The Odyssey Part One

by Homer

------translated by Robert Fitzgerald------translated by Robert Fitzgerald------

Part 1 The Adventures of Odysseus

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

Sing in me, Muse,¹ and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending, the wanderer, harried for years on end, after he plundered the stronghold on the proud height of Troy.²
He saw the townlands and learned the minds of many distant men, and weathered many bitter nights and days in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
But not by will nor valor could he save them, for their own recklessness destroyed them all—

children and fools, they killed and feasted on

¹**Muse:** Any one of the nine goddesses of the arts, literature, and the sciences.

² Troy: City in northwest Asia Minor, site of the Trojan War.

the cattle of Lord Helios,³ the Sun, and he who moves all day through heaven took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

15

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,⁴ tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

Sailing from Troy

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

| | Now this was the reply Odysseus made: |
|-----|---|
| | "I am Laertes' son, Odysseus. |
| | Men hold me |
| | formidable for guile ⁵ in peace and war: |
| | this fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim. |
| 130 | My home is on the peaked seamark of Ithaca ⁶ |
| | under Mount Neion's windblown robe of leaves, |
| | in sight of other islands—Dulichium, |
| | Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca |
| | being most lofty in that coastal sea, |
| 135 | and northwest, while the rest lie east and south. |
| | A rocky isle, but good for a boy's training; |
| | I shall not see on earth a place more dear, |
| | though I have been detained long by Calypso, |
| | loveliest among goddesses, who held me |
| 140 | in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight, |
| | as Circe of Aeaea, the enchantress, |
| | desired me, and detained me in her hall. |
| | But in my heart I never gave consent. |
| | Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass |
| 145 | his own home and his parents? In far lands |
| | he shall not, though he find a house of gold. |
| | What of my sailing, then, from Troy? |
| | What of those years |
| | of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? |

³ Helios: Sun god.
⁴ Zeus: King of the gods.
⁵ Guile: (n.) craftiness; cunning.

⁶ Ithaca: Island off the west coast of Greece.

The wind that carried west from Ilium⁷

- brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore,
 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!
 Out to sea again!' My men were mutinous,⁸
 fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep
 they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle,
 feasting—while fugitives went inland, running
- 160 to call to arms the main force of Cicones. This was an army, trained to fight on horseback or, where the ground required, on foot. They came with dawn over that terrain like the leaves and blades of spring. So doom appeared to us,
- 165 dark word of Zeus for us, our evil days. My men stood up and made a fight of it—
 backed on the ships, with lances kept in play, from bright morning through the blaze of noon holding our beach, although so far outnumbered;
- but when the sun passed toward unyoking time, then the Achaeans,⁹ 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:
- 175 our precious lives we had, but not our friends. No ship made sail next day until some shipmate had raised a cry, three times, for each poor ghost unfleshed by the Cicones on that field.

The Lotus-Eaters

Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north

- a storm against the ships, and driving veils of squall moved down like night on land and sea. The bows went plunging at the gust; sails cracked and lashed out strips in the big wind. We saw death in that fury, dropped the yards,
- 185 unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:¹⁰ then two long days and nights we lay offshore worn out and sick at heart, tasting our grief,

⁷ **Ilium:** Troy.

⁸ **Mutinous:** (adj.) rebellious.

⁹ Achaeans: Greeks; here, Odysseus' men.

¹⁰ Lee: (n.) area sheltered from the wind.

until a third Dawn came with ringlets shining. Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested, letting the steersmen and the breeze take over.

I might have made it safely home, that time, but as I came round Malea the current took me out to sea, and from the north a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.

195 Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea before dangerous high winds."

190

"Upon the tenth

we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters, who live upon that flower. We landed there

- 200 to take on water. All ships' companies mustered alongside for the midday meal. Then I sent out two picked men and a runner to learn what race of men that land sustained. They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,
- 205 who showed no will to do us harm, only offering the sweet Lotus to our friends but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus, never cared to report, nor to return: they longed to stay forever, browsing on
- 210 that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships, tied them down under their rowing benches, and called the rest: 'All hands aboard; come, clear the beach and no one taste
- 215 the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.' Filing in to their places by the rowlocks my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf, and we moved out again on our seafaring.

