

## The Land of the Dead

46. **Aeolia** (ē ō' lē ə) . . .  
**Aeolus** (ē' ə ləs)

47. **Laestrygonians**  
(les tri gō' nē ənz)

*Odysseus and his men sail to Aeolia, where Aeolus,<sup>46</sup> king of the winds, sends Odysseus on his way with a gift: a sack containing all the winds except the favorable west wind. When they are near home, Odysseus' men open the sack, letting loose a storm that drives them back to Aeolia. Aeolus casts them out, having decided that they are detested by the gods. They sail for seven days and arrive in the land of the Laestrygonians,<sup>47</sup> a race of cannibals. These creatures destroy all of Odysseus' ships except the one he is sailing in. Odysseus and his reduced crew escape and reach Aeaëa, the island ruled by the sorceress-goddess Circe. She transforms half of the men into swine. Protected by a magic herb, Odysseus demands that Circe change his men back into human form. Before Odysseus departs from the island a year later, Circe informs him that in order to reach home he must journey to the land of the dead, Hades, and consult the blind prophet Tiresias.*

48. **singing nymph** . . . **hair**  
Circe.

### Historical and Cultural Context

What details here suggest that the source of wind was mysterious to ancient Greeks?

We bore down on the ship at the sea's edge  
and launched her on the salt immortal sea,  
stepping our mast and spar in the black ship;  
embarked the ram and ewe and went aboard  
530 in tears, with bitter and sore dread upon us.  
But now a breeze came up for us astern—  
a canvas-bellying landbreeze, hale shipmate  
sent by the singing nymph with sunbright hair;<sup>48</sup>  
so we made fast the braces, took our thwarts,  
535 and let the wind and steersman work the ship  
with full sail spread all day above our coursing,  
till the sun dipped, and all the ways grew dark  
upon the fathomless unresting sea.

By night

our ship ran onward toward the Ocean's bourne,  
540 the realm and region of the Men of Winter,  
hidden in mist and cloud. Never the flaming  
eye of Helios lights on those men  
at morning, when he climbs the sky of stars,  
nor in descending earthward out of heaven;  
545 ruinous night being rove over those wretches.  
We made the land, put ram and ewe ashore,

and took our way along the Ocean stream  
to find the place foretold for us by Circe.  
There Perimedes and Eurylochus<sup>49</sup>

550 pinioned<sup>50</sup> the sacred beasts. With my drawn blade  
I spaded up the votive<sup>51</sup> pit, and poured  
libations<sup>52</sup> round it to the unnumbered dead:  
sweet milk and honey, then sweet wine, and last  
clear water; and I scattered barley down.

555 Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead,  
vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them  
before she calved, at home in Ithaca,  
and burn the choice bits on the altar fire;  
as for Tiresias,<sup>53</sup> I swore to sacrifice  
560 a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock.  
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 wellpit.  
Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus,<sup>54</sup>

565 brides and young men, and men grown old in pain,  
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  
570 with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.  
But presently I gave command to my officers  
to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make  
burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—  
to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone.<sup>55</sup>

575 Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep  
the surging phantoms from the bloody pit  
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

One shade came first—Elpenor, of our company,  
who lay unburied still on the wide earth

580 as we had left him—dead in Circe's hall,  
untouched, unmourned, when other cares compelled us.  
Now when I saw him there I wept for pity  
and called out to him:

‘How is this, Elpenor,  
how could you journey to the western gloom

585 swifter afoot than I in the black lugger?’  
He sighed, and answered:

49. **Perimedes** (per' ə mē' dēz) **and Eurylochus** (yŭō ril' ə kəs)  
50. **pinioned** (pin' yənd) *v.* confined or shackled.  
51. **votive** (vōt' iv) *adj.* done to fulfill a vow or express thanks.  
52. **libations** (lī bā' shənz) *n.* wine or other liquids poured upon the ground as a sacrifice or offering.

53. **Tiresias** (tī rē' sē əs)

### ◀ Vocabulary

**assuage** (ə swāj')

*v.* calm; pacify

54. **Erebus** (er' ə bəs) dark region under the earth through which the dead pass before entering the realm of Hades.

