

# The Odyssey

*Homer*

*Translated by Robert Fitzgerald*

## PART 1 FAR FROM HOME

### "I Am Odysseus"

Odysseus is in the banquet hall of Alcinous (ăĭ-sĭn'ō-əs), King of Phaeacia (fē-ā'shə), who helps him on his way after all his comrades have been killed and his last vessel destroyed. Odysseus tells the story of his adventures thus far.

"I am Laertes<sup>o</sup> son, Odysseus.

1. **Laertes** (lā-ūr'tēz).

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<sup>4</sup>  
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.  
A rocky isle, but good for a boy's training;

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4. **Ithaca** (ith'ə-kə): an island off the west coast of Greece.

10

I shall not see on earth a place more dear,  
 though I have been detained long by Calypso,<sup>o</sup>  
 loveliest among goddesses, who held me  
 in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight,  
 as Circe of Aeaea,<sup>o</sup> 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  
 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?<sup>o</sup>  
 The wind that carried west from Ilion<sup>o</sup>  
 brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore,  
 a strongpoint on the coast of the Cicones.<sup>o</sup>  
 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,  
 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.  
 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.  
 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,<sup>o</sup> 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.  
 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.

12. **Calypso** (kə-lip'sō).

15 15. **Circe** (sûr'sē) of **Aeaea** (ē'ē-ə).

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22. **Zeus** (zōōs): king of the gods.

23. **Ilion** (il'ē-ōn): Troy.

25 25. **Cicones** (sī-kō'nēz).

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45 45. **Achaeans** (ə-kē'ənz): Greeks  
 (Odysseus' men).

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## 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,  
unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:<sup>59</sup>  
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.

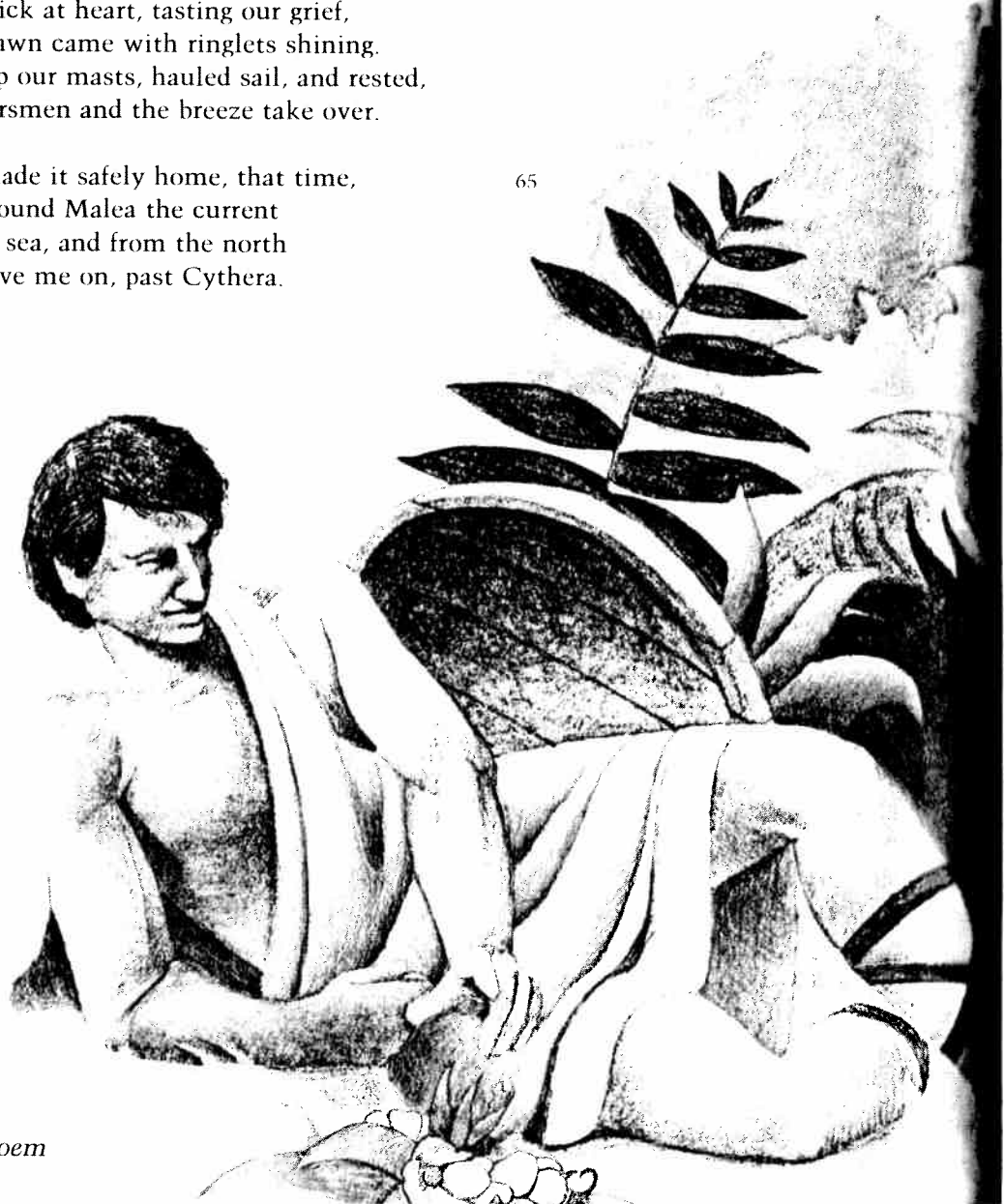
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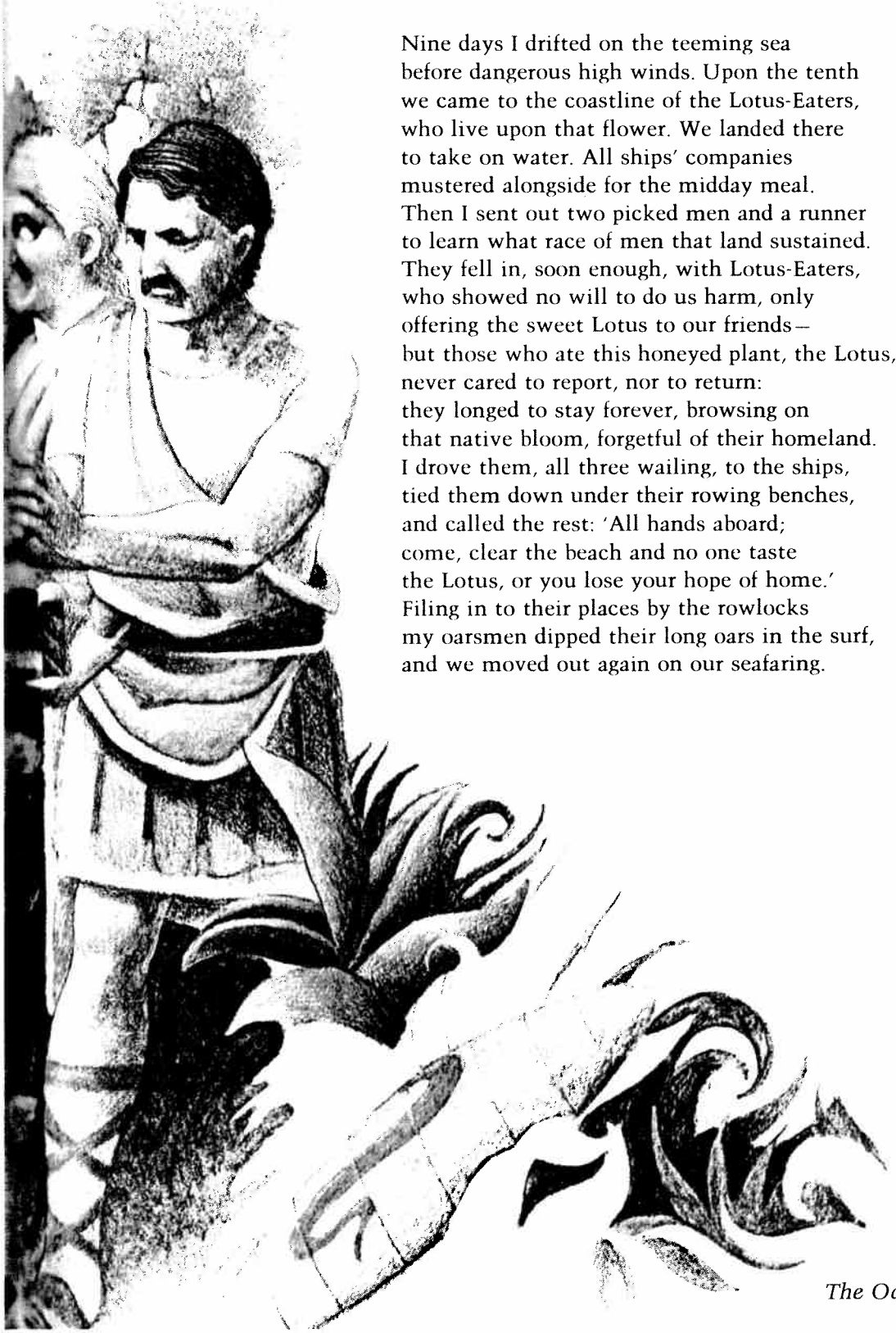
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59. **lee:** place sheltered from the wind.

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.

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Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea  
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth 70  
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 midday meal.  
Then I sent out two picked men and a runner 75  
to learn what race of men that land sustained.  
They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus-Eaters,  
who showed no will to do us harm, only  
offering the sweet Lotus to our friends—  
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus, 80  
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,  
tied them down under their rowing benches, 85  
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  
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf, 90  
and we moved out again on our seafaring.

## The Cyclops

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,<sup>92</sup>  
 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 95  
 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, 100  
 but each one dwells in his own mountain cave  
 dealing out rough justice to wife and child,  
 indifferent to what the others do. . . .

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,  
 at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern 105  
 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<sup>110</sup> man 110  
 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 115  
 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 120  
 of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son,  
 Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's<sup>122</sup>  
 holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness  
 we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,  
 he gave me seven shining golden talents<sup>125</sup>  
 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; 130

92. **Cyclopes** (sī-klō'pēz), plural  
 form of Cyclops (sī'-klōps); a race  
 of one-eyed Giants.

110. **prodigious** (prə-dij'əs): gigan-  
 tic.

122. **Apollo** (ə-pōl'ō): god of music,  
 prophecy, and medicine.

125. **talent**: a unit of money in an-  
 cient Greece.

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

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.

135

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops  
had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep,  
so we looked round at everything inside:  
a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens  
crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class:  
firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'  
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both. 140  
And vessels full of whey were brimming there—  
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.  
My men came pressing round me, pleading:

'Why not

take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,  
throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?  
We'll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say  
put out again on good salt water!'

150

Ah,

how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished  
to see the cave man, what he had to offer—  
no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.

155

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  
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.

160

Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered  
the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams  
and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung  
high overhead a slab of solid rock  
to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,

165

with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred  
the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it  
over the doorsill. Next he took his seat  
and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job  
he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;  
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.

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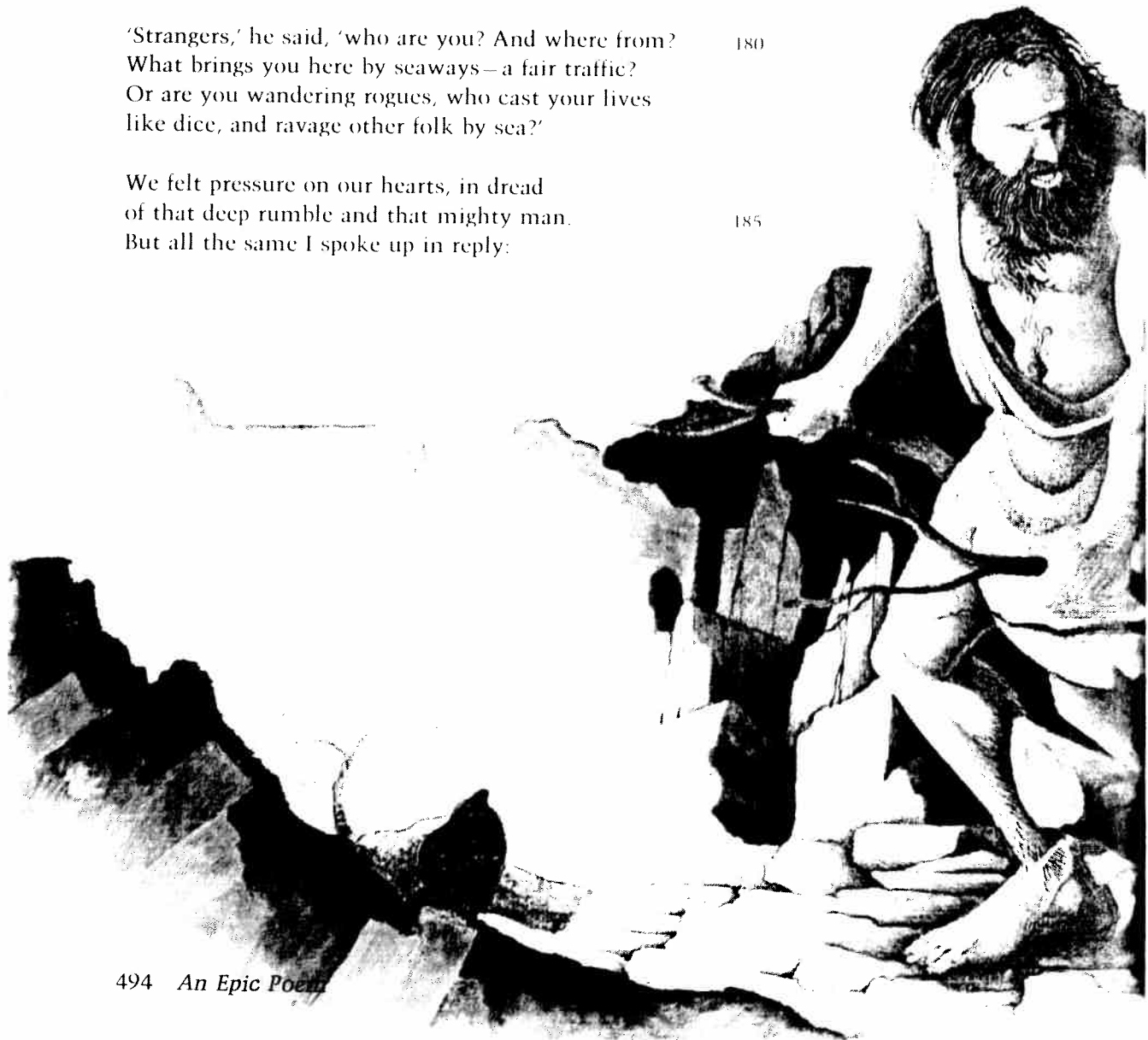
175     175. **withy** (wĭth'ē): made of  
slender twigs.

