

# O from the DYSSEY

Homer

translated by Robert Fitzgerald



- 1 Troy
- 2 Cicones
- 3 Lotus Eaters
- 4 Cyclops

- 5 Island of Aeolia
- 6 Laestrygonians
- 7 Circe
- 8 Teiresias and the Land of the Dead

- 9 Circe
- 10 Sirens
- 11 Charybdis
- 12 Scylla

- 13 Thrinakia
- 14 Calypso
- 15 Phaeacia
- 16 Ithaca



## TELL THE STORY

Homer opens with an invocation, or prayer, asking the Muse<sup>o</sup> to help him sing his tale. Notice how the singer gives his listeners hints about how his story is to end.

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

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.

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, the Sun,  
and he who moves all day through heaven  
took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,  
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

Begin when all the rest who left behind them  
headlong death in battle or at sea  
had long ago returned, while he alone still hungered  
for home and wife. Her ladyship Calypso  
clung to him in her sea-hollowed caves—  
a nymph, immortal and most beautiful,  
who craved him for her own.

And when long years and seasons  
wheeling brought around that point of time  
ordained for him to make his passage homeward,  
trials and dangers, even so, attended him  
even in Ithaca, near those he loved.

Yet all the gods had pitied Lord Odysseus,  
all but Poseidon, raging cold and rough  
against the brave king till he came ashore  
at last on his own land. . . .

<sup>o</sup>The Greeks believed that there were nine Muses, daughters of Zeus, the chief god. The Muses inspired people to produce music, poetry, dance, and all the other arts.

**2. contending** (kən·tend'ɪŋ) *v.* used as *n.*: fighting; dealing with difficulties.

### Oral presentation.

1–32. Read this prayer to the Muse aloud. (You and a partner could read it as a chorus, or you could alternate with single voices.) What does Homer tell you about the hero and about what is going to happen to him?

(from Book 1)



# PART ONE: THE WANDERINGS

## CALYPSO, THE SWEET NYMPH

Books 1–4 of the epic tell about Odysseus’s son, Telemachus. Telemachus has been searching the Mediterranean world for his father, who has never returned from the ten-year Trojan War. (Today, Odysseus would be listed as missing in action.)

When we first meet Odysseus, in Book 5 of the epic, he is a prisoner of the beautiful goddess Calypso. The old soldier is in despair: He has spent ten years (seven of them as Calypso’s not entirely unwilling captive) trying to get home.

The goddess Athena has supported and helped Odysseus on his long journey. Now she begs her father, Zeus, to help her favorite, and Zeus agrees. He sends the messenger god Hermes to Calypso’s island to order Odysseus released. Although Calypso is not described as evil, her seductive charms—even her promises of immortality for Odysseus—threaten to keep the hero away from his wife, Penelope.

35 No words were lost on Hermes the Wayfinder  
who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on,  
ambrosial,<sup>o</sup> golden, that carry him over water  
or over endless land in a swish of the wind,  
**A** and took the wand with which he charms asleep—  
or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men.  
So wand in hand he paced into the air,  
40 shot from Pieria<sup>o</sup> down, down to sea level,  
and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling  
between the wave crests of the desolate sea  
will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings;  
**B** no higher above the whitecaps Hermes flew  
45 until the distant island lay ahead,  
then rising shoreward from the violet ocean  
he stepped up to the cave. Divine Calypso,  
the mistress of the isle, was now at home.  
Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing  
50 **C** scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke  
and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low  
in her sweet voice, before her loom aweaving,  
she passed her golden shuttle to and fro.  
A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves  
55 of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress.  
Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—  
horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued  
beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea.  
Around the smooth-walled cave a crooking vine  
60 held purple clusters under ply<sup>o</sup> of green;

35. **ambrosial** (am·brō'zhəl) *adj.*: fit for the gods; divine. Nectar and ambrosia are the drink and food that kept the gods immortal.

40. **Pieria** (pī·ir'ē·ə): place in central Greece not far from Olympus; a favorite spot of Hermes'.



Man with a headband. Detail from a bronze statue (c. 460–450 B.C.).

