The Cyclops

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,¹⁵
giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery to the immortal gods, they neither plow nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and

wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rains. Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting, no consultation or old tribal ways, but each one dwells in his own mountain cave dealing out rough justice to wife and child,

120 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 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 prodigious¹⁶ man

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
 a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.
 We beached there, and I told the crew
- 135 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 of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son, Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's¹⁷
- holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness
 we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,
 he gave me seven shining golden talents¹⁸
 perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,
 and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars
- 145 of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave in Maron's household knew this drink; only he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew; and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored, honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,

15. Cyclopes (sī klō' pēz') *n.* plural form of Cyclops (sī kläps'), a race of giants with one eye in the middle of the forehead.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero and Conflict Based on Odysseus' description of Cyclopes, what conflicts might arise for Odysseus and his men?

16. prodigious (prō dij' əs) adj. enormous.

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences Rephrase the description of the Cyclops in lines 130–133, using your own words.

17. Apollo (a päľ ō) god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine.

18. talents units of money in ancient Greece.

150 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 victuals¹⁹ in a bag, for in my bones I knew some towering brute 155 would be upon us soon—all outward power, a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep, so we looked round at everything inside:

160 a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens crowded with lambs and kids,²⁰ each in its class: firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'



19. victuals (vit' als) n food or other provisions.

20. kids n. young goats.

Reading Check

What does Odysseus bring along when he goe to inspect the Cyclops' cave?

 Critical Viewing How does this image of Apollo compare with your impressions of the other gods or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both. And vessels full of whey²¹ were brimming there bowls of earthenware and pails for milking. My men came pressing round me, pleading:

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 170 put out again on good salt water!'

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. We lit a fire, burnt an offering,

- 175 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence around the embers, waiting. When he came he had a load of dry boughs²² on his shoulder to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it with a great crash into that hollow cave.
- 180 and we all scattered fast to the far wall. Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung high overhead a slab of solid rock
- to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons, with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it over the doorsill. Next he took his seat and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job
- 190 he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling; thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey, sieved out the curds to drip in withy²³ baskets, and poured the whey to stand in bowls cooling until he drank it for his supper.

¹⁹⁵ When all these chores were done, he poked the fire, heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

'Strangers,' he said, 'who are you? And where from? What brings you here by seaways—a fair traffic? Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?' 21. whey (hwa) a thin, watery part of milk separated from the thicker curgs

Why not

Ah.

22. boughs (bouz) m. tree branches.

23. withy (with e) adj. made from tough, flexible twigs.

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

We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course 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,²⁴ son of Atreus the whole world knows what city

210 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

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

from his brute chest, unmoved:

You are a ninny,

He answered this

or else you come from the other end of nowhere, telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes 220 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 whim²⁵ to. Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship— 225 around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?'

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

'My ship?

Poseidon²⁶ Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble, broke it up on the rocks at your land's end.
230 A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.

We are survivors, these good men and I.'

Neither reply nor pity came from him, but in one stride he clutched at my companions and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies 235 to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.

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

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Which quality of an epic hero does Odysseus demonstrate by addressing the mighty man?

24. Agamemnon (ag' a mem' nän') king who led the Greek army during the Trojan War.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero and Conflict What conflict is revealed in lines 217–223?

25. whim (hwim) *n*. sudden thought or wish to do something.

26. Poseidon (põ sī dən) god of the sea, earthquakes, horses, and storms at sea.

Reading Check

What does Odysseus tell Cyclops happened to their ship?

Odyssey, Part 1, The Adventures of Odysseus 🔶 989

We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus, 240 powerless, looking on at this, appalled:

but Cyclops went on filling up his belly with manflesh and great gulps of whey. then lay down like a mast among his sheep. My heart beat high now at the chance of action.

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.

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,

- 255 putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then, his chores being all <u>dispatched</u>, he caught another brace²⁷ 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.²⁸
 There was a din²⁹ of whistling as the Cyclops rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness. And now I pondered how to hurt him worst, if but Athena³⁰ granted what I prayed for.
 Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold an olive tree, felled green and left to season³¹ for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast a lugger³² of twenty oars, broad in the beam—

- 270 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 and set it down before my men, who scraped it; and when they had it smooth. I hewed again
- 275 to make a stake with pointed end. I held this in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it, then hid it, well back in the cavern, under one of the dung piles in profusion there. Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured
- 280 along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild

990

◆ The Epic

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences Reread lines 244–250 in complete sentences, ignoring the line breaks, to help you understand the passage.

dispatched (di spacht) v. finished quickly

27. brace (brās) n. pair.

28. cap a quiver (kwiv' er) close a case holding arrows.

29. din n. loud, continuous noise; uproar.

30. Athena (a the ne) goddess of wisdom, skills, and warfare.

31. felled green and left to season chopped down and exposed to the weather to age the wood.

32. lugger (lug' er) n. small sailing vessel.

Literary Analysis The Epic Hero Which heroic qualities does Odysseus reveal as he plots against Cyclops?

sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it, the men I would have chosen won the tossfour strong men, and I made five as captain.

285 At evening came the shepherd with his flock, his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time, entered the cave: by some sheepherding whimor a god's bidding-none were left outside. He hefted his great boulder into place

290 and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes in proper order, put the lambs to suck. and swiftly ran through all his evening chores. Then he caught two more men and feasted on them. My moment was at hand, and I went forward 295 holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink.

looking up, saying:

'Cyclops, try some wine.

Here's liquor to wash down your scraps of men. Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried under our planks. I meant it for an offering 300 if you would help us home. But you are mad, unbearable, a bloody monster! After this, will any other traveler come to see you?"

