

BOOK NINE

Ismarus, the Lotus Eaters, and the Cyclops

[Odysseus identifies himself and his origins; he recounts his first adventures after leaving Troy: the attack on the Cicones, the storm sent from Zeus, the arrival in the land of the Lotus-eaters; the arrival in the land of the Cyclops; the slaughter of his men; he and his men burn out Polyphemus' eye and escape from the cave; Odysseus taunts Polyphemus; Odysseus and his men sail on.]

Resourceful Odysseus then replied to Alcinous:

“Lord Alcinous, most renowned of men,
it is indeed a truly splendid thing
to listen to a singer such as this,
whose voice is like a god's. For I say
there's nothing gives one more delight
than when joy grips entire groups of men
who sit in proper order in a hall
feasting and listening to a singer,
[10] with tables standing there beside them
laden with bread and meat, as the steward
draws wine out of the mixing bowl, moves round,
and fills the cups. To my mind this seems
the finest thing there is. But your heart
wants to ask about my grievous sorrows,
so I can weep and groan more than before.
What shall I tell you first? Where do I stop?
For the heavenly gods have given me
so much distress. Well, I will make a start
[20] by telling you my name. Once you know that,
if I escape the painful day of death,
then later I can welcome you as guests,
though I live in a palace far away.
I am Odysseus, son of Laertes,
well known to all for my deceptive skills—
my fame extends all the way to heaven.
I live in Ithaca, a land of sunshine.

From far away one sees a mountain there,
thick with whispering trees, Mount Neriton,
[30] and many islands lying around it
close together—Dulichium, Same,
forested Zacynthus. Ithaca itself,
low in the sea, furthest from the mainland,
lies to the west—while those other islands
are a separate group, closer to the Dawn
and rising Sun. It's a rugged island,
but nurtures fine young men. And in my view,
nothing one can see is ever sweeter
than a glimpse of one's own native land.
[40] When Calypso, that lovely goddess, tried
to keep me with her in her hollow caves,
longing for me to be her husband,
or when, in the same way, the cunning witch
Aeaeon Circe held me in her home
filled with keen desire I'd marry her,
they never won the heart here in my chest.
That's how true it is there's nothing sweeter
than a man's own country and his parents,
even if he's living in a wealthy home,
[50] but in a foreign land away from those
who gave him life. But come, I'll tell you
of the miserable journey back which Zeus
arranged for me when I returned from Troy.¹

“I was carried by the wind from Troy
to Ismarus, land of the Cicones.
I destroyed the city there, killed the men,
seized their wives, and captured lots of treasure
which we divided up. I took great pains
to see that all men got an equal share.
[60] Then I gave orders we should leave on foot—
and with all speed. But the men were fools.
They didn't listen. They drank too much wine
and on the shoreline slaughtered many sheep,

as well as shambling cows with twisted horns.
Meanwhile the Cicones set off and gathered up
their neighbours, tribesmen living further inland.
There are more of them, and they are braver men,
skilled at fighting enemies from chariots
and also, should the need arise, on foot.

[70] They reached us in the morning, thick as leaves
or flowers growing in season. Then Zeus
brought us disaster—he made that our fate,
so we would suffer many casualties.
They set their ranks and fought by our swift ships.
We threw our bronze-tipped spears at one another.
While morning lasted and that sacred day
gained strength, we held our ground and beat them back,
for all their greater numbers. But as the sun
moved to the hour when oxen are unyoked,

[80] the Cicones broke through, overpowering
Achaean. Of my well-armed companions,
six from every ship were killed. The rest of us
made our escape, avoiding Death and Fate.