55. **Persephone** (per sef' ə nē) wife of Hades.

### Comprehension

What does Circe say that Odysseus must do in order to reach home?





Odysseus in the Land of the Dead from Homer's *The Odyssey*, N.C. Wyeth, Brandywine River Museum

‘Son of great Laertes,  
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,  
bad luck shadowed me, and no kindly power;  
ignoble death I drank with so much wine.  
590 I slept on Circe’s roof, then could not see  
the long steep backward ladder, coming down,  
and fell that height. My neckbone, buckled under,  
snapped, and my spirit found this well of dark.  
Now hear the grace I pray for, in the name  
595 of those back in the world, not here—your wife  
and father, he who gave you bread in childhood,  
and your own child, your only son, Telemachus,<sup>56</sup>  
long ago left at home.

When you make sail  
and put these lodgings of dim Death behind,  
600 you will moor ship, I know, upon Aeaëa Island;  
there, O my lord, remember me, I pray,  
do not abandon me unwept, unburied,  
to tempt the gods’ wrath, while you sail for home;  
but fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,  
605 and build a cairn<sup>57</sup> for me above the breakers—  
an unknown sailor’s mark for men to come.  
Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it  
the oar I pulled in life with my companions.’

He ceased, and I replied:

‘Unhappy spirit,  
610 I promise you the barrow and the burial.’

So we conversed, and grimly, at a distance,  
with my long sword between, guarding the blood,  
while the faint image of the lad spoke on.  
Now came the soul of Anticlea, dead,  
615 my mother, daughter of Autolycus,<sup>58</sup>  
dead now, though living still when I took ship  
for holy Troy. Seeing this ghost I grieved,  
but held her off, through pang on pang of tears,  
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.  
620 Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes<sup>59</sup> came forward  
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:

### ◀ Critical Viewing

What can you infer about ancient Greek beliefs concerning death and the afterlife from lines 555–577 on page 777 and from this illustration?

**56. Telemachus** (tə lem’ ə kəs)

**57. cairn** (kern) *n.* conical heap of stones built as a monument.

### Historical and Cultural Context

What ancient Greek values and beliefs are suggested by Elpenor’s requests?

**58. Autolycus** (ô täl’ i kəs)

**59. Thebes** (thēbz)

### Comprehension

What does Elpenor’s spirit ask of Odysseus?



### Historical and Cultural Context

What ancient Greek value is reflected in the “narrow strait” that Tiresias describes (lines 637–638)?

60. **kine** (kin) *n.* cattle.

### Vocabulary ►

**bereft** (bē ref’t)

*adj.* deprived

‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,  
Odysseus, master of landways and seaways,  
why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,  
625 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.’

At this I stepped aside, and in the scabbard  
let my long sword ring home to the pommel silver,  
630 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  
are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead;  
the god who thunders on the land prepares it,  
635 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:  
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.  
When you make landfall on Thrinacia first  
640 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.  
Avoid those kine,<sup>60</sup> hold fast to your intent,  
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.  
645 But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction  
for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,  
**bereft** of all companions, lost for years,  
under strange sail shall you come home, to find  
your own house filled with trouble: insolent men  
650 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  
combat or by stealth—to all the suitors,  
go overland on foot, and take an oar,  
655 until one day you come where men have lived  
with meat unsalted, never known the sea,  
nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows  
and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.  
The spot will soon be plain to you, and I  
660 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  
 and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:  
 a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,  
 665 and carry out pure hecatombs<sup>61</sup> at home  
 to all wide heaven’s lords, the undying gods,  
 to each in order. Then a seaborne death  
 soft as this hand of mist will come upon you  
 when you are wearied out with rich old age,  
 670 your country folk in blessed peace around you.  
 And all this shall be just as I foretell.’

61. **hecatombs** (hek’ ə tōmz’) *n.* large-scale sacrifices to the gods in ancient Greece; often, the slaughter of 100 cattle at one time.