'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  
like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?'

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We felt pressure on our hearts, in dread  
of that deep rumble and that mighty man.  
But all the same I spoke up in reply:

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'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.  
We served under Agamemnon,<sup>o</sup> 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  
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.'

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191. **Agamemnon** (äg'ə-mēm'nōn');  
Greek king who led the Greeks  
against the Trojans.

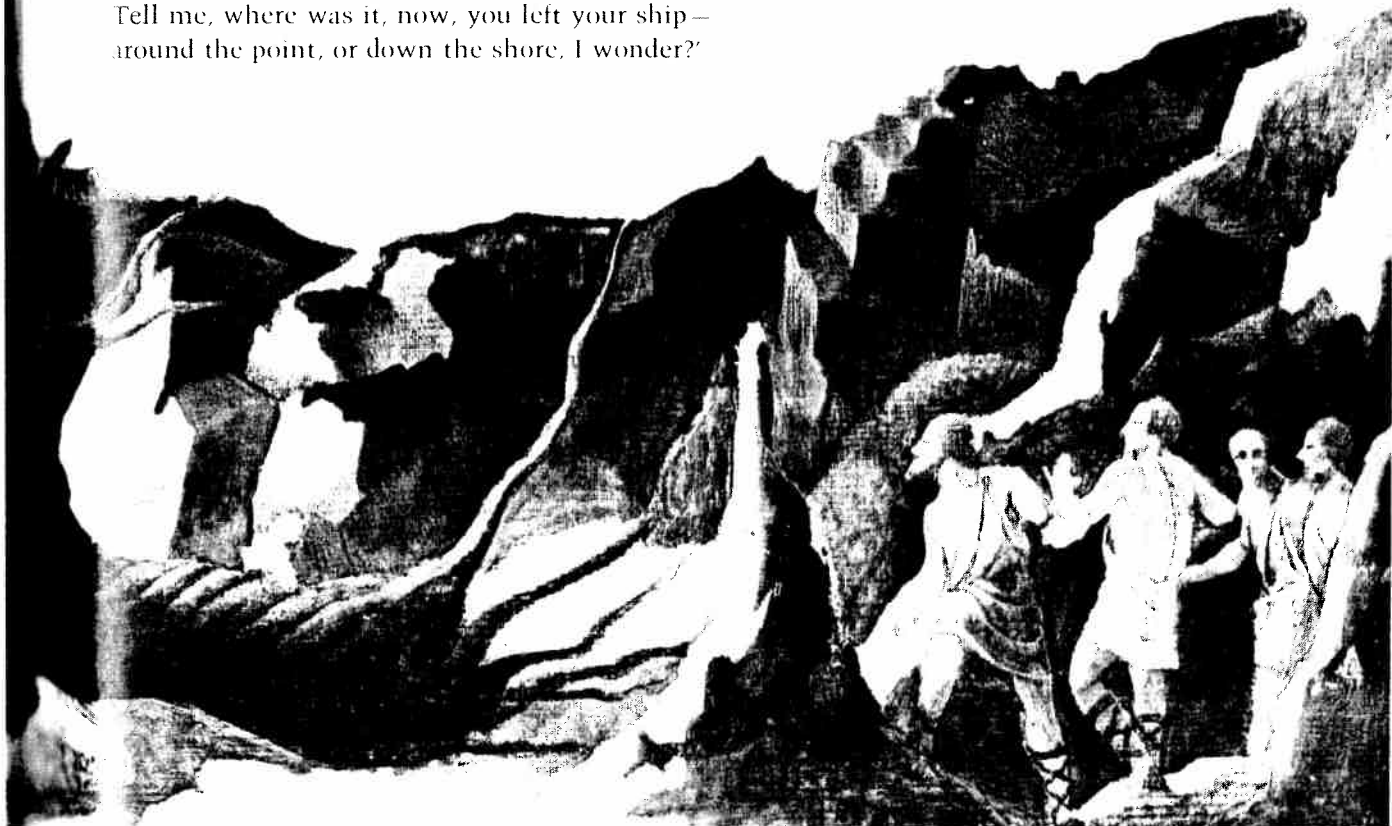
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He answered this  
from his brute chest, unmoved:

'You are a ninny,  
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,  
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes  
care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus  
or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.  
I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—  
you or your friends—unless I had a whim to.  
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—  
around the point, or down the shore. I wonder?'

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

'My ship?

210

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.'

211. **Poseidon** (pō-sī'dān): god of the sea and of earthquakes.

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

215

Then he dismembered them and made his meal,  
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion –  
everything: innards, flesh, and marrowbones.

220

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,  
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.

225

My heart beat high now at the chance of action,  
and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went  
along his flank to stab him where the midriff  
holds the liver. I had touched the spot  
when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him  
we perished there as well, for we could never  
move his ponderous doorway slab aside.

230

So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose  
lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire  
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,  
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,  
his chores being all dispatched, he caught  
another brace° of men to make his breakfast,  
and whisked away his great door slab  
to let his sheep go through – but he, behind,  
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.

235

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.

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240. **brace**: pair.

Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

245

247. **Athena** (ə-thē'nā): goddess of wisdom.

A club, or staff, lay there along the fold –  
 an olive tree, felled green and left to season 250  
 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 255  
 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 260  
 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, 265  
 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 sheepherding whim – 270  
 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. 275  
 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. 280  
 Taste it, and see the king 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 traveler come to see you?' 285

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

'Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,  
how are you called? I'll make a gift will please you.  
Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow  
out of grassland and loam in heaven's rain,  
but here's a bit of nectar and ambrosia!'

290

292. **nectar and ambrosia** (ām-brō'zhə): drink and food of the Olympian gods.

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,

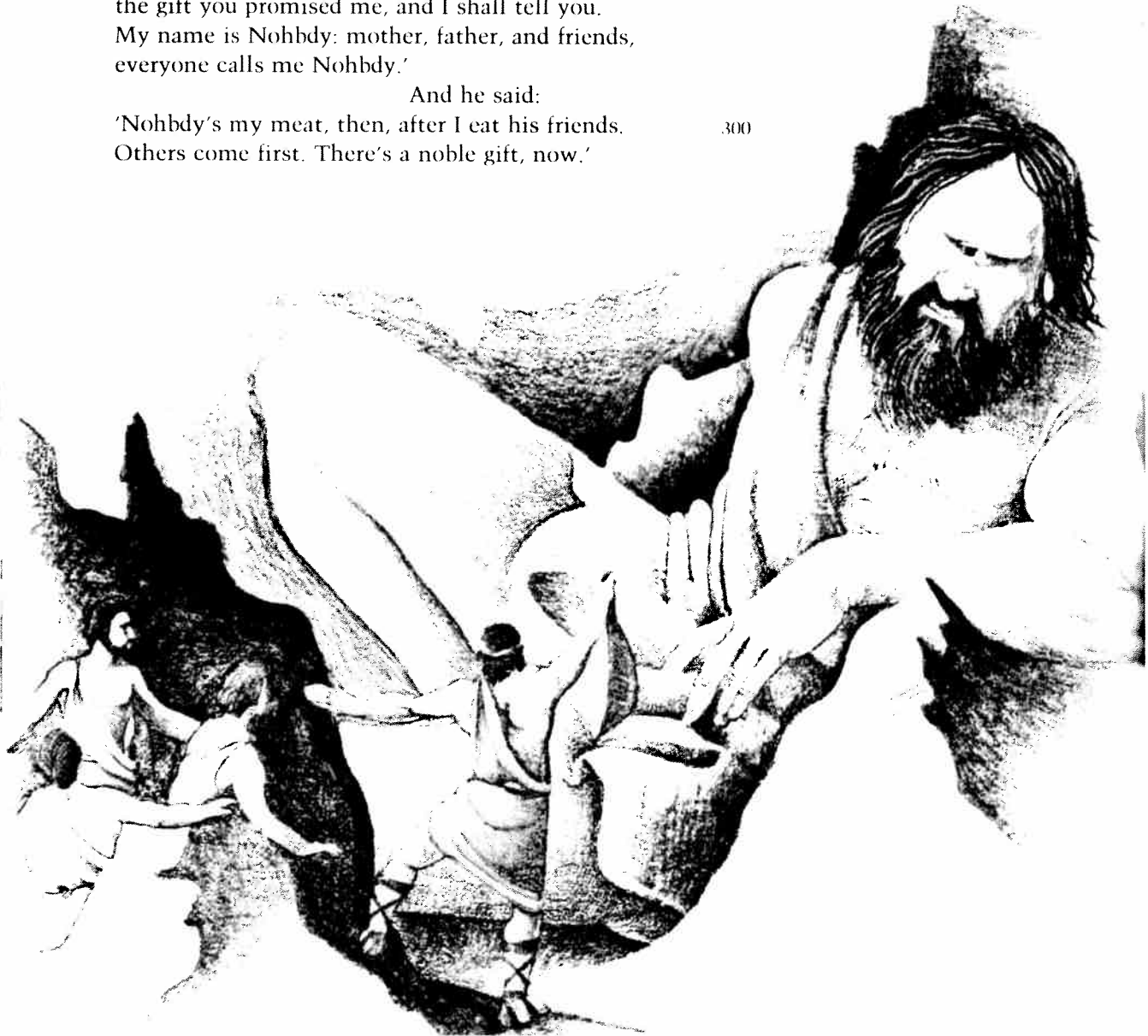
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you ask my honorable name? Remember  
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.  
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,  
everyone calls me Nohbdy.'

And he said:

'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.  
Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

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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. 305

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, 310  
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 315  
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 320  
while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.  
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball  
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

one sees a white-hot axhead or an adz  
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam – 325  
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, 330  
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<sup>334</sup> ways  
to clump around outside and call:

334 **divers** (dr'varz): various.

“What ails you, 335  
Polyphemus?” Why do you cry so sore  
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?”

336. **Polyphemus** (pol'ə-fe'məs).

Out of the cave  
the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer: 340

'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, 345  
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.'

So saying  
they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter  
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.  
Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,  
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone 350  
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? 355  
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 360  
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 365  
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. 370

When Dawn spread out her fingertips 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, 375  
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.



377. **pectoral** (pek'tar-əl): on the chest.

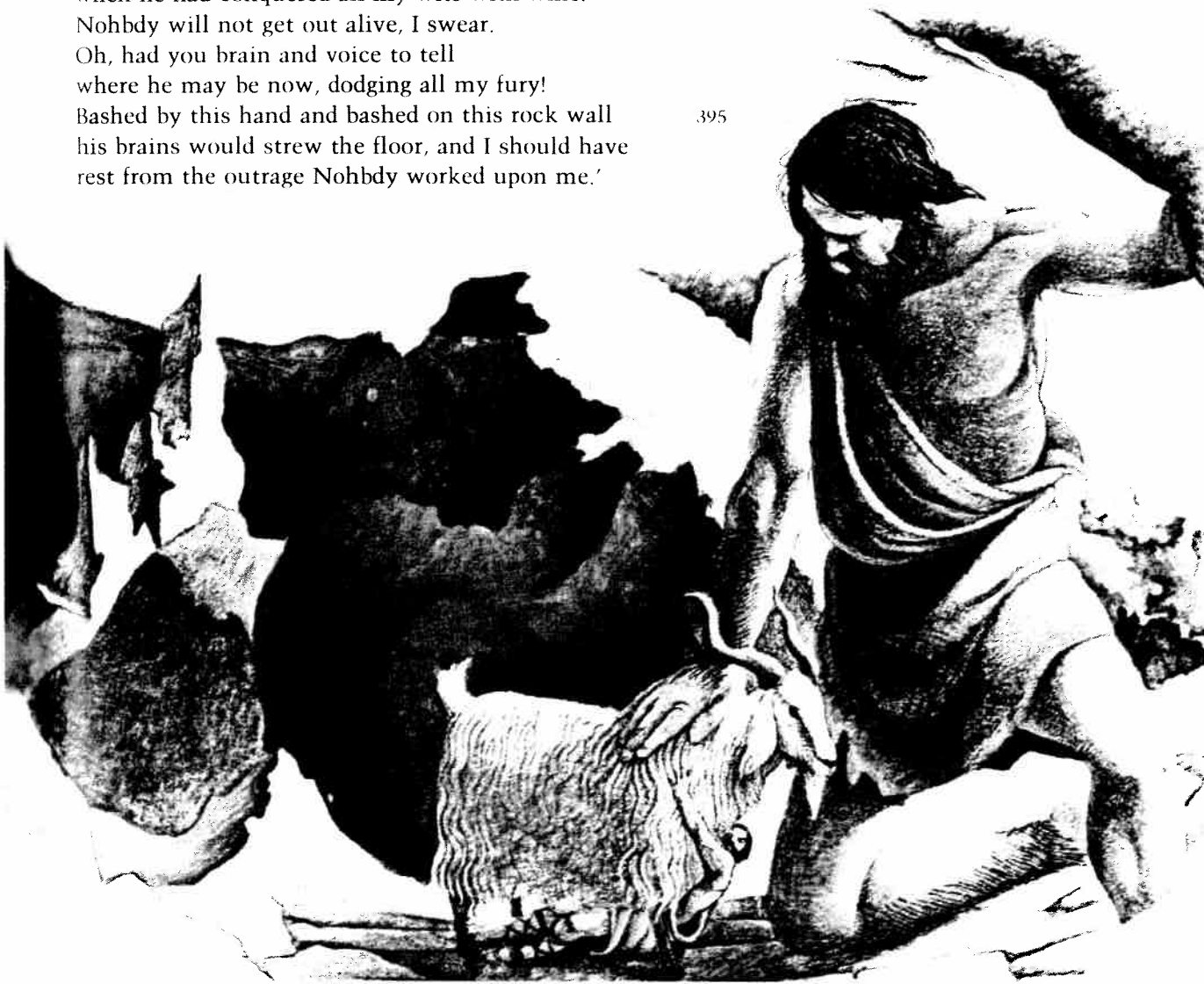
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,  
weighted by wool and me with my meditations. 380  
The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

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 385  
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<sup>o</sup>  
and his accurst companions burnt it out 390  
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 395  
his brains would strew the floor, and I should have  
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'

389. **carrion** (kâr'ē-ən) **rogue**: rotten scoundrel.



