

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE ODYSSEY

HUMANS

- AGAMEMNON** (ag' ə mem' nən): king and leader of Greek forces during the Trojan war
- ALCINOUS** (al sin' ō əs): king of the Phaeacians and person to whom Odysseus relates his story
- AMPHINOMUS** (am fin' ə mäs): one of Penelope's suitors
- ANTINOUS** (an tin' ō əs): rudest of Penelope's suitors
- EUMAEUS** (yoo mē' əs): Odysseus's loyal swineherd
- EURYCLEIA** (yoo' ri klē' ə): Odysseus's faithful old nurse
- EURYLOCHUS** (yoo ril' ə kəs): one of Odysseus's crew
- EURYMACHUS** (yoo rim' ə kəs): one of Penelope's suitors
- EURYNOME** (yoo rin' ə mē): Penelope's housekeeper
- LAERTES** (lā ur' tēz): Odysseus's father
- MARON** (mār' on): priest of Apollo who gives Odysseus a gift of powerful wine
- ODYSSEUS** (ō dis' ē əs): king of Ithaca and hero of the Trojan war
- PENELOPE** (pə nel' ə pē): Odysseus's wife
- PERIMEDES** (per' i mē' dēz): one of Odysseus's crew
- TELEMACHUS** (tə lem' ə kəs): Odysseus and Penelope's son
- TIRESIAS** (tī rē' sē əs): blind prophet from the underworld

GODS AND IMMORTALS

- APOLLO** (ə pol' ō): god of sunlight, music, poetry, medicine, law, and the tending of flocks and herds
- ATHENA** (ə thē' nə): daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare who helps her chosen heroes
- CALYPSO** (kə lip' sō): immortal sea nymph who held Odysseus captive for many years
- CHARYBDIS** (kə rib' dis): dangerous whirlpool personified as a female monster
- CIRCE** (sur' sē): enchantress who lives on the island of Aëaea
- CYCLOPES** (sī klō' pēz): race of one-eyed giants; an individual member of the race is a **CYCLOPS** (sī' klops)
- HELIOS** (hē' lē os'): god of the sun; another name for Apollo
- LOTUS EATERS** (lō' təs): inhabitants of a land visited by Odysseus and his crew
- POLYPHEMUS** (pol' i fē' mäs): a Cyclops and son of Poseidon
- POSEIDON** (pə sīd' ən): god of the sea and earthquakes
- SCYLLA** (sil' ə): six-headed female sea monster
- SIRENS** (sī' rənz): sea nymphs who sing songs that lure men to their death
- ZEUS** (zōös): king of the gods

Part I

An Invocation

Poets in Homer's day believed that the gods inspired their storytelling and singing. According to custom, Homer begins his performance with an invocation, calling upon the Muse, the goddess of epic poetry, for help and inspiration. The invocation serves a second purpose: to capture the audience's attention with highlights of heroic adventures that the poet will later describe in detail.

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,²
the wanderer, harried³ for years on end,
after he plundered the stronghold
5 on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands
and learned the minds of many distant men,
and weathered⁸ many bitter nights and days
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them,
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Helios,¹⁴ the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,¹⁷
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.
Begin when all the rest who left behind them
20 headlong death in battle or at sea
had long ago returned, while he alone still hungered
for home and wife. Her ladyship Calypso²²
clung to him in her sea-hollowed caves—
a nymph,²⁴ immortal²⁴ and most beautiful,
25 who craved him for her own.
And when long years and seasons

Vocabulary

plunder (plun' dər) *v.* to take (property) by force, especially in warfare
valor (val' ər) *n.* great courage, especially in battle

2 **contending**: fighting or dealing with difficulty.

3 **harried**: constantly tormented or troubled.

8 **weathered**: got through safely; survived.

14 **Helios** (hē' lē os'): the god of the sun.

17 **Zeus** (zōös): The most powerful of the gods, Zeus is the father of countless major and minor gods.

22 **Calypso** (kə lip' sō)

24 **nymph**: a young, beautiful spirit, or minor goddess, representing the divine power of a place or of something in nature, such as a tree, cave, or body of water. **immortal**: living forever; eternal.



wheeling brought around that point of time
 ordained° for him to make his passage homeward,
 trials and dangers, even so, attended him
 30 even in Ithaca, near those he loved.
 Yet all the gods had pitied Lord Odysseus,
 all but Poseidon, raging cold and rough°
 against the brave king° till he came ashore
 at last on his own land.