“We sailed away from there, hearts full of grief
at losing loyal companions, though happy
we had eluded death ourselves. But still,
I would not let our curved ships leave the place
until we’d made the ritual call three times
for our poor comrades slaughtered on that plain,
[90] killed by the Cicones. Cloud-gatherer Zeus
then stirred North Wind to rage against our ships—
a violent storm concealing land and sea,
as darkness swept from heaven down on us.
The ships were driven off course, our sails
ripped to shreds by the power of that wind.
We lowered the masts into the holds and then,
fearing for our lives, quickly rowed the ships
toward the land. For two whole days and nights
we lay there, hearts consumed with sorrow

[100] and exhaustion. But when fair-haired Dawn
gave birth to the third day, we raised the masts,
hoisted white sails, and took our place on board.
Wind and helmsman held us on our course,
and I'd have reached my native land unharmed,
but North Wind, sea currents, and the waves
pushed me off course, as I was doubling back
around Malea, driving me past Cythera.²

”Nine days fierce winds drove me away from there,
across the fish-filled seas, and on the tenth
[110] we landed where the Lotus-eaters live,
people who feed upon its flowering fruit.³
We went ashore and carried water back.
Then my companions quickly had a meal
by our swift ships. We had our food and drink,
and then I sent some of my comrades out
to learn about the men who ate the food
the land grew there. I chose two of my men
and with them sent a third as messenger.
They left at once and met the Lotus-eaters,
[120] who had no thought of killing my companions,
but gave them lotus plants to eat, whose fruit,
sweet as honey, made any man who tried it
lose his desire ever to journey home
or bring back word to us—they wished to stay,
to remain among the Lotus-eaters,
feeding on the plant, eager to forget
about their homeward voyage. I forced them,
eyes full of tears, into our hollow ships,
dragged them underneath the rowing benches,
[130] and tied them up. Then I issued orders
for my other trusty comrades to embark
and sail away with speed in our fast ships,
in case another man might eat a lotus
and lose all thoughts about his journey back.
They raced on board, went to their places,

and, sitting in good order in their rows,
struck the grey sea with their oar blades.

“We sailed away from there with heavy hearts
and reached the country of the Cyclopes,
[140] a crude and lawless people.⁴ They don’t grow
any plants by hand or plough the earth,
but put their trust in the immortal gods,
and though they never sow or work the land,
every kind of crop springs up for them—
wheat and barley and rich grape-bearing vines,
and Zeus provides the rain to make them grow.
They live without a council or assembly
or any rule of law, in hollow caves
among the mountain tops. Each one of them
[150] makes laws for his own wives and children,
and they shun all dealings with each other.

“Now, near the country of the Cyclopes,
outside the harbour, there’s a fertile island,
covered in trees, some distance from the shore,
but not too far away. Wild goats live there
in countless numbers. They have no need
to stay away from any human trails.
Hunters never venture there, not even those
who endure great hardships in the forest,
[160] as they roam across the mountain peaks.
That island has no flocks or ploughed-up land—
through all its days it’s never once been sown
or tilled or known the work of human beings.
The only life it feeds is bleating goats.
The Cyclopes don’t have boats with scarlet prows
or men with skills to build them well-decked ships,
which would enable them to carry out
all sorts of things—like travelling to towns
of other people, the way men cross the sea
[170] to visit one another in their ships—

or men who might have turned their island
into a well-constructed settlement.

The island is not poor. All things grow there
in season. It has soft, well-watered meadows
by the shore of the grey sea, where grape vines
could flourish all the time, and level farm land,
where they could always reap fine harvests,
year after year—the sub-soil is so rich.

It has a harbour, too, with good anchorage,

[180] no need for any mooring cable there,
or setting anchor stones, or tying up
with cables on the stern. One can beach a ship
and wait until a fair wind starts to blow
and sailors' hearts tell them to go on board.

At the harbour head there is a water spring—
a bright stream flows out underneath a cave.

Around it poplars grow. We sailed in there.

Some god led us in through the murky night—
we couldn't see a thing, and all our ships

[190] were swallowed up in fog. Clouds hid the moon,
so there was no light coming from the sky.
Our eyes could not catch any glimpse of land
or of the long waves rolling in onshore,
until our well-decked ships had reached the beach.
We hauled up our ships, took down all the sails,
went up along the shore, and fell asleep,
remaining there until the light of Dawn.

“When rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
we moved across the island quite amazed.

