

# BOOK 9:

## *New Coasts and Poseidon's Son*

*In Books 6–8, Odysseus is welcomed by King Alcinous, who gives a banquet in his honor. That night the king begs Odysseus to tell who he is and what has happened to him. In Books 9–12, Odysseus relates to the king his adventures.*

### “I AM LAERTES’ SON”

“What shall I  
say first? What shall I keep until the end?  
The gods have tried me in a thousand ways.  
But first my name: let that be known to you,  
5 and if I pull away from pitiless death,  
friendship will bind us, though my land lies far.

I am Laertes’ son, Odysseus.

Men hold me  
formidable for guile in peace and war:  
this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim.  
10 My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca  
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,  
15 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,  
loveliest among goddesses, who held me  
20 in her smooth caves, to be her heart’s delight,  
as Circe of Aeaëa, 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  
25 his own home and his parents? In far lands  
he shall not, though he find a house of gold. **E**

### ANALYZE VISUALS

This sculpture of Odysseus was produced in Rome sometime between A.D. 4 and 26. How would you describe the expression on his face?

**7–8 hold me formidable for guile:** consider me impressive for my cunning and craftiness.

**11–13 Mount Neion’s** (nē’ōnz’); **Dulichium** (dōō-līk’ē-əm); **Same** (sā’mē); **Zacynthus** (zē-sīn’thēs).

**18–26** Odysseus refers to two beautiful goddesses, Calypso and Circe, who have delayed him on their islands. (Details about Circe appear in Book 10.) At the same time, he seems nostalgic for his family and homeland, from which he has been separated for 18 years—10 of them spent fighting in Troy.

### **E** EPIC HERO

Reread lines 24–26. What does Odysseus value most highly?

What of my sailing, then, from Troy?  
What of those years  
of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? . . .”

*Odysseus explains that soon after leaving Troy, he and his crew land near Ismarus, the city of the Cicones. The Cicones are allies of the Trojans and therefore enemies of Odysseus. Odysseus and his crew raid the Cicones, robbing and killing them, until the Ciconian army kills 72 of Odysseus’ men and drives the rest out to sea. Delayed by a storm for two days, Odysseus and his remaining companions then continued their journey.*

## THE LOTUS EATERS

“I might have made it safely home, that time,  
30 but as I came round Malea the current  
took me out to sea, and from the north  
a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.  
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea  
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth  
35 we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters,  
who live upon that flower. We landed there  
to take on water. All ships’ companies  
mustered alongside for the mid-day meal.  
Then I sent out two picked men and a runner  
40 to learn what race of men that land sustained.  
They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,  
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,  
45 never cared to report, nor to return:  
they longed to stay forever, browsing on  
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.  
I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,  
tied them down under their rowing benches,  
50 and called the rest: ‘All hands aboard;  
come, clear the beach and no one taste  
the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’  
Filing in to their places by the rowlocks  
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,  
55 and we moved out again on our sea faring.

**30 Malea** (mä-lē’ä).

**32 Cythera** (sĭ-thĭr’ə).

**38 muster:** assembled; gathered.

**44–52 those who ate . . . hope of home.**  
*How do the Lotus Eaters pose a threat to Odysseus and his men?*

## THE CYCLOPS

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,  
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

**56 Cyclopes** (sĭ-klō’pēz): refers to the creatures in plural; *Cyclops* is singular.

60 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 rain.  
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,  
no consultation or old tribal ways,  
65 but each one dwells in his own mountain cave  
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,  
indifferent to what the others do. . . .”

58–67 *Why doesn't Odysseus respect the Cyclopes?*

*Across the bay from the land of the Cyclopes was a lush, deserted island. Odysseus and his crew landed on the island in a dense fog and spent days feasting on wine and wild goats and observing the mainland, where the Cyclopes lived. On the third day, Odysseus and his company of men set out to learn if the Cyclopes were friends or foes.*

“When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose **F**  
came in the east, I called my men together  
70 and made a speech to them:

**F** **EPITHET**

Notice the descriptive phrase used to characterize the dawn in line 68. What does this description tell you about the dawn?

‘Old shipmates, friends,  
the rest of you stand by; I’ll make the crossing  
in my own ship, with my own company,  
and find out what the mainland natives are—  
for they may be wild savages, and lawless,  
75 or hospitable and god fearing men.’

At this I went aboard, and gave the word  
to cast off by the stern. My oarsmen followed,  
filing in to their benches by the rowlocks,  
and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea.

