

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?

51 Reading
Check

How does Odysseus keep
his shipmates from hear-
ing the Sirens sing?

Literary Analysis

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** (gōrj) *n.* throat or gullet.

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

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

Now I say

Heads up, lads!

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We must obey the orders as I give them. Get the oar shafts in your hands, and lay back hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas. Zeus help us pull away before we founder.

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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;⁶⁴ steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we fetch up in the smother, and you drown us.'

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That was all, and it brought them round to action. But as I sent them on toward Scylla,⁶⁵ 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 cuirass⁶⁶ 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 the cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere could I catch sight of her.

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in travail,⁶⁷ sobbing, gaining on the current, we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire gorge⁶⁸ of the salt seatide. By heaven! when she vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron seething over intense fire, when the mixture suddenly heaves and rises.

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The shot spume

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



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◀ **Critical Viewing**

How does this image compare with the description of Scylla in the scene? [**Compare and Contrast**]

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,

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Reading Check

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

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

820 were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

so these

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den,
in the dire grapple, reaching still for me—
and deathly pity ran me through
56 | 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.

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