today
a. Trojan War as a background	a.
b. Hero is soldier who fought in war	b.
c. Journeys home around Mediterranean and down to Underworld	c.
d. Uses ships with oars and sails	d.
e. Meets Lotus Eaters, Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis	e.
f. Is tempted by Circe and Calypso	f.
g. Is rescued by a teen-age princess	g.
h. Fortune hunters at home hound his wife	h.
i. Dog lives on garbage heap	i.
j. Son is insulted	j.
k. Gods dominate the action	k.

- Casting a Woman as the Voyaging Hero.** Write a brief essay in which you explain how an *Odyssey* could be written with a woman as the voyaging hero. Consider these points in your essay:
 - Occupation of the heroine
 - Reason for being away from home
 - Situation at home
 - Trials of journey home
 - How the people blocking the heroine are defeated

A Critical Response

3. Explaining the Epic's Relevance to the Twentieth Century. A work of literature cannot be important to us unless it speaks to us and to our lives. In a paragraph, name at least four ways in which the *Odyssey* speaks to you in the twentieth century. You might consider how it says something about these values:

- The values of courage, trust, and discipline
- The value of home and family
- The value of obedience to the divine world
- The value of courtesy and respect for all classes of people

4. Explaining a Theme. On page 723 the three major themes of the *Odyssey* are very briefly stated. Take one theme, and in an essay explain how it is developed in the epic.

5. Analyzing the Elements of the Epic. Write a brief essay in which you cite incidents from the *Odyssey* that show how the epic includes these elements:

- It portrays the adventures of a larger-than-life hero.
- This hero is on a quest for something of great value.
- The epic is huge in scope and portrays domestic life as well as life in the divine world.
- It expresses the values of a particular society.

6. Analyzing Character. Various epithets describe Odysseus as "wily," "versatile," and a "strategist." In a brief essay, explain how Odysseus shows his cleverness and wit in the episodes with Nausicaa, with the Cyclops, and with Penelope at the end of the story. Consider also the hero's decision not to tell his men the whole of Circe's prophecy (page 764). At the end of your essay, explain how you feel about the character of Odysseus: Is he totally admirable? Is he believable? Is he like a modern hero, or does he seem old-fashioned today? Give at least one reason for your response.

7. Comparing Stories. Some of the story elements used in the *Odyssey* are found in legend and folklore. In a four-paragraph essay, explain how at least four situations found in the *Odyssey* are also found in another legend or folktale. Before you write, fill out a chart like the following one:

	Odyssey	Other Story
Magical weapon that works only for one person		
Scars or other signs that reveal true identity		
Divine beings (or fairy godmothers) who assist hero or heroine		
Magical transformations of hero or heroine		

8. Contrasting Two "Return" Stories. After any war there are homecoming stories, and the Trojan War was no different. One of the great homecoming stories to come out of that war is Odysseus's. Another homecoming story, which Homer's audience also knew very well, was the horrible story of Agamemnon's return to Mycenae and his wife Clytemnestra. In fact, Odysseus meets Agamemnon in the Land of the Dead and hears the old commander's tragic story. In a good sourcebook on mythology, look up the story of what happened when Agamemnon returned to Mycenae after the war. Then write an essay in which you contrast that homecoming with Odysseus's return to Ithaca and Penelope. (Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* will give you the information you need.) Write three paragraphs. Use the following chart to organize your main points.

	Odysseus	Agamemnon
The faithfulness of the heroes' wives		
The wives' motives for their behavior		
The reception each hero got upon being reunited with his wife		
The children's roles in the stories		

9. Supporting a Critical Response. Use one of these quotations as the basis of an essay on the *Odyssey*. Cite specific passages from the epic that you think support the ideas in the statement. If you disagree with the statement, cite specific passages from the epic to support your

own opinion, which you should make clear in your topic sentence. Write at least three paragraphs.

... what has made Homer for three thousand years the greatest poet in the world is his *naturalness*. We love each other as in Homer. We hate each other as in Homer. We are perpetually being interfered with as in Homer by chance and fate and necessity, by invisible influences for good, and by invisible influences for evil . . .

