

The Odyssey

Part One

by Homer

-----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

5 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.
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them,
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Helios,³ the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

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.

³ **Helios:** Sun god.

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 guile⁵ in peace and war:
this fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim.
130 My home is on the peaked seamount of Ithaca⁶
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 Aea, 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?
The wind that carried west from Ilium⁷
150 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.

⁴ **Zeus:** King of the gods.

⁵ **Guile:** (n.) craftiness; cunning.

⁶ **Ithaca:** Island off the west coast of Greece.

⁷ **Ilium:** Troy.

Plunder we took, and we enslaved the women,
to make division, equal shares to all—
155 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;
170 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
180 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,
until a third Dawn came with ringlets shining.
Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested,
190 letting the steersmen and the breeze take over.

⁸ **Mutinous:** (adj.) rebellious.

⁹ **Achaeans:** Greeks; here, Odysseus’ men.

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

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.”

“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.
240 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
 335 and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes
 in proper order, put the lambs to suck,
 and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.
 Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.
 My moment was at hand, and I went forward
 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,

370 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

380 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
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;
425 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,
430 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
440 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,
465 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,
540 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,
585 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.

600 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 pit
till 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,
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
 645 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

660 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,
 675 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. . . .”

“ . . . That is the den of Scylla, where she yaps
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,
730 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,
750 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
820 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—

830 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
850 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;
855 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,
880 ‘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 pay—
and pay in full—or I go down forever
930 to light the dead men in the underworld.’ . . .”

(from Book 12)