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 nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain – wild wheat and barley – grows untended, and wine grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rains. Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting, no consultation or old tribal ways, but each one dwells in his own mountain cave dealing out rough justice to wife and child, indifferent to what the others do. . .

"We lit a fire, burnt an offering,

- 220 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence around the embers, waiting. When he came he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it with a great crash into that hollow cave,
- 225 and we all scattered fast to the far wall. Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung high overhead a slab of solid rock
- 230 to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons, with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it over the doorsill. Next he took his seat and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job
- 235 he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling; thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey, sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets, and poured the whey to stand in bowls cooling until he drank it for his supper.
- When all these chores were done, he poked the fire, heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.'Strangers,' he said, 'who are you? And where from? What brings you here by seaways—a fair traffic? Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives
- 245 like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?'We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread of that deep rumble and that mighty man.But all the same I spoke up in reply:'We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course
- 250 by shifting gales on the Great South Sea; homeward bound, but taking routes and ways uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it. We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus the whole world knows what city
- 255 he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. It was our luck to come here; here we stand,

beholden for your help, or any gifts you give—as custom is to honor strangers. We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care

260 for the gods' courtesy; Zeus will avenge the unoffending guest.'

He answered this from his brute chest, unmoved: 'You are a ninny, or else you come from the other end of nowhere, telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes

- 265 care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far. I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—you or your friends—unless I had a whim to. Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—
- 270 around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?' He thought he'd find out, but I saw through this, and answered with a ready lie:

'My ship?

Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth atremble, broke it up on the rocks at your land's end.

- 275 A wind from seaward served him, drove us there. We are survivors, these good men and I.' Neither reply nor pity came from him, but in one stride he clutched at my companions and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies
- 280 to beat their brains out, spattering the floor. Then he dismembered them and made his meal, gaping and crunching like a mountain lion everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones. We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,
- 285 powerless, looking on at this, appalled; but Cyclops went on filling up his belly with manflesh and great gulps of whey, then lay down like a mast among his sheep. My heart beat high now at the chance of action,
- 290 and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went along his flank to stab him where the midriff holds the liver. I had touched the spot when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him we perished there as well, for we could never

295 move his ponderous doorway slab aside. So we were left to groan and wait for morning. (The Wandering page 2)The Odyssey, Part One, continued When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,

- 300 putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then, his chores being all dispatched, he caught another brace of men to make his breakfast, and whisked away his great door slab to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
- 305 reset the stone as one would cap a quiver. There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness. And now I pondered how to hurt him worst, if but Athena granted what I prayed for.
- 310 Here are the means I thought would serve my turn: a club, or staff, lay there along the fold an olive tree, felled green and left to season for Cyclops's hand. And it was like a mast a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
- 315 a deep-seagoing craft—might carry: so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I chopped out a six-foot section of this pole and set it down before my men, who scraped it; and when they had it smooth, I hewed again
- 320 to make a stake with pointed end. I held this in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it, then hid it, well back in the cavern, under one of the dung piles in profusion there. Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured
- 325 along with me? Whose hand could bear to thrust and grind that spike in Cyclops's eye, when mild sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it, the men I would have chosen won the toss four strong men, and I made five as captain.
- 330 At evening came the shepherd with his flock, his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time, entered the cave: by some sheepherding whim or a god's bidding—none were left outside. He hefted his great boulder into place
- and sat him down to milk the bleating ewesin proper order, put the lambs to suck,and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.My moment was at hand, and I went forward
- 40 holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,

looking up, saying:

'Cyclops, try some wine.

