



PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

THE ODYSSEY

MORTALS

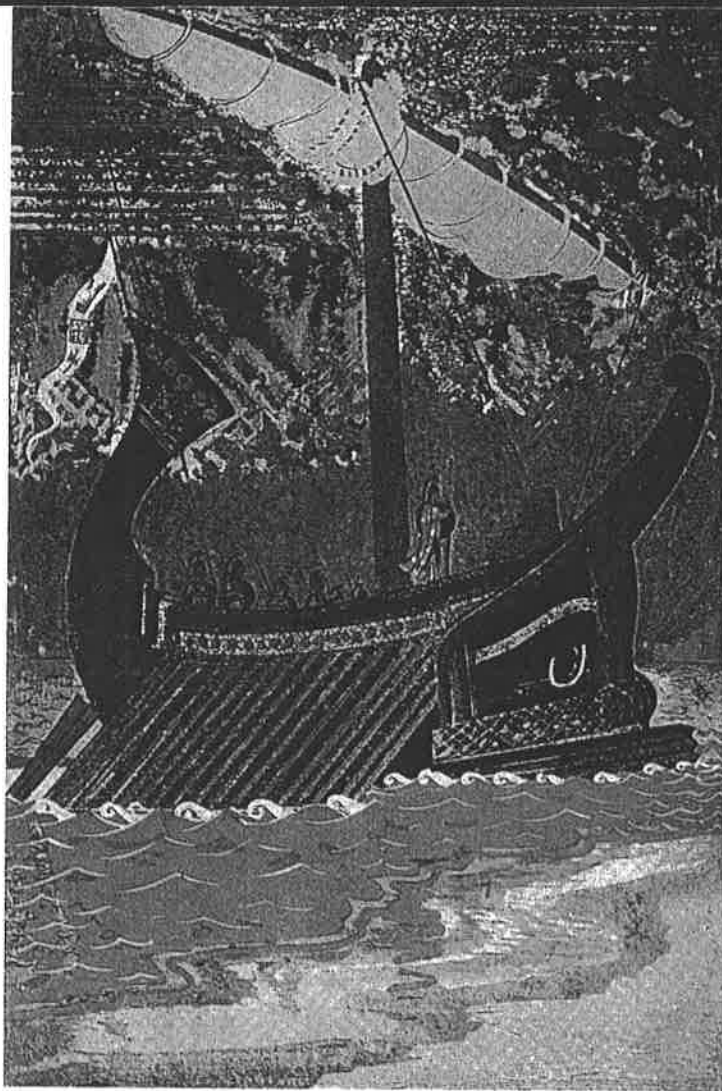
- Achaean** (ə kē'ənz), Homer's name for the Greeks.
- Alcinous** (al sin'ō əs), the generous, good-natured king of the Phaeacians, to whom Odysseus tells his story.
- Antinous** (an tin'ō əs), the most aggressive and cruel of Penelope's suitors.
- Eumaeus** (yü mē'əs), Odysseus's faithful swineherd.
- Eurycleia** (yü'rə klē'ə), Odysseus's faithful old nurse, who recognizes him in his beggar disguise.
- Eurylochus** (yü ri'lə kəs), one of Odysseus's crewmen.
- Eurymachus** (yü ri'mə kəs), a treacherous suitor.
- Laertes** (lä er'tēz), Odysseus's elderly father. He lives alone on a small farm outside of town.
- Melanthius** (mə lan'thē əs), Odysseus's chief goatherd. While Odysseus is gone, he ignores his duties and befriends the suitors.
- Mentor** (men'tôr), a faithful friend of Odysseus who served as Telemachus's tutor. Athena sometimes disguises herself as Mentor.
- Odysseus** (ō dis'ē əs), king of Ithaca and hero of the ten-year Trojan War. He is forced by the angry gods to wander for ten more years before returning home. In Latin, known as Ulysses.
- Penelope** (pə nel'ə pē), Odysseus's faithful wife.
- Philoetius** (fi lē'shəs), Odysseus's chief cowherd. He helps Odysseus fight the suitors.
- Telemachus** (tə lem'ə kəs), Odysseus's brave and loyal son, who fights with Odysseus against the suitors.

GODS AND SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

- Athena** (a thē'nə), daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom. She assists Odysseus during his journey and helps him defeat the suitors. See page 801.
- Calypso** (kə lip'sō), a sea nymph who keeps Odysseus captive for many years.
- Charybdis** (kə rib'dis), a huge, dangerous whirlpool.
- Circe** (sēr'sē), an enchantress who temporarily turns Odysseus's crew into swine. Odysseus stays with her for a year, and she helps him on his voyage home.
- Cyclopes** (sī klō'pēz), a race of one-eyed giants.
- Helios** (hē'lē os), god of the sun.
- Hermes** (hēr'mēz), son of Zeus and messenger of the gods. Hermes helps Odysseus resist Circe's spell. See page 802.
- Polyphemus** (pol'ə fē'məs), a Cyclops (sī'klops) and a son of Poseidon. Odysseus blinds Polyphemus, angering Poseidon.
- Poseidon** (pə sid'n), god of the sea and earthquakes, and younger brother of Zeus. See page 801.
- Scylla** (sil'ə), a sea monster with six heads who eats some of Odysseus's crew.
- Sirens** (sī'rənz), beautiful but deadly maidens who tempt passing sailors with tantalizing singing.
- Zeus** (zūs), the supreme god and king of Olympus. See page 801.

The Voyage

FROM THE
ODYSSEY
HOMER



▲ *Le Nef de Telemachus* (French, “The Ship of Telemachus”) shows Odysseus’s son in search of his father. What mood does this image convey? lighthearted adventure? heroic determination?

SAILING FROM TROY

“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
5 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.

2 formidable (fôr’mə də-bəl), *adj.* causing fear or dread; inspiring awe or wonder.

2 guile (gīl), *n.* crafty deceit; sly tricks; cunning.

10 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,
 15 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
 20 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,
 25 a strongpoint on the coast of the 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!
 30 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.
 35 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.
 40 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,
 45 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.
 50 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.

■ How does Odysseus justify his years with Calypso and Circe?

23 **Ilium** (il'ē əm), Troy.

25 **Cicones** (si kō'nēz), a tribe allied with the Trojans and raided by Odysseus and his men after they leave Troy.
 27 **plunder** (plun'dər), *n.* things taken by force or robbery.

30 **mutinous** (myūt'n əs), *adj.* openly rebellious against lawful authority, especially by sailors or soldiers against their officers.

37 **terrain** (te rān'), *n.* land; ground; territory.

44 **when the sun . . . time**, when the sun went down.

46 **Six benches . . . empty**, as many men who filled six rowing benches on each ship were killed in battle.

■ Why are so many of Odysseus's men killed in battle against the Cicones?

Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north
a storm against the ships, and driving veils
55 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:
60 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.

65 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
70 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.
75 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—
80 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.
I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,
85 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
90 my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,
and we moved out again on our sea faring."

55 squall (skwôl), *n.* a sudden, violent gust of wind often accompanied by rain, snow, or sleet.

58–59 dropped the yards . . . lee, dropped the sails, took out the oars, and began rowing toward the nearest shelter from the wind.

■ Do you think Odysseus's men who ate the Lotus will be glad he forced them to leave?

89 rowlock (rō'lok'), *n.* slot where oars are held in place on a ship or boat.

THE CYCLOPS

"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
5 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,
10 but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
indifferent to what others do. . . .

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern
15 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 prodigious man

20 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
25 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
30 of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son,
Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's
holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness
we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,
he gave me seven shining golden talents
35 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;

3 fruitage (frû'tij), *n.* fruit.

8–9 no muster . . . ways, no political assembly or social traditions.

■ How does Odysseus characterize the Cyclopes?

17 sheepfold (shēp'fōld'), *n.* pen or shelter for sheep.

18 earthfast (ērth'fast'), *adj.* held firmly in the ground.

19 prodigious (prə dij'əs), *adj.* very great; huge; vast.

34 talent (tal'ənt), *n.* an ancient unit of weight or money.

40 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

45 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,
a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops
50 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, each in its class:
firstlings apart from middlings, and the ‘dewdrops,’
55 or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.
And vessels full of whey were brimming there—
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.
My men came pressing round me, pleading:

‘Why not

60 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 caveman, what he had to offer—
65 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
70 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
75 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

45 **victuals** (vit'ls), *n.*
supplies of food.

■ What might be foreshad-
owed in lines 62–65?

the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it
80 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,
85 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?’
90 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?’

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread
of that deep rumble and that mighty man.
95 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.
100 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
105 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.’

He answered this
from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny,
110 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—
115 you or your friends—unless I had a whim to.
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—

84 **withy baskets**, baskets
made of twigs.

91 **rogue** (rōg), *n.* dishonest
or unprincipled person;
scoundrel; rascal.

100 **Agamemnon** (ag/ə-
mem/non), king of Argos in
southern Greece, who led the
Achaeans to war against Troy.

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?’

120 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.’

Neither reply nor pity came from him,
125 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—
130 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,
135 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
140 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 finger tips of rose
145 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,
150 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.
155 And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,
if but Athena granted what I prayed for.

160
165 ■ Why does Odysseus tell the Cyclops that he and his men are the only survivors of a shipwreck?

170
175
180
185 142 **ponderous** (pon’dər əs), *adj.* very heavy.

190
195 ■ Why doesn’t Odysseus kill the Cyclops in his sleep?

200
205 149 **brace** (brās), *n.* a pair; couple.

210 152 **cap a quiver** (kwiv’ər), put a cap on the point of an arrow or on the case that holds arrows.

215 153 **din** (din), *n.* a continuing loud, confused noise.