## Critical Thinking

- 1. Key Ideas and Details: (a)** Before the meeting with the Cyclops, what had Odysseus received from Maron at Ismarus? **(b) Generalize:** What does the encounter with Maron reveal about ancient Greek attitudes regarding hospitality? Explain.
- 2. Key Ideas and Details: (a)** How do Odysseus and his companions expect to be treated by the Cyclops? **(b) Infer:** What “laws” of behavior and attitude does Polyphemus violate? Explain.
- 3. Key Ideas and Details: (a)** How do Odysseus and his crew escape from the Cyclops? **(b) Evaluate:** What positive and negative character traits does Odysseus demonstrate in his adventure with the Cyclops? Explain, citing specific examples from the text.
- 4. Key Ideas and Details: (a)** What difficulty does Tiresias predict for the journey to come? **(b) Speculate:** Why would Odysseus continue, despite Tiresias’ grim prophecies? Explain, citing details from the text to support your answer.
- 5. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:** Judging from Tiresias’ prediction, which heroic qualities will Odysseus need to rely upon as he continues his journey? Explain.
- 6. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: (a)** What are Odysseus’ responsibilities as he reaches the land of the Cyclopes? **(b)** How well does he fulfill these responsibilities? Support your answer with details from the epic. *[Connect to the Big Question: Do heroes have responsibilities?]*





*Circe Meanwhile Had Gone Her Ways . . .*, 1924, William Russell Flint Collection of the New York Public Library, Special Collections/ Art Resources



## The Sirens

*Odysseus returns to Circe's island. The goddess reveals his course to him and gives advice on how to avoid the dangers he will face: the Sirens, who lure sailors to their destruction; the Wandering Rocks, sea rocks that destroy even birds in flight; the perils of the sea monster Scylla and, nearby, the whirlpool Charybdis;<sup>62</sup> and the cattle of the sun god, which Tiresias has warned Odysseus not to harm.*

**62. Charybdis** (kə rib' dis)

As Circe spoke, Dawn mounted her golden throne,  
and on the first rays Circe left me, taking  
her way like a great goddess up the island.  
675 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.  
But soon an offshore breeze blew to our liking—  
680 a canvas-bellying breeze, a lusty shipmate  
sent by the singing nymph with sunbright hair.  
So we made fast the braces, and we rested,  
letting the wind and steersman work the ship.  
The crew being now silent before me, I  
685 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  
with our eyes open, if we are going to die,  
690 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  
695 you are to tie me up, tight as a splint,  
erect along the mast, lashed to the mast,  
and if I shout and beg to be untied,  
take more turns of the rope to muffle me.’

I rather dwelt on this part of the forecast,  
700 while our good ship made time, bound outward down  
the wind for the strange island of Sirens.

### ◀ Critical Viewing

The sorceress Circe both helps and hinders Odysseus on his journey home. What can you tell about Circe from this illustration?

### Epic Hero

What does Odysseus reveal about his character by sharing information with his men?

### Comprehension

What instructions does Odysseus give his shipmates as they prepare to deal with the Sirens?





### Historical and Cultural Context

What does Odysseus' mention of Helios reveal about ancient Greek beliefs regarding astronomical events?

### Epic Hero

Which details in the Sirens' song are designed to flatter the epic hero?

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

705 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—  
710 no long task, for a burning heat came down  
from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward  
I carried wax along the line, and laid it  
thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb  
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,  
715 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:

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

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

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

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

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

740

*Argos' old soldiery*<sup>63</sup>

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

745 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,  
 750 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  
 755 the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;  
 then set me free.

## Scylla and Charybdis

But scarcely had that island  
 faded in blue air than I saw smoke  
 and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—  
 a sound the men heard, and it terrified them.  
 760 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.  
 Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern,  
 trying to put heart into them, standing over  
 765 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!  
 Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits  
 770 to find a way out for us?

**63. Argos' old soldiery**  
 soldiers from Argos, a city  
 in ancient Greece.

### ◀ Vocabulary

**ardor** (är' dər) *n.*  
 passion; enthusiasm

### Spiral Review

#### Universal Theme

What details in this scene  
 suggest the importance  
 of having loyal friends  
 and companions?

### Comprehension

How does Odysseus  
 keep his shipmates from  
 hearing the Sirens sing?

