

"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

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 Aea, 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
 145 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,
 ὃς πᾶσι δόλοισιν
 ἀνθρώποισι μέλω, καὶ
 μὲν κλέος οὐρανὸν
 ἵκει. ναιετάω δ'
 Ἰθάκην εὐδείελον·
 ἐν δ' ὄρος ἀγρῆ,
 Νήριτον εἰνοσίφυλλον
 ἀριπρεπέε· ἀμφὶ δὲ
 νῆσοι πολλαὶ
 ναιετάουσι μάλα
 σχεδὸν ἀλλήλησι,
 175 Δουλίχιόν τε· Σάμη
 τε καὶ ὕληεσσα
 Ζάκυνθος.


The passage beginning "I am Laertes' son" in Greek.

ἡ Λαερτιάδης,
λοισιν
μέλω, καί
οὐρανὸν
ἄω δ'
δδείλον·
αὐτῆ,
σοσίφωλλον
ἀμφὶ δὲ
λαί
ι μάλα
λήλησι,
τε· Σάμη
εσσα

inning "I am
Greek.

The wind that carried west from Ilion^o
brought me to Ismaros, on the far shore,
150 a strongpoint on the coast of the Cicones.
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!
155 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
to call to arms the main force of Cicones.
160 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.
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,^o
185 unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:^o
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.

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.

195 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.^o
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

200 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^o alongside for the midday meal.
Then I sent out two picked men and a runner
to learn what race of men that land sustained.
205 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,
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?