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

305 '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 ambrosial'33

310 Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down. I saw the fuddle and flush come over him, then I sang out in cordial tones:

'Cyclops,

you ask my honorable name? Remember the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you. 315 My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends, everyone calls me Nohbdy.'

And he said:

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero What plan do you think Odysseus has in mind by offering the drink?

33. nectar (nek' ter) and ambrosia (am bro' zha) drink and food of the gods.

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences How would you write Odysseus' sly lie in ordinary prose?

Reading Check

What does Odysseus give to Cyclops to drink?

Odyssey, Part 1, The Adventures of Odysseus + 991

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

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward, 320 his great head lolling to one side; and sleep took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping, he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike deep in the embers, charring it again,

- 325 and cheered my men along with battle talk to keep their courage up: no quitting now. The pike of olive, green though it had been, reddened and glowed as if about to catch. I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
- 330 gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops as more than natural force nerved them; straight forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it deep in his crater eye, and leaned on it turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
- 335 in planking, having men below to swing the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove. So with our brand we bored³⁴ that great eye socket while blood ran out around the red-hot bar. Evelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball 340 hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steamthe way they make soft iron hale and hard--: just so that eyeball hissed around the spike. 345 The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him.

- and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye. threw it away, and his wild hands went groping; then he set up a howl for Cyclopes
- 350 who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby. Some heard him; and they came by divers³⁵ wavs to clump around outside and call:

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

355 Sure no man's driving off your flock? No man

Polyphemus?³⁶ Why do you cry so sore

has tricked you, ruined you?'

What ails you,

35. divers (dī vərz) adj. several; various.

36. Polyphemus (pär i fē' məs)

34. bored (bord) v. made a hole in.

Reading Strategy

lines 323-326?

Reading in Sentences What is the main idea of

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992 🔶 The Epic

Out of the cave

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

To this rough shout they made a sage³⁷ reply:

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer;

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

So saying

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter to see how like a charm the name deceived them. Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him, fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide for any silly beast or man who bolted—

- ³⁷⁰ hoping somehow I might be such a fool.
 But I kept thinking how to win the game:
 death sat there huge; how could we slip away?
 I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics,
 reasoning as a man will for dear life,
- ³⁷⁵ until a trick came—and it pleased me well. The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

I tied them silently together, twining cords of willow from the ogre's bed; 380 then slung a man under each middle one to ride there safely, shielded left and right. So three sheep could convey each man. I took the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock, and hung myself under his kinky belly, 385 pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip. So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens where dams with udders full called for a milking. Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound, the master stroked each ram, then let it pass, mammoth (mam' eth) adj. enormous

37. sage (sāj) adj. wise.

Reading Strategy

Reading in Sentences How many questions do the other Cyclopes ask Polyphemus? What two basic things do they want to know?

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Which heroic quality does Odysseus demonstrate in lines 371–375?



What do the other Cyclopes think Polyphemus is saying when he says, "Nohbdy's tricked me"?

but my men riding on the pectoral³⁸ fleece ³⁹⁵ the giant's blind hands blundering never found. Last of them all my ram, the leader, came, weighted by wool and me with my meditations. The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest 400 in the night cave? You never linger so,

- but graze before them all, and go afar to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way leading along the streams, until at evening you run to be the first one in the fold.
- 405 Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue³⁹ and his accurst companions burnt it out when he had conquered all my wits with wine. Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
- 410 Oh, had you brain and voice to tell where he may be now, dodging all my fury! Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall his brains would strew the floor, and I should have rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'
- 415 He sent us into the open, then. Close by, I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly, going this way and that to untie the men. With many glances back, we rounded up his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
- and drove them down to where the good ship lay.
 We saw, as we came near, our fellows' faces shining: then we saw them turn to grief tallying those who had not fled from death.
 I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,
- 425 and in a low voice told them: 'Load this herd; move fast, and put the ship's head toward the breakers.' They all pitched in at loading, then embarked and struck their oars into the sea. Far out, as far off shore as shouted words would carry.

130 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? How do you like the beating that we gave you. 38. pectoral (pek' te ral) adj. located in or on the chest.

39. carrion (kar' ë en) rogue (rôg) repulsive scoundrel.

Reading Check

How do the men escape from the Cyclops' cave?

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194 🔶 The Epic

you damned cannibal? Eater of guests 435 under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!'

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us. Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave

440 that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore. I got the longest boathook out and stood fending us off, with furious nods to all to put their backs into a racing stroke row, row, or perish. So the long oars bent

 kicking the foam sternward, making head until we drew away, and twice as far.
 Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew in low voices protesting:

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

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

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

'Aye

He'll smash our timbers and our heads together!' 455 I would not heed them in my glorying spirit, but let my anger flare and yelled:

'Cyclops,

if ever mortal man inquire how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye: 460 Laertes' son, whose home's on Ithaca!'

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled: 'Now comes the weird⁴⁰ upon me, spoken of old. A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,⁴¹ a son of Eurymus;⁴² great length of days 465 he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes, and these things he foretold for time to come: my great eye lost, and at Odysseus' hands.

996 • The Epic

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Despite his heroism, which human weaknesses does Odysseus reveal as he sails away?

Reading Strategy Reading in Sentences Rephrase the sentence in lines 450–451.

40. weird n. fate or destiny 41. Telemus (tel e' masi

42. Eurymus (not rim as)

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'⁴⁴ 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.

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,⁴⁵
having our precious lives, but not our friends.

Literary Analysis

The Epic Hero Which admirable quality does Odysseus show in his actions with the stolen sheep?

44. Cronus (krô' nes) Titan who was ruler of the universe until he was everthrown by his son Zeus,

45. offing n. distant part of the sea visible from the shore