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. 400  
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 405  
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 410  
and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,  
as far offshore 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 cave man's hands? 415  
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. 420  
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 425  
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 430  
in low voices protesting:

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

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

'All but stove us in!'

Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,  
he'll get the range and lob a boulder.' 435

'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 440  
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<sup>o</sup> upon me, spoken of old. 445 445. **weird:** fate or destiny.  
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. 450  
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, 455  
praying the god of earthquake<sup>o</sup> 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.' 460

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!'

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness 465  
toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

'O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,  
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:

grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never  
see his home: Laertes' son, I mean,  
who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny  
intend that he shall see his roof again  
among his family in his 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.'

470

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.  
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,  
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone  
to bear us onward toward the island.

480

There  
as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,  
the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all  
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.  
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,  
and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.  
Then we unloaded all the Cyclops' flock  
to make division, share and share alike,  
only my fighters voted that my ram,  
the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him  
by the seaside and burnt his long thighbones  
to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus' son,  
who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering:  
destruction for my ships he had in store  
and death for those who sailed them, my companions.  
Now all day long until the sun went down  
we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine,  
till after sunset in the gathering dark  
we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

485

490

495

500

When the young Dawn with fingertips 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  
oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea.  
So we moved out, sad in the vast offing,  
having our precious lives, but not our friends.

505



## FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Odysseus begins his narrative when he and his men set sail from Troy. What does the episode of the Cicones reveal about Odysseus and his men?
2. Almost all of the adventures in the *Odyssey* illustrate some aspect of Odysseus' character. What specific characteristics are revealed in the episode of the Lotus-Eaters?
3. The land of the Lotus-Eaters has been said to symbolize *escapism*—that is, withdrawal from reality into a dream world. Do you agree? If you do, point out lines that support your view. If you do not, give reasons for your opinion.
4. Why does Odysseus consider the Cyclopes barbarians?
5. Hospitality to strangers is a theme that recurs throughout the *Odyssey*. The ancient Greeks believed that the gods themselves sometimes came to earth disguised as humble strangers. How does the Cyclops respond to Odysseus' plea for hospitality?
6. Twice in the Cyclops episode Odysseus brings misfortune upon himself and his men by ignoring their good advice. Identify both instances and tell why Odysseus acts as he does.
7. Odysseus devises a plan that enables him and his men to escape from the Cyclops' cave and to prevent anyone coming to the Cyclops' aid. What is each stage of the plan?
8. What aspects of Odysseus' character are revealed in the incident with the Cyclops?
9. Reread the Cyclops' prayer to Poseidon (lines 467–476). What lines suggest that Odysseus will have to face other trials? How does this foreshadowing add to the suspense of the poem?



## The Sirens

Odysseus and his crew arrive next at the island of Aeolus (ē'ā-lās), god of the winds, who helps them homeward by bottling up unfavorable winds and sending them a fair breeze. After nine days' sail, with Ithaca in sight, the men untie the bag of winds, and their ships are blown straight back to Aeolus' island. Realizing that their voyage is cursed by the gods, Aeolus drives them away.

In the land of the Laestrygonians (lē's'trī-gō'nē-ǝnz), a race of cannibals, all the ships but one are destroyed and their crews devoured. Odysseus' own ship escapes and proceeds to the island of Aeaea, where the goddess Circe transforms Odysseus' men into swine. After Circe releases his men from the spell, Odysseus spends a year with her. He longs, however, to return to Ithaca. Odysseus sails to the land of the dead, where the ghost of the blind prophet Tiresias (tī-rē'sē-ās) tells him what he must do to reach home. Before setting sail for Ithaca, Odysseus returns briefly to Circe's island. She warns him of the dangers that lie ahead, and Odysseus tells his men what Circe has predicted.

As Circe spoke, Dawn mounted her golden throne,  
and on the first rays Circe left me, taking 510  
her way like a great goddess up the island.

I made straight for the ship, roused up the men  
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 gray sea. 515

But soon an offshore breeze blew to our liking—  
a canvas-bellying breeze, a lusty shipmate  
sent by the singing nymph with sunbright hair.” 518. *nymph . . . hair:* Circe.

So we made fast the braces, and we rested,  
letting the wind and steersman work the ship. 520  
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  
Circe foresaw for us and shared with me,  
so let me tell her forecast: then we die 525  
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.

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.'

530

535

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.  
 Then all at once the wind fell, and a calm  
 came over all the sea, as though some power  
 lulled the swell.

540

The crew were on their feet  
 briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,  
 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  
 and rolled them in my hands until they softened—  
 no long task, for a burning heat came down  
 from Helios,<sup>o</sup> 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,  
 as we came smartly within hailing distance,  
 the two Sirens, noting our fast ship  
 off their point, made ready, and they sang:

545

550

555

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

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

560

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

565

548. **Helios** (hē'lē-ōs'): the sun god.

Sea rovers here take joy  
Voyaging onward,  
As from our song of Troy  
Graybeard and rower-boy  
Goeth more learned. 570

All feats on that great field  
In the long warfare,  
Dark days the bright gods willed,  
Wounds you bore there, 575

Argos' old soldiery°  
On Troy beach teeming,  
Charmed out of time we see.  
No life on earth can be  
Hid from our dreaming.' 580

577. **Argos' old soldiery:** the soldiers from Argos, a city in ancient Greece, who fought in the Trojan War.



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;  
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.

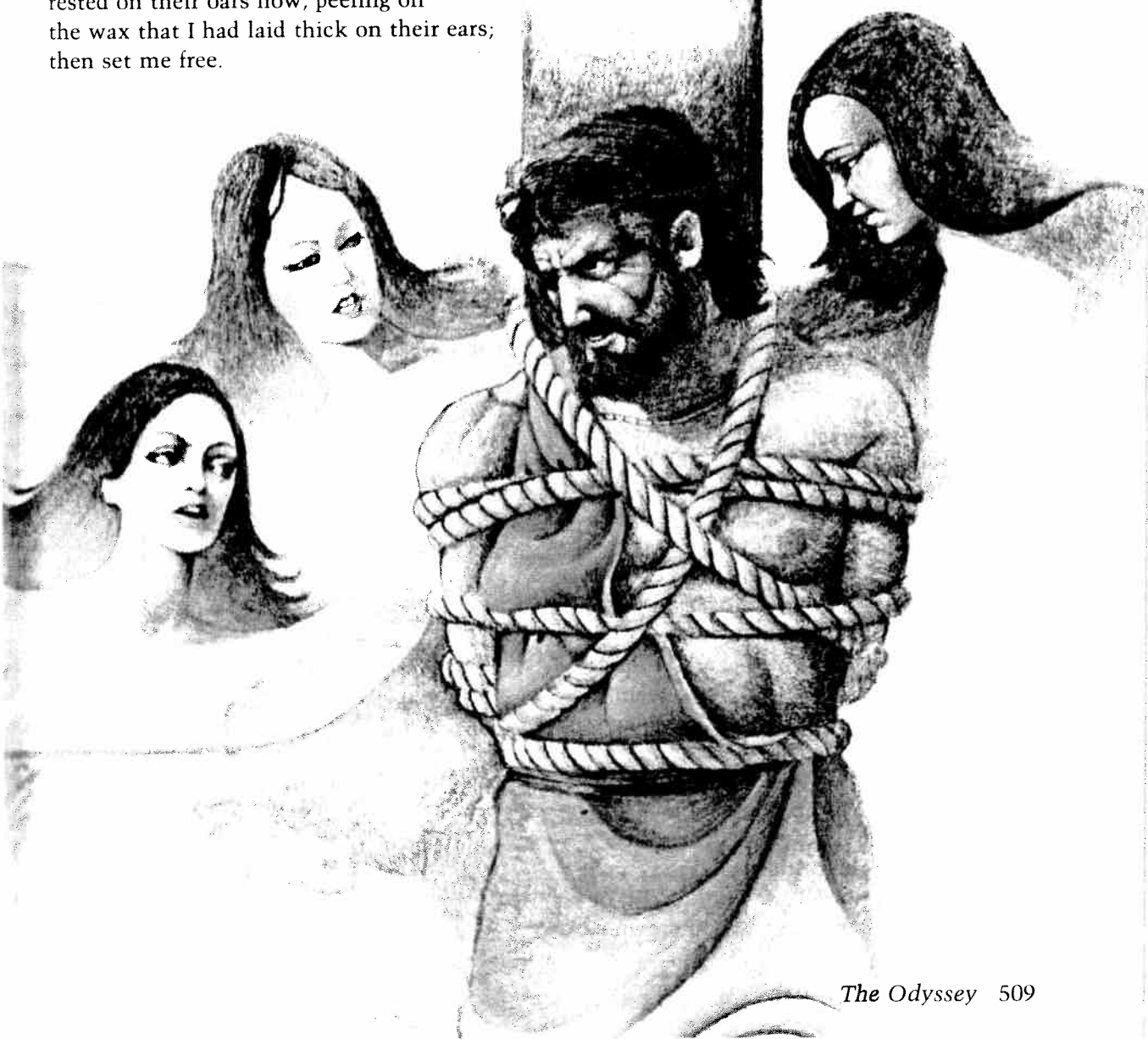
My faithful company  
rested on their oars now, peeling off  
the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;  
then set me free.

585

585. **Perimedes** (pēr'ə-mē'dēz).

586. **Eurylochus** (yōō-ril'ə-kəs).

590



## Scylla and Charybdis

Circe has warned Odysseus of another sea peril. He and his crew must pass between Scylla (sīl'ə) and Charybdis (kə-rīb'dis). Scylla is a terrifying monster with six heads. She dwells in a high rocky cave, devouring sailors in ships that pass close by. Charybdis is a whirlpool. Three times a day she swallows the sea, then vomits it up fiery hot. Circe has advised Odysseus to sail toward Scylla's crag, for it is better to lose six of his men—one to each of her heads—than for all to perish in the whirlpool.

But scarcely had that island  
faded in blue air than I saw smoke  
and white water, with sound of waves in tumult — 595  
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 oarblades to drive her through the water.

Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern, 600  
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  
penned us in his cave? What power he had! 605  
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!  
We must obey the orders as I give them, 610  
Get the oarshafts in your hands, and lay 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  
all that I say—the rudders are your duty; 615  
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.’



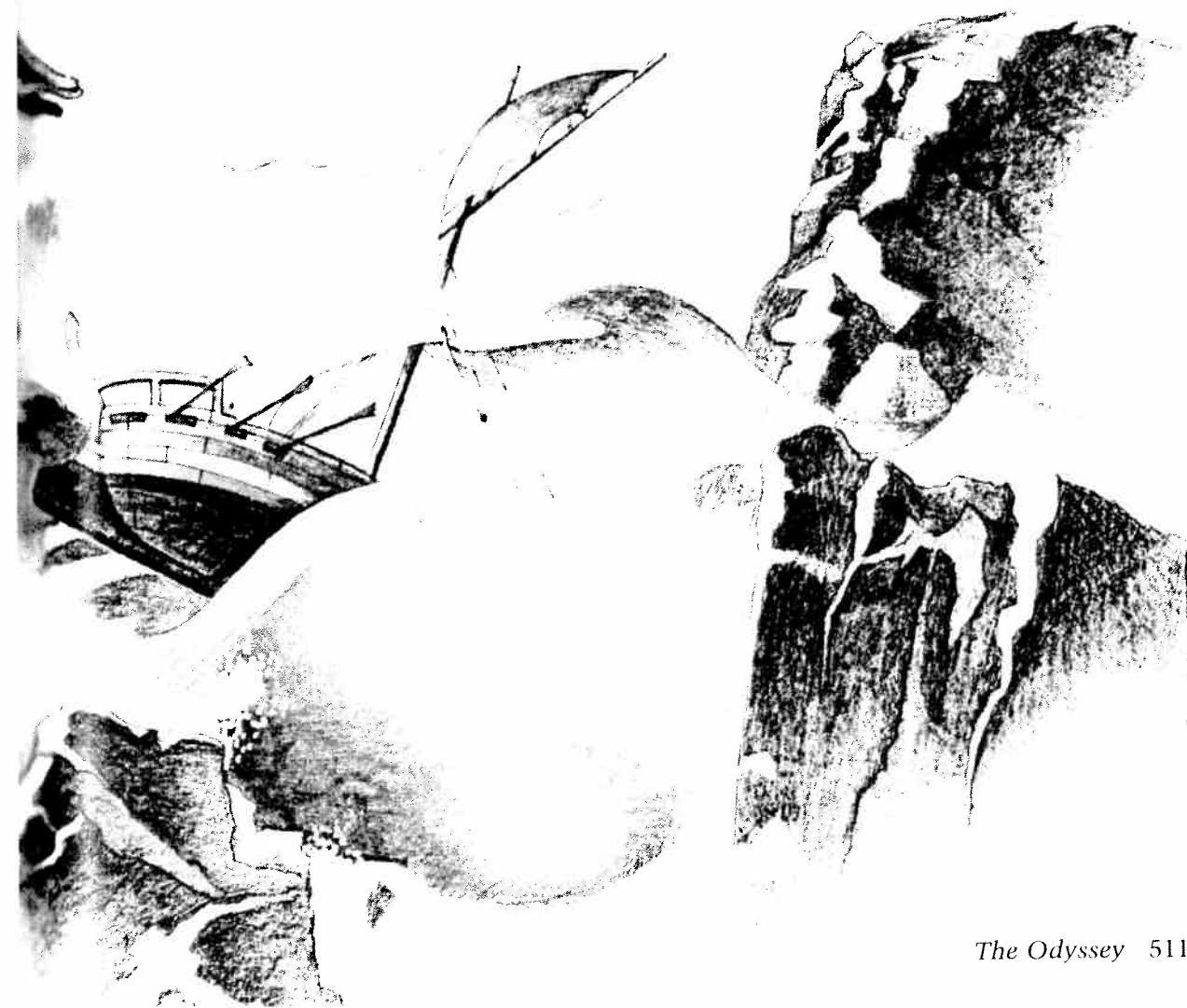
That was all, and it brought them round to action.  
But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I  
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.  
They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,  
to roll for cover under the decking. Circe's  
bidding against arms had slipped my mind,  
so I tied on my cuirass<sup>o</sup> 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  
upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere  
could I catch sight of her.