[200] Some nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,
flushed out mountain goats, food for us to eat.
We quickly brought our curved bows from the ships
and our long spears, as well. Then, splitting up,
we fanned out in three different groups to hunt.
The god soon gave us our heart's fill of game—
I had twelve ships with me, and each of them

received nine goats by lot. I was the only one
to be allotted ten. So all day long
until the sunset, we sat there and ate,
[210] feasting on that rich supply of meat,
with sweet wine, too—we'd not yet used up
the red wine in our ships and had some left.
We'd taken many jars for everyone
the day we'd seized the sacred citadel
of the Cicones. Then we looked across
toward the country of the Cyclopes,
which was nearby. We observed their smoke,
heard their talk and sounds of sheep and goats.
Then the sun went down, and darkness fell.
[220] So on the seashore we lay down to sleep.

“As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
I called a meeting and spoke to all the men:

‘My loyal comrades, stay here where you are.
I'll take my ship and my own company
and try to find out who those people are,
whether they are rough and violent,
with no sense of law, or kind to strangers,
with hearts that fear the gods.’

“I said these words,
then went down to my ship and told my crew
[230] to loose the cables lashed onto the stern
and come onboard. They embarked with speed,
and, seated at the oarlocks in their rows,
struck the grey sea with their oars. And then,
when we'd made the short trip round the island,
on the coast there, right beside the sea,
we saw a high cave, overhung with laurel.
There were many flocks, sheep as well as goats,
penned in there at night. All around the cave
there was a high front courtyard made of stones

[240] set deep into the ground, with tall pine trees
and towering oaks. At night a giant slept there,
one that grazed his flocks all by himself,
somewhere far off. He avoided others
and lived alone, away from all the rest,
a law unto himself, a monster, made
to be a thing of wonder, not like man
who lives by eating bread, no, more like
a lofty wooded mountain crag, standing there
to view in isolation from the rest.

[250] “I told the rest of my trustworthy crew
to stay there by the ship and guard it,
while I selected twelve of my best men
and went off to explore. I took with me
a goatskin full of dark sweet wine. Maron,
Euanthes’ son, one of Apollo’s priests,
the god who kept guard over Ismarus,
gave it to me because, to show respect,
we had protected him, his wife, and child.
He lived in a grove of trees, a piece of ground

[270] sacred to Apollo. He’d offered me fine gifts—
seven finely crafted golden talents,
a pure silver mixing bowl, and wine as well,
a total of twelve jars poured out unmixed,
drink fit for gods. None of his servants,
men or women in his household, knew
about this wine. He was the only one,
other than his wife and one house steward.
Each time they drank that honey-sweet red wine,
he’d fill one cup with it and pour that out

[280] in twenty cups of water, and the smell
arising from the mixing bowl was sweet,
astonishingly so—to tell the truth,
no one’s heart could then refuse to drink it.
I took some of this wine in a large goatskin,
a pouch of food, as well. My soldier’s heart

was warning me a man might soon attack,
someone invested with enormous power,
a savage with no sense of law and justice.

“We soon reached his cave but didn’t find him.

[290] He was pasturing his rich flocks in the fields.
We went inside the cave and looked around.
It was astonishing—crates full of cheese,
pens crammed with livestock—lambs and kids
sorted into separate groups, with yearlings,
older lambs, and newborns, each in different pens.
All the sturdy buckets, pails, and milking bowls
were awash with whey. At first, my comrades
urged me to grab some cheeses and return,
then drive the lambs and kids out of their pens

[300] back to our swift ship and cross the water.
But I did not agree, though if I had,
things would have been much better. I was keen
to see the man in person and find out
if he would show me hospitality.
When he did show up, as it turned out,
he proved no joy to my companions.

“We lit a fire and offered sacrifice.

Then we helped ourselves to cheese and ate it.
We stayed inside the cave and waited there,
[310] until he led his flocks back home. He came,
bearing an enormous pile of dried-out wood
to cook his dinner. He hurled his load
inside the cave with a huge crash. In our fear,
we moved back to the far end of the cave,
into the deepest corner. He then drove
his fat flock right inside the spacious cavern,
just the ones he milked. Rams and billy goats
he left outside, in the open courtyard.

Then he raised up high a massive boulder
[320] and fixed it in position as a door.