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
160 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
165 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
170 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,
175 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—
180 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.
185 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.
190 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 traveller come to see you?'

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

161 lugger (lug'ər), large sea-going boat with a four-sided sail.

166 hew (hyū), *v.* cut with an ax, sword, etc.; chop.

'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
200 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,

205 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.'

And he said:

'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
210 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.

215 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,
220 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
225 deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
in planking, having men below to swing
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket
230 while blood ran out around the red hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

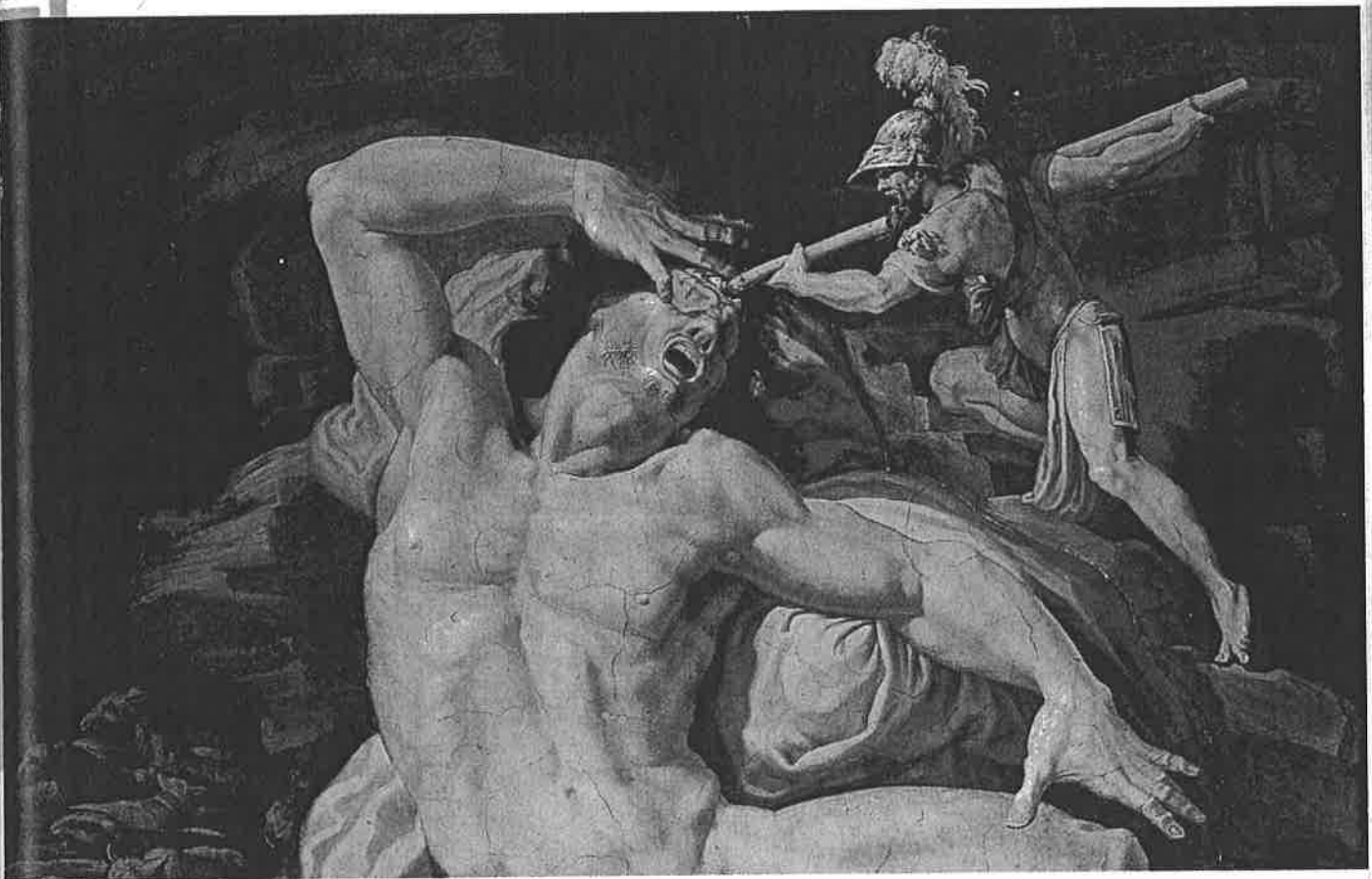
200 loam (lōm), *n.* rich, fertile earth.

201 nectar (nek'tər) and **ambrosia** (am brō'zhə), *n.* the drink and food of the gods.

203 fuddle and flush, confusion and flushed complexion caused by drunkenness.

■ **Predict** why Odysseus tells the Cyclops his name is Nohbdy.

226 shipwright (ship'rit'), *n.* carpenter skilled in ship repair and construction.



▲ *The Blinding of Polyphemus* was painted by the Italian artist Pellegrino Tibaldi (1527–1596). Do you think his version of this scene emphasizes the monstrosity of the Cyclops? Why or why not?

In a smithy

one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze
 plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—
 235 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,
 240 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,

245 Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore

232 **smithy** (smith/ē), *n.* the workshop of a smith.

233 **adze** (adz), *n.* axelike cutting tool used chiefly for shaping wood.

235 **hale** (hāl), *adj.* free from defect.

243 **divers** (dī/vərz), *adj.* several different.

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:

250 'Nohbdy, Nohbdy's tricked me, Nohbdy's ruined me!'

To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

'Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
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.'

255 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,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
260 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?
265 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
fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

270 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
So three sheep could convey each man. I took
275 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.

251 sage (sāj), *adj.* wise.

260 breach (brēch), *n.* a gap
in a wall.

Greek pottery was frequently decorated with pictures of gods and heroes, like this image of Odysseus escaping from the cave of the Cyclops. Compare this with the different ways—such as movie posters or trading cards—in which heroes are depicted in American popular culture today. ➤



280 When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
where dams with udders full called for a milking.
Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,
285 the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,
weighted by wool and me with my meditations.
290 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
295 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
and his accurst companions burnt it out
300 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

286 **pectoral** (pek'tər əl),
adj. of, in, or on the breast or
chest.

298 **carrion** (kar'e ən), *adj.*
rotten; filthy.

305 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.

310 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
315 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
320 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 Caveman's hands?

325 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.

330 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
335 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:

340 'Godsake, Captain!
Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!'

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

■ How does Odysseus get himself and his men safely out of the cave?

330 **prow** (prou), *n.* the front of a ship or boat.

331 **whelm** (hwelm), *v.* turn over; become submerged.

332 **stern** (stérn), *n.* the back of a ship or boat.

333 **boathook** (bōt húk), *n.* a pole with a hook used to pull or push a boat into place.

'All but stove us in!'

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

345

'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

350 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 upon me, spoken of old,
355 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,
a son of Eurymus; 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.

360 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,

365 praying the god of earthquake to befriend you—
his son I am, for he by his avowal
fathered me, and, if he will, he may
heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.'

370 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!'

375 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,

344 Give him our bearing,
reveal our location.

354 the weird, the strange
fate.

365 god of earthquake,
Poseidon.

366 avowal (ə vou'əl), *n.* an
open declaration or acknowl-
edgment.

if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:
grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never
see his home: Laertes' son, I mean,
380 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
385 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.
390 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
395 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,
400 only my fighters voted that my ram,
the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him
by the sea side and burnt his long thighbones
to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus' son,
who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering;
405 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
410 we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

When the young Dawn with finger tips 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
415 oarsmen in line dipped oars in the grey sea.
So we moved out, sad in the vast offing,
having our precious lives, but not our friends."

■ Why does Polyphemus pray to Poseidon?

388 *titanic* (tī tan'ik), *adj.* having great size, strength, or power; gigantic. The Titans were giants who ruled the world before being overthrown by Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades.

390 *aft* (aft), *adj.* behind.

396 *keel* (kēl), *n.* a long timber or plate extending lengthways along the center of the bottom of a ship.

402-403 *burnt . . . to Zeus.* It was customary in ancient Greece to roast choice cuts of meat and offer them to the gods as a symbolic display of respect.

413 *mooring* (mūr'ing) *lines*, ropes used to hold boats and ships to shore.

416 *offing* (ô'fing), *n.* the part of the deep sea seen from the shore; the near or foreseeable future.

THE GODDESS CIRCE

After escaping the Cyclops, Odysseus and his fleet reach the island of the wind king Aeolus (ē'ə ləs), where they receive shelter and provisions to continue their journey home. As a gift to ensure good sailing, Aeolus gives Odysseus a bull-hide sack holding all the contrary winds. Within sight of Ithaca, Odysseus's men jealously open the sack, believing it will contain gold and silver. The winds blow them all the way back to Aeolus's island. Odysseus again asks Aeolus for help, but the king denies him, saying Odysseus must be cursed by the gods. When Odysseus's fleet reaches land again, they are ambushed by Laestrygonians (les'trə gōn'ē ənz), a race of man-eating giants. All the ships but Odysseus's are destroyed.

Grieving for their comrades, Odysseus and his shipmates sail on to an unfamiliar island, where they spot smoke rising from the forest. Odysseus's shipmate Eurylochus goes with half of the crew to investigate, leaving Odysseus and the others with the ship. They discover the goddess Circe's stone house, where tamed wolves and mountain lions lie at the door. Fearing foul play, Eurylochus hides nearby. He watches helplessly as Circe turns his unsuspecting shipmates into swine by giving them wine mixed with a magic potion.

When Eurylochus returns to the ship and tells what has happened, Odysseus sets out alone to rescue his men. On his way, the messenger god Hermes appears and gives him a magic herb that will counteract Circe's bewitching potion.