620

625

625. **cuirass** [kwī-rās<sup>o</sup>]: armor for the chest and back.

630



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  
gorge<sup>o</sup> 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.

635      635. **gorge:** devouring mouth.

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,<sup>o</sup> heard  
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.

640  
641. **maelstrom** (mäl'strām) violent  
whirlpool.

645

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.

650

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,  
will hook a fish and rip it from the surface  
to dangle wriggling through the air:

655

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.

660

We rowed on.  
The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,  
and Scylla dropped astern. . . .

## The Cattle of the Sun God

Odysseus urges his exhausted crew to bypass Thrinacia (thrīn-ā'shə), the island of the sun god. The men, however, insist on landing. Odysseus makes them swear not to touch the god's cattle, for both Circe and Tiresias have warned him of disaster if the cattle are harmed.

In the small hours of the third watch, when stars  
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;      675  
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  
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,  
when all the barley in the ship was gone,  
hunger drove them to scour the wild shore  
with angling hooks, for fishes and seafowl,  
whatever fell into their hands; and lean days  
wore their bellies thin.

The storms continued. 690  
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. 695

I washed my hands there, and made supplication  
to the gods who own Olympus,<sup>o</sup> all the gods —  
but they, for answer, only closed my eyes  
under slow drops of sleep.

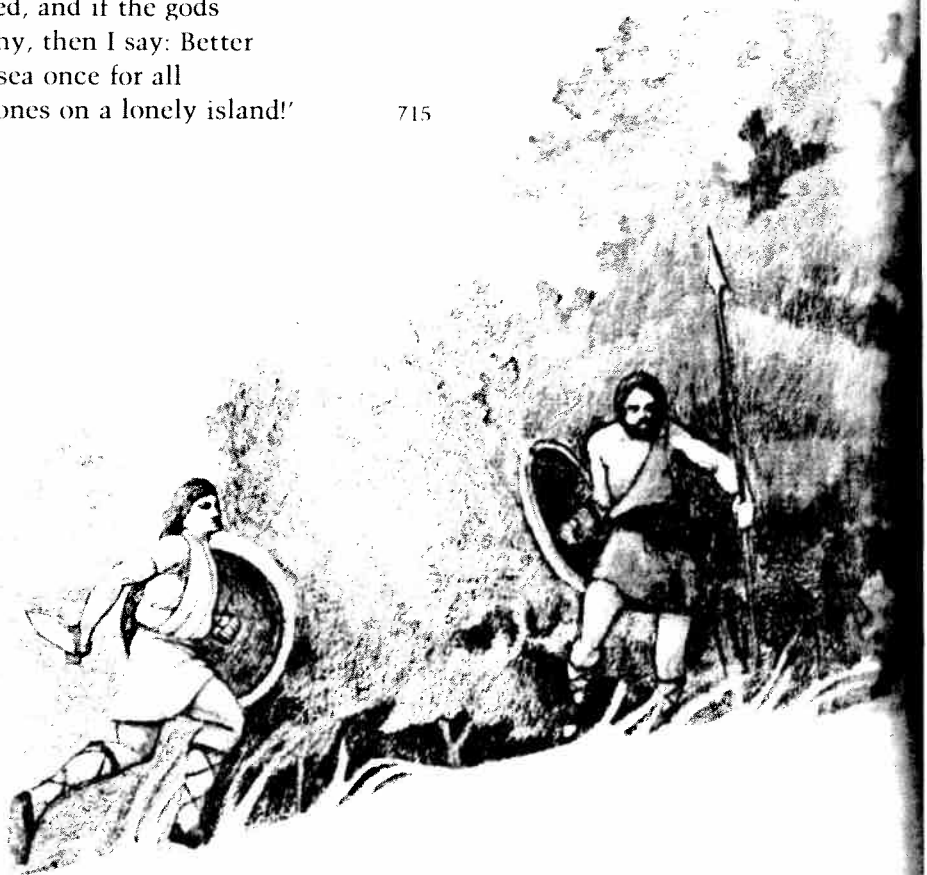
Now on the shore Eurylochus  
made his insidious plea:

‘Comrades,’ he said, 700  
‘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 705  
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.<sup>o</sup> 710  
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!’ 715

697. **Olympus** (ō-lim’pās): Mount Olympus, believed to be the home of the gods.

710. **Lord of Noon:** Helios.



Thus Eurylochos; 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. 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, 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.

720

723. **kine:** cattle.

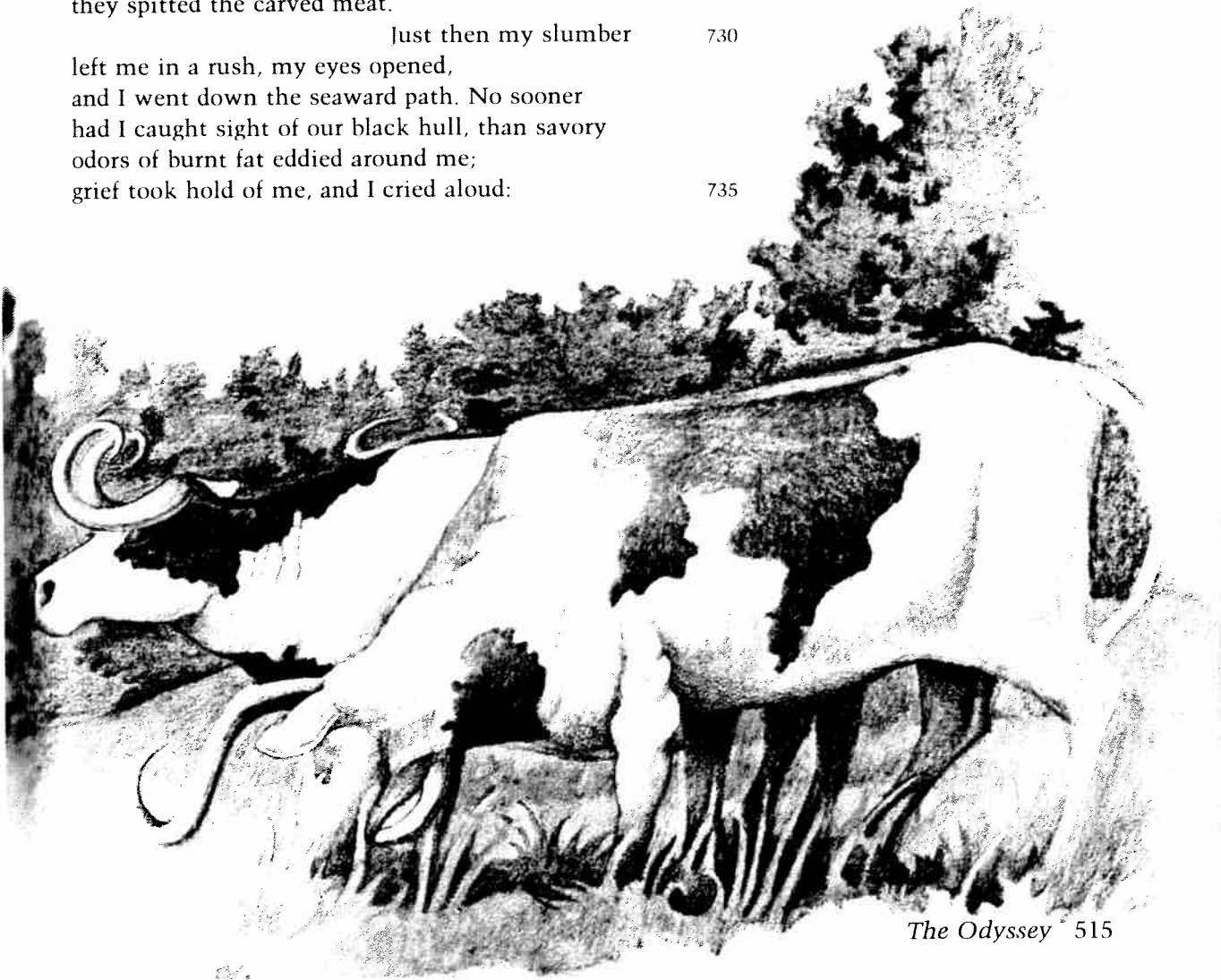
725

727. **libation:** ritual pouring of wine or other liquid.

Just then my slumber 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:

730

735



'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<sup>o</sup> in her long gown meanwhile  
 had borne swift word to the Overlord of Noon:  
 'They have killed your kine.'

740

740. **Lampetia** (lām-pe'shə): a nymph.

And the Lord Helios  
 burst into angry speech amid the immortals:

'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,  
 punish Odysseus' men! So overweening,  
 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  
 to light the dead men in the underworld.'

745

750

Then Zeus who drives the stormcloud made reply:

'Peace, Helios: shine on among the gods,  
 shine over mortals in the fields of grain.  
 Let me throw down one white-hot bolt, and make  
 splinters of their ship in the winedark sea.'

755

– Calypso later told me of this exchange,  
 as she declared that Hermes<sup>o</sup> had told her.

758. **Hermes** (hūr'mez'): the messenger of the gods.

Well, when I reached the sea cave and the ship,  
 I faced each man, and had it out; but where  
 could any remedy be found? There was none.  
 The silken beeves of Helios were dead.  
 The gods, moreover, made queer signs appear:  
 cowhides began to crawl, and beef, both raw  
 and roasted, lowed like kine upon the spits.

760

765

Now six full days my gallant crew could feast  
 upon the prime beef they had marked for slaughter  
 from Helios' herd; and Zeus, the son of Cronus,<sup>o</sup>  
 added one fine morning.

768. **Cronus** (krō'nəs): a Titan who ruled the universe before Zeus.

All the gales  
 had ceased, blown out, and with an offshore breeze 770  
 we launched again, stepping the mast and sail,  
 to make for the open sea. Astern of us  
 the island coastline faded, and no land  
 showed anywhere, but only sea and heaven,  
 when Zeus Cronion piled a thunderhead 775  
 above the ship, while gloom spread on the ocean.  
 We held our course, but briefly. Then the squall  
 struck whining from the west, with gale force, breaking  
 both forestays, and the mast came toppling aft  
 along the ship's length, so the running rigging 780  
 showered into the bilge.

On the afterdeck  
 the mast had hit the steersman a slant blow  
 bashing the skull in, knocking him overside,  
 as the brave soul fled the body, like a diver.  
 With crack on crack of thunder, Zeus let fly 785  
 a bolt against the ship, a direct hit,  
 so that she bucked, in reeking fumes of sulfur,  
 and all the men were flung into the sea.  
 They came up round the wreck, bobbing awhile  
 like petrels° on the waves.

No more seafaring 790  
 homeward for these, no sweet day of return;  
 the god had turned his face from them.

I clambered  
 fore and aft my hulk until a comber  
 split her, keel from ribs, and the big timber  
 floated free; the mast, too, broke away. 795  
 A backstay floated dangling from it, stout  
 rawhide rope, and I used this for lashing  
 mast and keel together. These I straddled,  
 riding the frightful storm.

Nor had I yet 800  
 seen the worst of it: for now the west wind  
 dropped, and a southeast gale came on—one more  
 twist of the knife—taking me north again,  
 straight for Charybdis. All that night I drifted,  
 and in the sunrise, sure enough, I lay  
 off Scylla mountain and Charybdis deep. 805  
 There, as the whirlpool drank the tide, a billow  
 tossed me, and I sprang for the great fig tree,

790. **petrels** (pēt'ralz): small sea birds.

catching on like a bat under a bough.

Nowhere had I to stand, no way of climbing,  
the root and bole° being far below, and far  
above my head the branches and their leaves,  
massed, overshadowing Charybdis pool.

But I clung grimly, thinking my mast and keel  
would come back to the surface when she spouted.

And ah! how long, with what desire, I waited!  
till, at the twilight hour, when one who hears  
and judges pleas in the marketplace all day  
between contentious men, goes home to supper,  
the long poles at last reared from the sea.

Now I let go with hands and feet, plunging  
straight into the foam beside the timbers,  
pulled astride, and rowed hard with my hands  
to pass by Scylla. Never could I have passed her  
had not the Father of gods and men,° this time,  
kept me from her eyes. Once through the strait,  
nine days I drifted in the open sea  
before I made shore, buoyed up by the gods,  
upon Ogygia° Isle. The dangerous nymph  
Calypso lives and sings there, in her beauty,  
and she received me, loved me.

But why tell  
the same tale that I told last night in hall  
to you and to your lady? Those adventures  
made a long evening, and I do not hold  
with tiresome repetition of a story."

810 810. **bole:** tree trunk.

815

820

825

824. **Father of gods and men:** Zeus.

828. **Ogygia** (ō-jī'ē-s).

830

## FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Odysseus maneuvers his men safely past the Sirens while he alone listens to their song. How do the Sirens tempt him?
2. Faced with a choice between Scylla and Charybdis, Odysseus does as Circe advises and chooses Scylla. He knows that six of his men will die, yet he withholds this information from his crew. Is this a strength or weakness in his character? Explain.

3. Consider each of the episodes you have read so far. How well does Odysseus control his men in each episode? How effective and responsible is he as a leader? Cite specific lines to support your answer.
4. Before Odysseus' men feast on the cattle of the sun god, they perform a ritual of sacrifice to the gods. Why does the ritual fail to please the gods? How are the men punished?
5. Odysseus alone survives. How is he aided by Zeus?