It was huge—twenty-two four-wheeled wagons,
good ones, too, could not have shifted it
along the ground—that’s how immense it was,
the rock he planted right in his doorway.
He sat down with his bleating goats and ewes
and milked them all, each in turn, setting
beside each one its young. Next, he curdled
half the white milk and set aside the whey
in wicker baskets, then put the other half
[330] in bowls for him to drink up with his dinner.
Once he’d finished working at these tasks,
he lit a fire. Then he spied us and said:

‘Strangers,
who are you? What sea route brought you here?
Are you trading men, or wandering the sea
at random, like pirates sailing anywhere,
risking their lives to injure other men.’

“As he spoke, our hearts collapsed, terrified
by his deep voice and monstrous size. But still,
I answered him by saying:

‘We are Achaeans
[340] coming back from Troy and blown off course
by various winds across vast tracts of sea.
Attempting to get home, we had to take
a different route and chart another course,
a scheme, I think, which gave Zeus pleasure.
We boast that we are Agamemnon’s men,
son of Atreus, now the best-known man
beneath wide heaven—the city he wiped out
was such a great one, and he killed so many.
As for us, we’re visitors here and come
[350] as suppliants to your knee, in hope that you
will make us welcome or provide some gift,
the proper thing one does for strangers.

So, good sir, respect the gods. We're here
as suppliants to you, and Zeus protects
all suppliants and strangers—as god of guests,
he cares for all respected visitors.'

"I finished speaking. He answered me at once—
his heart was pitiless:

'What fools you are,
you strangers, or else you come from far away—
[360] telling me to fear the gods and shun their rage.
The Cyclopes care nothing about Zeus,
who bears the aegis, or the blessed gods.
We are much more powerful than them.
I wouldn't spare you or your comrades
to escape the wrath of Zeus, not unless
my own heart prompted me to do it.
But now, tell me this—when you landed here,
where did you moor your ship, a spot close by
or further off? I'd like to know that.'

[370] "He said this to throw me off, but his deceit
could never fool me. I was too clever.
And so I gave him a cunning answer:

'Earthshaker Poseidon broke my ship apart—
driving it against the border of your island,
on the rocks there. He brought us close to land,
hard by the headland, then winds pushed us
inshore from the sea. But we escaped—
me and these men here. We weren't destroyed.'

"That's what I said. But his ruthless heart
[380] gave me no reply. Instead, he jumped up,
seized two of my companions in his fist,
and smashed them on the ground like puppy dogs.
Their brains oozed out and soaked the ground below.

He tore their limbs apart to make a meal,
and chewed them up just like a mountain lion—
innards, flesh, and marrow—leaving nothing.
We raised our hands to Zeus and cried aloud,
to witness the horrific things he did,
our hearts unable to do anything.

[390] Once Cyclops had stuffed his massive stomach
with human flesh and washed it down with milk,
he lay down in the cave, stretched out there
among his flocks. Then, in my courageous heart
I formed a plan to move up close beside him,
draw the sharp sword I carried on my thigh,
and run my hand along his chest, to find
exactly where his midriff held his liver,
then stick him there. But I had second thoughts.
We, too, would have been utterly destroyed,
[400] there in the cave—we didn't have the strength
with our own hands to roll from the high door
the massive rock he'd set there. So we groaned,
and stayed there waiting for bright Dawn.

“As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
he lit a fire and milked his flock, one by one,
with a new-born placed beside each mother.
When this work was over, he once again
snatched two of my men and gorged himself.
After his meal, he easily rolled back

[410] the huge rock door, drove his rich flock outside,
and set the stone in place, as one might put
a cap back on a quiver. Then Cyclops,
whistling loudly, drove his fat flocks away
towards the mountain. He left me there,
plotting a nasty scheme deep in my heart,
some way of gaining my revenge against him,
if Athena would grant me that glory.
My heart came up with what appeared to me
the best thing I could do. An enormous club