60. **ply** (plī) *n.*: twisted strands.



and four springs, bubbling up near one another  
shallow and clear, took channels here and there  
through beds of violets and tender parsley.  
Even a god who found this place  
65 would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight:  
so Hermes did; but when he had gazed his fill  
he entered the wide cave. Now face-to-face  
the magical Calypso recognized him,  
as all immortal gods know one another  
70 on sight—though seeming strangers, far from home.  
But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus,  
who sat apart, as a thousand times before,  
and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet  
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. . . .

D

*Hermes tells Calypso that she must give up Odysseus forever. Now we are directly introduced to Odysseus. Notice what this great warrior is doing when we first meet him.*


75 The strong god glittering left her as he spoke,  
and now her ladyship, having given heed  
to Zeus's mandate, went to find Odysseus  
in his stone seat to seaward—tear on tear  
brimming his eyes. The sweet days of his lifetime  
80 were running out in anguish over his exile,  
for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.  
Though he fought shy of her and her desire,  
he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.  
But when day came he sat on the rocky shore  
85 and broke his own heart groaning, with eyes wet  
scanning the bare horizon of the sea.  
Now she stood near him in her beauty, saying:

E

“O forlorn man, be still.  
Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel  
90 your life consumed here; I have pondered it,  
and I shall help you go. . . .”

*Calypso promises Odysseus a raft and provisions to help him homeward without harm—provided the gods wish it. Now Odysseus and Calypso say goodbye.*


Swiftly she turned and led him to her cave,  
and they went in, the mortal and immortal.  
He took the chair left empty now by Hermes,

 33–66. There is a great deal of nature **imagery** in this episode. Jot down some of the images that help you see Hermes' flight. What images describing Calypso's island appeal to your senses of sight, hearing, and smell? How does the natural beauty of Calypso's island compare with the reality of Odysseus's situation?



National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Hermes. Bronze statue (5th century B.C.).

 88–91. Zeus ordered Calypso to free Odysseus, but the nymph claims that the idea is her own. Why do you think she does this? What is your opinion of her deception?



95 where the divine Calypso placed before him  
victuals and drink of men; then she sat down  
facing Odysseus, while her serving maids  
brought nectar and ambrosia to her side.  
Then each one's hands went out on each one's feast  
100 until they had had their pleasure; and she said:

“Son of Laertes,<sup>o</sup> versatile Odysseus,  
after these years with me, you still desire  
your old home? Even so, I wish you well.  
If you could see it all, before you go—  
105 all the adversity you face at sea—  
you would stay here, and guard this house, and be  
immortal—though you wanted her forever,  
that bride for whom you pine each day.

Can I be less desirable than she is?

110 **A** Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals  
compare with goddesses in grace and form?”

To this the strategist Odysseus answered:

“My lady goddess, there is no cause for anger.  
My quiet Penelope—how well I know—  
115 would seem a shade before your majesty,  
death and old age being unknown to you,  
while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day  
I long for home, long for the sight of home. . . .”

*So Odysseus builds the raft and sets sail. But the sea god Poseidon is by no means ready to allow an easy passage over his watery domain. He raises a storm and destroys the raft. It is only with the help of Athena and a sea nymph that Odysseus arrives, broken and battered, on the island of Scheria (skē'rē·ə). There he hides himself in a pile of leaves and falls into a deep sleep.*

120 **B** A man in a distant field, no hearth fires near,  
will hide a fresh brand<sup>o</sup> in his bed of embers  
to keep a spark alive for the next day;  
so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself,  
while over him Athena showered sleep  
that his distress should end, and soon, soon.  
125 In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.

(from Book 5)


### Vocabulary

**adversity** (ad·vər'sə·tē) n.: hardship; great misfortune.

101. Laertes (lā·ur'tēz').



Calypso and Odysseus. Detail from a red-figured vase (5th century B.C.).

 101–118. According to Calypso, what would Odysseus gain by staying with her? What does Odysseus's response tell you about his feelings for his wife? How has Odysseus managed to say no to Calypso and still not offend her?

120. **fresh brand:** burning stick.