Here's liquor to wash down your scraps of men. Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried under our planks. I meant it for an offering

345 if you would help us home. But you are mad, unbearable, a bloody monster! After this, will any other traveler come to see you?' He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down so fiery and smooth he called for more:

- 350 'Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me, how are you called? I'll make a gift will please you. Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow out of grassland and loam in heaven's rain, but here's a bit of nectar and ambrosia!'
- 355 Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down. I saw the fuddle and flush come over him, then I sang out in cordial tones:

'Cyclops,

you ask my honorable name? Remember the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.

360 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. Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.' Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,

- 365 his great head lolling to one side; and sleep took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping, he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men. Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike deep in the embers, charring it again,
- and cheered my men along with battle talk to keep their courage up: no quitting now.The pike of olive, green though it had been, reddened and glowed as if about to catch.I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
- 375 gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops as more than natural force nerved them; straight forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
- in planking, having men below to swingthe two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.So with our brand we bored that great eye socket

while blood ran out around the red-hot bar. Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

385 In a smithy one sees a white-hot axhead or an adze plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam the way they make soft iron hale and hard just so that eyeball hissed around the spike.

390 The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him, and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye, threw it away, and his wild hands went groping; then he set up a howl for Cyclopes

395 who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby. Some heard him; and they came by divers ways to clump around outside and call:

'What ails you, Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore

in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.

400 Sure no man's driving off your flock? No man has tricked you, ruined you?'

Out of the cave the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer: 'Nohbdy, Nohbdy's tricked me. Nohbdy's ruined me!' To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

405 'Ah well, if nobody has played you foul there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain given by great Zeus. Let it be your father, Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.'

So saying

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter

- 410 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 and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide for any silly beast or man who bolted—
- 415 hoping somehow I might be such a fool.But I kept thinking how to win the game: death sat there huge; how could we slip away? I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics, reasoning as a man will for dear life,

420 until a trick came—and it pleased me well. The Cyclops's rams were handsome, fat, with heavy fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

I tied them silently together, twining

cords of willow from the ogre's bed;

- then slung a man under each middle one to ride there safely, shielded left and right. So three sheep could convey each man. I took the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock, and hung myself under his kinky belly,
- pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
- 435 and peals of bleating echoed round the pens where dams with udders full called for a milking. Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound, the master stroked each ram, then let it pass, but my men riding on the pectoral 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. The Cyclops patted him, and then he said: 'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest
- 445 in the night cave? You never linger so, but graze before them all, and go afar to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way leading along the streams, until at evening you run to be the first one in the fold.
- 450 Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue and his accurst companions burnt it out when he had conquered all my wits with wine. Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
- 455 Oh, had you brain and voice to tell where he may be now, dodging all my fury! Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall his brains would strew the floor, and I should have rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'
- (The Wandering page 3)
- 460 He sent us into the open, then. Close by, I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly, going this way and that to untie the men. With many glances back, we rounded up his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
- and drove them down to where the good ship lay.We saw, as we came near, our fellows' faces shining; then we saw them turn to grief tallying those who had not fled from death.

I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,

- 470 and in a low voice told them: 'Load this herd; move fast, and put the ship's head toward the breakers.' They all pitched in at loading, then embarked and struck their oars into the sea. Far out, as far offshore as shouted words would carry,
- 475 I sent a few back to the adversary:'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?Puny, am I, in a Caveman's hands?How do you like the beating that we gave you,you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
- 480 under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!' The blind thing in his doubled fury broke a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us. Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giantwave
- 485 that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore. I got the longest boathook out and stood fending us off, with furious nods to all to put their backs into a racing stroke row, row or perish. So the long oars bent
- 490 kicking the foam sternward, making head until we drew away, and twice as far. Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew in low voices protesting:

'Godsake, Captain!

Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!'

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

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

'Aye

He'll smash our timbers and our heads together!'

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

'Cyclops,

if ever mortal man inquire how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:

- 505 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.
 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus, a son of Eurymus great length of days
- 510 he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,

and these things he foretold for time to come: my great eye lost, and at Odysseus' hands. Always I had in mind some giant, armed in giant force, would come against me here.

