from the

Odyssey

Homer
translated by Robert Fitzgerald

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

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

He saw the townlands and learned the minds of many distant men, and weathered many bitter nights and days in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only to save his life, to bring his shipmates home. But not by will nor valor could he save them, for their own recklessness destroyed them all—
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Helios, the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
took from their eyes the dawn of their return.
Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus, tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

Sailing From Troy

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

“I am Laertes’ 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 under Mount Neion’s wind-blown robe of leaves,
in sight of other islands—Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca
being most lofty in that coastal sea,
and northwest, while the rest lie east and south.
A rocky isle, but good for a boy’s training;
I shall not see on earth a place more dear,
though I have been detained long by Calypso, loveliest among goddesses, who held me
in her smooth caves to be her heart’s delight,
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
he shall not, though he find a house of gold.

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

NOTES

3. Helios (HEE lee ohs) sun god.
4. Zeus (zoos) king of the gods.
5. Laertes (LAY ur teez)
6. guile (gyl) n. craftiness; cunning.
7. Ithaca (IHTH uh kuh) island off the west coast of Greece.
8. Calypso (kuh LIHP soh) sea goddess who loved Odysseus.
9. Circe (SUR see) of Aeaea (EE ee uh)
10. Ilium (IHL ee uhm) Troy.
11. Cicones (sih KOH neez)
Out to sea again!’ My men were mutinous, fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle, feasting,—while fugitives went inland, running to call to arms the main force of Cicones. This was an army, trained to fight on horseback or, where the ground required, on foot. They came with dawn over that terrain like the leaves and blades of spring. So doom appeared to us, dark word of Zeus for us, our evil days.

My men stood up and made a fight of it—backed on the ships, with lances kept in play, from bright morning through the blaze of noon holding our beach, although so far outnumbered; but when the sun passed toward unyoking time, then the Achaeans, one by one, gave way. Six benches were left empty in every ship that evening when we pulled away from death.

And this new grief we bore with us to sea: our precious lives we had, but not our friends. No ship made sail next day until some shipmate had raised a cry, three times, for each poor ghost unfleshed by the Cicones on that field.

The Lotus-Eaters

Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north a storm against the ships, and driving veils of squall moved down like night on land and sea. The bows went plunging at the gust; sails cracked and lashed out strips in the big wind.

We saw death in that fury, dropped the yards, unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee: then two long days and nights we lay offshore worn out and sick at heart, tasting our grief, until a third Dawn came with ringlets shining.

Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested, letting the steersmen and the breeze take over.

I might have made it safely home, that time, but as I came round Malea the current took me out to sea, and from the north a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera. Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth we came to the coastline of the Lotus-Eaters, who live upon that flower. We landed there to take on water. All ships’ companies
mustered alongside for the mid-day meal. Then I sent out two picked men and a runner
to learn what race of men that land sustained. They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus-Eaters,
who showed no will to do us harm, only offering the sweet Lotus to our friends—but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus,
ever cared to report, nor to return: they longed to stay forever, browsing on
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,
tied them down under their rowing benches, and called the rest: ‘All hands aboard;
come, clear the beach and no one taste
the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’ Filing in to their places by the rowlocks
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf, and we moved out again on our sea faring.

The Cyclops

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

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

A prodigious16 man
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks
to graze afield—remote from all companions,
knowing none but savage ways, a brute
so huge, he seemed no man at all of those
who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather
a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.

We beached there, and I told the crew
to stand by and keep watch over the ship:
as for myself I took my twelve best fighters
and went ahead. I had a goatskin full
of that sweet liquor that Euanthes’ son,
Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo’s\textsuperscript{17}
holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness
we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,
he gave me seven shining golden talents\textsuperscript{18}
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,
and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars
of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave
in Maron’s household knew this drink; only
he, his wife, and the storeroom mistress knew;
and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored,
honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,
but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume
over the winebowl. No man turned away
when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full
I brought along, and victuals\textsuperscript{19} in a bag,
for in my bones I knew some towering brute
would be upon us soon—all outward power,
a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops
had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep,
so we looked round at everything inside:
a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens
crowded with lambs and kids,\textsuperscript{20} each in its class:
firstlings apart from middlings, and the ‘dewdrops,’
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.
And vessels full of whey\textsuperscript{21} were brimming there—
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.
My men came pressing round me, pleading:

‘Why not
take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,
throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?
We’ll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say
put out again on good salt water!’