“ . . . Then toward Olympus through the island trees
Hermes departed, and I sought out Circe,
my heart high with excitement, beating hard.
Before her mansion in the porch I stood
5 to call her, all being still. Quick as a cat
she opened her bright doors and sighed a welcome;
then I strode after her with heavy heart
down the long hall, and took the chair she gave me,
silver-studded, intricately carved,
10 made with a low footrest. The lady Circe
mixed me a golden cup of honeyed wine,
adding in mischief her unholy drug.
I drank, and the drink failed. But she came forward
aiming a stroke with her long stick, and whispered:

15 ‘Down in the sty and snore among the rest!’

Without a word, I drew my sharpened sword
and in one bound held it against her throat.
She cried out, then slid under to take my knees,
catching her breath to say, in her distress:

- 20 'What champion, of what country, can you be?
Where are your kinsmen and your city?
Are you not sluggish with my wine? Ah, wonder!
Never a mortal man that drank this cup
but when it passed his lips he had succumbed.
- 25 Hale must your heart be and your tempered will.
Odysseus then you are, O great contender,
of whom the glittering god with golden wand
spoke to me ever, and foretold
the black swift ship would carry you from Troy.
- 30 Put up your weapon in the sheath. We two
shall mingle and make love upon our bed.
So mutual trust may come of play and love.'

To this I said:

- 'Circe, am I a boy,
that you should make me soft and doting now?
- 35 Here in this house you turned my men to swine;
now it is I myself you hold, enticing
into your chamber, to your dangerous bed,
to take my manhood when you have me stripped.
I mount no bed of love with you upon it.'
- 40 Or swear me first a great oath, if I do,
you'll work no more enchantment to my harm.'
She swore at once, outright, as I demanded,
and after she had sworn, and bound herself,
I entered Circe's flawless bed of love.

- 45 Presently in the hall her maids were busy,
the nymphs who waited upon Circe: four,
whose cradles were in fountains, under boughs,
or in the glassy seaward-gliding streams.
One came with richly colored rugs to throw
- 50 on seat and chairback, over linen covers;
a second pulled the tables out, all silver,
and loaded them with baskets all of gold;
a third mixed wine as tawny-mild as honey
in a bright bowl, and set out golden cups.
- 55 The fourth came bearing water, and lit a blaze

24 succumb (sə kʊm/), *v.*
give way; yield.

■ How does Circe discover
Odysseus's identity?

36 entice (en tɪs/), *v.* attract
artfully; tempt; lure.

46 nymph (nɪnf), *n.* divine
maiden.

53 tawny (tô'nē), *adj.*
brownish-yellow.

under a cauldron. By and by it bubbled,
and when the dazzling brazen vessel seethed
she filled a bathtub to my waist, and bathed me,
pouring a soothing blend on head and shoulders,
60 warming the soreness of my joints away.
When she had done, and smoothed me with sweet oil,
she put a tunic and a cloak around me
and took me to a silver-studded chair
with footrest, all elaborately carven.
65 Now came a maid to tip a golden jug
of water into a silver finger bowl,
and draw a polished table to my side.
The larder mistress brought her tray of loaves
with many savory slices, and she gave
70 the best, to tempt me. But no pleasure came;
I huddled with my mind elsewhere, oppressed.

Circe regarded me, as there I sat
disconsolate and never touched a crust.
Then she stood over me and chided me:

75 'Why sit at table mute, Odysseus?
Are you mistrustful of my bread and drink?
Can it be treachery that you fear again,
after the gods' great oath I swore for you?'
I turned to her at once, and said:

'Circe,

80 where is the captain who could bear to touch
this banquet, in my place? A decent man
would see his company before him first.
Put heart in me to eat and drink—you may,
by freeing my companions. I must see them.'

85 But Circe had already turned away.
Her long staff in her hand, she left the hall
and opened up the sty. I saw her enter,
driving those men turned swine to stand before me.
She stroked them, each in turn, with some new chrism;
90 and then, behold! their bristles fell away,
the coarse pelt grown upon them by her drug
melted away, and they were men again,
younger, more handsome, taller than before.
Their eyes upon me, each one took my hands,
95 and wild regret and longing pierced them through,

68 **larder mistress**, servant in charge of the larder, or pantry, where meats and other foods are kept.

69 **savory** (sā/vər ē), *adj.* pleasing in taste or smell; appetizing.

73 **disconsolate** (dis kon'sə-lit), *adj.* without hope; forlorn; unhappy.

74 **chide** (chīd), *v.* find fault with; scold.

77 **treachery** (trech'ər ē), *n.* deceitfulness; betrayal.

■ How does clever Odysseus get Circe to free his men?

89 **chrism** (kriz'əm), *n.* oil.

91 **pelt** (pelt), *n.* animal skin.

so the room rang with sobs, and even Circe
pitied that transformation. Exquisite
the goddess looked as she stood near me, saying:

‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
100 Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
go to the sea beach and sea-breasting ship;
drag it ashore, full length upon the land;
stow gear and stores in rock-holes under cover;
return; be quick; bring all your dear companions.’

105 Now, being a man, I could not help consenting.
So I went down to the sea beach and the ship,
where I found all my other men on board,
weeping, in despair along the benches.
Sometimes in farmyards when the cows return
110 well fed from pasture to the barn, one sees
the pens give way before the calves in tumult,
breaking through to cluster about their mothers,
bumping together, bawling. Just that way
my crew poured round me when they saw me come—
115 their faces wet with tears as if they saw
their homeland, and the crags of Ithaca,
even the very town where they were born.
And weeping still they all cried out in greeting:

‘Prince, what joy this is, your safe return!
120 Now Ithaca seems here, and we in Ithaca!
But tell us now, what death befell our friends?’

And, speaking gently, I replied:

‘First we must get the ship high on the shingle,
and stow our gear and stores in clefts of rock
125 for cover. Then come follow me, to see
your shipmates in the magic house of Circe
eating and drinking, endlessly regaled.’

They turned back, as commanded, to this work;
only one lagged, and tried to hold the others:
130 Eurylochus it was, who blurted out:

‘Where now, poor remnants? Is it devil’s work
you long for? Will you go to Circe’s hall?
Swine, wolves, and lions she will make us all,

111 tumult (tū/mult), *n.*
disorderly agitation;
commotion.

123 shingle (shing/gəl), *n.*
gravel or rocky material often
found on the seashore.

127 regaled (ri gāld’), *adj.*
agreeably entertained, espe-
cially with feasting.

beasts of her courtyard, bound by her enchantment.

135 Remember those the Cyclops held, remember
shipmates who made that visit with Odysseus!
The daring man! They died for his foolishness!

When I heard this I had a mind to draw
the blade that swung against my side and chop him,
140, bowling his head upon the ground—kinsman
or no kinsman, close to me though he was.
But others came between, saying, to stop me,

'Prince, we can leave him, if you say the word;
let him stay here on guard. As for ourselves,
145 show us the way to Circe's magic hall.'

So all turned inland, leaving shore and ship,
and Eurylochus—he, too, came on behind,
fearing the rough edge of my tongue. Meanwhile
at Circe's hands the rest were gently bathed,
150 anointed with sweet oil, and dressed afresh
in tunics and new cloaks with fleecy linings.
We found them all at supper when we came.
But greeting their old friends once more, the crew
could not hold back their tears; and now again
155 the rooms rang with sobs. Then Circe, loveliest
of all immortals, came to counsel me:

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
enough of weeping fits. I know—I, too—
160 what you endured upon the inhuman sea,
what odds you met on land from hostile men.
Remain with me, and share my meat and wine;
restore behind your ribs those gallant hearts
that served you in the old days, when you sailed
165 from stony Ithaca. Now parched and spent,
your cruel wandering is all you think of,
never of joy, after so many blows.'

As we were men, we could not help consenting.
So day by day we lingered, feasting long
170 on roasts and wine, until a year grew fat.
But when the passing months and wheeling seasons
brought the long summery days, the pause of summer,
my shipmates one day summoned me and said:

■ Why doesn't Eurylochus
want to enter Circe's hall?

165 parched (pärchd), *adj.*
hot, dry, or thirsty.

■ Why does Odysseus decide
to stay with Circe?

'Captain shake off this trance, and think of home—
if home indeed awaits us,
175 if we shall ever see
your own well-timbered hall on Ithaca.'

They made me feel a pang, and I agreed.
That day, and all day long, from dawn to sundown,
we feasted on roast meat and ruddy wine,
180 and after sunset when the dusk came on
my men slept in the shadowy hall, but I
went through the dark to Circe's flawless bed
and took the goddess' knees in supplication,
urging, as she bent to hear:

'O Circe,
185 now you must keep your promise; it is time.
Help me make sail for home. Day after day
my longing quickens, and my company
give me no peace, but wear my heart away
pleading when you are not at hand to hear.'

190 The loveliest of goddesses replied:

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
you shall not stay here longer against your will;
but home you may not go
195 unless you take a strange way round and come
to the cold homes of Death and pale Persephone.
You shall hear prophecy from the rapt shade
of blind Tiresias of Thebes, forever
charged with reason even among the dead;
200 to him alone, of all the flitting ghosts,
Persephone has given a mind undarkened.'

At this I felt a weight like stone within me,
and, moaning, pressed my length against the bed,
with no desire to see the daylight more.
205 But when I had wept and tossed and had my fill
of this despair, at last I answered her:

'Circe, who pilots me upon this journey?
No man has ever sailed to the land of Death.'"

Circe gives Odysseus instructions on how to reach the land of the dead and what to do once he arrives there. The next morning, Odysseus and his crew depart.

183 supplication (sʌp/ɪl-
kɑːʃən), *n.* a humble prayer
addressed to a god.

196 Persephone (pɜːsɪf/ə-
nē), the wife of Hades, god of
the underworld. See the
information on Demeter, her
mother, on page 803.