77 **stern**: the rear end of a ship.

80 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  
85 earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged  
towering oak trees.

82 **screened with laurel**: partially hidden by laurel trees.

A prodigious man  
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks  
to graze afield—remote from all companions,  
knowing none but savage ways, a brute  
90 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

91–92 *What does Odysseus' metaphor imply about the Cyclops?*

to stand by and keep watch over the ship;  
95 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's  
holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness  
100 we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,  
he gave me seven shining golden talents  
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,  
and then this liquor—twelve two-handed jars  
of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave  
105 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,  
but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume  
110 over the winebowl. No man turned away  
when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals in a bag,  
for in my bones I knew some towering brute  
would be upon us soon—all outward power,  
115 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:  
a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens  
120 crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class:  
firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'  
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.  
And vessels full of whey were brimming there—  
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.  
125 My men came pressing round me, pleading:

'Why not

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  
put out again on good salt water!'

Ah,

130 how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished  
to see the caveman, what he had to offer—  
no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.

**97–98 Euanthes** (yōō-ăn'thêz); **Maron** (mâr'ôn').

**101 talents:** bars of gold or silver of a specified weight, used as money in ancient Greece.

**112 victuals** (vīt'lz): food.

**121–122** The Cyclops has separated his lambs into three age groups.

**123 whey:** the watery part of milk, which separates from the curds, or solid part, during the making of cheese.

**129 good salt water:** the open sea.

**130–132** *Why does Odysseus refuse his men's "sound" request?*

We lit a fire, burnt an offering,  
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence  
135 around the embers, waiting. When he came  
he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder  
to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it  
with a great crash into that hollow cave,  
and we all scattered fast to the far wall.  
140 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,  
145 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  
he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;  
150 thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,  
sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,  
and poured the whey to stand in bowls  
cooling until he drank it for his supper.  
When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,  
155 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from?  
What brings you here by sea ways—a fair traffic?  
Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives  
like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’

160 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;  
165 homeward bound, but taking routes and ways  
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.  
We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus—  
the whole world knows what city  
he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. **G**  
170 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  
for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will avenge  
175 the unoffending guest.’

**133 burnt an offering:** burned a portion of the food as an offering to secure the gods’ goodwill. (Such offerings were frequently performed by Greek sailors during difficult journeys.)

**151 withy baskets:** baskets made from twigs.

**157 fair traffic:** honest trading.

**G ALLUSION**

Reread lines 163–169. Agamemnon was the Greek king who led the war against the Trojans. Consider what Odysseus says about Agamemnon; what point is he making about himself by claiming this association?

**172–175** It was a sacred Greek custom to honor strangers with food and gifts. Odysseus is warning the Cyclops that Zeus will punish anyone who mistreats a guest.

He answered this  
from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny,  
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,  
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes  
care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus  
180 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 whim to.  
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—  
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

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

‘My ship?’

Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble,  
broke it up on the rocks at your land’s end.  
A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.  
190 We are survivors, these good men and I.’ **H**

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  
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.  
195 Then he dismembered them and made his meal,  
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—  
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.  
We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,  
powerless, looking on at this, **appalled**;  
200 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  
205 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.  
210 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 **I**  
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,



Detail of *The Cyclops* (about 1914) Odilon Redon. Oil on canvas. Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands. © Peter Will/SuperStock.

**178–182** *What is the Cyclopes' attitude toward the gods?*

#### **H** EPIC HERO

Reread lines 185–190. Why does Odysseus lie to the Cyclops about his ship?

**appalled** (ə-pòld') *adj.* filled with dismay; horrified **appall** *v.*

**ponderous** (pɒn'dər-əs) *adj.* heavy in a clumsy way; bulky

**207–210** *Why doesn't Odysseus kill the Cyclops right now?*

#### **I** EPITHET

What **epithet** is repeated in lines 211–212? Look for more repetitions like this one.

putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,  
215 his chores being all dispatched, he caught  
another brace 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.  
220 There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops  
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.  
And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,  
if but Athena granted what I prayed for.  
Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

225 a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—  
an olive tree, felled green and left to season  
for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast  
a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—  
a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:  
230 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  
to make a stake with pointed end. I held this  
235 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  
along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust  
240 and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild  
sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,  
the men I would have chosen won the toss—  
four strong men, and I made five as captain.