Ah,
how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished
to see the cave man, what he had to offer—
no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends. We lit a fire, burnt an offering,
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence 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.

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, 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;
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, heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

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

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

22. boughs (bowz) n. tree branches.

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

QUESTION: What kind of creature does that verb evoke?
CONCLUDE: What comparison does it suggest between Cyclops and Odysseus and his men?

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

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

avenged (uh VEHNJ) v. to get revenge
He answered this from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny, or else you come from the other end of nowhere, telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes 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?’

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. We are survivors, these good men and I.’

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

26. Poseidon (poh SY duhn) god of the sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea.
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 brain out, spattering the floor. Then he dismembered them and made his meal, gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones. We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus, powerless, looking on at this, appalled; but Cyclops went on filling up his belly with manflesh and great gulps of whey, then lay down like a mast among his sheep.

My heart beat high now at the chance of action, and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went along his flank to stab him where the midriff holds the liver. I had touched the spot when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him we perished there as well, for we could never move his ponderous doorway slab aside. So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order, putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then, 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. 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:

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—an olive tree, felled green and left to season for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—a deep-sea-going craft—might carry: so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I chopped out a six foot section of this pole and set it down before my men, who scraped it; and when they had it smooth, I hewed again to make a stake with pointed end. I held this in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,
then hid it, well back in the cavern, under one of the dung piles in profusion there. Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust and grind that spike in Cyclops’ eye, when mild sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it, the men I would have chosen won the toss—four strong men, and I made five as captain.

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

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

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

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me, how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you. Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain, but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down. I saw the fuddle and flush come over him, then I sang out in cordial tones:

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

33. nectar (NEHK tuhr) and ambrosia (am BROH zhuh) drink and food of the gods.
And he said:
‘Nohbdy’s my meat, then, after I eat his friends. Others come first. There’s a noble gift, now.’

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

Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike deep in the embers, charring it again, and cheered my men along with battle talk to keep their courage up: no quitting now. The pike of olive, green though it had been, reddened and glowed as if about to catch. I drew it from the coals and my four fellows gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops as more than natural force nerved them; straight forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it deep in his crater eye, and leaned on it turning it as a shipwright turns a drill in planking, having men below to swing the two-handed strap that spins it in the groove. So with our brand we bored the 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 one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—the way they make soft iron hale and hard—just so that eyeball hissed around the spike.

The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him, and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye, threw it away, and his wild hands went groping; then he set up a howl for Cyclopes who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby. Some heard him; and they came by divers 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?’
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\textsuperscript{37} reply:

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

\begin{enumerate}
\item[365] So saying
they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.
\end{enumerate}

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.
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 \textit{tactics},
reasoning as a man will for dear life,
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.
The Cyclops’ rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
fleeces, a dark violet.

\begin{enumerate}
\item[370] Three abreast
I tied them silently together, twining
cords of willow from the ogre’s bed;
then slung a man under each middle one
to ride there safely, shielded left and right.
\end{enumerate}

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
in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
where dams with udders full called for a milking.
Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,
the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
but my men riding on the pectoral\textsuperscript{38} fleece
the giant’s blind hands blundering never found.

\textsuperscript{37.} sage \textit{adj.} wise.

\textsuperscript{38.} pectoral \textit{(PEHK tuh ruhl) adj.}
located in or on the chest.
The Cyclops fails to notice the men hidden under the ram.
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came, weighted by wool and me with my meditations. The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

’Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest in the night cave? You never linger so, but graze before them all, and go afar to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way leading along the streams, until at evening you run to be the first one in the fold. Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving over your Master’s eye? That carrion rogue\(^{39}\) 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 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, 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.