## Epic Hero

What parts of Odysseus' speech demonstrate his strength as a leader?

64. **the combers** (kōm' ərs) **and the smoke** the large waves that break on the beach and the ocean spray.

65. **Scylla** (sil' ə)

66. **cuirass** (kwi ras') *n.* armor for the upper body.

67. **travail** (trə vāl') *n.* very hard work.

68. **gorge** (gôrj) *n.* throat or gullet.

69. **maelstrom** (māl' strəm) *n.* large, violent whirlpool.

Now I say

by hook or crook this peril too shall be something that we remember.

Heads up, lads!

We must obey the orders as I give them.  
Get the oar shafts in your hands, and lay back  
775 hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.  
Zeus help us pull away before we founder.  
You at the tiller, listen, and take in  
all that I say—the rudders are your duty;  
keep her out of the combers and the smoke;<sup>64</sup>  
780 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,<sup>65</sup> I  
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.  
785 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>66</sup> and took up  
two heavy spears, then made my way along  
790 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 the cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere  
could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,

795 in travail,<sup>67</sup> sobbing, gaining on the current,  
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port  
and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire  
gorge<sup>68</sup> of the salt seatide. By heaven! when she  
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron  
800 seething over intense fire, when the mixture  
suddenly heaves and rises.

The shot spume

soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.  
But when she swallowed the sea water down  
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom,<sup>69</sup> heard  
805 the rock bellowing all around, and dark  
sand raged on the bottom far below.  
My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes





### ◀ Critical Viewing

How does this image compare with the description of Scylla in the scene?

were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear  
of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,  
810 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.

815 A man surfcasting on a point of rock  
for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod  
to drop the sinker and the bait far out,

### Comprehension

What demand does  
Odysseus make of his  
men as they approach  
the rough waters?

### Epic Hero

What quality of heroic leadership does Odysseus show in lines 823–825?

### Historical and Cultural Context

Which details here suggest that ancient Greeks believed the gods controlled the weather?

### Historical and Cultural Context

How does this passage show that ancient Greeks believed their gods had human-like emotions?

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

so these

820 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,

825 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  
that shone out in the first dusk of evening  
830 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  
835 to cover in a grotto, a sea cave  
where nymphs had chairs of rock and sanded floors.  
I mustered all the crew and said:

‘Old shipmates,

our stores are in the ship’s hold, food and drink;  
the cattle here are not for our provision,

840 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  
845 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,

850 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.

So one day I withdrew to the interior  
855 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.  
I washed my hands there, and made supplication  
860 to the gods who own Olympus,<sup>70</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,

‘You’ve gone through everything; listen to what I say.  
865 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  
for sacrifice to the gods who own the sky;  
870 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>71</sup>  
But if he flares up over his heifers lost,  
875 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!’

Thus Eurylochus; and they murmured ‘Aye!’  
880 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—  
885 having no barley meal—to strew the victims,  
performed the prayers and ritual, knifed the kine

**70. Olympus** (ō lim’ pēs)  
Mount Olympus, home of  
the gods.

#### ◀ Vocabulary

**insidious** (in sid’ ē əs)  
*adj.* characterized by  
craftiness and betrayal

**71. Lord of Noon** Helios.

#### Epic Hero

How are the values of  
Eurylochus different from  
those of Odysseus?

#### Comprehension

Who owns the heifers  
and sheep on the island?



## LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

### Geography Connection

#### Real Places and Imaginary Events in the *Odyssey*

Odysseus' journey carries him to real places, including Troy, Sparta, and the Strait of Gibraltar. However, in the story, many of these real places are populated by imaginary creatures, such as the Cyclops and the Sirens. The combination of real places and fantastic events is part of the story's appeal.



### Connect to the Literature

How does the inclusion of real places make the story's imaginary events more believable?

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.

890 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  
left me in a rush, my eyes opened,  
895 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:

‘O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,  
900 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.’<sup>72</sup>

72. **contrived** (kən trɪvd') v.  
thought up; devised.

Lampetia<sup>73</sup> in her long gown meanwhile  
had borne swift word to the Overlord of Noon:  
905 ‘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,  
now they have killed my peaceful kine, my joy  
910 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.’