At evening came the shepherd with his flock,  
245 his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,  
entered the cave: by some sheep-herding whim—  
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.  
He hefted his great boulder into place  
and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes  
250 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  
holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,  
255 looking up, saying:

**216 brace:** pair.

**218–219** The Cyclops reseals the cave with the massive rock as easily as an ordinary human places the cap on a container of arrows.

**226 left to season:** left to dry out and harden.

**228 lugger:** a small, wide sailing ship.

**profusion** (prə-fyŏŏ'zhən)  
*n.* abundance

**238–243** *What does Odysseus plan to do to the Cyclops?*

‘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  
if you would help us home. But you are mad,  
260 unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,  
will any other traveller come to see you?’

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

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,  
265 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 ambrosia!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.  
270 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.  
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,  
275 everyone calls me Nohbdy.’

And he said:

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

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,  
his great head lolling to one side: and sleep  
280 took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccupping,  
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,  
and cheered my men along with battle talk  
285 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  
gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops  
290 as more than natural force nerved them; straight  
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it

**255–261** *Why does Odysseus offer the Cyclops the liquor he brought from the ship?*

**268 nectar** (nĕk’tĕr) **and ambrosia** (ăm-brō’zĕ): the drink and food of the gods.

**270 fuddle and flush:** the state of confusion and redness of the face caused by drinking alcohol.

❶ **EPIC HERO**

Say the name *Nohbdy* out loud and listen to what it sounds like. What might Odysseus be planning? Consider what this tells you about his **character**.

**286 the pike:** the pointed stake.

deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it  
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill  
in planking, having men below to swing  
295 the two-handed strap that spins it in the groove.  
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket  
while blood ran out around the red hot bar.  
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball  
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

300 one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze  
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—  
the way they make soft iron hale and hard—:  
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike. **K**  
The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,  
305 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  
who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.  
310 Some heard him; and they came by divers ways  
to clump around outside and call:

‘What ails you,

Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore  
in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.  
Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man  
315 has tricked you, ruined you?’

Out of the cave

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul  
320 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.’ **L**

So saying

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter  
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.  
325 Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,  
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone

**299 smithy:** blacksmith’s shop.

**300 adze** (ădz): an axlike tool with  
a curved blade.

**K EPIC SIMILE**

Find the epic similes in lines 292–  
297 and lines 299–303. What two  
things are being compared in each  
case? What are the effects of this  
**figurative language?**

**310 divers:** various.

**312 Polyphemus** (pŏl’ə-fē’məs):  
the name of the Cyclops.

**318 sage:** wise.

**319–322** Odysseus’ lie about his  
name has paid off. *What do the other  
Cyclopes assume to be the source of  
Polyphemus’ pain?*

**L ALLUSION**

What do you learn about  
Polyphemus from the allusion  
in lines 321–322?

and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide  
for any silly beast or man who bolted—  
hoping somehow I might be such a fool.  
330 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,  
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.  
335 The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy  
fleeces, a dark violet. **M**

Three abreast

I tied them silently together, twining  
cords of willow from the ogre's bed;  
then slung a man under each middle one  
340 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,  
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep  
345 in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.  
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose  
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,  
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens  
350 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,  
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece  
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.  
355 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  
in the night cave? You never linger so,  
360 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.  
Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving  
365 over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue  
and his accurst companions burnt it out  
when he had conquered all my wits with wine.  
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.

327 **breach**: opening.

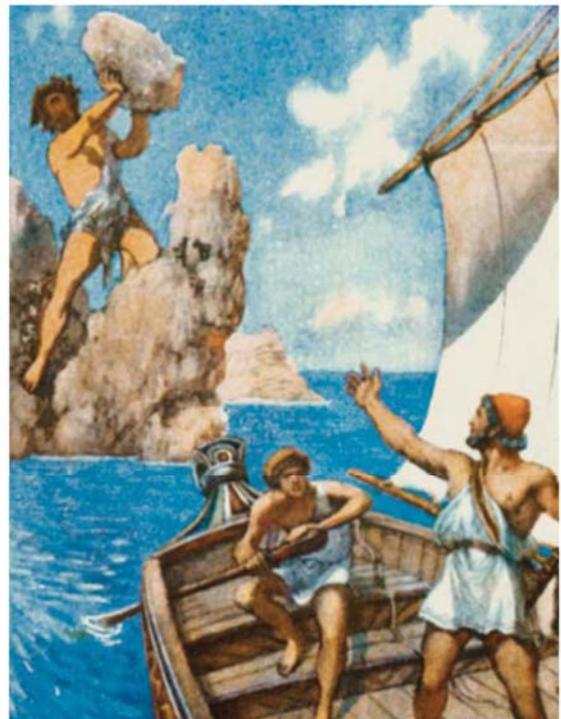
**M** **EPIC HERO**

Notice Odysseus' great mental struggle in lines 330–336. As you read on, note the clever plan he has managed to come up with on the spot.