197 shade (ʃhād), *n.* a ghost.

198 Tiresias (tī rē/sē əs), a
blind prophet whose ghost
resided in the underworld.

THE SIRENS

Following Circe's advice, Odysseus and his men sail to the land of the dead at the edge of the world. When Odysseus offers sacrificial blood, the blind prophet Tiresias arrives, drinks some of the blood, and tells Odysseus about his future.

Tiresias warns Odysseus that only discipline and denial will protect him from Poseidon's revenge for the blinding of his son, Polyphemus. When Odysseus and his crew reach the land of Helios, the sun god, they must not raid his cattle. If they do, many more years will pass before Odysseus, alone and unknown, reaches Ithaca. There he will face many difficulties before re-establishing himself as master of his palace. Once Odysseus has done this, Tiresias continues, he must offer a sacrifice to Poseidon, thus regaining the god's favor. Then Odysseus will enjoy a long and peaceful life.

After Tiresias departs, Odysseus remains to speak with the ghost of his mother, friends, and famous people from the past. Unable to bear the company of the dead any longer, Odysseus flees to his ship and sails with his crew back to Circe's home.

“Soon, then,

knowing us back from the Dark Land, Circe came
freshly adorned for us, with handmaids bearing
loaves, roast meats, and ruby-colored wine.

5 She stood among us in immortal beauty
jesting:

‘Hearts of oak, did you go down
alive into the homes of Death? One visit
finishes all men but yourselves, twice mortal!
Come, here is meat and wine, enjoy your feasting
10 for one whole day; and in the dawn tomorrow
you shall put out to sea. Sailing directions,
landmarks, perils, I shall sketch for you, to keep you
from being caught by land or water
in some black sack of trouble.’

In high humor

15 and ready for carousal, we agreed;
so all that day until the sun went down
we feasted on roast meat and good red wine,
till after sunset, at the fall of night,
the men dropped off to sleep by the stern hawsers.

15 **carousal** (kə rou'zəl), *n.* a noisy revel or drinking party.

19 **hawser** (hō'zər), *n.* large stout rope, used for mooring or towing ships.

20 She took my hand then, silent in that hush,
drew me apart, made me sit down, and lay
beside me, softly questioning, as I told
all I had seen, from first to last.

Then said the Lady Circe:

'So: all those trials are over.

Listen with care

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

Steer wide;

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

But if you wish to listen,

let the men tie you in the lugger, hand
and foot, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
40 so you may hear those harpies' thrilling voices;
shout as you will, begging to be untied,
your crew must only twist more line around you
and keep their stroke up, till the singers fade.
What then? One of two courses you may take,
45 and you yourself must weigh them. I shall not
plan the whole action for you now, but only
tell you of both.

Ahead are beetling rocks

and dark blue glancing Amphitrite, surging,
roars around them. Prowling Rocks, or Drifters,
50 the gods in bliss have named them—named them well.
Not even birds can pass them by, not even
the timorous doves that bear ambrosia
to Father Zeus; caught by downdrafts, they die
on rockwall smooth as ice.

Each time, the Father

55 wafts a new courier to make up his crew.

Still less can ships get searoom of these Drifters,
whose boiling surf, under high fiery winds,

34 **flayed** (flād), *adj.* having the skin or outer covering stripped off; skinned.

■ What happens to men who listen to the singing of the Sirens?

40 **harpies** (hār'pē), *n.* a mythical creature that is part woman and part bird; a cruel, greedy person.

47 **beetling** (bē'tl ing), *adj.* projecting; jutting.

48 **Amphitrite** (am'fə trī'tē), goddess of the sea, wife of Poseidon.

52 **timorous** (tim'ər əs), *adj.* easily frightened; timid.

55 **waft** (waft), *v.* cause to move lightly by the impulse of wind or waves.

55 **courier** (kēr'ē ər), *n.* messenger.

carries tossing wreckage of ships and men.
Only one ocean-going craft, the far-famed
60 Argo, made it, sailing from Aieta;
but she, too, would have crashed on the big rocks
if Hera had not pulled her through, for love
of Jason, her captain.

A second course

lies between headlands. One is a sharp mountain
65 piercing the sky, with stormcloud round the peak
dissolving never, not in the brightest summer,
to show heaven's azure there, nor in the fall.
No mortal man could scale it, nor so much
as land there, not with twenty hands and feet,
70 so sheer the cliffs are—as of polished stone.
Midway that height, a cavern full of mist
opens toward Erebus and evening. Skirting
this in the lugger, great Odysseus,
your master Bowman, shooting from the deck,
75 would come short of the cavemouth with his shaft;
but that is the den of Scylla, where she yaps
abominably, a newborn whelp's cry,
though she is huge and monstrous. God or man,
no one could look on her in joy. Her legs—
80 and there are twelve—are like great tentacles,
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks
are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
with triple serried rows of fangs and deep
gullets of black death. Half her length, she sways
85 her heads in air, outside her horrid cleft,
hunting the sea around that promontory
for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game
thundering Amphitrite feeds in thousands.
And no ship's company can claim
90 to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,
from every ship, one man for every gullet.

The opposite point seems more a tongue of land
you'd touch with a good bowshot, at the narrows:
A great wild fig, a shaggy mass of leaves,
95 grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below
to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times
from dawn to dusk she spews it up
and sucks it down again three times, a whirling
maelstrom; if you come upon her then
100 the god who makes earth tremble could not save you.

60–63 Argo . . . captain. The Greek hero Jason sailed on the Argo in search of the Golden Fleece. With the goddess Hera's help, the ship passed safely through the treacherous rocky place called the Drifters.

67 azure (azh'ər), *adj.* sky blue.

72 Erebus (er'ə bəs), a place of darkness in the underworld on the way to Hades.

77 abominably (ə bom'ə nā-blē), *adv.* in a way that arouses disgust and hatred; detestably; horribly.

77 whelp (hwelp), *n.* young dog, wolf, bear, lion, tiger, etc.

83 serried (ser'ēd), *adj.* crowded closely together.

84 gullet (gul'it), *n.* throat.

85 cleft (kleft), *n.* space or opening made by splitting; crack; fissure.

86 promontory (prom'an-tōr'ē), *n.* a high point of land extending from the coast into the water; cape; headland.

99 maelstrom (māl'strəm), *n.* a great or turbulent whirlpool.

No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship
through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn
six men than lose them all, and the ship, too.'

So her advice ran; but I faced her, saying:

105 'Only instruct me, goddess, if you will,
'how, if possible, can I pass Charybdis,
'or fight off Scylla when she raids my crew?'

Swiftly that loveliest goddess answered me:

110 'Must you have battle in your heart forever?
The bloody toil of combat? Old contender,
will you not yield to the immortal gods?
That nightmare cannot die, being eternal
evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos;
there is no fighting her, no power can fight her,
all that avails is flight.

115 Lose headway there

along that rockface while you break out arms,
and she'll swoop over you, I fear, once more,
taking one man again for every gullet.

120 No, no, put all your backs into it, row on;
invoke Blind Force, that bore this scourge of men,
to keep her from a second strike against you.

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

125 No lambs are dropped,

or calves, and these fat cattle never die.
Immortal, too, their cowherds are—their shepherds—
Phaethousa and Lampetia, sweetly braided
nymphs that divine Neaira bore

130 to the overlord of high noon, Helios.
These nymphs their gentle mother bred and placed
upon Thrinacia, the distant land,
in care of flocks and cattle for their father.

135 Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts
intent upon your course for home,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.



▲ How has the artist conveyed the heroism of Odysseus in this engraving of his ship passing between Scylla and Charybdis?

115 **avail** (ə vāl'), *v.* help; benefit.

■ Why does Circe tell Odysseus to steer toward Scylla instead of Charybdis?

120 **scourge** (skêrj), *n.* some thing or person that causes great trouble or misfortune; affliction.

128 **Phaethousa** (fā'ə thūz'ə) and **Lampetia** (lam pē/shə).

129 **Neaira** (nē ī'rə).

134 **kine** (kīn), *n.* cows or cattle.

134 **give . . . a wide berth**, keep well away from.

But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
for ship and crew.

Rough years then lie between
you and your homecoming, alone and old,
140 the one survivor, all companions lost.'

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
145 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 grey sea.
But soon an off-shore breeze blew to our liking—
a canvas-bellying breeze, a lusty shipmate

150 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,
155 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
160 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,
165 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
170 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.