[420] belonging to Cyclops was lying there
beside a stall, a section of green olive wood
he'd cut to carry with him once it dried.
To human eyes it seemed just like the mast
on a black merchant ship with twenty oars,
a broad-beamed vessel which can move across
the mighty ocean—that's how long and wide
that huge club looked. Moving over to it,
I chopped off a piece, six feet in length,
gave it to my companions, telling them
[430] to smooth the wood. They straightened it, while I,
standing at one end, chipped and tapered it
to a sharp point. Then I picked up the stake
and set it in the blazing fire to harden.
That done, I placed it carefully to one side,
concealing it beneath some of the dung
which lay throughout the cave in massive piles.
Then I told my comrades to draw lots
to see which men would risk their lives with me—
when sweet sleep came upon the Cyclops,
[440] we'd lift that stake and twist it in his eye.
The crew drew lots and picked the very men
I would have chosen for myself, four of them,
with me included as fifth man in the group.
In the evening he came back, leading on
his fine-skinned animals and bringing them
inside the spacious cave, every sheep and goat
in his rich flock—not leaving even one
out in the open courtyard. Perhaps he had
a sense of something wrong, or else a god
[450] had given him an order. He picked up
and put his huge rock door in place, then sat
to milk each ewe and bleating goat,
one by one, setting beside each mother
one of her young. When this task was over,
he quickly seized two men and wolfed them down.
Then I moved up and stood at Cyclops' side,

holding in my hands a bowl of ivy wood
full of my dark wine. I said:

‘Cyclops,
take this wine and drink it, now you’ve had
[460] your meal of human flesh, so you may know
the kind of wine we had on board our ship,
a gift of drink I was carrying for you,
in hope you’d pity me and send me off
on my journey home. But your savagery
is something I can’t bear. You cruel man,
how will any of the countless other men
ever visit you in future? How you act
is so against all human law.’

“I spoke.
He grabbed the cup and gulped down the sweet wine.
[470] Once he’d swallowed, he felt such great delight,
he asked me for some more, a second taste.

‘Be kind and give me some of that again.
And now, without delay tell me your name,
so, as my guest, I can offer you a gift,
something you’ll like. Among the Cyclopes,
grain-bearing earth grows clusters of rich grapes,
which Zeus’ rain increases, but this drink—
it’s a stream of nectar and ambrosia.’

“He spoke. So I handed him more fiery wine.
[480] Three times I poured some out and gave it to him,
and, like a fool, he swilled it down. So then,
once the wine had addled Cyclops’ wits,
I spoke these reassuring words to him:

‘Cyclops, you asked about my famous name.
I’ll tell you. Then you can offer me a gift,
as your guest. My name is Nobody.

My father and mother, all my other friends—
they call me Nobody.’

“That’s what I said.
His pitiless heart replied:

‘Well, Nobody,
[490] I’ll eat all your companions before you
and have you at the end—my gift to you,
since you’re my guest.’

“As he said this,
he collapsed and toppled over on his back,
lying with his thick neck twisted to one side.
All-conquering sleep then overpowered him.
In his drunken state he kept on vomiting,
his gullet drooling wine and human flesh.
So then I pushed the stake deep in the ashes,
to make it hot, and spoke to all my men,
[500] urging them on, so no one, in his fear,
would hesitate. When that stake of olive wood,
though green, was glowing hot, its sharp point
ready to catch fire, I walked across to it
and with my companions standing round me
pulled it from the fire. And then some god
breathed powerful courage into all of us.
They lifted up that stake of olive wood
and jammed its sharpened end down in his eye,
while I, placing my weight at the upper end,
[510] twisted it around—just as a shipwright
bores a timber with a drill, while those below
make it rotate by pulling on a strap
at either end, so the drill keeps moving—
that’s how we held the red-hot pointed stake
and twisted it inside the socket of his eye.
Blood poured out through the heat—around his eye,
lids and brows were singed, as his eyeball burned—

its roots were crackling in fire. When a blacksmith
plunges a great axe or adze in frigid water
[520] with a loud hissing sound, to temper it
and make the iron strong—that's how his eye
sizzled around the stake of olive wood.
His horrific screams echoed through the rock.
We drew back, terrified. He yanked the stake
out of his eye—it was all smeared with blood—
hurled it away from him, and waved his arms.
He started yelling out to near-by Cyclopes,
who lived in caves up on the windy heights,
his neighbours. They heard him shouting out
[530] and came crowding round from all directions.
Standing at the cave mouth, they questioned him,
asking what was wrong:

‘Polyphemus,
what's so bad with you that you keep shouting
through the immortal night and wake us up?
Is some mortal human driving off your flocks
or killing you by treachery or force?’