353 **pectoral fleece**: the wool covering a sheep's chest.

**meditation** (mĕd'ĭ-tā'shən)  
*n.* the act of being in serious, reflective thought

This 1910 color print depicts Odysseus taunting Polyphemus as he and his men make their escape.



Detail of *Odysseus and Polyphemus* (1910), after L. du Bois-Reymond. Color print. From *Sagen des klassischen Altertums* by Karl Becker, Berlin. © akg-images.

Oh, had you brain and voice to tell  
370 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.’

He sent us into the open, then. Close by,  
375 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. **N**  
380 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,  
and in a low voice told them: ‘Load this herd;  
385 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,  
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:

390 ‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?  
Puny, am I, in a Caveman’s hands?  
How do you like the beating that we gave you,  
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests  
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

395 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  
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.

400 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  
405 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!’

### **N** EPIC HERO

What **character traits** has Odysseus demonstrated in his dealings with Polyphemus?

**385 put . . . the breakers:** turn the ship around so that it is heading toward the open sea.

**adversary** (ăd’vər-sēr’ē)  
*n.* an opponent; enemy

**390–394** Odysseus assumes that the gods are on his side.

**395–403** The hilltop thrown by Polyphemus lands in front of the ship, causing a huge wave that carries the ship back to the shore. Odysseus uses a long pole to push the boat away from the land.

**406 cupped my hands:** put his hands on either side of his mouth in order to magnify his voice.

‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw  
410 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!’

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,  
415 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:  
Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

⦿ **EPITHET**

Notice that Odysseus uses the warlike **epithet** “raider of cities” in his second boast to the Cyclops. What **trait** does he display in revealing so much about himself?

420 At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird upon me, spoken of old.  
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,  
a son of Eurymus; great length of days  
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,  
425 and these things he foretold for time to come:  
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.  
Always I had in mind some giant, armed  
in giant force, would come against me here.  
But this, but you—small, pitiful and twiggy—  
430 you put me down with wine, you blinded me.  
Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,  
praying the god of earthquake to befriend you—  
his son I am, for he by his avowal  
fathered me, and, if he will, he may  
435 heal me of this black wound—he and no other  
of all the happy gods or mortal men.’

**421 Now comes . . . of old:** Now I recall the destiny predicted long ago.

**421–430 Now comes . . . you blinded me:** Polyphemus tells of a prophecy made long ago by Telemus, a prophet who predicted that Polyphemus would lose his eye at the hands of Odysseus. *How have the actual events turned out differently from what Polyphemus expected?*

**432 the god of earthquake:** Poseidon.

**433 avowal:** honest admission.

Few words I shouted in reply to him:  
‘If I could take your life I would and take  
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!  
440 The god of earthquake could not heal you there!’

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness  
toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

‘O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,  
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:  
445 grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never  
see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean,  
who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny  
intend that he shall see his roof again  
among his family in his father land,  
450 far be that day, and dark the years between.  
Let him lose all companions, and return  
under strange sail to bitter days at home.’ P

In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.  
Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone  
455 and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,  
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track.  
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,  
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone  
to bear us onward toward the island.

460 as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,  
the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all  
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.  
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,  
and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.  
465 Then we unloaded all the Cyclops’ flock  
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 sea side and burnt his long thighbones  
470 to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus’ 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  
475 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 finger tips of rose  
touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders  
480 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,  
having our precious lives, but not our friends.”

**P EPIC HERO**

Reread lines 437–452. Paraphrase Polyphemus’ curse. How has Odysseus brought this curse upon himself?

**455 titanic for the cast:** drawing on all his enormous strength in preparing to throw.

**457 aft:** behind.

**459 the island:** the deserted island where most of Odysseus’ men had stayed behind.

There

**470 Cronus’ son:** Zeus’ father, Cronus, was a Titan, one of an earlier race of gods.

**483 offing:** the part of the deep sea visible from the shore.