- 515 But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy you put me down with wine, you blinded me. Come back, Odysseus, and I'll treat you well, praying the god of earthquake to befriend you his son I am, for he by his avowal
- 520 fathered me, and, if he will, he may heal me of this black wound—he and no other of all the happy gods or mortal men.' Few words I shouted in reply to him:
 'If I could take your life I would and take
- 525 your time away, and hurl you down to hell! The god of earthquake could not heal you there! 'At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

'O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,

- 530 if I am thine indeed, and thou art father: grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never see his home: Laertes' son, I mean, who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny intend that he shall see his roof again
- 535 among his family in his fatherland, far be that day, and dark the years between. Let him lose all companions, and return under strange sail to bitter days at home.'..." (*from* Book 9)

THE WITCH CIRCE

"In the wild wood they found an open glade,

- around a smooth stone house—the hall of Circe and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil.
 None would attack—oh, it was strange, I tell you but switching their long tails they faced our men
- 545 like hounds, who look up when their master comes with tidbits for them—as he will—from table. Humbly those wolves and lions with mighty paws fawned on our men—who met their yellow eyes and feared them.

In the entranceway they stayed

550 to listen there: inside her quiet house they heard the goddess Circe.

Low she sang in her beguiling voice, while on her loom she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright, by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven.

- 555 No one would speak, until Polites—most faithful and likable of my officers—said:
 'Dear friends, no need for stealth: here's a young weaver singing a pretty song to set the air atingle on these lawns and paven courts.
- 560 Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her?' So reassured, they all cried out together, and she came swiftly to the shining doors to call them in. All but Eurylochus who feared a snare—the innocents went after her.
- 565 On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs, while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine, adding her own vile pinch, to make them lose desire or thought of our dear fatherland.
- 570 Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all swinish now, though minds were still unchanged. So, squealing, in they went. And Circe tossed them
- 575 acorns, mast, and cornel berries—fodder for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth. Down to the ship Eurylochus came running to cry alarm, foul magic doomed his men! But working with dry lips to speak a word
- 580 he could not, being so shaken; blinding tears welled in his eyes; foreboding filled his heart. When we were frantic questioning him, at last we heard the tale: our friends were gone. . . ." (from Book 10)

(The Wandering page 4) THE LAND OF THE DEAD

"Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead, vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them before she calved, at home in Ithaca, and burn the choice bits on the altar fire; as for Teiresias, I swore to sacrifice a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock.

- 590 Thus to assuage the nations of the dead I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe, letting their black blood stream into the well pit. Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus, brides and young men, and men grown old in pain,
- 595 and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief; many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads, battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear. From every side they came and sought the pit with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.
- But presently I gave command to my officers to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone.
 Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep
- 605 the surging phantoms from the bloody pittill I should know the presence of Teiresias. . . .Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes came forward bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
- 610 Odysseus, master of landways and seaways, why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe, to see the cold dead and the joyless region? Stand clear, put up your sword; let me but taste of blood, I shall speak true.'
- 615 At this I stepped aside, and in the scabbard let my long sword ring home to the pommel silver, as he bent down to the somber blood. Then spoke the prince of those with gift of speech:

'Great captain,

a fair wind and the honey lights of home 620 are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead; the god who thunders on the land prepares it.