“From the cave mighty Polyphemus roared:

‘Nobody is killing me, my friends,
by treachery, not using any force.’

“They answered him—their words had wings:

[540] ‘Well, then,
if nobody is hurting you and you're alone,
it must be sickness given by great Zeus,
one you can't escape. So say your prayers
to our father, lord Poseidon.’

“With these words,
they went away, and my heart was laughing—

my cunning name had pulled off such a trick.
But Cyclops groaned, writhing in agony.
Groping with his hands he picked up the stone,
removed it from the door, and sat down there,
[550] in the opening. He stretched out his arms,
attempting to catch anyone who tried
to get out with the sheep. In his heart,
he took me for a fool. But I was thinking
the best thing I could do would be to find
if somehow my crewmen and myself
could escape being killed. I wove many schemes,
all sorts of tricks, the way a man will do
when his own life's at stake—and we were faced
with a murderous peril right beside us.

[560] To my heart the best plan was as follows:
in Cyclops' flocks the rams were really fat—
fine, large creatures, with thick fleecy coats
of deep black wool. I picked three at a time
and, keeping quiet, tied them up together,
with twisted willow shoots, part of the mat
on which the lawless monster Polyphemos
used to sleep. The middle ram carried a man.
The two on either side were for protection.
So for every man there were three sheep.

[570] I, too, had my own ram, the finest one
in the whole flock by far. I grabbed its back
then swung myself under its fleecy gut,
and lay there, face upwards, with my fingers
clutching its amazing fleece. My heart was firm.
We waited there like that until bright Dawn.

“As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
males in the flock trotted off to pasture,
while the females, who had not yet been milked
and thus whose udders were about to burst,
[580] bleated in their pens. Their master, in great pain,
ran his hands across the backs of all his sheep

as they moved past him, but was such a fool,
he didn't notice how my men were tied
to their bellies underneath. Of that flock
my ram was the last to move out through the door,
weighed down by its thick fleece and my sly thoughts.
Mighty Polyphemus, as he stroked its back,
spoke to the animal:

‘My lovely ram,
why are you the last one in the flock
[590] to come out of the cave? Not once before
have you ever lagged behind the sheep.
No. You’ve always been well out in front,
striding off to graze on tender shoots of grass
and be the first to reach the river’s stream.
You’re the one who longs to get back home,
once evening comes, before the others.
But now you’re last of all. You must be sad,
grieving for your master’s eye, now blinded
by that evil fellow with his hateful crew.
[600] That Nobody destroyed my wits with wine.
But, I tell you, he’s not escaped being killed.
If only you could feel and speak like me—
you’d tell me where he’s hiding from my rage.
I’d smash his brains out on the ground in here,
sprinkle them in every corner of this cave,
and then my heart would ease the agonies
this worthless Nobody has brought on me.’

“With these words, he pushed the ram away from him,
out through the door. After the ram had moved
[610] a short distance from the cave and courtyard,
first I got out from underneath its gut
and then untied by comrades. We rushed away,
driving off those rich, fat, long-legged sheep,
often turning round to look behind us,
until we reached our ship—a welcome sight

to fellow crewmen—we'd escaped being killed,
although they groaned and wept for those who'd died.
But I would not allow them to lament—
with a scowl I told everyone to stop.

[620] I ordered them quickly to fling on board
the many fine-fleeced sheep and then set sail
across the salty sea. They climbed aboard
at once, took their places on the rowing bench,
and, sitting in good order in their rows,
struck the grey sea with their oars. But then,
when I was as far from land as a man's voice
can carry when he yells, I shouted out
and mocked the Cyclops:

‘Cyclops,
it seems he was no weakling, after all,
[630] the man whose comrades you so wished to eat,
using brute force in that hollow cave of yours.
Your evil acts were bound to catch you out,
you wretch—you didn't even hesitate
to gorge yourself on guests in your own home.
Now Zeus and other gods have paid you back.’