—John Cowper Powys

... the whole problem of the *Odyssey* is for Odysseus to establish his identity.

—George S. Dimock, Jr.

There are many women, young and old, enchantresses and queens and serving maids [in the *Odyssey*]. In the "society," as we say, of the *Odyssey*, women can be very distinguished: Athena is powerful in the highest circles, Arete holds equal power with her husband in Phaeacia, Helen has been re-established in the power of her beauty, which if I am not mistaken she makes Telemachus feel. Three of the principal adventures of Odysseus are with exquisite young women of great charm and spirit . . .

—Robert Fitzgerald

Analyzing Language and Vocabulary

Words from the Epic

Even today, a difficult journey full of adventures and possible hardships is called an *odyssey*. In fact, any kind of wandering, or journey in search of something, is an *odyssey*. We speak of a scientist's "odyssey" in search of the secret of DNA. We speak of Alex Haley's "odyssey" in search of his African roots. John Steinbeck wrote of his "odyssey" in search of America in *Travels with Charley* (his poodle Charley rode with him). (See page 389.)

Here are some questions about some names from the *Odyssey* and some related English words. To answer the questions, you'll need a good dictionary. Look up the words in italics. Right after the word itself in the dictionary, you'll find information in parentheses that gives you the word's history.

1. The Cyclops was a giant with a single enormous eye. What does the word *Cyclops* have in common with our word *cycle*?
2. The Sirens were beautiful women with enchanting voices that lured sailors to steer their ships toward the rocks. Why do you think the warning horn on an ambulance or police car came to be called a *siren*?
3. *Siren* and *sinew* have a common root word, meaning "to tie." How did the Sirens "tie" men who heard their songs? How does the word *sinew* relate to the sense of "tie"?
4. Homer and Demodocus, both great bards, open their epic poems with a prayer to the Muse. There were nine Muses in mythology. They were goddesses who inspired people working in the arts and sciences. How is our word *museum* related to the *Muses*?
5. What does our word *music* have to do with the *Muses*?
6. Athena is often disguised in this epic as *Mentor*, a captain who was a friend of Odysseus's family. As Mentor, she guides the young Telemachus on his own "odyssey" to find his father and reclaim his rightful inheritance. What do we mean today when we say someone is a *mentor*?
7. Olympus was believed to be the home of the gods—it is a real mountain that can be seen today in Greece. Why were the *Olympics* named for this dwelling place of the gods?
8. The gods were believed to remain immortal by eating nectar and ambrosia. You find these divine foods mentioned several times in the *Odyssey*. What does *nectar* have in common with the medical term *necrosis*, which means "the death of tissue"?
9. Why do you think people named a fruit the *nectarine*?
10. The singer Homer and other bards were called *rhapsodes*. What does our word *rhapsody* mean today?