28 ordained: set or determined by an authority—in this case, fate or the gods.

31–33 Odysseus (ō dis' ē əs) . . . the brave king: Odysseus is the king of Ithaca.

32 Poseidon (pə sīd' ən), raging cold and rough: Poseidon, brother of Zeus, governs the oceans as well as earthquakes. In the next section, you will find clues to his anger at Odysseus.

New Coasts and Poseidon's Son

The gods are worried. Nearly ten years have passed since the end of the war against Troy, but one of the greatest Greek generals has not yet returned home. Odysseus has encountered a series of disasters on his voyage and is now the prisoner of a nymph named Calypso. He has also angered Poseidon, who has prevented him from returning to his wife, Penelope (pə nel' ə pē), and his son, Telemachus (tə lem' ə kəs), on the island of Ithaca. But Poseidon is visiting Africa, and the other gods agree to act behind his back.

The poet now tells of Odysseus, who is miserable after seven years on his island prison. Calypso loves her handsome captive and will not let him go, but she is forced to reconsider her position when she receives a strongly worded order from Mount Olympus. Giving in, Calypso helps Odysseus make a raft, and he thankfully departs. But he does not have smooth sailing. Poseidon, returning from Africa, spots his old enemy at sea and shipwrecks him in an instant with a fierce storm.

Zeus's daughter Athena intervenes. She casts Odysseus, naked and near death, ashore on the island of Phaeacia (fē ə' shə). There a beautiful princess discovers him and takes him home to the palace of her father, King Alcinous (əl sin' ō əs). The Phaeacians treat Odysseus as a noble guest and urge him to reveal his identity. At last he relents and uncertainly begins to tell his gripping story.

“What shall I

say first? What shall I keep until the end?
 The gods have tried° me in a thousand ways.
 But first my name: let that be known to you,
 5 and if I pull away from pitiless death,
 friendship will bind us, though my land lies far.

3 tried: tested.

I am Laertes'° son, Odysseus.

Men hold° me

7 Laertes (lə ur' tēz)

8 hold: regard; consider.



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formidable for guile in peace and war:
10 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
15 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,
20 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.
25 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

30 of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus?"°

Odysseus relates his first adventure. He and his fleet of twelve ships attacked and plundered the coastal settlement of the Cicones (si kō' nēz). The raid was a success, but the overconfident men became drunk and mutinous (unresponsive to Odysseus's orders to retreat). The Cicones's army surprised Odysseus and his men at dawn, and drove them back to sea with heavy losses.

"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.°
35 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

Vocabulary

formidable (fōr' mi də bəl) *adj.* causing fear, dread, awe, or admiration as a result of size, strength, power, or some other impressive quality
guile (gīl) *n.* slyness; craftiness; skillful deception

12 Neion (nē' on)

13 Dulichium (dōō lik' ē əm)

14 Same (sā' mē). Zacynthus (zə sin' thəs)

22 Circe (sur' sē) . . . the enchantress: Circe is a goddess capable of enchanting, or working magic upon, men. Aeaea (ē ē' ə) is her island.

30 weathered under Zeus: Odysseus uses words craftily. Here, he appears to give respectful credit to Zeus for getting him safely through danger; but he also is making a pun on the word *weathered*. Zeus governs the heavens and the weather, and is well known for sending people storms, lightning, and thunder when he is displeased.

32 Malea (mə lē' ə)

34 Cythera (sith' ə rə)



An Egyptian Lotus Plant, 1834.
Unattributed woodcut.
Private collection.

Viewing the art: What connection can you make between the appearance of the lotus plant and its effect on Odysseus's men?

to take on water. All ships' companies
40 mustered^o 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.^o
They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,
who showed no will to do us harm,^o only
45 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.
50 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.'
55 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.

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,^o
giants, louts,^o without a law to bless them.
60 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 rain.
65 Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,

40 **mustered:** gathered together.

42 **sustained:** kept alive; supported.

58 **Cyclopes** (sī klō' pēz): a race of one-eyed giants.

59 **louts:** stupid beings.



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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."