- the god who thunders on the land prepares it, not to be shaken from your track, implacable, in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded. One narrow strait may take you through his blows:
- 625 denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates. When you make landfall on Thrinakia first and quit the violet sea, dark on the land you'll find the grazing herds of Helios by whom all things are seen, all speech is known.
- 630 Avoid those kine, hold fast to your intent, and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca. But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction for ship and crew. Though you survive alone, bereft of all companions, lost for years,

- 635 under strange sail shall you come home, to find your own house filled with trouble: insolent men eating your livestock as they court your lady. Aye, you shall make those men atone in blood! But after you have dealt out death—in open
- 640 combat or by stealth—to all the suitors, go overland on foot, and take an oar, until one day you come where men have lived with meat unsalted, never known the sea, nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows
- and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.The spot will soon be plain to you, and I can tell you how: some passerby will say,"What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?" Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf
- 650 and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon: a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back, and carry out pure hecatombs at home to all wide heaven's lords, the undying gods, to each in order. Then a seaborne death
- 655 soft as this hand of mist will come upon you when you are wearied out with rich old age, your countryfolk in blessed peace around you. And all this shall be just as I foretell.'..." (*from* Book 11)

THE SIRENS; SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

"Listen with care

- 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
- 665 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;

670 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,

- 680 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 and there are twelve—are like great tentacles, unjointed, and upon her serpent necks
- 685 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 her heads in air, outside her horrid cleft, hunting the sea around that promontory
- 690 for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game thundering Amphitrite feeds in thousands. And no ship's company can claim to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes, from every ship, one man for every gullet.
- 695 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, grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times
- 700 from dawn to dusk she spews it up and sucks it down again three times, a whirling maelstrom; if you come upon her then the god who makes earth tremble could not save you. No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship
- 705 through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn six men than lose them all, and the ship, too. . . Then you will coast Thrinakia, the island where Helios's cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven, with fifty beasts in each.

710 No lambs are dropped, or calves, and these fat cattle never die....
Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts intent upon your course for home, and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
715 But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction

for ship and crew...."" "The crew being now silent before me, I addressed them, sore at heart:

'Dear friends,

more than one man, or two, should know those things

- 720 Circe foresaw for us and shared with me, so let me tell her forecast: then we die with our eyes open, if we are going to die, or know what death we baffle if we can. Sirens weaving a haunting song over the sea
- 725 we are to shun, she said, and their green shore all sweet with clover; yet she urged that I alone should listen to their song. Therefore you are to tie me up, tight as a splint, erect along the mast, lashed to the mast,
- and if I shout and beg to be untied, take more turns of the rope to muffle me.' I rather dwelt on this part of the forecast, while our good ship made time, bound outward down the wind for the strange island of Sirens.
- 735 Then all at once the wind fell, and a calm came over all the sea, as though some power lulled the swell.

The crew were on their feet briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then, each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades

- 740 and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved a massive cake of beeswax into bits and rolled them in my hands until they softened no long task, for a burning heat came down from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward
- 745 I carried wax along the line, and laid it thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast, and took themselves again to rowing. Soon, as we came smartly within hailing distance,
- the two Sirens, noting our fast ship off their point, made ready, and they sang....
 The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water made me crave to listen, and I tried to say 'Untie me!' to the crew, jerking my brows;
- 755 but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes got to his feet, he and Eurylochus, and passed more line about, to hold me still. So all rowed on, until the Sirens dropped under the sea rim, and their singing dwindled away.

(The Wandering page 5) The Odyssey, Part One, continued

760 My faithful company rested on their oars now, peeling off the wax that I had laid thick on their ears; then set me free. But scarcely had that island faded in blue air when I saw smoke 765 and white water, with sound of waves in tumult a sound the men heard, and it terrified them. Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking wild alongside till the ship lost way, with no oar blades to drive her through the water. 770 Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern, trying to put heart into them, standing over every oarsman, saying gently, 'Friends, have we never been in danger before this? More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops 775 penned us in his cave? What power he had! Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits to find a way out for us? Now I say by hook or crook this peril too shall be something that we remember.

Heads up, lads!

- 780 We must obey the orders as I give them.Get the oar shafts in your hands, and lie back hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.Zeus help us pull away before we founder.You at the tiller, listen, and take in
- 785 all that I say—the rudders are your duty; keep her out of the combers and the smoke; 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.
- 790 But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I told them nothing, as they could do nothing. They would have dropped their oars again, in panic, to roll for cover under the decking. Circe's bidding against arms had slipped my mind,
- 795 so I tied on my cuirass and took up two heavy spears, then made my way along to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there, the monster of the gray rock, harboring torment for my friends. I strained my eyes

800 upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere could I catch sight of her.