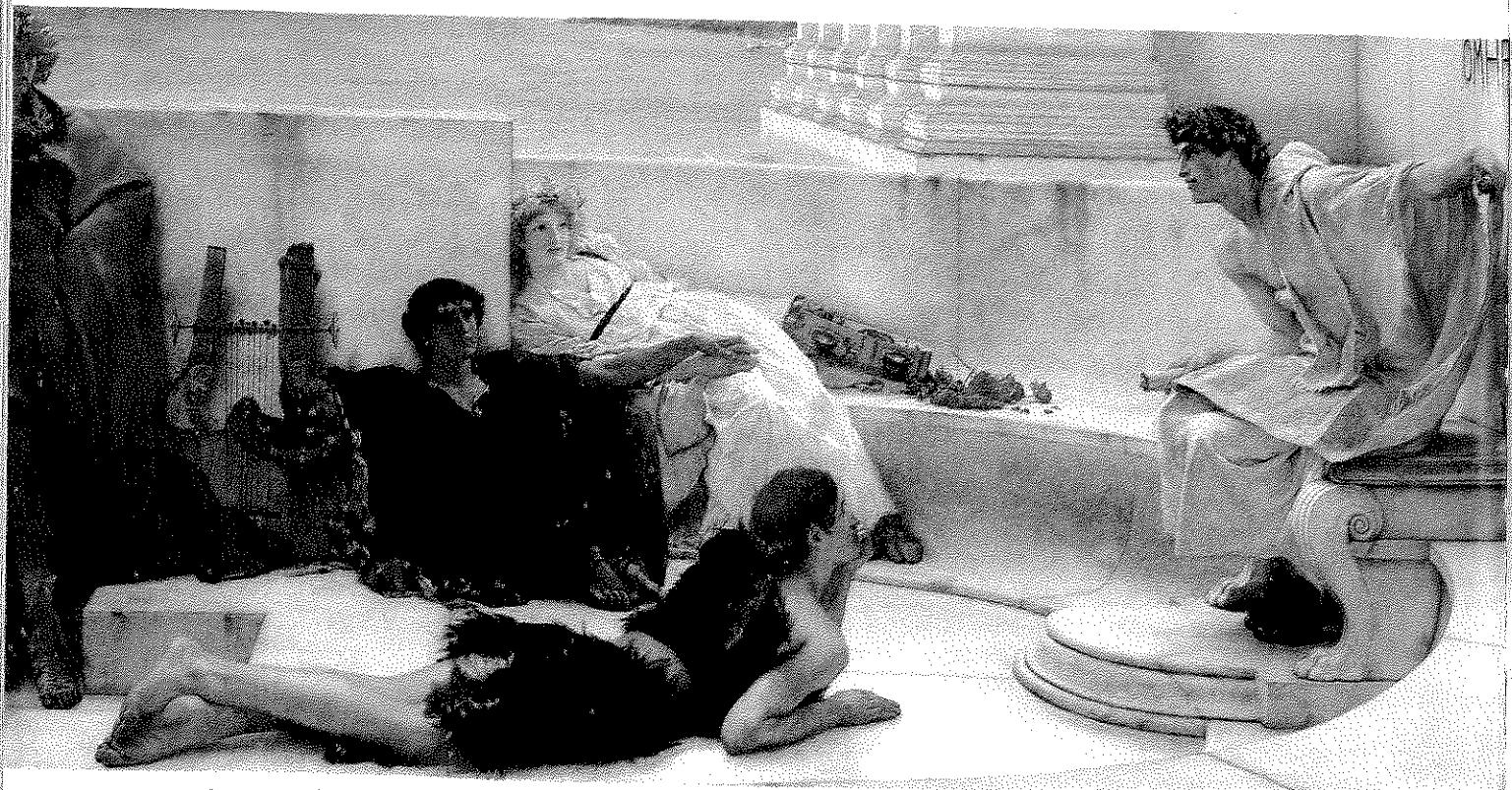
THE ELEMENTS OF AN EPIC

Epics are long narrative poems that tell about the adventures of a hero who represents the values of a particular civilization. As you have seen from reading the *Odyssey*, epic heroes are superhuman—they are braver and stronger than ordinary people are. Usually the epic hero is on a quest for something of great value to him or his people. The villains that try to keep the hero from his quest are usually uglier, more evil, and more cunning than

anyone we know in ordinary life. And, in most epics, we find the divine world mixing in with the human world.

The following episode is from the *Aeneid*, the Roman epic written in the first century B.C. by the poet Virgil. It tells of the fall of Troy, but from the point of view of a Trojan prince named Aeneas. In this episode, Aeneas realizes Troy is doomed. He has just seen the Greeks murder the old Trojan king, Priam. All of his men have been killed, and now he worries about his own family (his old father, Anchises; his wife, Creusa; and his little son, Ascanius). All around him, Troy is in flames. Aeneas tells his own story.

The notes on the side will help guide your reading.



A Reading from Homer
by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1885). Oil.