915 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.’

920 —Calypso later told me of this exchange,  
as she declared that Hermes<sup>74</sup> had told her.  
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.  
925 The silken beeves<sup>75</sup> 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.

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

All the gales  
had ceased, blown out, and with an offshore breeze  
we launched again, stepping the mast and sail,  
935 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  
above the ship, while gloom spread on the ocean.

**73. Lampetia** (lam pē’ shə)  
a nymph.

**74. Hermes** (hur’ mēz’) *n.* god  
who serves as herald and  
messenger of the other  
gods.

**75. beeves** (bēvz) *n.* alternate  
plural form of “beef.”

### Epic Hero

What details in lines 920–  
921 clarify the flashback  
presented here?

### Comprehension

What do Odysseus’  
shipmates do while  
he is sleeping?





La Nef de Telemachus (The Ship of Telemachus), New York Public Library Picture Collection



940 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  
showered into the bilge.

On the afterdeck

945 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  
a bolt against the ship, a direct hit,  
950 so that she bucked, in reeking fumes of sulphur,  
and all the men were flung into the sea.  
They came up 'round the wreck, bobbing awhile  
like petrels<sup>76</sup> on the waves.

No more seafaring

homeward for these, no sweet day of return;  
955 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.  
A backstay floated dangling from it, stout  
960 rawhide rope, and I used this for lashing  
mast and keel together. These I straddled,  
riding the frightful storm.

Nor had I yet

seen the worst of it: for now the west wind  
dropped, and a southeast gale came on—one more  
965 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.  
There, as the whirlpool drank the tide, a billow  
970 tossed me, and I sprang for the great fig tree,  
catching on like a bat under a bough.  
Nowhere had I to stand, no way of climbing,  
the root and bole<sup>77</sup> being far below, and far  
above my head the branches and their leaves,  
975 massed, overshadowing Charybdis pool.  
But I clung grimly, thinking my mast and keel  
would come back to the surface when she spouted.

### ◀ Critical Viewing

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' son Telemachus searches for his father in a ship like this one. From what you observe in the painting, how does this ship compare with modern ships?

76. **petrels** (pe' trəlz) *n.* small, dark sea birds.

### Epic Hero

Which of Odysseus' heroic qualities does he demonstrate in this passage?

77. **bole** (bōl) *n.* tree trunk.

### Comprehension

How is Odysseus' ship destroyed?



78. Father . . . men Zeus.

79. Ogygia (o jji' i ə)

### Epic Hero

In what way do lines 994–997 remind you that Odysseus is telling his story to an audience?

And ah! how long, with what desire, I waited!  
till, at the twilight hour, when one who hears  
980 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,  
985 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,<sup>78</sup> this time,  
kept me from her eyes. Once through the strait,  
nine days I drifted in the open sea  
990 before I made shore, buoyed up by the gods,  
upon Ogygia<sup>79</sup> 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  
995 to you and to your lady? Those adventures  
made a long evening, and I do not hold  
with tiresome repetition of a story."

## Language Study

**Vocabulary** The italicized words in each numbered item appear in the *Odyssey*, Part 1. Using your knowledge of these words, identify the word in each group that does not belong. Then, explain your response.

1. *plundered*, robbed, donated
2. *dispatched*, hesitated, completed
3. *assuage*, soothe, increase
4. *ardor*, spirit, fear
5. *insidious*, traitorous, friendly

### Word Study

**Part A** Explain how the **Old English prefix *be-*** contributes to the meanings of *bemuse*, *belittle*, and *befriend*. Consult a dictionary if necessary.

**Part B** Use the context of the sentences and what you know about the Old English prefix *be-* to explain your answer to each question.

1. If people *begrudge* your success, are they happy for you?
2. What happens if a sailing ship is *becalmed*?

### WORD STUDY

The **Old English prefix *be-*** means "around," "make," or "covered with." In this selection, Tiresias warns Odysseus that he will be **bereft** of his companions. Tiresias means that Odysseus will lose his companions. *Bereft* is a form of *bereave*, which means "made to suffer a loss."