## PART 2 ODYSSEUS IN ITHACA

### Father and Son

After hearing the story of Odysseus' wanderings, the king of Phaeacia offers him a boat and crew to take him home to Ithaca. Thus Odysseus returns to his own land after an absence of twenty years.

The goddess Athena appears to Odysseus and tells him to proceed cautiously. Believing that he is dead, many suitors have besieged his palace, eager to marry his beautiful wife, Penelope. Penelope does not believe that Odysseus is dead, but she is unable to make the suitors leave. They remain in Ithaca, eating and drinking at her expense. They are even plotting to murder her son, Telemachus (tə-lēm'ə-kəs), before he is old enough to inherit his father's lands. Telemachus, who hopes for his father's return, has gone to Sparta to ask for news of him.

Athena disguises Odysseus as a ragged old beggar and sends him to the hut of Eumaeus (yūō-mē'əs), an old and loyal swineherd. She then directs Telemachus to return to Ithaca and tells Odysseus that it is time to reveal his identity to his son.

... From the air 835  
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,  
unseen, though, by Telemachus, unguessed,  
for not to everyone will gods appear. 840  
Odysseus noticed her; so did the dogs,  
who cowered whimpering away from her. She only  
nodded, signing to him with her brows,  
a sign he recognized. Crossing the yard,  
he passed out through the gate in the stockade 845  
to face the goddess. There she said to him:

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,  
Odysseus, master of landways and seaways,  
dissemble to your son no longer now.  
The time has come: tell him how you together 850  
will bring doom on the suitors in the town.

I shall not be far distant then, for I  
myself desire battle."

Saying no more,  
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 gray upon his chin. And she  
withdrew when she had done.

855

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

860

"Stranger,  
you are no longer what you were just now!  
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!"

865

866. **oblation:** an offering to a god.



The noble and enduring man replied:

"No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.  
I am that father whom your boyhood lacked 870  
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,  
uncomprehending, wild  
with incredulity, cried out:  
"You cannot 875  
be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits  
conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!  
No man of woman born could work these wonders  
by his own craft, unless a god came into it  
with ease to turn him young or old at will. 880  
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:

"This is not princely, to be swept  
away by wonder at your father's presence. 885  
No other Odysseus will ever come,  
for he and I are one, the same; his bitter  
fortune and his wanderings are mine.  
Twenty years gone, and I am back again  
on my own island.

As for my change of skin, 890  
that is a charm Athena, Hope of Soldiers,  
uses as she will; she has the knack  
to make me seem a beggar man sometimes  
and sometimes young, with finer clothes about me.  
It is no hard thing for the gods of heaven 895  
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  
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears  
rose from the wells of longing in both men, 900  
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering

as those of the great taloned hawk,  
 whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.  
 So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,  
 and might have gone on weeping so till sundown, 905  
 had not Telemachus said:

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

Then said Odysseus, who had borne the barren sea: 910

“Only plain truth shall I tell you, child.  
 Great seafarers, the Phaeacians, gave me passage  
 as they give other wanderers. By night  
 over the open ocean, while I slept,  
 they brought me in their cutter, set me down 915  
 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  
 to this wild place, directed by Athena,  
 so that we might lay plans to kill our enemies. 920  
 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  
 if we two by ourselves can take them on  
 or if we should look round for help.”

Telemachus 925

replied:

“O Father, all my life your fame  
 as a fighting man has echoed in my ears—  
 your skill with weapons and the tricks of war—  
 but what you speak of is a staggering thing,  
 beyond imagining, for me. How can two men 930  
 do battle with a houseful in their prime?  
 For I must tell you this is no affair  
 of ten or even twice ten men, but scores,  
 throngs of them. You shall see, here and now.  
 The number from Dulichium alone 935  
 is fifty-two, picked men, with armorers,  
 a half-dozen; twenty-four came from Same,  
 twenty from Zacynthus; our own island  
 accounts for twelve, high-ranked, and their retainers,

Medon the crier, and the Master Harper,  
besides a pair of handymen at feasts.

940

If we go in against all these  
I fear we pay in salt blood for your vengeance.  
You must think hard if you would conjure up  
the fighting strength to take us through."

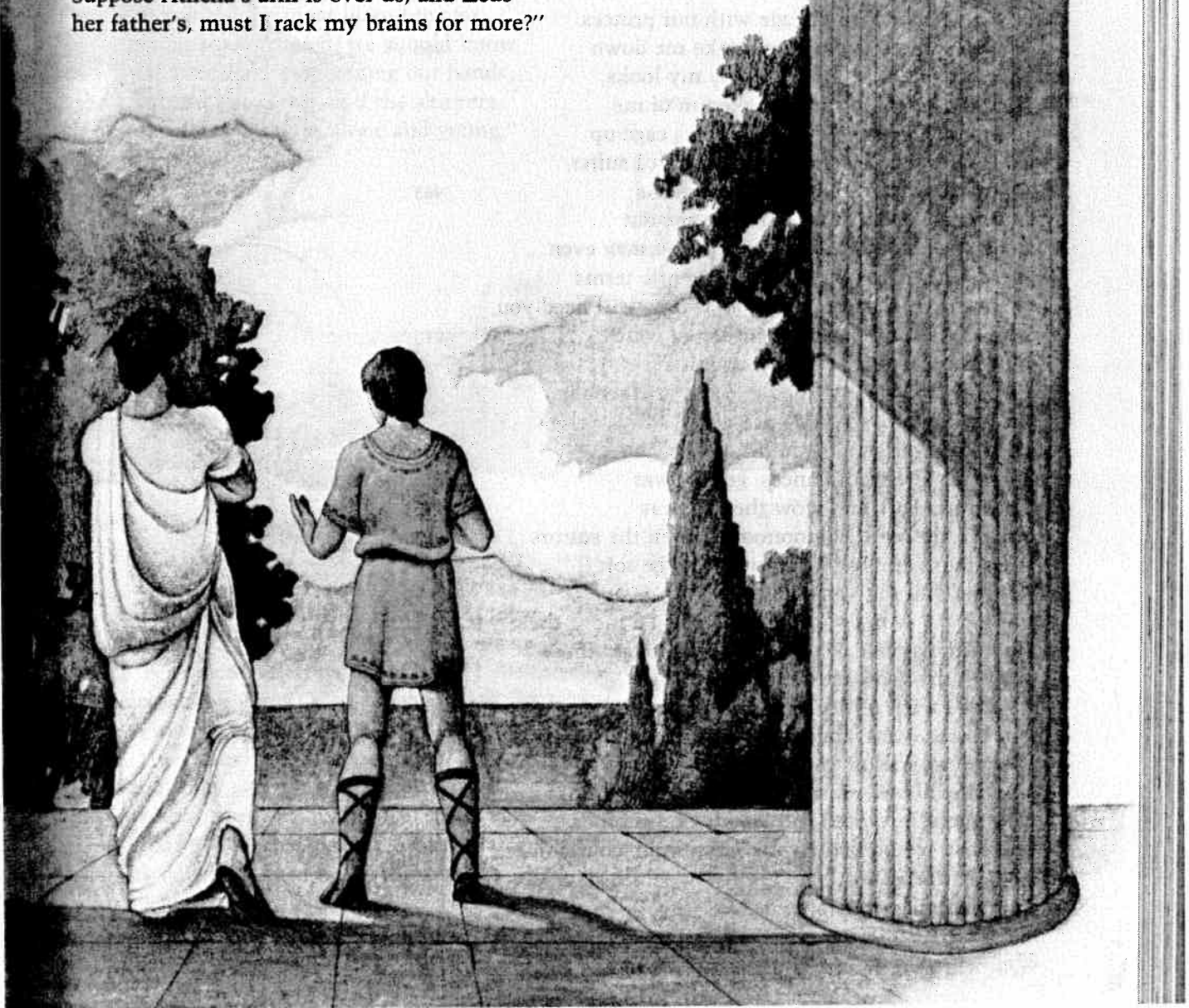
Odysseus

945

who had endured the long war and the sea  
answered:

"I'll tell you now.

Suppose Athena's arm is over us, and Zeus  
her father's, must I rack my brains for more?"



Clearheaded Telemachus looked hard and said:  
"Those two are great defenders, no one doubts it,  
but throned in the serene clouds overhead;  
other affairs of men and gods they have  
to rule over."

And the hero answered:

"Before long they will stand to right and left of us  
in combat, in the shouting, when the test comes—  
our nerve against the suitors' in my hall.  
Here is your part: At break of day tomorrow  
home with you, go mingle with our princes.  
The swineherd later on will take me down  
the port-side trail—a beggar, by my looks,  
hangdog and old. If they make fun of me  
in my own courtyard, let your ribs cage up  
your springing heart, no matter what I suffer,  
no matter if they pull me by the heels  
or practice shots at me, to drive me out.  
Look on, hold down your anger. You may even  
plead with them, by heaven! in gentle terms  
to quit their horseplay—not that they will heed you,  
rash as they are, facing their day of wrath.  
Now fix the next step in your mind.

Athena,  
counseling me, will give me word, and I  
shall signal to you, nodding: at that point  
round up all armor, lances, gear of war  
left in our hall, and stow the lot away  
back in the vaulted storeroom. When the suitors  
miss those arms and question you, be soft  
in what you say—answer:

'I thought I'd move them  
out of the smoke. They seemed no longer those  
bright arms Odysseus left us years ago  
when he went off to Troy. Here where the fire's  
hot breath came, they had grown black and drear.  
One better reason, too, I had from Zeus:  
Suppose a brawl starts up when you are drunk,  
you might be crazed and bloody one another,  
and that would stain your feast, your courtship.

Tempered  
iron can magnetize a man.

950

955

960

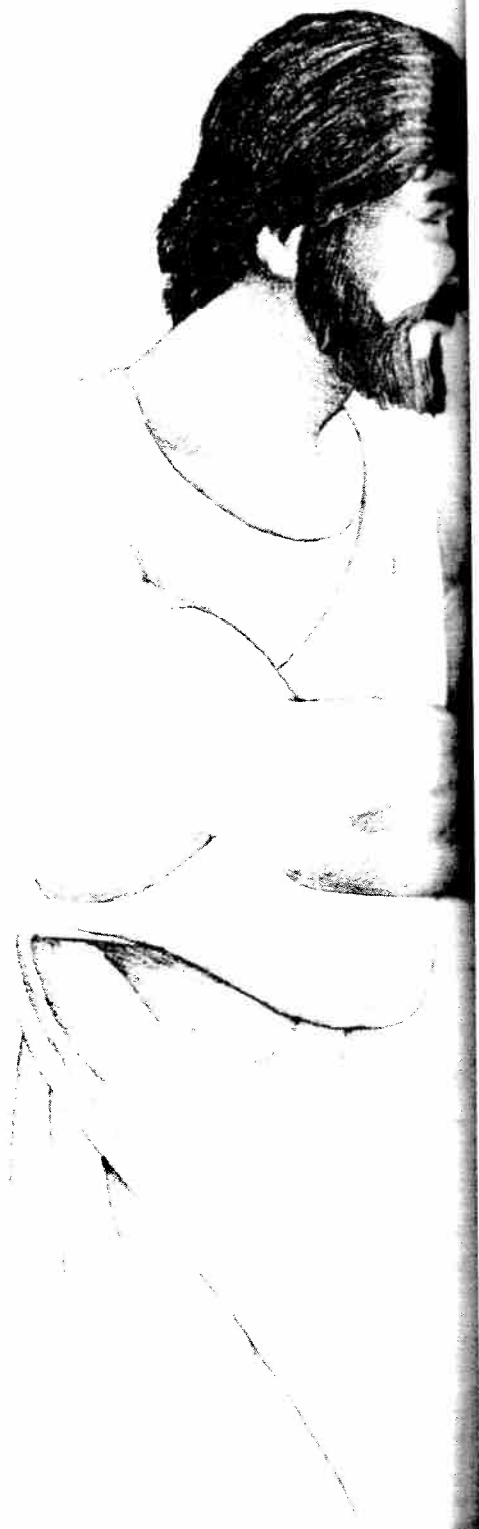
965

970

975

980

985



Say that.

But put aside two broadswords and two spears  
for our own use, two oxhide shields nearby  
when we go into action. Pallas Athena  
and Zeus All-Provident will see you through,  
bemusing our young friends.

990

Now one thing more.

If son of mine you are and blood of mine,  
let no one hear Odysseus is about.  
Neither Laertes, nor the swineherd here,  
nor any slave, nor even Penelope.  
But you and I alone must learn how far  
the women are corrupted; we should know  
how to locate good men among our hands,  
the loyal and respectful, and the shirkers  
who take you lightly, as alone and young."

995

1000



### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What makes Telemachus think that Odysseus must be a god? How does Odysseus convince Telemachus that he is his father?
2. Telemachus warns Odysseus that there are far too many suitors for the two of them to fight. How does Odysseus persuade Telemachus that they can win?
3. Odysseus outlines his plan in lines 958–990. What is Telemachus' part in the plan?
4. Why does Odysseus want to keep his return a secret?

## The Suitors

The next day, disguised once more as a beggar, Odysseus enters the hall of his home and passes among the suitors to beg. Antinous (ān-tīn'ō-əs), the most arrogant and outspoken of the suitors, breaks into a rage.

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  
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?"

1005

1010

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 handyman. You sit here, fat  
on others' meat, and cannot bring yourself  
to rummage out a crust of bread for me!"

1015

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!"

1020

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,  
then sat, and dropped his loaded bag again  
upon the doorsill. Facing the whole crowd  
he said, and eyed them all:

1025

"One word only,  
my lords, and suitors of the famous queen.



One thing I have to say. 1030

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— 1035  
how many bitter seas men cross for hunger!

If beggars interest the gods, if there are Furies<sup>o</sup>  
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. 1040

Eat and be quiet where you are, or shamle 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!"

1037. **Furies:** three goddesses who  
punished those crimes that went  
unavenged.



But now the rest were mortified, and someone  
spoke from the crowd of young bucks to rebuke him: 1045

"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 1050  
in towns and settlements to keep an eye  
on manners, good or bad."

But at this notion  
Antinous only shrugged.