And all this time, in travail, sobbing, gaining on the current, we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire

805 gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she vomited, all the sea was like a caldron seething over intense fire, when the mixture suddenly heaves and rises.

The shot spume

soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.

- 810 But when she swallowed the sea water down we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard the rock bellowing all around, and dark sand raged on the bottom far below.My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes
- 815 were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,

whisking six of my best men from the ship. I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling

- high overhead. Voices came down to me in anguish, calling my name for the last time. A man surf-casting on a point of rock for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod to drop the sinker and the bait far out,
- 825 will hook a fish and rip it from the surface to dangle wriggling through the air; so these were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den, in the dire grapple, reaching still for me—

and deathly pity ran me through at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered questing the passes of the strange sea. We rowed on.
The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,

and Scylla dropped astern.

THE CATTLE OF THE SUN GOD

In the small hours of the third watch, when stars 845 that shone out in the first dusk of evening had gone down to their setting, a giant wind blew from heaven, and clouds driven by Zeus shrouded land and sea in a night of storm; so, just as Dawn with fingertips of rose

touched the windy world, we dragged our ship to cover in a grotto, a sea cave where nymphs had chairs of rock and sanded floors. I mustered all the crew and said:
'Old shipmates,

our stores are in the ship's hold, food and drink;

the cattle here are not for our provision, or we pay dearly for it.

Fierce the god is

who cherishes these heifers and these sheep: Helios; and no man avoids his eye.' To this my fighters nodded. Yes. But now

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

The storms continued.

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

made his insidious plea:

'Comrades,' he said,

You've gone through everything; listen to what I say.All deaths are hateful to us, mortal wretches, but famine is the most pitiful, the worst end that a man can come to.

Will you fight it?

Come, we'll cut out the noblest of these cattle

885 for sacrifice to the gods who own the sky;

and once at home, in the old country of Ithaca, if ever that day comes we'll build a costly temple and adorn it with every beauty for the Lord of Noon.

- 890 But if he flares up over his heifers lost, wishing our ship destroyed, and if the gods make cause with him, why, then I say: Better open your lungs to a big sea once for all than waste to skin and bones on a lonely island!'
- 895 Thus Eurylochus; and they murmured 'Aye!' trooping away at once to round up heifers. Now, that day tranquil cattle with broad brows were grazing near, and soon the men drew up around their chosen beasts in ceremony.
- 900 They plucked the leaves that shone on a tall oak having no barley meal—to strew the victims, performed the prayers and ritual, knifed the kine and flayed each carcass, cutting thighbones free to wrap in double folds of fat. These offerings,
- 905 with strips of meat, were laid upon the fire. Then, as they had no wine, they made libation with clear spring water, broiling the entrails first; and when the bones were burnt and tripes shared, they spitted the carved meat.

Just then my slumber

- 910 left me in a rush, my eyes opened, and I went down the seaward path. No sooner had I caught sight of our black hull, than savory odors of burnt fat eddied around me; grief took hold of me, and I cried aloud:
- 915 'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever, you made me sleep away this day of mischief! O cruel drowsing, in the evil hour! Here they sat, and a great work they contrived.' Lampetia in her long gown meanwhile
- 920h had borne swift word to the Overlord of Noon: 'They have killed your kine.'

And the Lord Helios burst into angry speech amid the immortals: 'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever, punish Odysseus' men! So overweening,

925 now they have killed my peaceful kine, my joy at morning when I climbed the sky of stars, and evening, when I bore westward from heaven. Restitution or penalty they shall payand pay in full—or I go down forever 930 to light the dead men in the underworld.'..." (*from* Book 12)