Just offshore from the land of the Cyclopes is a deserted island with a fine natural harbor. Odysseus and his men spend two comfortable nights there. On the second day, overcome by curiosity, Odysseus sails with one ship and a crew to the mainland. He wants to see just what sort of creatures these Cyclopes are.

70 "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,^o
and many rams and goats about the place
inside a sheepfold^o—made from slabs of stone
75 earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged
towering oak trees.

A prodigious^o man
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks
to graze afield—remote from all companions,
80 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
85 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
90 holy grove at Ismarus;^o for kindness
we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,
he gave me seven shining golden talents^o
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,
and then this liquor—twelve two-handed jars
95 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,
100 but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume
over the winebowl. No man turned away
when cups of this came round.

72 **screened with laurel:** partly hidden
behind laurel trees.

74 **sheepfold:** an enclosure, or pen, for
holding sheep.

77 **prodigious:** huge; enormous.

88–90 **Euanthes'** (yoo an' thēz) son,
... **Ismarus** (iz mār' əs): In ancient
Greece, worshippers of certain gods built
shrines to them, surrounded by woods,
or "groves," that were considered sacred
sanctuaries. Priests oversaw the planting
and tending of the groves. **Maron**
(mār' on) is a priest of **Apollo** (ə pol' ō),
an important god associated with music,
medicine, law, and the tending of flocks
and herds.

92 **talents:** bars of gold used as money
in ancient Greece.



A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals^o in a bag,
 105 for in my bones I knew some towering brute
 would be upon us soon—all outward power,
 a wild man, ignorant of civility.^o

104 **victuals** (vit' əls): food

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

107 **civility**: polite and courteous behavior.

108 **Cyclops** (sī' klops): Note the different spelling and pronunciation of this reference to a single one-eyed giant.

111–114 **pens** . . . **both**: The lambs are grouped by age.

115 **whey**: the watery part of milk that separates from the curd, or solid part, during the cheese-making process.

'Why not

take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,
 120 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^o that was! Yet I refused. I wished
 125 to see the caveman, what he had to offer—
 no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.
 We lit a fire, burnt an offering,^o
 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence
 around the embers, waiting. When he came
 130 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
 135 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
 140 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

124 **sound**: sensible.

127 **burnt an offering**: The men burned some food as a gift to the gods in the hope of winning their support.

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127 burnt an offering: The men burned some food as a gift to the gods in the hope of winning their support.

145 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,^o
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.

150 '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?'

155 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:

160 'We are from Troy, Achaeans,^o 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^o—
the whole world knows what city
he laid waste, what armies he destroyed.
It was our luck to come here; here we stand,
165 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.'

170 He answered this
from his brute chest, unmoved:

175 'You are a ninny,^o
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.
180 Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?'

144–145 thickened . . . baskets: The milk is curdled (thickened) by adding fig juice, and the whey is drained off through wicker (withy) baskets.

151–153 What brings . . . by sea: What brings you here from the sea—honest trade? Or are you wandering scoundrels who carelessly risk your lives and steal from others?

157 Achaeans (ə kē' əns): Greeks.

161 Agamemnon (ə gə' mɛm' nɒn), son of Atreus (ə' trɛ əs): king of Argos, in southern Greece, who led the war against Troy.

167–169 We would . . . guest: Odysseus earnestly asks or begs (entreat) for the Cyclops's hospitality and warns him that Zeus punishes anyone who mistreats a harmless guest.

172 ninny: fool.



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

'My ship?

185 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.'

190 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.

Then he dismembered them and made his meal,
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones:

195 We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,
powerless, looking on at this, appalled;^o
but Cyclops went on filling up his belly
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.

200 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
205 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
210 and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,
his chores being all dispatched,^o he caught
another brace^o of men to make his breakfast,
and whisked away his great door slab
215 to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.^o
There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.

196 appalled: horrified; shocked; terrified.

212 dispatched: finished.

213 brace: pair.

216 cap a quiver: put the cap on a quiver for holding arrows.

Vocabulary

ponderous (pon' der əs) *adj.* having great weight or bulk; heavy

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powerless, looking on at this, appalled;^o
but Cyclops went on filling up his belly
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.
200 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
205 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
210 and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,
his chores being all dispatched,^o he caught
another brace^o of men to make his breakfast,
and whisked away his great door slab
215 to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.^o
There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.