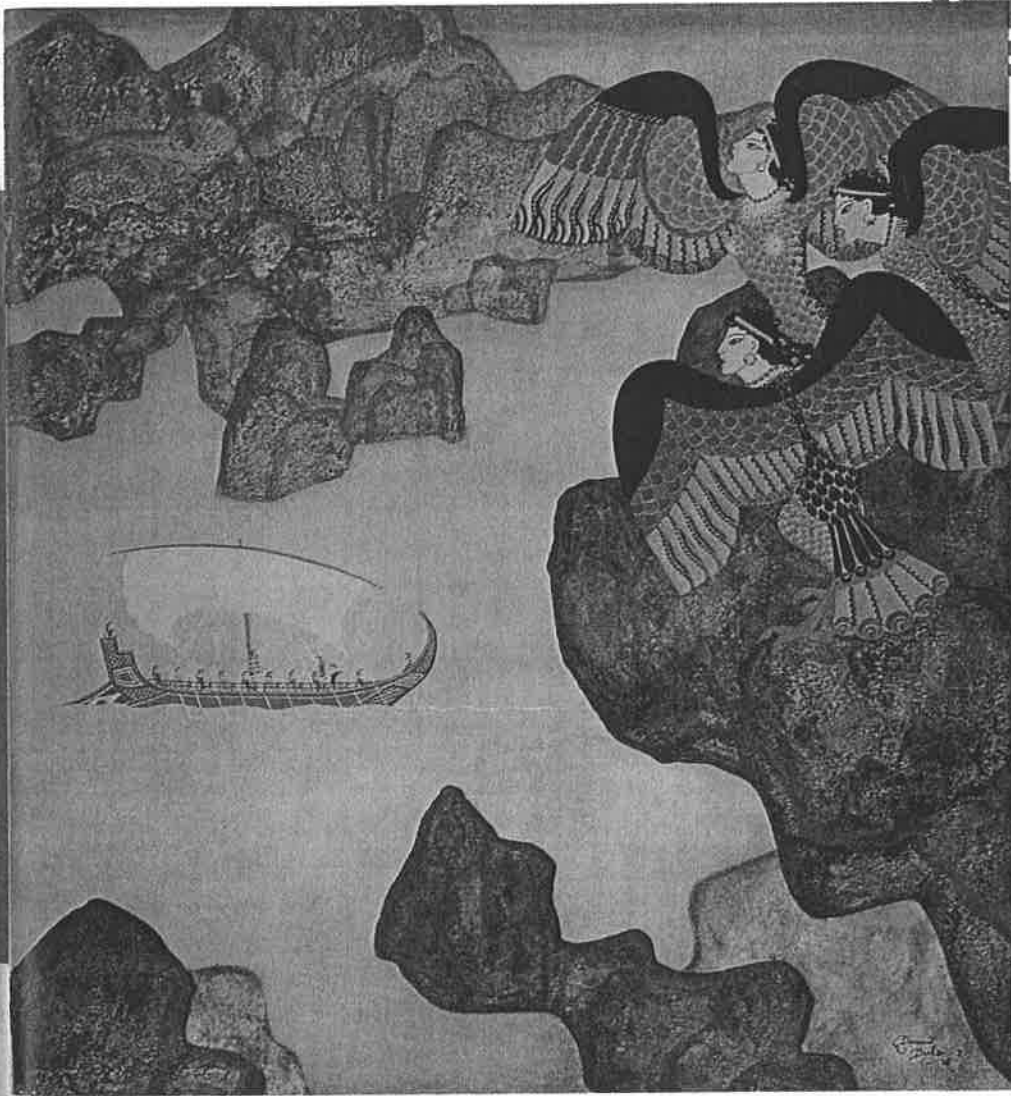
The crew were on their feet
briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,
175 each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades
and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved
a massive cake of beeswax into bits

137 **beeves** (bēvz), *n.* plural
of *beef*; i.e., the cattle.

149 **canvas-bellying breeze**, a
breeze that fills a ship's sails.

173 **the swell**, the waves.

174 **furl** (fērl), *v.* roll up;
fold up.



▲ Compare and contrast this painting of Odysseus and the Sirens, by Edmund Dulac (1882–1953), with the painting by J. W. Waterhouse on pages 728–729.

and rolled them in my hands until they softened—
 no long task, for a burning heat came down
 180 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,
 185 as we came smartly within hailing distance,
 the two Sirens, noting our fast ship
 off their point, made ready, and they sang:

182–183 **plumb amidships**,
 upright in the middle of
 the ship.

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

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

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

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

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

*Argos' old soldiery
210 On Troy beach teeming,
Charmed out of time we see.
No life on earth can be
Hid from our dreaming.*

The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water
215 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.
220 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;
225 then set me free."

196 **purling** (pèrl'ing) *adj.*
rippling.

209 **Argos**, city in southern
Greece.

214 **ardor** (ār' dər), *n.*
passion; great enthusiasm;
eagerness.

217 **Perimedes** (per'ə mē'-
dēz).

■ How do the Sirens attempt
to lure Odysseus's ship to
their shore?

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

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

10 ‘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?’

15 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 oarshafts in your hands, and lay back
20 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;
25 steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we
fetch up in the smother, and you drown us.’

That was all, and it brought them round to action.
But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.
30 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 and took up
two heavy spears, then made my way along
35 to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there,

22 **tiller** (til’ər), *n.* a lever used to control the rudder of a boat.

23 **rudder** (rud’ər), *n.* a flat piece of wood attached by a hinge to a ship’s stern, used to steer.

24 **comber** (kō’mər), *n.* long, curling ocean wave.

26 **fetch up**, end up.

26 **smother** (smuθh’ər), *n.* thick stifling smoke; a dense cloud of fog, foam, spray, snow, or dust.

33 **cuirass** (kwi ras’), *n.* a piece of armor covering the body from neck to waist.

the monster of the grey rock, harboring
torment for my friends. I strained my eyes
upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere
could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,

- 40 in travail, sobbing, gaining on the current,
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port
and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire
gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron
45 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, heard
50 the rock bellowing all around, and dark
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,

- 55 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.

- 60 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

- 65 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.

70

We rowed on.

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

36 **harbor** (här'bər), *v.* hold a thought, feeling, or intention; contain.

40 **travail** (trə vāl'), *n.* a physical, mental, or emotional exertion; great effort; toil.

42 **dire** (dir), *adj.* inspiring horror; dismal, oppressive.

49 **funnel** (fun'l), *n.* a cone-like opening.

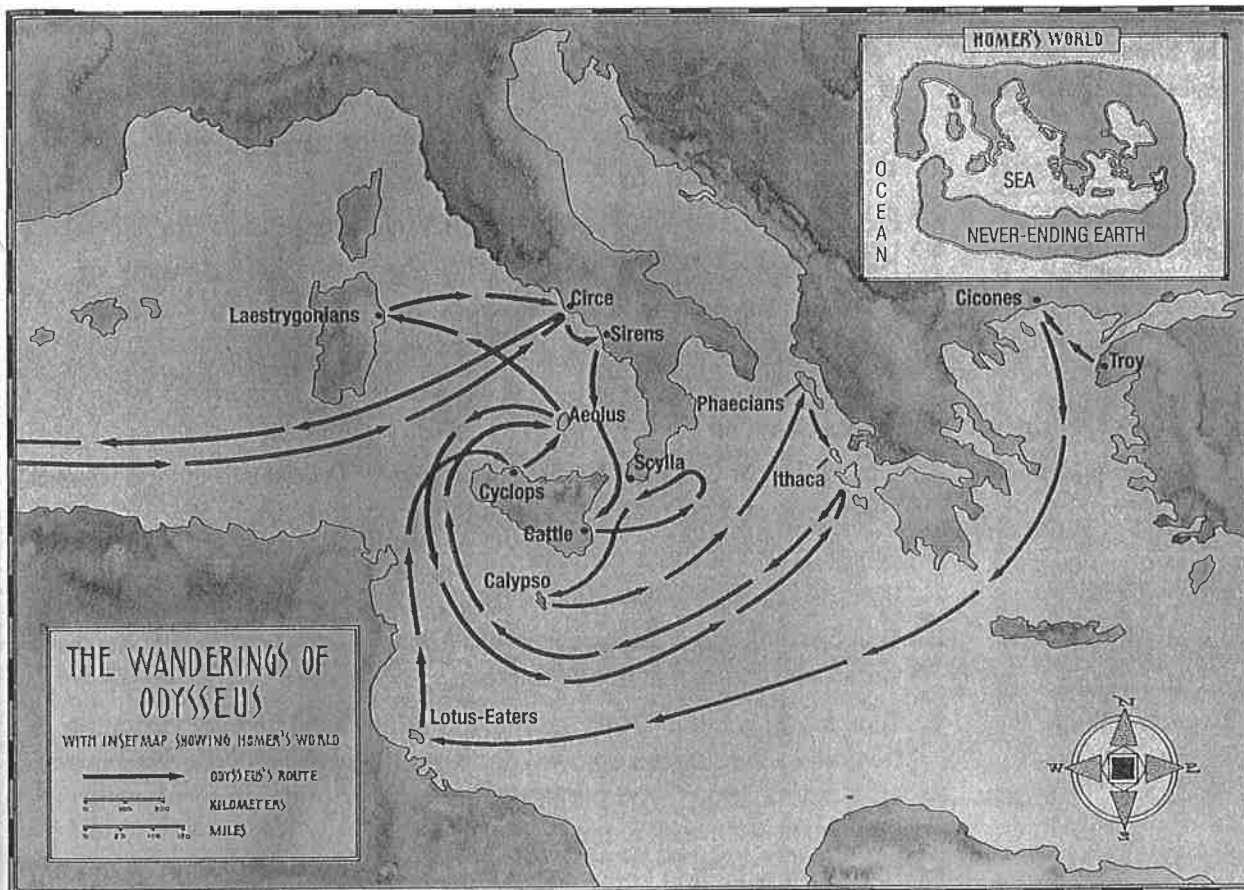
52 **blanch** (blanch), *v.* become pale with fear.



▲ This vase decorated with the half-woman, half-snake Scylla was done in the third century B.C. How does this image of Scylla contrast with that in the engraving on page 763?

67 **grapple** (grap'əl), *n.* an instrument with iron claws used to fasten onto an enemy ship; a struggle.

■ What do you think the men would have done if Odysseus had told them about Scylla?



▲ The map shows one accepted version of the route Odysseus followed on his voyage home to Ithaca. Compare the geography shown here to that of a modern map of the region.

Odysseus's ship approaches the land of the sun god's prized cattle. Odysseus agrees to go ashore, but makes his crew promise not to touch the sacred cattle. Onshore winds prevent the crew from sailing for a month, and they are forced to eat all their food supplies. One day while Odysseus is sleeping, Eurylochus persuades the hungry men to slaughter the cattle, saying it is better to risk angering the gods than to starve to death. When Helios, the sun god, learns of the crime, he demands that Zeus punish Odysseus and his men.

