

PART 1

# The Adventures of Odysseus



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

Sing in me, Muse,<sup>1</sup> and through me tell the story  
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,  
the wanderer, harried for years on end,  
after he plundered the stronghold  
5 on the proud height of Troy.<sup>2</sup>

He saw the townlands  
and learned the minds of many distant men,  
and weathered many bitter nights and days  
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only  
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.  
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them,  
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—  
children and fools, they killed and feasted on  
the cattle of Lord Helios,<sup>3</sup> the Sun,  
and he who moves all day through heaven  
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return.  
Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,<sup>4</sup>  
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

**1. Muse** (myoʊz) any one of the nine goddesses of the arts, literature, and the sciences; the spirit that is thought to inspire a poet or other artist.

**plundered** (plun' derd) v. took goods by force; looted

**2. Troy** (troi) city in northwest Asia Minor; site of the Trojan War.

**3. Helios** (hē' lē əs') sun god.

**4. Zeus** (zōʊs) king of the gods.

**Note:** In translating the *Odyssey*, Fitzgerald spelled Greek names to suggest the sound of the original Greek. In these excerpts, more familiar spellings have been used. For example, Fitzgerald's "Kirkē," "Kyklops," and "Seirēnēs" are spelled here as "Circe," "Cyclops," and "Sirens."

### Reading Check

Which act led to an epic journey?

## Sailing from Troy

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

"I am Laertes<sup>5</sup> son, Odysseus.

Men hold me

formidable for guile<sup>6</sup> 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>7</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;  
I shall not see on earth a place more dear,  
though I have been detained long by Calypso,<sup>8</sup>

loveliest among goddesses, who held me  
in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight,  
as Circe of Aeaea,<sup>9</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?

The wind that carried west from Ilium<sup>10</sup>  
brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore,  
a strongpoint on the coast of Cicones,<sup>11</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,<sup>12</sup>  
fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep  
they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle,

5. Laertes (lā ər' tēz')

6. guile (gīl) *n.* craftiness; cunning.

7. Ithaca (ith' ə kə) island off the west coast of Greece.

### Reading Strategy

#### Reading in Sentences

Why do these opening lines sound more natural when you ignore the line breaks?

8. Calypso (kə lip' sō)

9. Circe (sɜr' sē) of Aeaea (ē ē ə)

10. Ilium (ī ē əm) Troy.

11. Cicones (si kō' nēz)

12. mutinous (myūōōs' ən əs) *adj.* rebellious.

### Reading Check

Who has asked Odysseus to tell his tale?

50 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  
55 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  
60 holding our beach, although so far outnumbered;  
but when the sun passed toward unyoking time,  
then the Achaeans,<sup>13</sup> one by one, gave way.  
Six benches were left empty in every ship  
that evening when we pulled away from death.  
65 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.

13. Achaeans (ə kē' ənz)  
Greeks; here, Odysseus' men.

## The Lotus-Eaters

70 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.  
75 We saw death in that fury, dropped the yards,  
unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:<sup>14</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.  
80 Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested,  
letting the steersmen and the breeze take over.

squall (skwól) n. brief,  
violent storm

14. lee (lē) n. area sheltered  
from the wind.

I might have made it safely home, that time,  
but as I came round Malea the current  
took me out to sea, and from the north  
85 a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.  
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea  
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth  
we came to the coastline of the Lotus-Eaters,  
who live upon that flower. We landed there

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

## Review and Assess

### Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** What is your first impression of Odysseus? Which of his qualities do you admire?
2. (a) **Recall:** Describe the events on Ismarus.  
(b) **Interpret:** What lessons can be learned from the defeat of

### Reading Strategy

#### Reading in Sentences

Read lines 94–98 as a complete sentence. How does doing so help your understanding of the passage?

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic Hero** Which characteristics of a hero and leader does Odysseus show in the episode with the Lotus-Eaters?