# Calypso

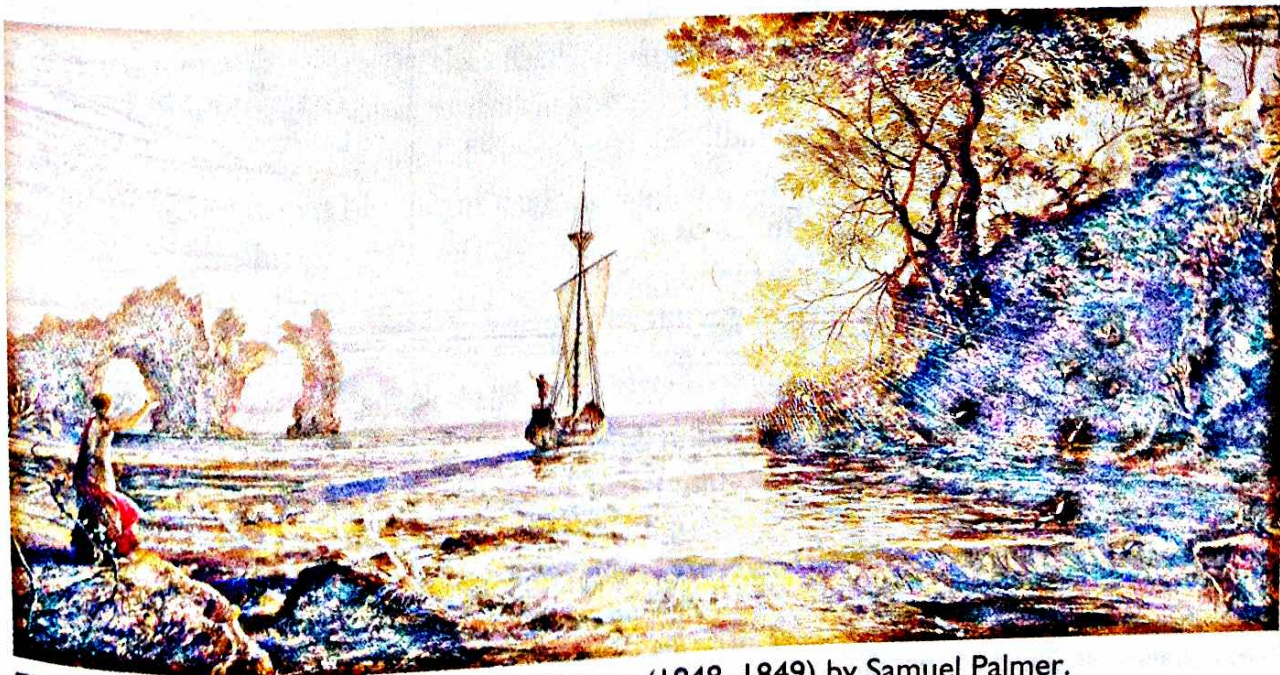
Suzanne Vega

My name is Calypso  
And I have lived alone  
I live on an island  
And I waken to the dawn  
5 A long time ago  
I watched him struggle with the sea  
I knew that he was drowning  
And I brought him into me  
Now today  
10 Come morning light  
He sails away  
After one last night  
I let him go.

My name is Calypso  
15 My garden overflows  
Thick and wild and hidden  
Is the sweetness there that grows  
My hair it blows long  
As I sing into the wind  
20 I tell of nights  
Where I could taste the salt on his skin

Salt of the waves  
And of tears  
And though he pulled away  
25 I kept him here for years  
I let him go.

My name is Calypso  
I have let him go  
In the dawn he sails away  
30 To be gone forever more  
And the waves will take him in again  
But he'll know their ways now  
I will stand upon the shore  
With a clean heart  
35 And my song in the wind  
The sand will sting my feet  
And the sky will burn  
It's a lonely time ahead  
I do not ask him to return  
40 I let him go  
I let him go.



The Whitworth Art Gallery, the University of Manchester.

The Departure of Ulysses from the Isle of Calypso (1848–1849) by Samuel Palmer.