A few days later, the weather improves and Odysseus and his crew set out to sea. Zeus sends a deadly storm that destroys the ship and kills all the men except Odysseus. Fighting the storm, Odysseus lashes together a raft from the wreckage of his ship. He floats back toward Charybdis, where he is tossed by a wave into an overhanging fig tree. He waits for hours in the tree until his raft is spit back up again by Charybdis. With help from the gods, he then floats unnoticed past dangerous Scylla and drifts to the island of the nymph Calypso.

With this, Odysseus concludes the long story of his adventures that he has been relating to his hosts, the Phaeacians, at their banquet.

The Homecoming

FROM THE
● DYSSEY
H ● M E R

☐ FATHER AND SON



... From the air

she walked, taking the form of a tall woman,
handsome and clever at her craft, and stood
beyond the gate in plain sight of Odysseus,
5 unseen, though, by Telemachus, unguessed,
for not to everyone will gods appear.
Odysseus noticed her; so did the dogs,
who cowered whimpering away from her. She only
nodded, signing to him with her brows,
10 a sign he recognized. Crossing the yard,
he passed out through the gate in the stockade
to face the goddess. Then she said to him:

“Son of Laertes and gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
15 dissemble to your son no longer now.
The time has come: tell him how you together
will bring doom on the suitors in the town.
I shall not be far distant then, for I
myself desire battle.”

▲ This statue of Athena *Prōmachos* (“Defender”), shows the goddess holding the *aegis*, the “snake-fringed shield” with which she terrifies the suitors. How does this image convey Athena’s dual character as a goddess of wisdom and warfare?

11 *stockade* (sto kād’), *n.* a line of posts set firmly to form a defense; an enclosure or pen.

■ Why do you think Athena desires battle?

Saying no more,

20 she tipped her golden wand upon the man,
making his cloak pure white, and the knit tunic
fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,
ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard
no longer grey upon his chin. And she
withdrew when she had done.

Then Lord Odysseus

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

“Stranger,

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

The noble and enduring man replied:

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

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

Only Telemachus,

40 uncomprehending, wild
with incredulity, cried out:

“You cannot

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

Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear
and said:

50 “This is not princely, to be swept
away by wonder at your father’s presence.
No other Odysseus will ever come,
for he and I are one, the same; his bitter

22 **lithe** (līth), *adj.* characterized by flexibility and grace.

32 **oblation** (o blā’shən), *n.* something offered in worship or devotion.

41 **incredulity** (in’krə dū/lə-tē), *n.* disbelief; skepticism.

fortune and his wanderings are mine.
55 Twenty years gone, and I am back again
on my own island.

As for my change of skin,
that is a charm Athena, Hope of Soldiers,
uses as she will; she has the knack
to make me seem a beggar man sometimes
60 and sometimes young, with finer clothes about me.
It is no hard thing for the gods of heaven
to glorify a man or bring him low.”

When he had spoken, down he sat.

Then, throwing

his arms around this marvel of a father
65 Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears
rose from the wells of longing in both men,
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering
as those of the great taloned hawk,
whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.
70 So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,
and might have gone on weeping so till sundown,
had not Telemachus said:

“Dear father! Tell me
what kind of vessel put you here ashore
on Ithaca? Your sailors, who were they?
75 I doubt you made it, walking on the sea!”

Then said Odysseus, who had borne the barren sea:

“Only plain truth shall I tell you, child.
Great seafarers, the Phaeacians, gave me passage
as they give other wanderers. By night
80 over the open ocean, while I slept,
they brought me in their cutter, set me down
on Ithaca, with gifts of bronze and gold
and stores of woven things. By the gods’ will
these lie all hidden in a cave. I came
85 to this wild place, directed by Athena,
so that we might lay plans to kill our enemies.
Count up the suitors for me, let me know
what men at arms are there, how many men.
I must put all my mind to it, to see
90 if we two by ourselves can take them on
or if we should look round for help.”

■ Why is Telemachus disbelieving at first that Odysseus has returned?

81 cutter (kut'ər), *n.* a small ship.

THE BEGGAR AT THE MANOR

Unafraid to learn that the suitors number over a hundred, Odysseus tells Telemachus of his plan for revenge with the help of Athena and Zeus. Telemachus visits Penelope and tells her he has heard Odysseus is alive but stranded on Calypso's island. Meanwhile, the suitors are angered to discover that Telemachus has outwitted their plot to ambush him, and they determine to kill him if it is the will of the gods.

The swineherd Eumaeus and the disguised Odysseus are ridiculed by Odysseus's goatherd Melanthius on their way to Odysseus's palace. Odysseus is enraged but restrains himself. As they approach the palace, Odysseus is overjoyed to see his home again but is brought to tears seeing Argus, a dog he trained as a puppy, lying neglected and ill at the front gate. Argus recognizes Odysseus, wags his tail, and dies.

Odysseus and the swineherd enter Odysseus's hall, where the suitors are feasting. Odysseus goes to each suitor and begs for food. When he reaches Antinous, the arrogant young man insults him before the entire assembly.

But here Antinous broke in, shouting:

“God!

What evil wind blew in this pest?

Get over,

stand in the passage! Nudge my table, will you?

Egyptian whips are sweet

5 to what you'll come to here, you nosing rat,
making your pitch to everyone!

These men have bread to throw away on you
because it is not theirs. Who cares? Who spares
another's food, when he has more than plenty?”

10 With guile Odysseus drew away, then said:

“A pity that you have more looks than heart.
You'd grudge a pinch of salt from your own larder
to your own handy man. You sit here, fat
on others' meat, and cannot bring yourself

15 to rummage out a crust of bread for me!”

Then anger made Antinous' heart beat hard,
and, glowering under his brows, he answered:

“Now!

You think you’ll shuffle off and get away
after that impudence? Oh, no you don’t!”

- 20 The stool he let fly hit the man’s right shoulder
on the packed muscle under the shoulder blade—
like solid rock, for all the effect one saw.
Odysseus only shook his head, containing
thoughts of bloody work, as he walked on,
25 then sat, and dropped his loaded bag again
upon the door sill. Facing the whole crowd
he said, and eyed them all:

“One word only,

my lords, and suitors of the famous queen.
One thing I have to say.

- 30 There is no pain, no burden for the heart
when blows come to a man, and he defending
his own cattle—his own cows and lambs.
Here it was otherwise. Antinous
hit me for being driven on by hunger—
35 how many bitter seas men cross for hunger!
If beggars interest the gods, if there are Furies
pent in the dark to avenge a poor man’s wrong, then may
Antinous meet his death before his wedding day!”

Then said Eupheithes’ son, Antinous:

“Enough.

- 40 Eat and be quiet where you are, or shamble elsewhere,
unless you want these lads to stop your mouth
pulling you by the heels, or hands and feet,
over the whole floor, till your back is peeled!”

But now the rest were mortified, and someone
45 spoke from the crowd of young bucks to rebuke him:

- “A poor show, that—hitting this famished tramp—
bad business, if he happened to be a god.
You know they go in foreign guise, the gods do,
looking like strangers, turning up
50 in towns and settlements to keep an eye
on manners, good or bad.”

19 **impudence** (im’pyə-dəns), *n.* contemptuous or cocky disregard; insolence.

■ Why do you think Homer mentions that Odysseus doesn’t even lose his stride when he is hit with the footstool?

36 **Furies** (fyūr’ēz), *goddesses of vengeance.*

44 **mortified** (môr’tə fid), *adj.* severely embarrassed; shamed.

45 **rebuke** (ri byük’), *v.* criticize sharply; reprimand.

46 **famished** (fam’isht), *adj.* suffering from severe hunger; starving.

48 **guise** (gīz), *n.* external appearance; costume.

Antinous only shrugged. But at this notion

Telemachus,
after the blow his father bore, sat still
without a tear, though his heart felt the blow.
55 Slowly he shook his head from side to side,
containing murderous thoughts.

Penelope
on the higher level of her room had heard
the blow, and knew who gave it. Now she murmured:

“Would god you could be hit yourself, Antinous—
hit by Apollo’s bowshot!”

60 And Eurynome
her housekeeper, put in:

“He and no other?
If all we pray for came to pass, not one
would live till dawn!”

Her gentle mistress said:

“Oh, Nan, they are a bad lot; they intend
65 ruin for all of us, but Antinous
appears a blacker-hearted hound than any.
Here is a poor man come, a wanderer,
driven by want to beg his bread, and everyone
in hall gave bits, to cram his bag—only
70 Antinous threw a stool, and banged his shoulder!”

So she described it, sitting in her chamber
among her maids—while her true lord was eating.
Then she called in the forester and said:

“Go to that man on my behalf, Eumaeus,
75 and send him here, so I can greet and question him.
Abroad in the great world, he may have heard
rumors about Odysseus—may have known him!”

60 Apollo (ἄπολλο), the god
Apollo was a skilled bowman
whose arrows were said to
cause sudden death. See page
803.



THE TEST OF THE BOW

That afternoon, while the suitors are exercising in the courtyard, a large, ill-mannered beggar named Irus threatens Odysseus, saying there is room for only one beggar in Ithaca. For their own amusement, the suitors arrange a boxing match between Irus and Odysseus. They are amazed by Odysseus's muscular body and praise him for defeating Irus.

At dinner, Penelope, made even more beautiful by Athena, chides the suitors for continuing to exhaust the resources of her husband's estate. With growing argument and unrest among them, the men agree to go home for the night as Telemachus suggests.

That night, Odysseus and Telemachus remove all the weapons from the hall and hide them. The disguised Odysseus tells Penelope that he believes her husband is alive and on his way home. Penelope explains that for the safety of her household she must finally agree to marry one of the suitors. She decides she will select the man who can string her husband's bow and shoot an arrow through a straight row of twelve axes.