196 appalled: horrified; shocked; terrified.

212 dispatched: finished.

213 brace: pair.

216 cap a quiver: put the cap on a quiver for holding arrows.

Vocabulary

ponderous (pon' der as) *adj.* having great weight or bulk; heavy

220 And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,
if but Athena^o 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
225 a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:^o
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;
230 and when they had it smooth, I hewed^o 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.
235 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,
240 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 sheep-herding whim—
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.
245 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.
250 My moment was at hand, and I went forward
holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,^o
looking up, saying:

'Cyclops, try some wine.

255 Here's liquor to wash down your scraps of men.
Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried

Vocabulary

profusion (prə fū' zhan) *n.* plentiful amount; abundance

220 Athena: Odysseus prays for the support of Athena, his patron goddess who guides and protects him. Among other things, Athena is a warrior goddess who directly helps her chosen heroes.

221–226 Here are . . . carry: Odysseus spies the trunk of an olive tree, which the Cyclops cut down (felled) when the wood was green and left to dry (season) before carving it into a club or staff. Odysseus compares its size to that of a mast on a seafaring ship (lugger) that is wide in the middle (broad in the beam).

230 hewed: chopped or hacked.

251 dark drink: This is the liquor Odysseus described in lines 94–102.



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?"

260 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
265 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^o cover over him,
then I sang out in cordial tones:

270 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.'

275 '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
280 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
285 to keep their courage up: no quitting now.
The pike of olive,^o 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
290 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

266 nectar and ambrosia: the foods of the gods, causing immortality. The Cyclops suggests that any wine is a gift from heaven, but this one is like the gods' own drink.

268 fuddle and flush: the confused mental state and reddish complexion caused by drinking alcohol.



The Blinding of Polyphemus.
Greek hydria. Museo Nazionale
di Villa Giulia, Rome.

286 pike of olive: the sharpened stake made from the olive tree.

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turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
in planking, having men below to swing
295 the two-handed 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.

300 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.
305 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
310 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
315 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:
320 'Nohbdy, Nohbdy's tricked me, Nohbdy's ruined me!'

To this rough shout they made a sage° reply:
325 'Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain
given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.'

So saying
they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.
Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,

296 brand: the piece of burning hot wood.

301 adze: an axlike tool with a curved blade.

303 hale: strong.

311 divers: several different; various.

314 Polyphemus (pol' i fē' mās): the blinded Cyclops's name.

321 sage: wise.



330 fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
 and squatted in the breach^o with arms thrown wide
 for any silly beast or man who bolted^o—
 hoping somehow I might be such a fool.
 But I kept thinking how to win the game:
 335 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.
 The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
 340 fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

I tied them silently together, twining
 cords of willow from the ogre's^o bed;
 then slung a man under each middle one
 345 to ride there safely, shielded left and right.
 So three sheep could convey each man. I took
 the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,
 and hung myself under his kinky belly,
 pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
 350 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
 355 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 fleece^o
 the giant's blind hands blundering never found.
 360 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,
 365 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
 370 over your Master's eye? That carrion^o rogue
 and his accurst companions burnt it out

331 breach: a gap or opening.

332 bolted: broke away.

343 ogre: monster; fearsome giant.

358 pectoral fleece: the wool on the rams' chests.

370 carrion: rotten, filthy.

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Odysseus. Jacob Jordaens
(1593–1678). Oil on canvas,
61 x 97 cm. Pushkin Museum,
Moscow.

Viewing the painting:
Imagine that you are the man
beneath the ram on the left.
What is going through your
mind? What might the
Cyclops be thinking and
feeling in this scene?

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
375 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,
380 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.
385 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;
390 move fast, and put the ship's head toward the breakers.'^o
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked^o
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:

395 '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!'^o

390 put . . . breakers: turn the ship
around, toward the open sea.
391 embarked: got on board.

395–399 O Cyclops! . . . you: In his
boasting, Odysseus assumes that the gods
have favored him. Why might there be
danger in such boasts and assumptions?



400 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.
405 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
410 until we drew away, and twice as far.^o
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!

415 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.’^o

420 He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

‘Aye



Polyphemus Attacking Sailors in Their Boat, 1855. Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps. Oil on canvas, 98 x 145 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, France.