Philadelphia Museum of Art,
George W. Elkins Collection

Review: Exercises in Reading the Epic/*cont.*

Yes, I was now the one man left of my party. But just
then,
Hugging close to the threshold of Vesta,^o speechlessly hid-
ing there,
I noticed the daughter of Tyndareus, Helen. The blaze lit
up
The whole scene as I wandered, peering this way and that.
5 Helen, the scourge of Troy and her own land alike,
In dread anticipation of Trojan wrath at Troy's
Downfall, of Greek revenge, of her cuckolded^o husband's
anger—
Helen, that hateful creature, was crouched by the altar, in
hiding.
A fire broke out in my heart, a passion of rage to avenge
10 My country's fall and punish her crime by a crime upon her.
Was she going to get away with it? See Sparta again and
her homeland?
Return as a queen, in triumph? Be once more reunited
With husband, home, parents, and children? Use our Trojan
Ladies for her attendants and Trojan men for slaves?—
15 All this, with Priam put to the sword, and Troy in ashes,
And Troy's shore time and again bathed in a sweat of blood?
Not so, I said. For although to kill a woman earns one
No fame, and victory over a female wins no decorations,
I shall be praised for stamping out an iniquity, punishing
20 One who so richly deserves it; and I shall enjoy fulfilling
My soul with a flame of vengeance, appeasing my people's
ashes.
Such were my thoughts, the insensate^o fury that drove me
onward,
When to my view—and never before had I seen her so
clear—
My gentle mother appeared: all glowing with light she came
25 Through the gloom, a goddess manifest, oh, high and hand-
some as
The heaven dwellers know her. She laid a hand on mine,
Restraining me, then shaped these words with her rosy lips:
My son, what anguish spurs you to this ungoverned rage?
What madness has driven all thought for love out of your
heart?
30 Will you not first find out if your aged father, Anchises,
Is where you left him, and whether your wife, Creusa, be
still

You should at once decide who "I" is.

2. Vesta: goddess of the hearth and home.

Do you have a picture of this scene?

7. cuckolded: deceived, meaning that his wife was deceiving him with another man.

We hear now the private thoughts of the narrator. Think about what they reveal of his character and values.

These lines foreshadow what is going to happen to the Trojans who are taken prisoners. They help establish motive.

If you don't know what "iniquity" means, the context might help. Make a good guess.

22. insensate: unreasonable.

You should notice the words that tell you that this is a ghost. Remember that in the world of the epic, supernatural events often occur.

Remember that Odysseus also met his mother, and that she was also dead. Notice what this woman tells her angry son.

Review: Exercises in Reading the Epic/cont.

Alive, and little Ascanius? A whole Greek army is surging
Round them on every side, and but for my guardian care
The flames would have got them by now, the fell³⁴ sword
drained their blood.

- 35 It is not the beauty of hated Helen, it is not Paris,
Though you hold him to blame—the gods, the gods, I tell
you, are hostile,
It's they who have undermined Troy's power and sent it
tumbling.

—from the *Aeneid*, Book 2,
translated by C. Day Lewis

34. **fell:** deadly or cruel.

Epic take place in a world where the
divinities mingle in human affairs. You
should have an idea from this of how the
Romans felt about the gods' power.

1. What does Aeneas want to do with Helen? What are his motives?
2. Helen eloped with a Trojan prince and willingly lived as his wife for many years in Troy—even though she already had a husband and children in Sparta. What irony can you see in the fact that this woman is now crouched beside the statue of a goddess dedicated to the family and home?
3. What was the Roman attitude toward killing women? Does this suggest that the Romans honored women, or does it suggest something else? Explain.
4. What supernatural event takes place in this part of the epic?
5. What does Aeneas's mother tell him is more important than vengeance?
6. From what the mother says to her son, how would you describe the Roman attitude toward the gods and their relationship to the human world?
7. How do you feel about the ways these people respond to the devastation of their country? Do you think people today would respond in the same ways? Explain.
8. What causes warfare and terrorism today? Are the reasons anything like the cause of the Trojan War? Explain.

Writing

1. **Narrating an Epic Episode.** Narrate one episode of an epic that will be read in the year 3000 by a class of high-school students. Base your epic on a great event of the twentieth century:

World War I or II
The atomic blast at Hiroshima
The Vietnam War

Choose some incident that will dramatize a code of behavior that your society values. Who will your hero or heroine be? What will his or her quest be? What obstacles will have to be overcome? Will you include any supernatural elements in your story?