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: move fast, and put the ship’s head toward the breakers.’ They all pitched in at loading, then embarked and struck their oars into the sea. Far out, as far off shore as shouted words would carry, I sent a few back to the adversary: ‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions? Puny, am I, in a cave man’s hands? How do you like the beating that we gave you, you damned cannibal? Eater of guests under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us. Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.
I got the longest boathook out and stood
fending us off, with furious nods to all
to put their backs into a racing stroke—
row, row, or perish. So the long oars bent
kicking the foam sternward, making head
until we drew away, and twice as far.
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
in low voices protesting:

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

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

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

‘Aye
He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

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

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

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:
‘Now comes the weird\(^{40}\) upon me, spoken of old.
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,\(^{41}\)
a son of Eurymus;\(^{42}\) great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.
Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.
But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—you put me down with wine, you blinded me.
Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,
praying the god of earthquake\(^{43}\) to befriend you—
his son I am, for he by his avowal
fathered me, and, if he will, he may
heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.’
Few words I shouted in reply to him:

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

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

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

Let him lose all companions, and return
under strange sail to bitter days at home.’
In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.

Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone
and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track.
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone
to bear us onward toward the island.

There
as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,
The trim ships drawn up side by side, and all
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,
and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.
Then we unloaded all the Cyclops’ flock
to make division, share and share alike,
only my fighters voted that my ram,
the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him
by the seaside and burnt his long thighbones
to Zeus beyond the storm cloud, Cronus’ son,
who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering;
destruction for my ships he had in store
and death for those who sailed them, my companions.

Now all day long until the sun went down
we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine,
till after sunset in the gathering dark
we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.
When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose
touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders
to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines;
and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks
oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea.
So we moved out, sad in the vast offing,\(^{45}\)
having our precious lives, but not our friends.

The Land of the Dead

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

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

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

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

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{NOTES}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item \textbf{45.} \textit{offing} \textit{n.} distant part of the
      sea visible from the shore.
    \item \textbf{46.} \textit{Aeolia} (ee OH lee uh) . . .
      \textit{Aeolus} (EE uh luhs)
    \item \textbf{47.} \textit{Laestrygonians} (lehs trih GOH
      nee uhnhz)
    \item \textbf{48.} \textit{singing nymph} . . . \textit{hair} Circe.
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
at morning, when he climbs the sky of stars, nor in descending earthward out of heaven; ruinous night being rove over those wretches. We made the land, put ram and ewe ashore, and took our way along the Ocean stream to find the place foretold for us by Circe. There Perimedes and Eurylochus\(^{49}\) pinioned\(^{50}\) the sacred beasts. With my drawn blade I spaded up the votive\(^{51}\) pit, and poured libations\(^{52}\) round it to the unnumbered dead: sweet milk and honey, then sweet wine, and last clear water; and I scattered barley down. Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead, vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them before she calved, at home in Ithaca, and burn the choice bits on the altar fire; as for Tiresias,\(^{53}\) I swore to sacrifice a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock. Thus to assuage the nations of the dead I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe, letting their black blood stream into the wellpit. Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus,\(^{54}\) brides and young men, and men grown old in pain, and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief; many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads, battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear. From every side they came and sought the pit with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear. But presently I gave command to my officers to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone.\(^{55}\) Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep the surging phantoms from the bloody pit till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

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

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

\(^{49}\) Perimedes (pehr uh MEE deez)
\(^{50}\) Eurylochus (yoo RIHL uh kuhs)
\(^{51}\) pinioned (PIHN yuhnd) v. confined or shackled.
\(^{52}\) votive (VOHT ihv) adj. done to fulfill a vow or express thanks.
\(^{53}\) libations (ly BAY shuhnz) n. wine or other liquids poured upon the ground as a sacrifice or offering.
\(^{54}\) Tiresias (ty REE see uhs)
\(^{55}\) Erebus (EHR uh buhs) dark region under the earth through which the dead pass before entering realm of Hades.
Son of great Laertes,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
bad luck shadowed me, and no kindly power;
ignoble death I drank with so much wine.