Later, Penelope prays to Artemis (ār'tə mis), goddess of chastity and hunting, saying she would rather die than marry another man. Elsewhere in the palace, Eurycleia, Odysseus's aged nurse, recognizes him by a scar on his foot. He makes her swear to keep his identity secret. Athena appears to reassure the fretful Odysseus that he will be victorious.

The next day, Odysseus appeals to Zeus for a sign of his favor, and Zeus answers with a rumbling of thunder. During lunch, one of the suitors insults Odysseus and throws a bone at him. Outraged, Telemachus delivers an angry speech at the group, telling them he knows of their plot to kill him. The men are too stunned and drowsy with overeating to respond, and they fall into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Later, during the contest of the bow, none of the suitors is strong enough to string it. Odysseus requests a try and, though the suitors deny him, Penelope assents. As Odysseus confidently takes up his old bow, his faithful servants Eumaeus and Philoetius lock the palace gates and doors.

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

"Dealer in old bows!"

"A bow lover!"

3 boring (bôr ing), *n.* a hole.

“Maybe he has one like it
at home!”

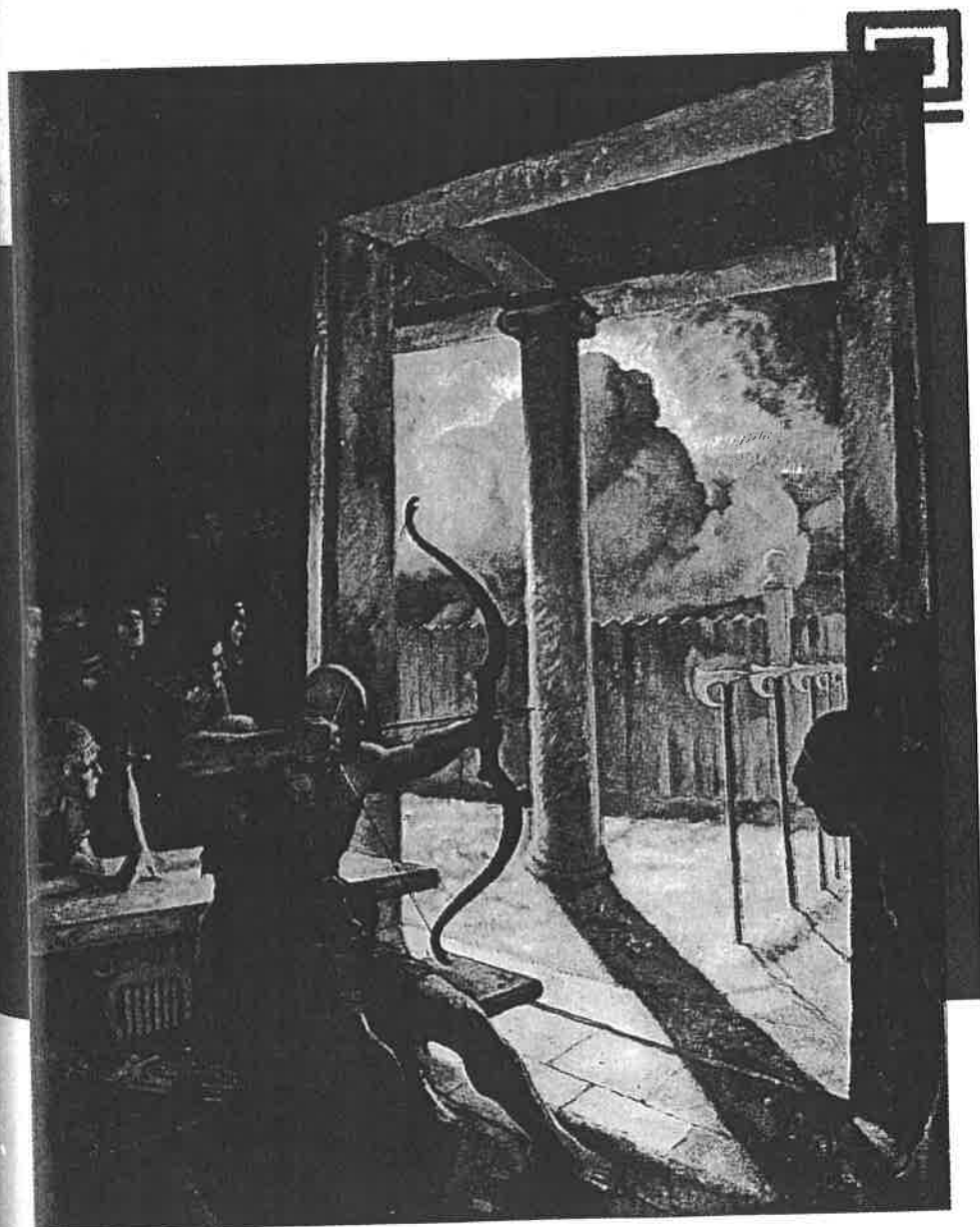
“Or has an itch to make one for himself.”

“See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!”

10 And one disdainful suitor added this:

“May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he bends it!”

10 disdainful (dis dān'fəl),
adj. full of contempt; scornful.



◀ N. C. Wyeth, *The Trial of the Bow*. Why do you think the artist posed the onlookers in the way he did?

But the man skilled in all ways of contending,
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,
like a musician, like a harper, when
15 with quiet hand upon his instrument
he draws between his thumb and forefinger
a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,
20 so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang
a swallow's note.

In the hushed hall it smote the suitors
and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered
overhead, one loud crack for a sign.
And Odysseus laughed within him that the son
25 of crooked-minded Cronus had flung that omen down.
He picked one ready arrow from his table
where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still
in the quiver for the young men's turn to come.
He nocked it, let it rest across the handgrip,
30 and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,
aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

Now flashed

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

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

35 "Telemachus, the stranger
you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.
I did not miss, neither did I take all day
stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,
not so contemptible as the young men say.
40 The hour has come to cook their lordships' mutton—
supper by daylight. Other amusements later,
with song and harping that adorn a feast."

He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince
Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,
45 belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,
and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze
stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father.

13 **heft** (heft), *n.* weight, heaviness.

■ Do you think Homer's comparison of Odysseus to a musician is an effective **simile** here? Why or why not?

21 **smote** (smōt), *v.* struck sharply; delivered a blow (past tense of *smite*).

25 **omen** (ō'mən), *n.* a sign of what is to happen.

29 **nock** (nok), *v.* fit against a bowstring.

39 **contemptible** (kən-temp'tə bəl), *adj.* deserving scorn; mean; low; worthless.

DEATH IN THE GREAT HALL

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the islands leapt and stood on the broad door sill, his own bow in his hand. He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over.
5 Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before,
if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.”

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup, embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers:
10 the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death?
How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—could dare to bring death’s pain on him and darkness on his eyes?
Odysseus’ arrow hit him under the chin
15 and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted crimson runnels, a river of mortal red, and one last kick upset his table
20 knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.
Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall, everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,
25 not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and throw.
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”

“Your own throat will be slit for this!”

“Our finest lad is down!”

You killed the best on Ithaca.”

“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

1 wily (wī/lē), *adj.* crafty; cunning; tricky.

9 embossed (em bossd/), *adj.* decorated with a design, pattern, etc., that stands out from the surface.

11 revelry (rev/əl rē), *n.* boisterous reveling or festivity.

11 throng (throng), *n.* crowd; multitude.

■ Why do you think Homer includes details about the cup Antinous drinks from?

18 runnel (run/əl), *n.* small stream or brook; rivulet; runlet.

30 For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild shot,
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend
they were already in the grip of death.
But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it
35 home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder,
twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared
bid for my wife while I was still alive.
Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide heaven,
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.
40 Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

As they all took this in, sickly green fear
pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered
looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.
Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:

45 “If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,
all that you say these men have done is true.
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.
But here he lies, the man who caused them all.
Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on
50 to do these things. He cared less for a marriage
than for the power Cronion has denied him
as king of Ithaca. For that
he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.
He is dead now and has his portion. Spare
55 your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make
restitution of wine and meat consumed,
and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen
with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.
Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger.”

60 Odysseus glowered under his black brows
and said:

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

They felt their knees fail, and their hearts—but heard
Eurymachus for the last time rallying them.

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51 Cronion (krō/nē ən),
another name for Zeus, the
supreme god and son of
Cronus.

57 tithe (tītē), *n.* a portion,
often one-tenth, of yearly
income paid as a tax or
donation.

70 “Friends,” he said, “the man is implacable.
Now that he’s got his hands on bow and quiver
he’ll shoot from the big door stone there
until he kills us to the last man.

Fight, I say,

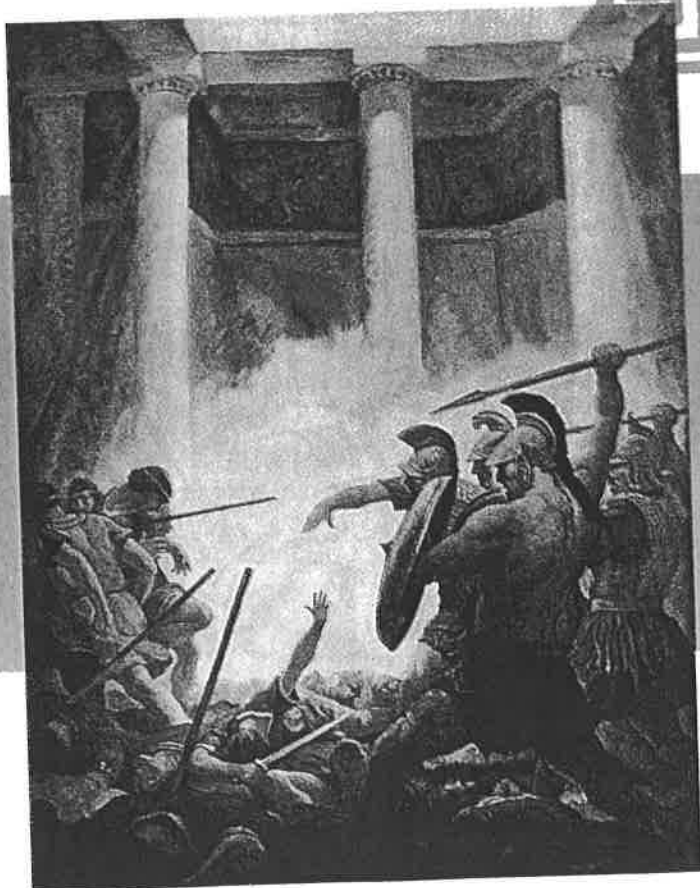
70 **implacable** (im plā/kə-
bəl), *adj.* unable to be
appeased; refusing to be
reconciled; unyielding.

