

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 Laertes⁵ son, Odysseus.

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formidable for guile⁶ in peace and war;
this fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim.

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Men hold me

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My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca⁷
under Mount Neion's wind-blown robe of leaves,
in sight of other islands—Dulichium,
Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca

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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,⁸
loveliest among goddesses, who held me
in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight,
as Circe of Aeaea,⁹ the enchantress,
desired me, and detained me in her hall.

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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

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of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus?
The wind that carried west from Ilium¹⁰
brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore,
a strongpoint on the coast of Cicones.¹¹

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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,¹²
fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep

5. Laertes (lā ur' tēz')

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

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

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero For what quality does Odysseus say he is famous?

8. Calypso (kə lip' sō) sea goddess who loved Odysseus.

9. Circe (sur' sē) of Aeaea (ē' ē ə)

10. Ilium (il' ē əm) Troy.

11. Cicones (si kō' nēz)

12. mutinous (myōōt' n əs) *adj.* rebellious.

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Reading Check

Who has asked Odysseus to tell his tale?

they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle,
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,¹³ 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.
7 | 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.