

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  
5 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  
10 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,  
15 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.

**I**N THESE OPENING LINES *of the Odyssey, the poet invokes or calls upon the Muse—the goddess of poetry—to give him inspiration in telling the story of Odysseus. During seven of Odysseus' ten years on the Mediterranean Sea, he is held captive by the goddess Calypso. With Athena's help, Odysseus finally persuades Calypso to let him go, and she helps him build a raft to leave her island. After Odysseus sails away, his raft is destroyed by storms.*

*Alone and exhausted, Odysseus is washed up on the land of the Phaeacians, where Alcinous is king. Alcinous gives a banquet in honor of Odysseus and asks him to reveal who he is and where he came from. Odysseus relates to the king his adventures up to that time. His account makes up Books 9–12 of the Odyssey.*



BOOK

NEW COASTS AND POSEIDON'S SON



NINE



“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.

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.  
 10 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,  
 15 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,

Guide for Reading

3 tried: tested.

7 hold: regard.

11–13 Mount Neion's (nē'ōnz') . . . Dulichium (dōō-līk'ē-əm) . . . Same (sā'mē) . . . Zacynthus (ze-sŷn'thes).

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**formidable** (fōr'mī-də-bəl) *adj.* inspiring admiration, awe, or fear  
**guile** (gil) *n.* skillful slyness; craftiness

loveliest among goddesses, who held me  
20 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  
25 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?"

18–22 Odysseus refers to two beautiful goddesses, Calypso and Circe, who have delayed him on their islands. (Details about Circe appear in Book 10.) Notice, however, that Odysseus seems nostalgic for his own family and homeland. At this point in the story, Odysseus has been away from home for more than 18 years—10 of them spent in the war at Troy.

28 **weathered:** survived.



**S** O O N A F T E R L E A V I N G T R O Y, *Odysseus and his crew land near Ismarus, the city of the Cicones. The Cicones are allies of the Trojans and therefore enemies of Odysseus. Odysseus and his crew raid the Cicones, robbing and killing people, until the Ciconian army kills 72 of Odysseus' men and drives the rest out to sea. Delayed by a storm for two days, Odysseus and his remaining companions continue their journey.*

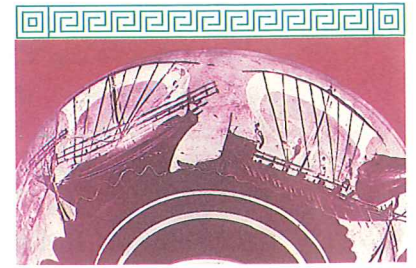


"I might have made it safely home, that time,  
30 but as I came round Malea the current  
took me out to sea, and from the north  
a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.  
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea  
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth  
35 we came to the coastline of the Lotus 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  
40 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,  
45 never cared to report, nor to return:  
they longed to stay forever, browsing on  
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.

38 **mustered:** assembled; gathered.

41–47 **How are the Lotus Eaters a threat to Odysseus and his men?**

I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,  
tied them down under their rowing benches,  
50 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,  
55 and we moved out again on our sea faring.



57 louts: clumsy, stupid people.

58–67 Why doesn't Odysseus respect the Cyclopes?

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,  
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  
60 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.  
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,  
no consultation or old tribal ways,  
65 but each one dwells in his own mountain cave  
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,  
indifferent to what the others do.”

**A**CROSS THE BAY *from the land of the Cyclopes is a lush, deserted island.*  
*Odysseus and his crew land on the island in a dense fog and spend several days feasting*  
*on wine and wild goats and observing the mainland, where the Cyclopes live. On the third*  
*day, Odysseus and his company of men set out to learn if the Cyclopes are friends or foes.*

“When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose  
came in the east, I called my men together  
70 and made a speech to them:

‘Old shipmates, friends,  
the rest of you stand by; I’ll make the crossing  
in my own ship, with my own company,  
and find out what the mainland natives are—  
for they may be wild savages, and lawless,  
75 or hospitable and god-fearing men.’

68 This use of “with fingertips of rose” to describe the personified Dawn is a famous epithet—a descriptive phrase that presents a trait of a person or thing. Watch for reappearances of this epithet in the poem, and be on the lookout for other epithets.

WORDS  
TO KNOW  
**indifferent** (ĭn-dĭf'ər-ənt) *adj.* having no interest in or concern for

At this I went aboard, and gave the word  
to cast off by the stern. My oarsmen followed,  
filing in to their benches by the rowlocks,  
and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea.

77 **stern:** the rear end of a ship.