■ What makes Eurymachus
decide to fight?

75 **deflect** (di flekt’), *v.* turn
aside.

let’s remember the joy of it. Swords out!
75 Hold up your tables to deflect his arrows.
After me, everyone: rush him where he stands.
If we can budge him from the door, if we can pass
into the town, we’ll call out men to chase him.
This fellow with his bow will shoot no more.”

He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine bronze,
80 honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and loud
he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly
an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt
sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his liver.
The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell aside,
85 pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,



◀ N. C. Wyeth, *The Slaughter of the Suitors*. The artist has positioned two hands—one has just flung a spear and the other reaches up for mercy—at the center of his illustration of the combat in the great hall. What does this focus add to the mood of his painting?

were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head slammed on the ground.

Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet kicking out, he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave of mist closed on his eyes. . . .

Odysseus fells many more men with arrows, while Telemachus fetches shields and spears for himself, his father, Eumaeus, and the cowherd. Meanwhile, the treacherous goatherd Melanthius escapes to the storage room and brings arms for twelve of the suitors. Eumaeus and the cowherd discover Melanthius returning for more arms and string him up to the ceiling. Aided by Athena, the four men defeat the suitors. The few survivors beg for mercy.

One more who had avoided furious death
90 was the son of Terpis, Phemius, the minstrel,
singer by compulsion to the suitors.
He stood now with his harp, holy and clear,
in the wall's recess, under the window, wondering
if he should flee that way to the courtyard altar,
95 sanctuary of Zeus, the Enclosure God.
Thighbones in hundreds had been offered there
by Laertes and Odysseus. No, he thought;
the more direct way would be best—to go
humbly to his lord. But first to save
100 his murmuring instrument he laid it down
carefully between the winebowl and a chair,
then he betook himself to Lord Odysseus,
clung hard to his knees, and said:

“Mercy,

mercy on a suppliant, Odysseus!
105 My gift is song for men and for the gods undying.
My death will be remorse for you hereafter.
No one taught me: deep in my mind a god
shaped all the various ways of life in song.
And I am fit to make verse in your company
110 as in the god's. Put aside lust for blood.
Your own dear son Telemachus can tell you,
never by my own will or for love
did I feast here or sing amid the suitors.
They were too strong, too many; they compelled me.”

115 Telemachus in the elation of battle
heard him. He at once called to his father:

87 revulsion (ri vul/'shən), *n.*
a sudden, violent change or
reaction, especially of disgust;
repugnance. 120

91 compulsion (kəm-
pul/'shən), *n.* a being
compelled; use of force. 130

95 the Enclosure God, or
god of the courtyard. It was
thought that a statue of Zeus
in a courtyard would protect
the home. 135

104 suppliant (sup/'lē ənt),
n. one who makes humble
entreaty or begs. 140

106 remorse (ri mōrs/'), *n.*
sorrowful regret. 145

115 elation (i lā/'shən), *n.*
high spirits; joy or pride. 15

“Wait: that one is innocent: don’t hurt him.
And we should let our herald live—Medon;
he cared for me from boyhood. Where is *he*?
120 Has he been killed already by Philoetius
or by the swineherd? Else he got an arrow
in that first gale of bowshots down the room.”

Now this came to the ears of prudent Medon
under the chair where he had gone to earth,
125 pulling a new-flayed bull’s hide over him.
Quiet he lay while blinding death passed by.
Now heaving out from under
he scrambled for Telemachus’ knees and said:

“Here I am, dear prince; but rest your spear!
130 Tell your great father not to see in me
a suitor for the sword’s edge—one of those
who laughed at you and ruined his property!”

The lord of all the tricks of war surveyed
this fugitive and smiled. He said:

135 “Courage: my son has dug you out and saved you.
Take it to heart, and pass the word along:
fair dealing brings more profit in the end.
Now leave this room. Go and sit down outdoors
where there’s no carnage, in the court,
140 you and the poet with his many voices,
while I attend to certain chores inside.”

At this the two men stirred and picked their way
to the door and out, and sat down at the altar,
looking around with wincing eyes
145 as though the sword’s edge hovered still.
And Odysseus looked around him, narrow-eyed,
for any others who had lain hidden
while death’s black fury passed.

In blood and dust
he saw that crowd all fallen, many and many slain.

150 Think of a catch that fishermen haul in to a halfmoon bay
in a fine-meshed net from the white-caps of the sea:
how all are poured out on the sand, in throes for the salt sea,
twitching their cold lives away in Helios’ fiery air:
so lay the suitors heaped on one another.

133 **survey** (sər vā’), *v.* look over; view; examine.

139 **carnage** (kār’nij), *n.* slaughter of a great number of people.

152 **throes** (thrōz), *n.* a desperate struggle.

■ What **simile** does Homer use to describe the fallen suitors?

THE TRUNK OF THE OLIVE TREE

After the fighting ends, Odysseus's old servant Eurycleia comes out and begins to rejoice, but Odysseus stops her, saying such a massacre is no reason for rejoicing. Odysseus then orders the woman servants who consorted with suitors to remove the dead bodies and clean up the bloody hall. Afterward, Telemachus hangs the women outside. Odysseus orders Eurycleia to burn fire and brimstone to cleanse the palace. He then sends for Penelope, who has been sleeping under Athena's spell. Penelope greets Odysseus, who is still blood-stained from the fight, but she is not sure he really is her husband.

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

"Strange woman,

15 the immortals of Olympus made you hard,
harder than any. Who else in the world
would keep aloof as you do from her husband
if he returned to her from years of trouble,
cast on his own land in the twentieth year?

20 Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
Her heart is iron in her breast."

8 infused (in fyūzd'), *adj.*
poured into; instilled.

10 Hephaestus (hi fes'təs),
god of fire and metalworking.
See page 803.

11 lavish (lav'ish), *v.* give or
spend very freely or
generously.

17 aloof (ə lūf'), *adj.* unsym-
pathetic; not interested;
reserved.



This statue of Penelope, a Roman copy of a Greek original, was done in the first century A.D. What is the chief emotion conveyed by this image? ➤

Penelope

spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

“Strange man,

if man you are . . . This is no pride on my part
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.

25 I know so well how you—how he—appeared
boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . . .

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed
30 with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen.”

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

“Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!
Who dared to move my bed?

35 No builder had the skill for that—unless
a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal
in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,
built into that bed—my handiwork
and no one else’s!

40 An old trunk of olive
grew like a pillar on the building plot,
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.
45 Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,
hewed and shaped that stump from the roots up
into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve
as model for the rest. I planed them all,
inlaid them all with silver, gold and ivory,
50 and stretched a bed between—a pliant web
of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.

There’s our sign!

I know no more. Could someone else’s hand
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?”

Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees
55 grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.
With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,
murmuring:

60 ■ Why does Penelope ques-
tion that Odysseus is a man?

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49 **inlay** (in/lā), *v.* decorate
with a design or material set
in the surface.

50 **pliant** (pli’ənt), *adj.* bend-
ing easily; flexible; supple.

51 **crimson** (krim’zən), *n.*
deep red.

55 **tremulous** (trem/yə ləs),
adj. trembling; quivering.

“Do not rage at me, Odysseus!

No one ever matched your caution! Think
60 what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us
life together in our prime and flowering years,
kept us from crossing into age together.
Forgive me, don't be angry. I could not
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself
65 long ago against the frauds of men,
impostors who might come—and all those many
whose underhanded ways bring evil on!
Helen of Argos, daughter of Zeus and Leda,
70 if she had known her destiny? known the Achaeans
in arms would bring her back to her own country?
Surely a goddess moved her to adultery,
her blood unchilled by war and evil coming,
the years, the desolation; ours, too.
75 But here and now, what sign could be so clear
as this of our own bed?
No other man has ever laid eyes on it—
only my own slave, Actoris, that my father
sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.
80 You make my stiff heart know that I am yours.”

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
longed for

85 as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by a swimmer
spent in rough water where his ship went down
under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
Few men can keep alive through a big surf
to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
90 in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
her white arms round him pressed as though forever.

65 **fraud** (frôd), *n.* dishonest dealing; trickery; cheating.

68 **Helen of Argos . . . Leda** (lē'də). Helen is the wife of Achaean king Menelaus; her abduction by Paris and adultery with him led to the Trojan War. Leda became pregnant with Helen after Zeus appeared to her as a swan and seduced her.

74 **desolation** (des'ə-lā'shən), *n.* grief, sadness; loneliness; barrenness.

89 **clotted** (klot'əd), *adj.* covered with thick clumps or masses.

89 **brine** (brīn), *n.* very salty water.

90 **abyss** (ə bis'), *n.* a bottomless or very great depth; chasm.