## “I AM LAERTES’ SON. . . .”

*Odysseus is found by the daughter of Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians. That evening he is a guest at court (Books 6–8).*

*To the ancient people of Greece and Asia Minor, all guests were godsent. They had to be treated with great courtesy before they could be asked to identify themselves and state their business. That night, at the banquet, the stranger who was washed up on the beach is seated in the guest’s place of honor. A minstrel, or singer, is called, and the mystery guest gives him a gift of pork, crisp with fat, and requests a song about Troy. In effect, Odysseus is asking for a song about himself.*

*Odysseus weeps as the minstrel’s song reminds him of all his companions, who will never see their homes again. Now Odysseus is asked by the king to identify himself. It is here that he begins the story of his journey.*

Now this was the reply Odysseus made: . . .

“I am Laertes’ son, Odysseus.

Men hold me

**A** formidable for guile in peace and war:  
this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim.

130 My home is on the peaked seamark of Ithaca  
under Mount Neion’s windblown robe of leaves,  
in sight of other islands—Doulikhion,  
Same, wooded Zakynthos—Ithaca  
being most lofty in that coastal sea,  
135 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  
140 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.

145 **B** 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?

### Vocabulary

**formidable** (fôr’mə·də·bəl) *adj.*: awe-inspiring by reason of excellence; strikingly impressive.


εἶμ’ Ὀδυσσεὺς Λαερτιάδης,  
ὅς πᾶσι δόλοισιν  
ἀνθρώποισι μέλω, καί  
μεν κλέος οὐρανὸν  
ἵκει. ναιετάω δ’  
Ἰθάκην εὐδείελον·  
ἐν δ’ ὄρος αὐγῆ,  
Νήριτον εἰνοσίφυλλον  
ἀριπρεπές· ἀμφὶ δὲ  
νῆσοι πολλαὶ  
ναιετάουσι μάλα  
σχεδὸν ἀλλήλησι,  
Δουλίχιόν τε· Σάμη  
τε καὶ ὑλήεσσα  
Ζάκυνθος.

The passage beginning “I am Laertes’ son” in Greek.



150 The wind that carried west from Ilion<sup>o</sup>  
 brought me to Ismaros, on the far shore,  
 a strongpoint on the coast of the Cicones.  
 I stormed that place and killed the men who fought. **C**  
 Plunder we took, and we enslaved the women,  
 to make division, equal shares to all—  
 155 but on the spot I told them: ‘Back, and quickly!  
 Out to sea again!’ My men were mutinous,  
 fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep  
 they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle,  
 feasting—while fugitives went inland, running  
 160 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  
 and blades of spring. So doom appeared to us,  
 165 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  
 holding our beach, although so far outnumbered;  
 170 but when the sun passed toward unyoking time,  
 then the Achaeans, one by one, gave way.  
 Six benches were left empty in every ship  
 that evening when we pulled away from death. **D**  
 And this new grief we bore with us to sea:  
 175 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.  
 Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north  
 180 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.  
 We saw death in that fury, dropped the yards,<sup>o</sup>  
 185 unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:<sup>o</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.  
 Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested,  
 190 letting the steersmen and the breeze take over. **E**

149. **Ilion** (il'ē·än'): another name for Troy.

 152–160. What do you think of the way Odysseus and his men behave toward the Cicones? Do armies behave like this in modern times?

184. **yards** (yārdz) *n.*: rods supporting the sails.

185. **lee** (lē) *n.*: place of shelter 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  
a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.<sup>o</sup>  
195 Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea  
before dangerous high winds.”

(from Book 9)

194. Cythera (si·thir'ə).

## THE LOTUS EATERS

“Upon the tenth  
we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters,  
who live upon that flower. We landed there  
200 to take on water. All ships' companies  
mustered<sup>o</sup> alongside for the midday 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,  
205 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  
210 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  
215 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,  
and we moved out again on our seafaring. . . .”

(from Book 9)

201. **mustered** (mus'tərd) v.:  
gathered; assembled.



**204–215.** Why does  
Odysseus tie down the three men?  
What does this action tell you about  
him?