80 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  
85 earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged  
towering oak trees.

82 **screened with laurel:** partially hidden by laurel trees.

84 **sheepfold:** a pen for sheep.

A prodigious man

slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks  
to graze afield—remote from all companions,  
knowing none but savage ways, a brute  
90 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;  
95 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  
holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness  
100 we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,  
he gave me seven shining golden talents  
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,  
and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars  
of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave  
105 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  
110 over the winebowl. No man turned away  
when cups of this came round.

86 **prodigious** (prə-dī'j'əs): enormous, huge.

91–92 **What does Odysseus' metaphor imply about the Cyclops?**

97–98 **Euanthes'** (yōō-ăn'thēz) . . . **Maron** (mâr'ŏn').

101 **talents:** bars of gold or silver of a specified weight, used as money in ancient Greece.

A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals in a bag,  
for in my bones I knew some towering brute  
would be upon us soon—all outward power,

112 **victuals** (vīt'lz): food.

115 a wild man, ignorant of civility.

115 **civility:** polite behavior.

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  
120 crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class:  
firstlings apart from middlings, and the ‘dewdrops,’  
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.  
And vessels full of whey were brimming there—  
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.  
125 My men came pressing round me, pleading:

120 **kids:** young goats.

121–122 The Cyclops has separated his lambs into three age groups.

123 **whey:** the watery part of milk, which separates from the curds, or solid part, during the making of cheese.

‘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!’

129 **good salt water:** the open sea. (The men want to rob the Cyclops and quickly sail away.)

Ah,

130 how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished  
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,  
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence  
135 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.  
140 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,  
145 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;  
150 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.

130–132 **Why does Odysseus refuse his men’s “sound” request?**

133 **burnt an offering:** burned a portion of the food as an offering to secure the gods’ goodwill. (Such offerings were frequently performed by Greek sailors during difficult journeys.)

137 **stoke:** build up; feed.

144–147 Notice the size of the rock that closes the entrance of the Cyclops’ cave.



When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,  
155 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

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

160 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;  
165 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.  
170 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  
175 the unoffending guest.’

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  
180 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?’

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

**157–159** The Cyclops asks whether the seafaring men are here for honest trading (“fair traffic”) or are dishonest people (“rogues”) who steal from (“ravage”) those they meet.

**163 Achaeans** (ə-kē’ənz): Greeks.

**167 Agamemnon** (äg’ə-mēm’nōn’): the Greek king (Menelaus’ brother) who led the war against the Trojans; **Atreus** (ā’trē-əs).

**172–175** It was a sacred Greek custom to honor strangers with food and gifts. Odysseus is warning the Cyclops that Zeus will punish anyone who mistreats a guest.

**176 ninny**: fool.

**178–182** [What is the Cyclops’ attitude toward the gods?](#)

**185–190** [Why do you think Odysseus lies about his ship?](#)

WORDS **entreat** (ĕn-trēt’) *v.* to ask earnestly; beg  
TO **avenge** (ə-vĕnj’) *v.* to take revenge on behalf of  
KNOW **whim** (hwĭm) *n.* a sudden impulse or notion; fancy



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

Neither reply nor pity came from him,  
but in one stride he clutched at my companions  
and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies  
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.  
195 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;  
200 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  
205 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.  
210 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,  
215 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.  
220 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:

193–196 The two similes in this passage emphasize the helplessness of the men (“like squirming puppies”) and the savagery of the Cyclops (“gaping and crunching like a mountain lion”).

203–210 Why doesn’t Odysseus kill the Cyclops at this time?



215 **dispatched**: completed.

216 **brace**: pair.

218–219 The Cyclops reseals the cave with the massive rock as easily as an ordinary human places the cap on a container of arrows.

223 Odysseus calls on his protector, the goddess Athena, for help as he forms a plan.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**appalled** (ə-pôld') *adj.* filled with dismay; horrified **appall** *v.*  
**ponderous** (pŏn'dər-əs) *adj.* heavy in a clumsy way; bulky

225 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:  
230 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  
235 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  
240 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,  
245 his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,  
entered the cave: by some sheep-herding whim—  
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.  
He hefted his great boulder into place  
and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes  
250 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,  
255 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,  
260 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:

228 **lugger**: a small, wide sailing ship.

233 **hewed**: chopped.

237 **profusion**: abundance.

238–243 **What does Odysseus plan to do to the Cyclops?**

255–261 **Why does Odysseus offer the Cyclops the liquor he brought from the ship?**