I slept on Circe’s roof, then could not see
the long steep backward ladder, coming down,
and fell that height. My neckbone, buckled under,
snapped, and my spirit found this well of dark.
Now hear the grace I pray for, in the name
of those back in the world, not here—your wife
and father, he who gave you bread in childhood,
and your own child, your only son, Telemachus,\textsuperscript{56}
long ago left at home.

When you make sail
and put these lodgings of dim Death behind,
you will moor ship, I know, upon Aeaea Island;
there, O my lord, remember me, I pray,
do not abandon me unwept, unburied,
to tempt the gods’ wrath, while you sail for home;
but fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,
and build a cairn\textsuperscript{57} for me above the breakers—
an unknown sailor’s mark for men to come.
Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it
the oar I pulled in life with my companions.’

He ceased and I replied:

‘Unhappy spirit,
I promise you the barrow and the burial.’

So we conversed, and grimly, at a distance,
with my long sword between, guarding the blood,
while the faint image of the lad spoke on.
Now came the soul of Anticlea, dead,
my mother, daughter of Autolycus,\textsuperscript{58}
dead now, though living still when I took ship
for holy Troy. Seeing this ghost I grieved,
but held her off, through pang on pang of tears,
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes\textsuperscript{59} came forward
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:

‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of landways and seaways,
why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,
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,
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,
not to be shaken from your track, implacable,
in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded.
One narrow strait may take you through his blows:
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.
When you make landfall on Thrinacia first
and quit the violet sea, dark on the land
you’ll find the grazing herds of Helios
by whom all things are seen, all speech is known.
Avoid those kine,hold fast to your intent,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.

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
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,
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
can tell you how: some passerby will say,
“What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?”
Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf
and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:
a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,
and carry out pure hecatombs 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,
your country folk in blessed peace around you.
And all this shall be just as I foretell.’

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

QUESTION: What do these contrasting words express?

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

60. kine (kyn) n. cattle.

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

As Circe spoke, Dawn mounted her golden throne, and on the first rays Circe left me, taking her way like a great goddess up the island. I made straight for the ship, roused up the men to get aboard and cast off at the stern. They scrambled to their places by the rowlocks and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea. But soon an offshore breeze blew to our liking—a canvas-bellying breeze, a lusty shipmate sent by the singing nymph with sunbright hair. So we made fast the braces, and we rested, letting the wind and steersman work the ship. The crew being now silent before me, I addressed them, sore at heart:
‘Dear friends, more than one man, or two, should know those things Circe foresaw for us and shared with me, so let me tell her forecast: then we die with our eyes open, if we are going to die, 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 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, while our good ship made time, bound outward down the wind for the strange island of Sirens.

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

The crew were on their feet 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—
no long task, for a burning heat came down
from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward
I carried wax along the line, and laid it
thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
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:

This way, oh turn your bows,
Achaea’s glory,
As all the world allows—
Moor and be merry.

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

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

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

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

Argos’ old soldiery

from Argos, a city in ancient
Greece.

The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water
made me crave to listen, and I tried to say
‘Untie me!’ to the crew, jerking my brows;
but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes
got to his feet, he and Eurylochus,
and passed more line about, to hold me still.
So all rowed on, until the Sirens
dropped under the sea rim, and their singing
dwindled away.

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

Scylla and Charybdis

But scarcely had that island
faded in blue air than I saw smoke
and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—
a sound the men heard, and it terrified them.

Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking
wild alongside till the ship lost way,
with no oar blades to drive her through the water.
Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern,
trying to put heart into them, standing over
every oarsman, saying gently,

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{64} the combers and the smoke
large waves that break on the
beach and the ocean spray.
That was all, and it brought them round to action. But as I sent them on toward Scylla,\(^65\) I told them nothing, as they could do nothing. They would have dropped their oars again, in panic, to roll for cover under the decking. Circe’s bidding against arms had slipped my mind, so I tied on my cuirass\(^66\) and took up two heavy spears, then made my way along to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there, the monster of the gray rock, harboring torment for my friends. I strained my eyes upon the cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere could I catch sight of her.