“That's what I said. It made his heart more angry.
He snapped off a huge chunk of mountain rock
and hurled it. The stone landed up ahead of us,
just by our ship's dark prow. As the stone sank,
[640] the sea surged under it, waves pushed us back
towards the land, and, like a tidal flood,
drove us on shore.⁵ I grabbed a long boat hook
and pushed us off, encouraging the crew,
and, with a nod of my head, ordering them
to ply their oars and save us from disaster.
They put their backs into it then and rowed.
But when we'd got some distance out to sea,
about twice as far, I started shouting,
calling the Cyclops, although around me

[650] my comrades cautioned me from every side,
trying to calm me down:

‘That’s reckless.

Why are you trying to irritate that savage?
Just now he threw a boulder in the sea
and pushed us back on shore. We really thought
he’d destroyed us there. If he’d heard us speak
or uttering a sound, he’d have hurled down
another jagged rock and crushed our skulls,
the timbers on this ship, as well. He’s strong,
powerful enough to throw this far.’

“That’s what they said.

[660] But my warrior spirit did not listen.
So, anger in my heart, I yelled again:

‘Cyclops, if any mortal human being
asks about the injury that blinded you,
tell them Odysseus destroyed your eye,
a sacker of cities, Laertes’ son,
a man from Ithaca.’

“When I said this,
he groaned and spoke out in reply:

‘Alas!

Now an ancient prophecy about me
has truly been fulfilled! Telemus,
[670] fine, tall son of Eurymus, a seer
who surpassed all men in prophecy,
reached old age among the Cyclopes
as a soothsayer. He said all these things
would come to pass someday—I’d lose my sight
at the hand of someone called Odysseus.
But I always expected he’d be large,
a noble man, with enormous power.

But now a puny, good-for-nothing weakling,
after overpowering me with wine,
[680] has destroyed my eye. Come here, Odysseus,
so I can give you your gift as my guest,
and urge the famous Shaker of the Earth
to escort you home—I am his son,
and he boasts he's my father. If he wishes,
he himself will cure me. No other blessed god,
nor any mortal man, can do that.'

"He finished speaking. I answered him and said:

'I wish I were as certain I could end your life,
rob you of your living spirit, and send you
[690] off to Hades' home, as I am confident
not even the great Shaker of the Earth
will fix your eye.'

"After I'd said this,
he stretched out his hands to starry heaven
and offered this prayer to lord Poseidon:

'Hear me, Poseidon, Enfolder of the Earth,
dark-haired god, if I truly am your son
and if you claim to be my father,
grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities,
a man from Ithaca, Laertes' son,
[700] never gets back home. If it's his destiny
to see his friends and reach his native land
and well-built house, may he get back late
and in distress, after all his comrades
have been killed, and in someone else's ship.
May he find troubles in his house, as well.'

"That's what he prayed. The dark-haired god heard him.
Then Cyclops once again picked up a rock,
a much larger stone, swung it round, and threw it,

using all his unimaginable force.

[710] It landed right behind the dark-prowed ship
and almost hit the steering oar. Its fall
convulsed the sea, and waves then pushed us on,
carrying our ship up to the further shore.

“We reached the island where our well-decked ships
were grouped together. Our comrades sat around them,
in great sorrow, always watching for us.
We rowed in, drove our ship up on the sand,
then climbed out through the surf. From the ship’s hold
we unloaded Cyclops’ flock and shared it out.

[720] I took great care to see that all men there
received an equal part. But when the flock
was being divided up, my well-armed comrades
awarded me the ram, my special gift,
one just for me. I sacrificed that ram,
there on the shore, to Zeus, Cronos’ son,
lord of the dark cloud, ruler of all,
offering him burnt pieces of the thigh.
But he did not care for my sacrifice.
Instead he started planning to destroy

[730] all my well-decked ships and loyal comrades.

“So then, all day long until the sunset,
we sat feasting on the huge supply of meat
and sweet wine, too. When the sun went down
and darkness came, we lay down to rest
and slept there on the shore beside the sea.

“As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
I roused my shipmates and ordered them aboard.
They untied cables fastened to the sterns
and got in at once, moved to the rowing bench,
[740] and sitting in good order in their rows,
they struck the grey sea with their oar blades.
So we sailed away from there, sad at heart,

happy to have avoided being destroyed,
although some dear companions had been killed.”