Telemachus,  
after the blow his father bore, sat still  
without a tear, though his heart felt the blow. 1055  
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!" 1060

And Eurynome,<sup>o</sup>  
her housekeeper, put in:

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

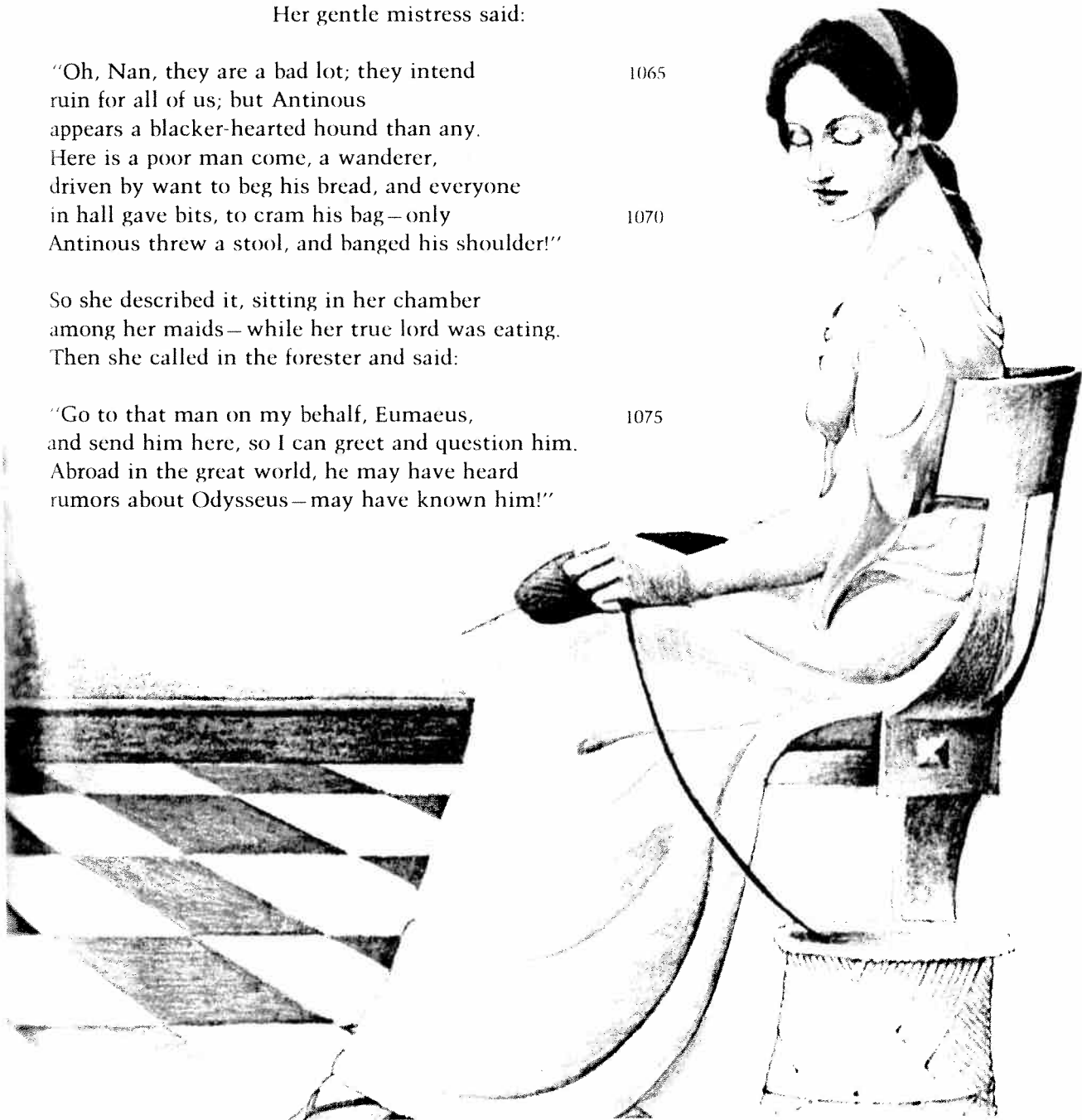
Her gentle mistress said:

"Oh, Nan, they are a bad lot; they intend 1065  
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 1070  
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, 1075  
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!"

1061. **Eurynome** [yōō-rīn'ā-mē].



## Penelope

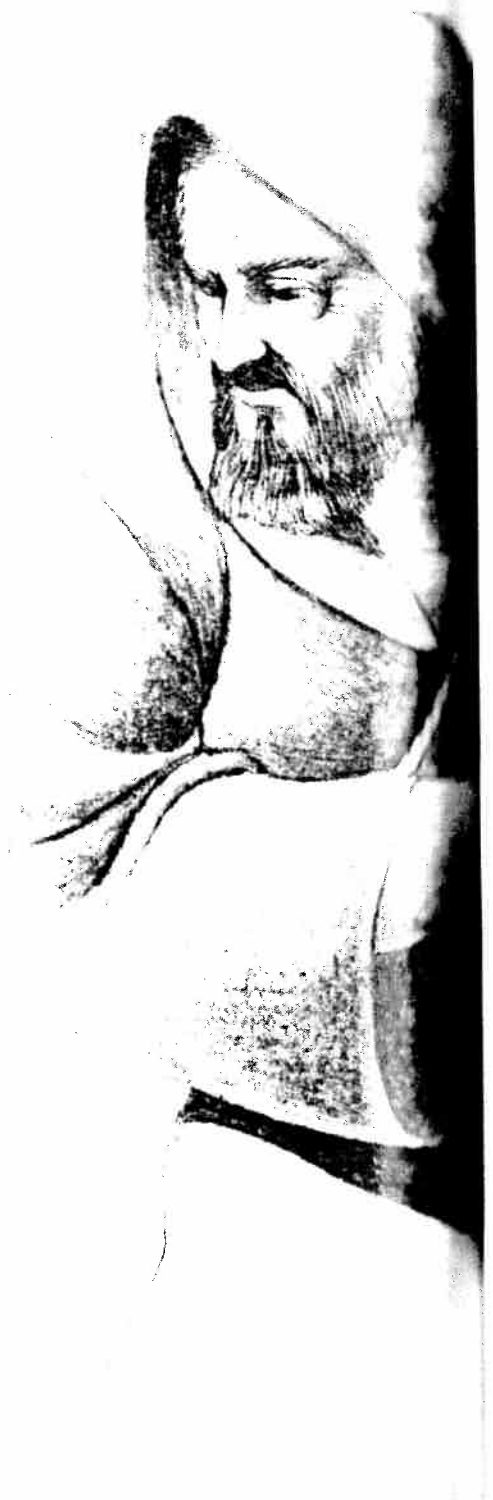
Later that night Penelope meets secretly with the old beggar.  
She asks him if he has heard any news of her husband.

"Friend, let me ask you first of all:  
who are you, where do you come from, of what nation 1080  
and parents were you born?"

And he replied:

"My lady, never a man in the wide world  
should have a fault to find with you. Your name  
has gone out under heaven like the sweet  
honor of some god-fearing king, who rules  
in equity over the strong: his back lands bear  
both wheat and barley, fruit trees laden bright,  
new lambs at lambing time—and the deep sea  
gives great hauls of fish by his good strategy,  
so that his folk fare well.

1085





O my dear lady, 1090  
this being so, let it suffice to ask me  
of other matters—not my blood, my homeland.  
Do not enforce me to recall my pain.  
My heart is sore; but I must not be found  
sitting in tears here, in another's house: 1095  
it is not well forever to be grieving.  
One of the maids might say—or you might think—  
I had got maudlin over cups of wine."

And Penelope replied:

"Stranger, my looks,  
my face, my carriage, were soon lost or faded 1100  
when the Achaeans crossed the sea to Troy,  
Odysseus my lord among the rest.  
If he returned, if he were here to care for me,  
I might be happily renowned!  
But grief instead heaven sent me—years of pain. 1105  
Sons of the noblest families on the islands,  
Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus,  
with native Ithacans, are here to court me,  
against my wish; and they consume this house.  
Can I give proper heed to guest or suppliant 1110  
or herald on the realm's affairs?

How could I?  
wasted with longing for Odysseus, while here  
they press for marriage.

Ruses served my turn  
to draw the time out—first a close-grained web  
I had the happy thought to set up weaving 1115  
on my big loom in hall. I said, that day:  
'Young men—my suitors, now my lord is dead,  
let me finish my weaving before I marry,  
or else my thread will have been spun in vain.  
It is a shroud I weave for Lord Laertes 1120  
when cold Death comes to lay him on his bier.  
The country wives would hold me in dishonor  
if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.'  
I reached their hearts that way, and they agreed.  
So every day I wove on the great loom, 1125  
but every night by torchlight I unwove it;  
and so for three years I deceived the Achaeans.  
But when the seasons brought a fourth year on,

as long months waned, and the long days were spent,  
 through imprudent folly in the slinking maids 1130  
 they caught me—clamored up to me at night;  
 I had no choice then but to finish it.  
 And now, as matters stand at last,  
 I have no strength left to evade a marriage,  
 cannot find any further way; my parents 1135  
 urge it upon me, and my son  
 will not stand by while they eat up his property.  
 He comprehends it, being a man full-grown,  
 able to oversee the kind of house  
 Zeus would endow with honor.  
 But you too 1140  
 confide in me, tell me your ancestry.  
 You were not born of mythic oak or stone.”

The beggar invents a tale of how he had seen Odysseus twenty years ago in Crete, when Odysseus was bound for Troy. He convinces Penelope that the story is true by describing Odysseus' clothes in detail. Then he tells her he has heard that Odysseus is about to set sail for Ithaca.

“You see, then, he is alive and well, and headed  
 homeward now, no more to be abroad  
 far from his island, his dear wife and son. 1145  
 Here is my sworn word for it. Witness this,  
 god of the zenith,” noblest of the gods, 1147. *god of the zenith*: Zeus.  
 and Lord Odysseus' hearthfire, now before me:  
 I swear these things shall turn out as I say.  
 Between this present dark and one day's ebb, 1150  
 after the wane, before the crescent moon,  
 Odysseus will come.”

## FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. A number of years have passed since Odysseus' adventure with the Cyclops. How has Odysseus changed?
2. Penelope represents characteristics that the Greeks admired in women. What qualities does she reveal about herself in her discussion with her housekeeper (lines 1065–

1071)? In her interview with the beggar? How was she able to trick the suitors for three years? What does this ruse show about her?

3. The scene in which Penelope meets her husband Odysseus disguised as a beggar is an example of *dramatic irony*, for the reader knows something that Penelope does not know. Why do you think Odysseus keeps his identity a secret from his wife?

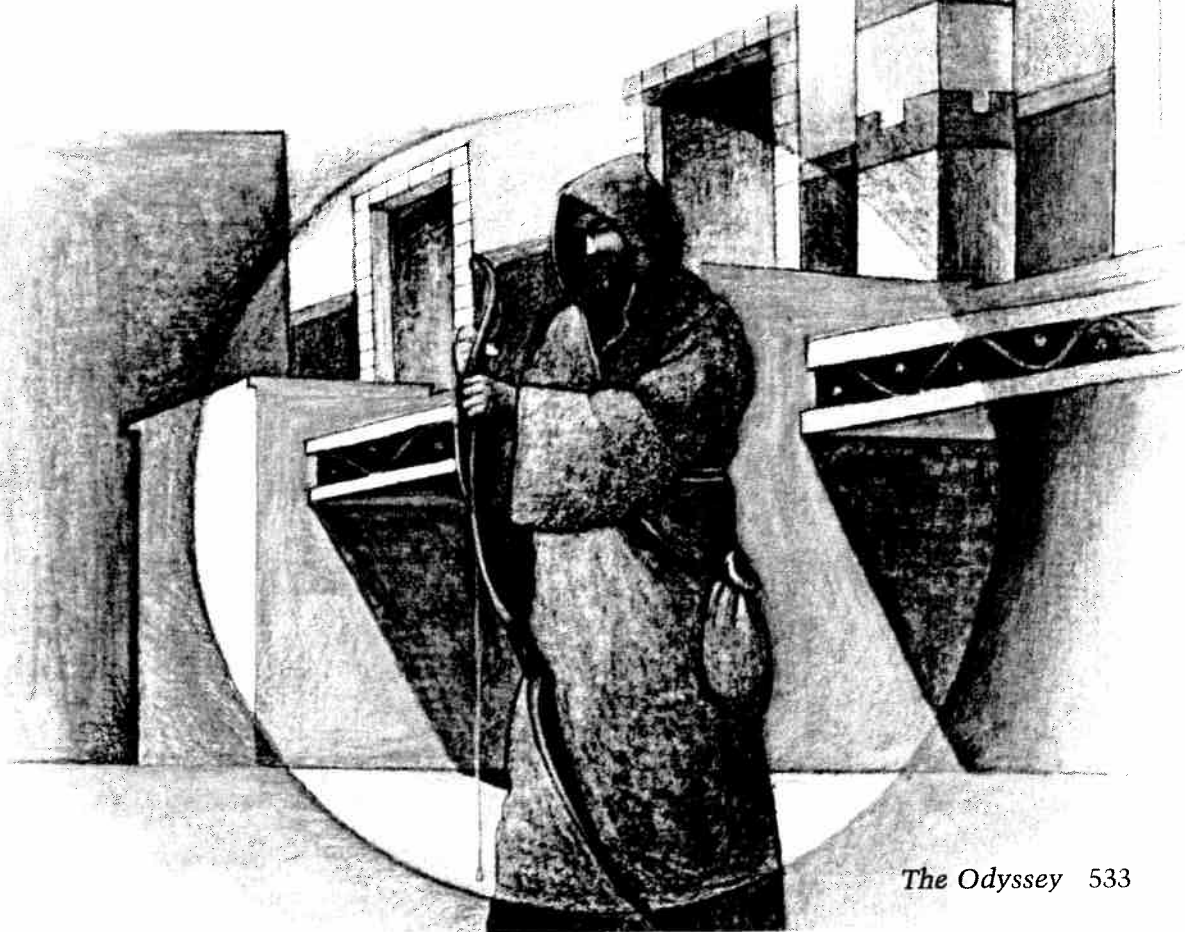
## The Challenge

The suitors summon Penelope to the hall and demand that she choose one of them at once. Penelope announces a challenge: she will marry whoever can string Odysseus' great bow and shoot an arrow through a row of twelve ax-handle sockets, as Odysseus used to do. One by one the suitors try but fail to even bend the bow. The old beggar then asks for a turn. The suitors protest until both Penelope and Telemachus insist that he be given the bow.

