

while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

385 In a smithy^o
one sees a white-hot axhead or an adze^o
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.
390 The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,
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
395 who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.
Some heard him; and they came by divers^o 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.
400 Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man
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^o reply:
405 ‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
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?’

So saying
they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
410 to see how like a charm the name deceived them.
Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide
for any silly beast or man who bolted—
415 hoping somehow I might be such a fool.
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,

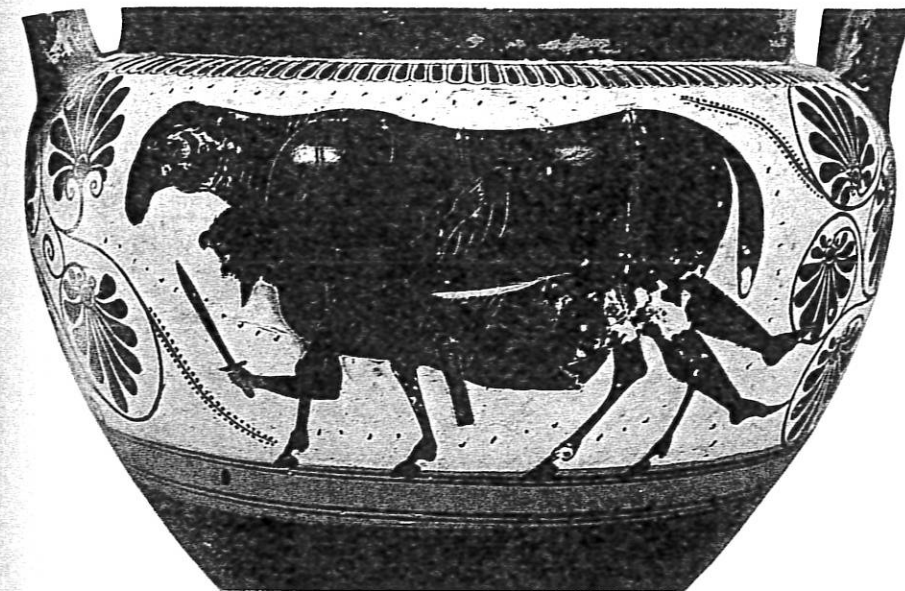
385. **smithy** (smith'ē) *n.*: black-smith's shop, where iron tools are made.
386. **adze** (adz) *n.*: axlike tool with a long, curved blade.

396. **divers** (dī'vərz) *adj.*: diverse; various.

404. **sage** (sāj) *adj.*: wise.



Odysseus and his men blinding the Cyclops. Hydria, or water jar (530–510 B.C.).
Collection Villa Guilia, Rome.



Odysseus escaping the cave of Polyphemus under the belly of the ram. Detail from a krater, a vessel for holding wine (c. 510 B.C.).
Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, Germany.

420 until a trick came—and it pleased me well.
The Cyclops’ rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
fleeces, a dark violet.

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

When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
435 and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
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^o
440 the giant’s blind hands blundering never found.
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,

439. **pectoral fleece**: wool on an animal’s chest.


weighted by wool and me with my meditations.
The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

445 'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest
in the night cave? You never linger so,
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.
450 Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving
over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue^o
and his accurst companions burnt it out
when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
455 Oh, had you brain and voice to tell
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.'

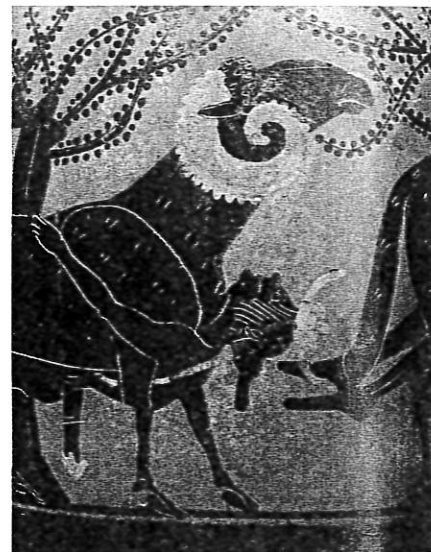
460 He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly,
going this way and that to untie the men.
With many glances back, we rounded up
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
465 and drove them down to where the good ship lay.
We saw, as we came near, our fellows' 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,
470 and in a low voice told them: 'Load this herd;
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 offshore as shouted words would carry,
475 I sent a few back to the adversary:
'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
480 under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!'

Vocabulary

adversary (ad'vər·ser'ē) *n.*: enemy; opponent.