2. **Extending an Epic.** You have met the famous Helen of Troy twice now (see also page 729). Add an episode to the *Odyssey* in which you let the readers know how Helen feels now about her role in the war. Start the narration right after Telemachus's visit (page 729) to Sparta. Include a flashback to the war. You could write a monologue in which Helen speaks.

Exercises in Critical Thinking and Writing

PRESENTING TWO SIDES OF AN ARGUMENT

Writing Assignment

Imagine that Odysseus has been accused of neglecting his responsibility to his kingdom and to his men, resulting in a senseless loss of life and economic chaos in Ithaca. Write an interview in which Odysseus and his accuser (let's call him Demetrius) present their sides of the story.

Background

Besides telling a captivating story, the *Odyssey* also reveals values that were significant in Greek culture. Our culture also has values that make it uniquely American. Our public figures, for example, expect to be held accountable for their actions.

Imagine, then, what would happen if Odysseus were alive today. Would he receive a hero's welcome upon his return? What questions might the returned ruler be asked on the nightly news programs? (Why did he take so long to come home? Why did all of his men die? Could he have done more to save their lives? Was he simply enjoying his adventures too much to make more of an effort to come home? Was he really making a serious effort to surmount circumstances beyond his control?)

Prewriting

1. Prepare for this assignment by listening to a television or radio news interview program. As you listen, note the interviewer's behavior and the kinds of questions he or she asks. Be alert to the following points—which you should also keep in mind as you develop your interview for this assignment:

- a. Does the interviewer act as though there are two sides to the issue? Remember, there are at least two sides to any complex issue or argument. While you may personally agree with a particular side, you cannot ignore your responsibility to explore both sides.
 - b. Does the interviewer remain objective? No matter how you feel about the issue or people involved, your job as an interviewer is to get the facts out and to reveal the character of the person you are interviewing (what is this person like?)—in a way that is fair, honest, and respectful.
 - c. Does the interviewer ask specific questions? With time limits for your interview, you must ask questions directly related to the issue. If the person you're interviewing starts to ramble, you must get him or her to refocus on the subject.
2. List at least five (preferably more) questions that you, as the interviewer on a news program, would ask Odysseus and his accuser, Demetrius.
 3. Draw a chart with the answers that both Odysseus and Demetrius would give to your questions. Base their answers on information in the *Odyssey*. Remember that Odysseus and Demetrius should each present one side of the issue. That is, Odysseus should respond to a question with one answer, and Demetrius's answer should present the other side of the issue. For example, your chart could begin like this:

Question	Odysseus	Demetrius
1. Why were you with Circe for so long?	1. I had to stay with her to get her to tell me what I needed to know to get home. I could not escape.	1. For at least a time, Odysseus forgot his obligation to his kingdom and instead selfishly enjoyed Circe's attentions.

Exercises in Critical Thinking and Writing/*cont.*

Writing

After developing your arguments and counterarguments, set up your writing in either an interview format or a dialogue format. If you use the **interview format**, you should follow each speaker's name with a colon (:). Then, write the speaker's comments in

Interviewer: Here on "Faces in the News" today, we will be examining the baffling story of the return of Odysseus, without his crew, after an absence of over twenty years. The government investigation team, led by Demetrius, would like Odysseus to explain his long absence and loss of men. Demetrius, what are your charges?

Demetrius: We allege that Odysseus, in fact, had no desire to return home quickly. A trip that should have been completed in a matter of days took him ten years to complete.

Odysseus: No, that charge isn't true. Throughout my travels, I made every effort to save the lives of my crew and to extricate us from our troubles. Consider, for example, my ingenious plan for escaping from the horrible Cyclops. And remember that the god Poseidon was dead set against me and tried to kill us all.

Checklist for Revision

1. Have you included at least five arguments and counterarguments?
2. Have you included examples from the *Odyssey* to support each speaker's statements?
3. Have you presented arguments on both sides of the issue?
4. Have you correctly used the interview or the dialogue format?

sentence form. If you use the **dialogue format**, enclose each speaker's words in quotation marks, and begin a new paragraph when the speaker changes.

Here is how you might use the interview format:

Speaker's name is followed by a colon.
Comments are in sentence form.

One argument is cited.

The counterargument is cited.

An example is given from the *Odyssey*.