... 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.  
The suitors were now watching him, and some  
jested among themselves:

1155

"A bow lover!"



"Dealer in old bows!"

"Maybe he has one like it  
at home!"

"Or has an itch to make one for himself." 1160

"See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!"

And one disdainful suitor added this:

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

But the man skilled in all ways of contending,  
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft, 1165  
like a musician, like a harper, when  
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. 1170  
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,  
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. 1175  
And Odysseus laughed within him that the son  
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. 1180  
He nocked<sup>o</sup> it, let it rest across the handgrip,  
and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,  
aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

1181. **noocked:**  
placed an  
arrow against  
the string of  
the bow.

Now flashed  
arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle  
through every socket ring, and grazed not one, 1185  
to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

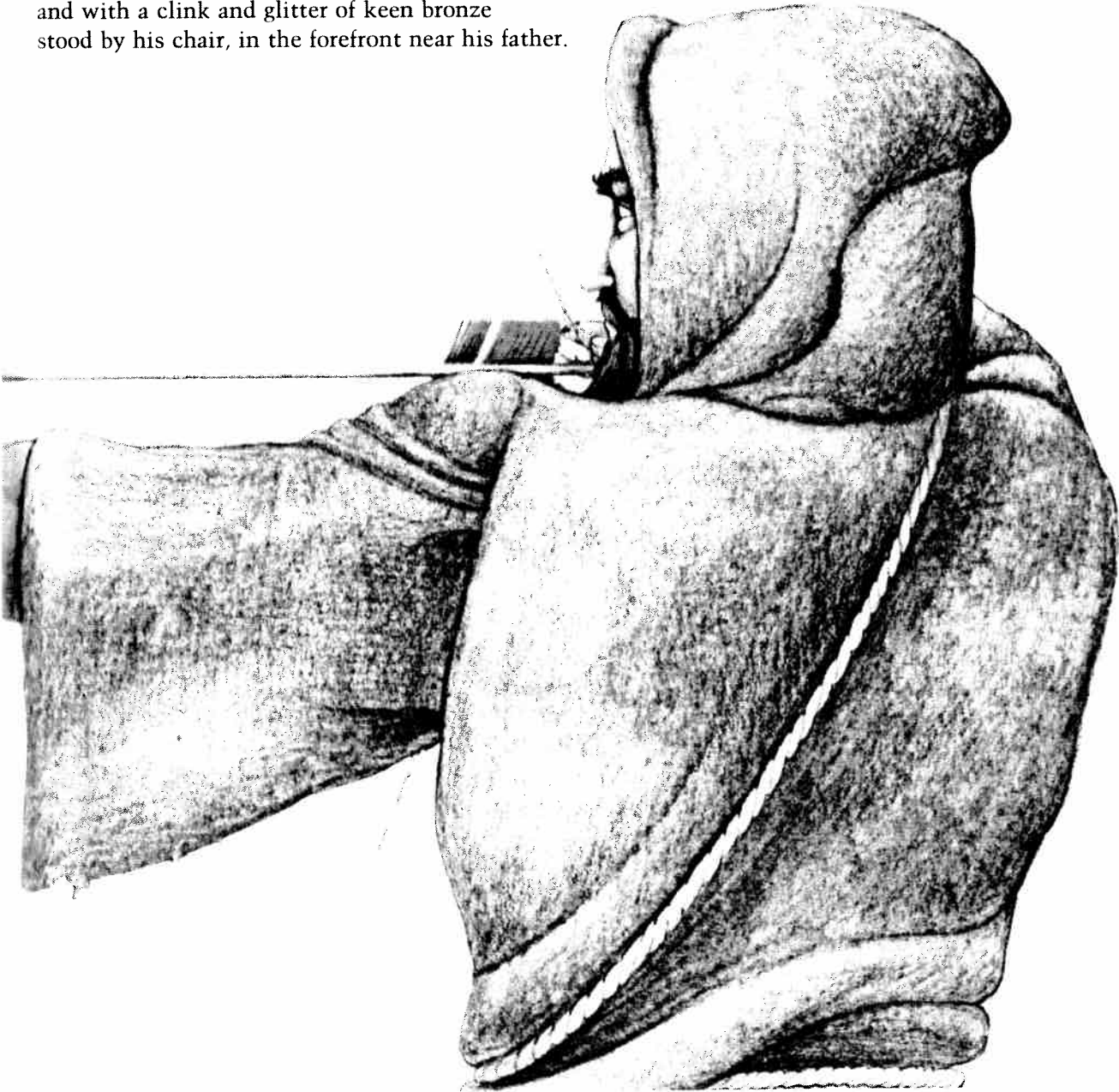
"Telemachus, the stranger  
you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.  
I did not miss, neither did I take all day

stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,  
not so contemptible as the young men say.  
The hour has come to cook their lordships' mutton—  
supper by daylight. Other amusements later,  
with song and harping that adorn a feast."

1190

He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince  
Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,  
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.

1195



## Odysseus' Revenge

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the  
islands 1200  
leapt and stood on the broad doorsill, 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.  
Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before,  
if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.” 1205

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:  
the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of  
death?  
How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of  
friends 1210  
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  
and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall 1215  
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted  
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,  
and one last kick upset his table  
knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.  
Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay 1220  
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,  
not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take  
and throw.  
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus: 1225

"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!"

For they imagined as they wished—that it was a  
wild shot,  
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend 1230  
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  
home from the land of Troy. You took my house  
to plunder.

... You dared  
bid for my wife while I was still alive. 1235  
Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule  
wide heaven,  
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.  
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 1240  
looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.  
Eurymachus° alone could speak. He said:

1242. **Eurymachus** (yōō-rī'mə-kəs).

"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. 1245  
But here he lies, the man who caused them all.  
Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on  
to do these things. He cared less for a marriage  
than for the power Cronion has denied him  
as king of Ithaca. For that 1250  
he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.  
He is dead now and has his portion. Spare  
your own people. As for ourselves, we'll make  
restitution of wine and meat consumed,  
and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen 1255  
with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.  
Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger."

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.  
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.”

1260

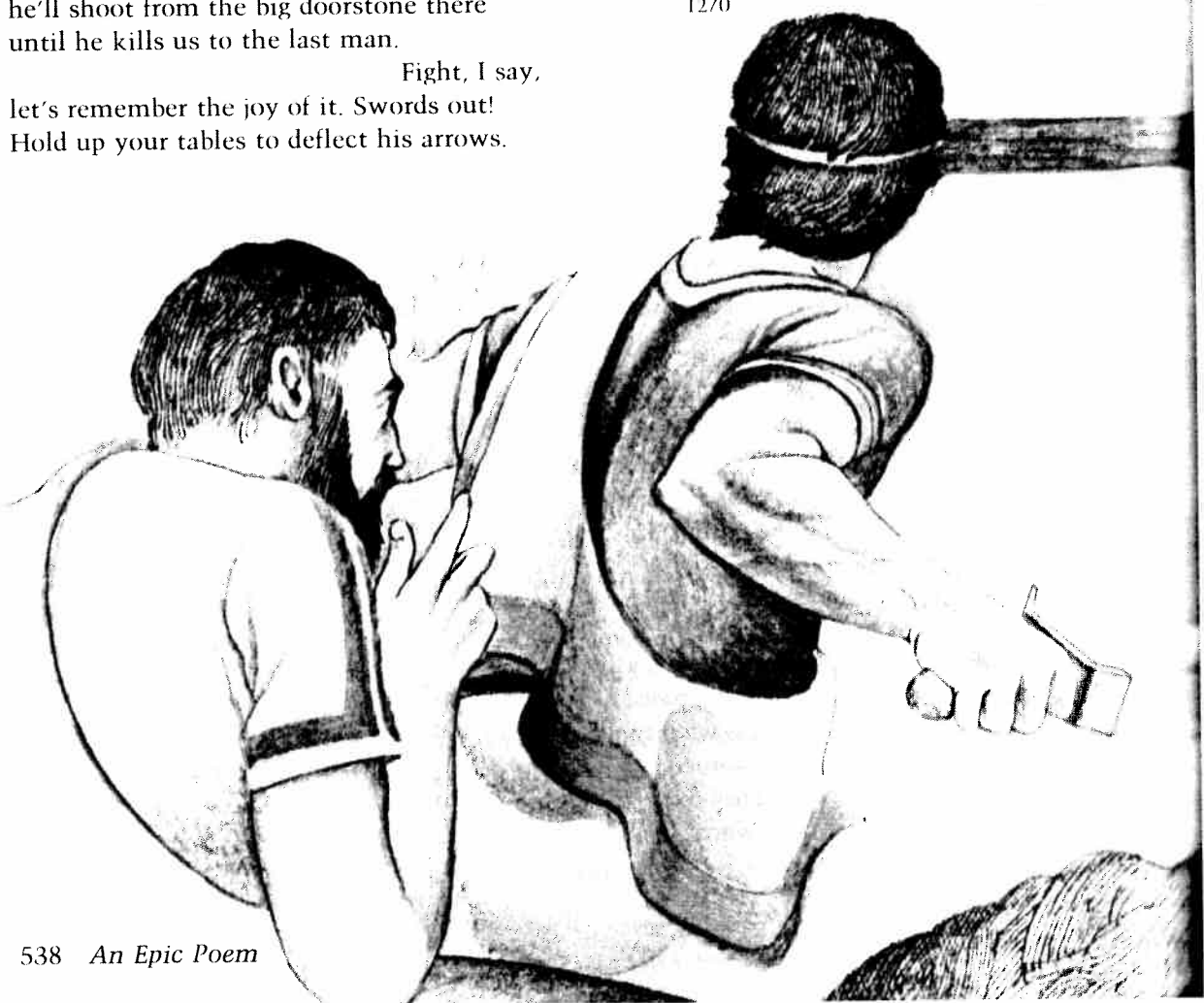
1265

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

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

1270

Fight, I say,  
let’s remember the joy of it. Swords out!  
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."

1275

He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of  
fine bronze,  
honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse  
and loud  
he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let  
fly

1280

an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered  
butt

sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in  
his liver.

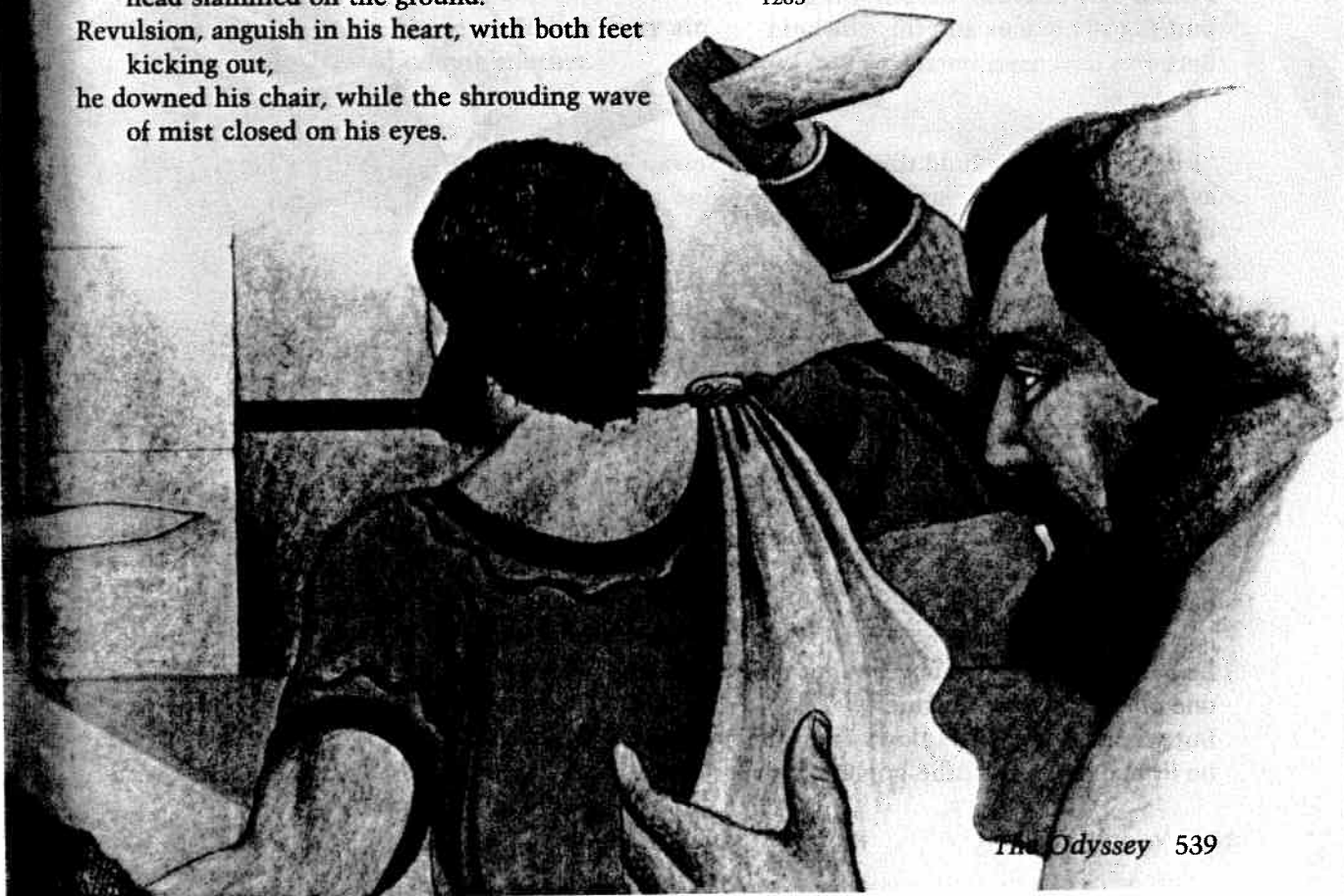
The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and  
fell aside,

pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,  
were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his  
head slammed on the ground.

1285

Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet  
kicking out,

he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave  
of mist closed on his eyes.