 421–442. Explain
Odysseus's trick. What do you
visualize happening in this scene?

451. **carrion rogue**: rotten
scoundrel. *Carrion* is decaying flesh.



Odysseus escaping under the ram.
Detail from a black-figured convex
lecythus (c. 590 B.C.), by the
Ambush Vase Painter.
Staatliche Antikensammlung, Munich,
Germany.

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
485 that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.
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
490 kicking the foam sternward, making head
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!'

495 'That tidal wave he made on the first throw
all but beached us.'

'All but stove us in!'

'Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he'll get the range and lob^o a boulder.'

498. **lob** (lāb) *v.*: toss.

'Aye

He'll smash our timbers and our heads together!'

500 I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
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:
505 Laertes' son, whose home's on Ithaca!'

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

'Now comes the weird^o upon me, spoken of old.
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,^o
a son of Eurymus;^o great length of days
510 he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
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.

515 But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—

507. **weird** (wird) *n.*: fate.

508. **Telemus** (tel'ə·məs).

509. **Eurymus** (yūr'ē·məs).

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
520 fathered me, and, if he will, he may
heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.

Few words I shouted in reply to him:

525 'If I could take your life I would and take
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!
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:

530 'O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:
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
535 among his family in his fatherland,
far be that day, and dark the years between.
Let him lose all companions, and return
under strange sail to bitter days at home.' . . ."


(from Book 9)

Here we will imagine that Homer stops reciting for the night. The blind poet might take a glass of wine before turning in. The listeners would go off to various corners of the local nobleman's house. They might discuss highlights of the poet's tale among themselves and look forward to the next evening's installment.



Louvre, Paris, France.

Polyphemus. Terra-cotta head
(4th century B.C.).

 538. Take a few minutes to list what you think are the highlights of Odysseus's journey so far. What questions do you have? What do you think will happen next?

 Read "Welcome: A Religious Duty" on page 771. Then, as you continue reading the story, trace the ways Homer repeatedly dramatizes the importance of mutual respect among people. Think about your own ideas of hospitality today—what are the customs in your family and neighborhood? What are the customs in American society as a whole?

A CLOSER LOOK

Welcome: A Religious Duty

Today's visitors to Greece are often struck by the generous hospitality of its people. An ancient tradition lies behind the traveler's welcome in Greece—and it is a tradition that was fundamentally religious before it became a part of social custom.

Zeus, the king of the gods, demanded that strangers be treated graciously. Hosts had a religious duty to welcome strangers, and guests had a responsibility to respect hosts. The close interconnections and mutual respect in this host-guest relationship are reflected in the fact that the word *xenos* (zen'ōs) in ancient Greek can mean both "host" and "guest." The relationship is often symbolized in the *Odyssey* by the presentation of gifts. Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, for example, gives Odysseus a magically swift ship in which to sail home.

What happens when the host-guest relationship is abused or otherwise breaks down? In Homer's epic songs about the Trojan War, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the customs of hospitality are violated at least three times. The first occasion caused the war itself: Paris, prince of Troy, ran off with the beautiful Helen from Sparta while he was the guest of Helen's husband, Menelaus. For the Greeks this insult to *xenia* (hospitality) was at least as serious as Helen's unfaithfulness, and it meant that Zeus would, in the end, allow the Greeks to triumph in the long war.

The second example of violated hospitality has its humorous and ironic side.

In the *Odyssey* the Cyclops is monstrous not only because of his huge size and brutish appearance. He is set apart from civilized beings precisely because of his barbaric outlook on *xenia*. When Odysseus begs the Cyclops for hospitality and warns that Zeus will avenge an injured guest, the Cyclops replies that he and his kind "care not a whistle for . . . Zeus" (line 265). With dark humor the Cyclops uses the word *xeineion* (Greek for "guest-gift" or "noble gift") when he tells Odysseus that he will have the privilege of being eaten last (lines 362–363). The poetic justice of the Cyclops's blinding would not be lost on Homer's Greek audience.

The final example of a breach in the law of hospitality underlies the entire plot structure of the *Odyssey*: Back in Ithaca, year after year the suitors abuse the hospitality of Odysseus—an absent "host"—and threaten to take away his wife. The bloody vengeance that Odysseus wreaks on these suitors should be understood in the context of their outrageous violation of religious law. The suitors have turned hospitality into a crude mockery. Perhaps it is not accidental that Odysseus invokes the host-guest relationship just before the battle, when he quietly gives his son, Telemachus, the signal to fight (lines 1208–1209):

"Telemachus, the stranger [*xeinos*] you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you."