And all this time, in travail,\(^67\) sobbing, gaining on the current, we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire gorge\(^68\) of the salt seatide. By heaven! when she vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron seething over intense fire, when the mixture suddenly heaves and rises.

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

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**NOTES**

65. Scylla (SIHL uh)

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

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

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

69. maelstrom (MAYL struhm) *n.* large, violent whirlpool.
sand raged on the bottom far below.
My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear of being devoured.

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

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

so these were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

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

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

The Cattle of the Sun God

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

‘Old shipmates, our stores are in the ship’s hold, food and drink; the cattle here are not for our provision, or we pay dearly for it.
Fierce the god is who cherishes these heifers and these sheep: Helios; and no man avoids his eye.’

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

The storms continued.

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

Now on the shore Eurylochus made his insidious plea: ‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘You’ve gone through everything; listen to what I say. All deaths are hateful to us, mortal wretches, but famine is the most pitiful, the worst end that a man can come to.

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

880 trooping away at once to round up heifers.
Now, that day tranquil cattle with broad brows were grazing near, and soon the men drew up around their chosen beasts in ceremony.
They plucked the leaves that shone on a tall oak—having no barley meal—to strew the victims, performed the prayers and ritual, knifed the kine and flayed each carcass, cutting thighbones free to wrap in double folds of fat. These offerings, with strips of meat, were laid upon the fire.

890 Then, as they had no wine, they made libation with clear spring water, broiling the entrails first; and when the bones were burnt and tripes shared, they spitted the carved meat.

Just then my slumber left me in a rush, my eyes opened,

895 and I went down the seaward path. No sooner had I caught sight of our black hull, than savory odors of burnt fat eddied around me; grief took hold of me, and I cried aloud:

‘O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,
you made me sleep away this day of mischief!
O cruel drowsing, in the evil hour!
Here they sat, and a great work they contrived.’

72. contrived v. thought up; devised.

Lampetia73 in her long gown meanwhile had borne swift word to the Overlord of Noon:

‘They have killed your kine.’

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

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

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

NOTES

72. contrived v. thought up; devised.
73. Lampetia (lam PEE shuh) a nymph.
—Calypso later told me of this exchange, as she declared that Hermes\textsuperscript{74} had told her.
Well, when I reached the sea cave and the ship, I faced each man, and had it out; but where could any remedy be found? There was none.

The silken beeves\textsuperscript{75} of Hellos were dead.
The gods, moreover, made queer signs appear: cowhides began to crawl, and beef, both raw and roasted, lowed like kine upon the spits.

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

All the gales had ceased, blown out, and with an offshore breeze we launched again, stepping the mast and sail, to make for the open sea. Astern of us the island coastline faded, and no land showed anywhere, but only sea and heaven, when Zeus Cronion piled a thunderhead above the ship, while gloom spread on the ocean.

We held our course, but briefly. Then the squall struck whining from the west, with gale force, breaking both forestays, and the mast came toppling aft along the ship’s length, so the running rigging showered into the bilge.

On the afterdeck the mast had hit the steersman a slant blow bashing the skull in, knocking him overside, as the brave soul fled the body, like a diver. With crack on crack of thunder, Zeus let fly a bolt against the ship, a direct hit, so that she bucked, in reeking fumes of sulphur, and all the men were flung into the sea.

They came up ’round the wreck, bobbing awhile like petrels\textsuperscript{76} on the waves.

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

I clambered fore and aft my hulk until a comber split her, keel from ribs, and the big timber floated free; the mast, too, broke away.
A backstay floated dangling from it, stout rawhide rope, and I used this for lashing mast and keel together. These I straddled, riding the frightful storm.

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

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

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

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

NOTES

77. bole (bohl) n. tree trunk.

78. Father... Zeus.

79. Ogygia (o JIHj ee uh)