Amphinomus now came running at Odysseus,  
broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make  
the great soldier give way at the door.  
But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit  
him

1290

between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove  
clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell  
forward, thudding, forehead against the ground.  
Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long  
dark spear

1295

planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out  
someone might jump him from behind or cut him  
down with a sword  
at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the  
tables  
to his father's side and halted, panting, saying:

"Father let me bring you a shield and spear,  
a pair of spears, a helmet.  
I can arm on the run myself; I'll give  
outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.  
Better to have equipment."

1300

Said Odysseus:

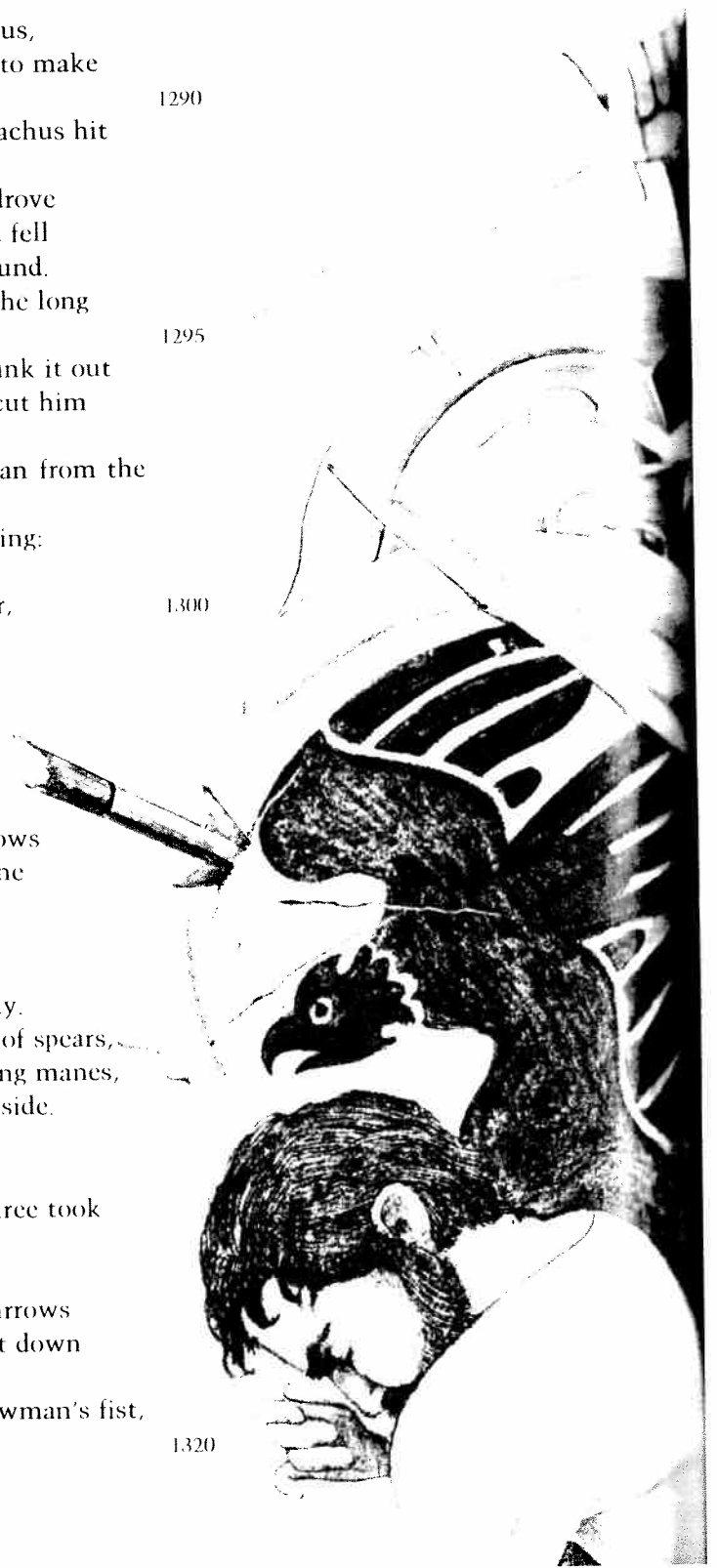
"Run then, while I hold them off with arrows  
as long as the arrows last. When all are gone  
if I'm alone they can dislodge me."

Quick

upon his father's word Telemachus  
ran to the room where spears and armor lay.  
He caught up four light shields, four pairs of spears,  
four helms of war high-plumed with flowing manes,  
and ran back, loaded down, to his father's side.  
He was the first to pull a helmet on  
and slide his bare arm in a buckler strap.  
The servants armed themselves, and all three took  
their stand  
beside the master of battle.

While he had arrows  
he aimed and shot, and every shot brought down  
one of his huddling enemies.  
But when all barbs had flown from the bowman's fist,  
he leaned his bow in the bright entryway

1320



beside the door, and armed: a four-ply shield  
hard on his shoulder, and a crested helm,  
horsetailed, nodding stormy upon his head,  
then took his tough and bronze-shod spears. . . .

Odysseus, Telemachus, and the two faithful servants kill  
every suitor. Several times Athena saves Odysseus' life by  
turning aside the suitors' deadly blows.

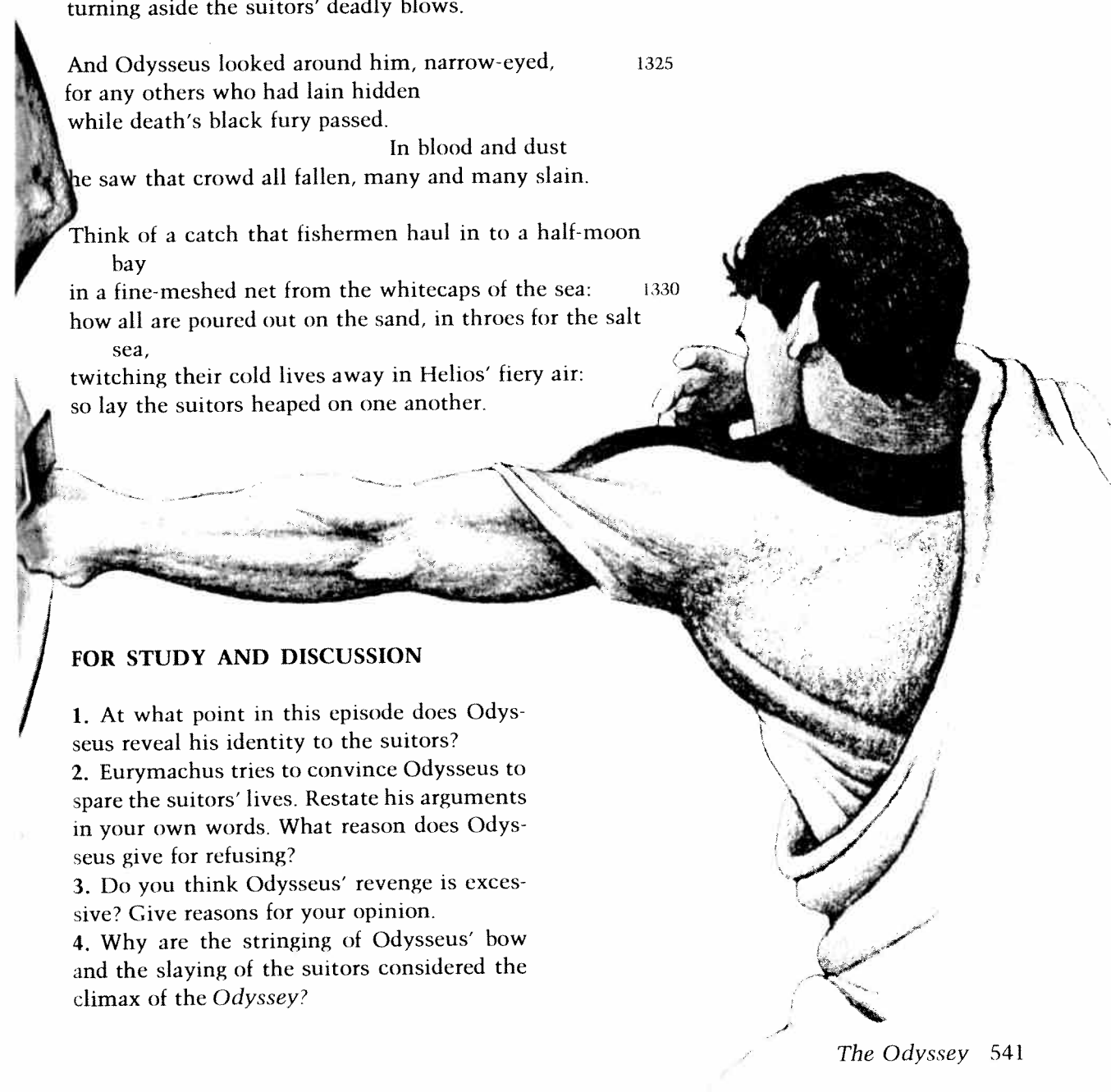
And Odysseus looked around him, narrow-eyed, 1325  
for any others who had lain hidden  
while death's black fury passed.

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

Think of a catch that fishermen haul in to a half-moon  
bay  
in a fine-meshed net from the whitecaps of the sea: 1330  
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.

#### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. At what point in this episode does Odysseus reveal his identity to the suitors?
2. Eurymachus tries to convince Odysseus to spare the suitors' lives. Restate his arguments in your own words. What reason does Odysseus give for refusing?
3. Do you think Odysseus' revenge is excessive? Give reasons for your opinion.
4. Why are the stringing of Odysseus' bow and the slaying of the suitors considered the climax of the *Odyssey*?



## Penelope Tests Odysseus

After twenty years of waiting for Odysseus, Penelope hesitates to acknowledge the stranger as her husband. She tests him with a secret only Odysseus could know.

Greathearted Odysseus, home at last,  
was being bathed now by Eurynome 1335  
and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again  
in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena

lent him beauty, head to foot. She made him  
taller, and massive, too, with crisping hair  
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth 1340  
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused

on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art  
Hephaestus<sup>o</sup> taught him, or Athena—one 1343. **Hephaestus** (hi-fēs'təs): god  
whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished  
beauty over Odysseus' head and shoulders. 1345  
of metalworking.

He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,  
facing his silent wife, and said:

“Strange woman,  
the immortals of Olympus made you hard,  
harder than any. Who else in the world  
would keep aloof as you do from her husband 1350  
if he returned to her from years of trouble,  
cast on his own land in the twentieth year?

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

Penelope  
spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

“Strange man, 1355  
if man you are . . . This is no pride on my part  
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.  
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. 1360  
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord  
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed  
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: 1365

“Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!  
Who dared to move my bed?  
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. 1370  
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,  
built into that bed—my handiwork  
and no one else’s!

    An old trunk of olive  
grew like a pillar on the building plot,  
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree, 1375  
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,  
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.  
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 1380  
as model for the rest. I planed them all,  
inlaid them all with silver, gold and ivory,  
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 1385  
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?”

Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees  
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, 1390  
murmuring:

    “Do not rage at me, Odysseus!  
No one ever matched your caution! Think  
what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us  
life together in our prime and flowering years,  
kept us from crossing into age together. 1395  
Forgive me, don’t be angry. I could not  
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself  
long ago against the frauds of men,  
impostors who might come—and all those many  
whose underhanded ways bring evil on! . . . 1400

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. 1405  
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 as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by  
a swimmer 1410

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  
in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind: 1415  
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,  
her white arms round him pressed as though forever.

### Postscript

The following morning Odysseus and Telemachus set out for the country estate of Laertes, Odysseus' father. Their happy reunion is interrupted by the arrival of angry relatives of the slain suitors, armed for battle. Athena appears and commands them to make peace. So ends the *Odyssey*, with Odysseus restored to his family and to his kingdom.

### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What does Penelope imply by the phrase "if man you are" in line 1356?
2. What test does Penelope devise to tell whether the stranger is really Odysseus?
3. How does Penelope show that she and Odysseus are well-matched?

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPIC

#### Homeric Simile

As you know, a simile is a comparison of two dissimilar actions or objects that are usually linked by *like*, *as*, or some other connecting word. A Homeric simile is an extended comparison of two actions or objects that develops

mounting excitement and usually ends in a climax. In this passage, Scylla seizing Odysseus' men is compared to a fisherman landing a fish:

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,  
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.

Notice how the simile is extended by describing the actions of a fisherman and the parallel actions of the monster. How does Homer's choice of details make the action rise in excitement?

Look at the simile Homer uses to describe Odysseus' stringing of the bow (lines 1166-1170). Why is this simile strikingly effective?

Find other examples of Homeric similes and tell how the comparisons make the actions more vivid and gripping.

### The Epithet

Like the extended simile, the epithet is a favorite device of the ancient epic poets. An epithet is a word or phrase used to characterize someone or something, as in "the wine-dark sea." Homer refers to Odysseus as "raider of cities," "the wiliest fighter of the islands," and "Laertes' son." The gods and goddesses are often identified by epithets. Zeus, for example, is called "Father of gods and men," "god of the zenith," "the lord of cloud," and "All Provident." Find other epithets Homer uses in the *Odyssey*.

## FOR COMPOSITION

### Analyzing Odysseus as Epic Hero

In the opening lines of this translation of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus describes himself as "formidable for guile in peace and war." Do you think Odysseus characterizes himself accurately? Why or why not?

The hero of an epic is generally larger than life. He is stronger, braver, and more clever than the other characters. Sometimes his powers are superhuman. Write a brief composition in which you analyze Odysseus as an epic hero. Use evidence from the poem to support your analysis.

### Analyzing the Role of the Olympians

In Homer's epics the Olympian gods and goddesses frequently intervene in human affairs. In the *Iliad*, they join the battle of the Greeks and the Trojans on the plains outside Troy. They take sides: Athena and Hera fight for the Greeks, Apollo and Aphrodite for the Trojans. The gods intervene in several ways—by starting arguments, by shielding warriors, or by changing the course of an arrow.

How do the gods and goddesses affect the action of the *Odyssey*? Choose several episodes that illustrate *divine intervention* and tell in a brief composition the motives for these interventions and their consequences.