Viewing the painting:
How does this painting reinforce the sense of urgency conveyed by the description of Odysseus’s escape?

425
430
435
440
445
450
455

402–410 Ahead . . . twice as far: The sinking hilltop creates a wave at the ship’s front end (prow) that washes the boat backwards (stern foremost) to the shore.

415–419 That tidal . . . boulder: The men complain, reasonably enough, that Polyphemus nearly smashed the ship (All but stove us in) and that Odysseus’s shouting will give away their position (bearing).



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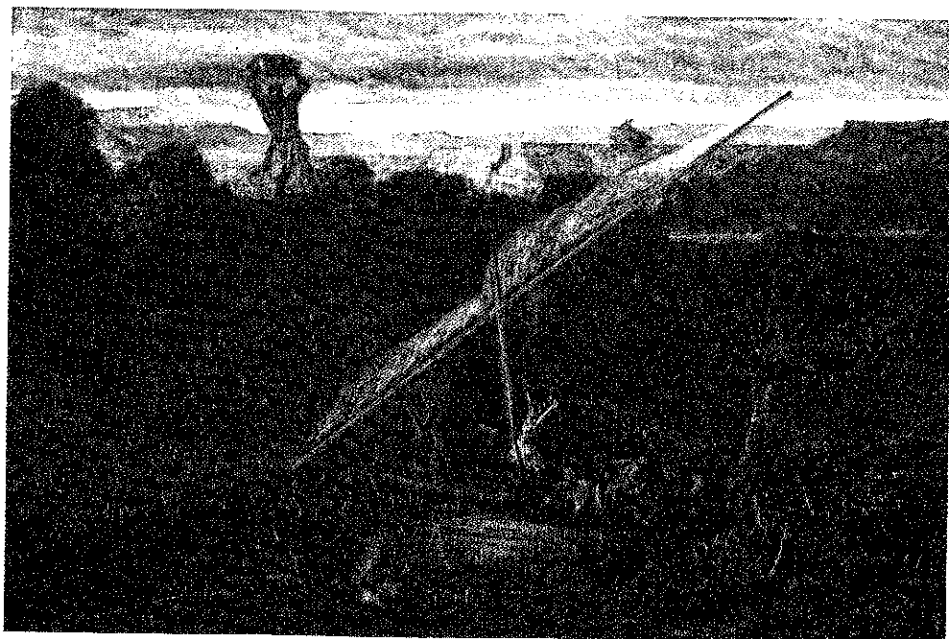
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I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
 but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,

425 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:

430 ‘Now comes the weird^o upon me, spoken of old.
 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,^o
 a son of Eurymus;^o great length of days
 he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
 and these things he foretold for time to come:
 435 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.
 440 Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,
 praying the god of earthquake^o 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
 445 of all the happy gods or mortal men.’

430 the weird: the strange fate.
 431 Telemus (tel’ a mas)
 432 Eurymus (yoo ri’ mas)

441 god of earthquake: Poseidon

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!’

450 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
 455 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.
 460 Let him lose all companions, and return
 under strange sail to bitter days at home.^o

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,^o
 465 to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel's track.
 But it fell short, just aft^o the steering oar,
 and whelming seas rose giant above the stone
 to bear us onward toward the island.^o

There

470 as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,
 the trim^o 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.
 475 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
 480 to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus^o son,
 who rules the world. But Zeus disdained^o 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
 485 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
 490 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,^o
 having our precious lives, but not our friends."

452-461 **O hear . . . home:** In ancient cultures, curses were neither made nor taken lightly. Homer's audience would have believed in their power. In his curse upon Odysseus, Polyphemus begs Poseidon to make his enemy suffer, using every detail he knows about Odysseus to make sure the god's punishment will be directed toward the right person.

464 **titanic for the cast:** drawing upon his great size and strength in preparation for the throw.

466 **aft:** behind.

468 **the island:** the deserted island where the other eleven ships and their crews have remained while Odysseus and his handpicked men explored the Cyclops's mainland.

471 **trim:** in good condition and ready to sail.

480 **Cronus (krō' nās):** Heaven and Earth, the first gods, had been dethroned by their son Cronus, who was in turn overthrown by his son Zeus.

481 **disdained:** rejected.

493 **vast offing:** the visible expanse of open sea.

