

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)


## 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)

194. *Cythera* (si·thir'ə).

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?*

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Troy: It Casts a Spell

The ancient Greeks and Romans had no doubt that the Trojan War really happened. They believed it took place around 1200 B.C. The Greek historian Thucydides (c. 460–c. 400 B.C.) believed that the real causes of the war were economic and political—he rejected Homer’s story of Helen’s abduction and the vengeance taken on Troy by the Greeks. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, most historians had dismissed the Trojan War as a legend.

Enter Heinrich Schliemann (1822–1890). Schliemann was a wealthy German merchant who turned archaeologist when he was middle-aged and archaeology was in its infancy. Armed with a well-thumbed copy of Homer’s *Iliad*, Schliemann arrived in northwestern Turkey in 1871. A few miles from the Dardanelles, the narrow and windy sea lane that divides Europe from Asia, Schliemann began excavations at a small hill called Hissarlik, perched about a hundred feet above a wide plain.

After five long years, Schliemann made an electrifying discovery. He unearthed gold cups, bracelets, and a spectacular gold headdress. Homer had called Troy “rich in gold,” and Schliemann now told the world he had found the treasure of Priam, the last king of Troy. (The gold’s eventful history was not over. Schliemann took the treasure to Berlin, where it disappeared at the end of World War II. “Priam’s gold” surfaced again in 1993 in Moscow’s Pushkin Museum.)

Schliemann went on to excavate Mycenae, the home of King Agamemnon in Greece. There he also found treasure.

Despite his successes, he was plagued by doubts about whether he had really found Troy. The level, or stratum, where the gold was discovered seemed too ancient to date from the traditional time of the Trojan War.

We now know that Schliemann’s treasure came from a stratum (called Troy II) that dated back to a thousand years before the Trojan War. Another level (Troy VIIA) showed violent destruction by fire around 1200 B.C. Could this have been Homer’s Troy? During the 1930s, another team of archaeologists (this time from the United States) thought so. Despite the inconsistencies that remain, the hill of Hissarlik is now widely accepted as the most likely location of the Trojan War.

In the 1990s, a fifteen-year archaeological project began in Turkey, directed by Professor Manfred Korfmann from the University of Tübingen in Germany. Whatever Korfmann and his international team of seventy scientists and ninety local workers discover, their presence at Troy in the third millennium is powerful proof that this ancient war still casts a spell.



## THE CYCLOPS

In his next adventure, Odysseus describes his encounter with the Cyclops named Polyphemus, Poseidon's one-eyed monster son. Polyphemus may represent the brute forces that any hero must overcome before he can reach home. Now Odysseus must rely on the special intelligence associated with his name. Odysseus is the cleverest of the Greek heroes because he is guided by the goddess of wisdom, Athena.

It is Odysseus's famed curiosity that leads him to the Cyclops's cave and that makes him insist on waiting for the barbaric giant.

Odysseus is still speaking to the court of King Alcinous.

220 "We lit a fire, burnt an offering,  
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence  
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,  
225 and we all scattered fast to the far wall.  
Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered  
the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams



The Cyclops (detail) (late 19th or early 20th century) by Odilon Redon.

Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, the Netherlands.

and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung  
high overhead a slab of solid rock  
230 to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,  
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  
235 he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;  
thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,  
sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,<sup>o</sup>  
and poured the whey to stand in bowls  
cooling until he drank it for his supper.  
240 When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,  
heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

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

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:

250 'We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course  
by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;  
homeward bound, but taking routes and ways  
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.  
We served under Agamemnon,<sup>o</sup> son of Atreus<sup>o</sup>—  
the whole world knows what city  
255 he laid waste, what armies he destroyed.  
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  
260 for the gods' courtesy; Zeus will avenge  
the unoffending guest.'

He answered this  
from his brute chest, unmoved:

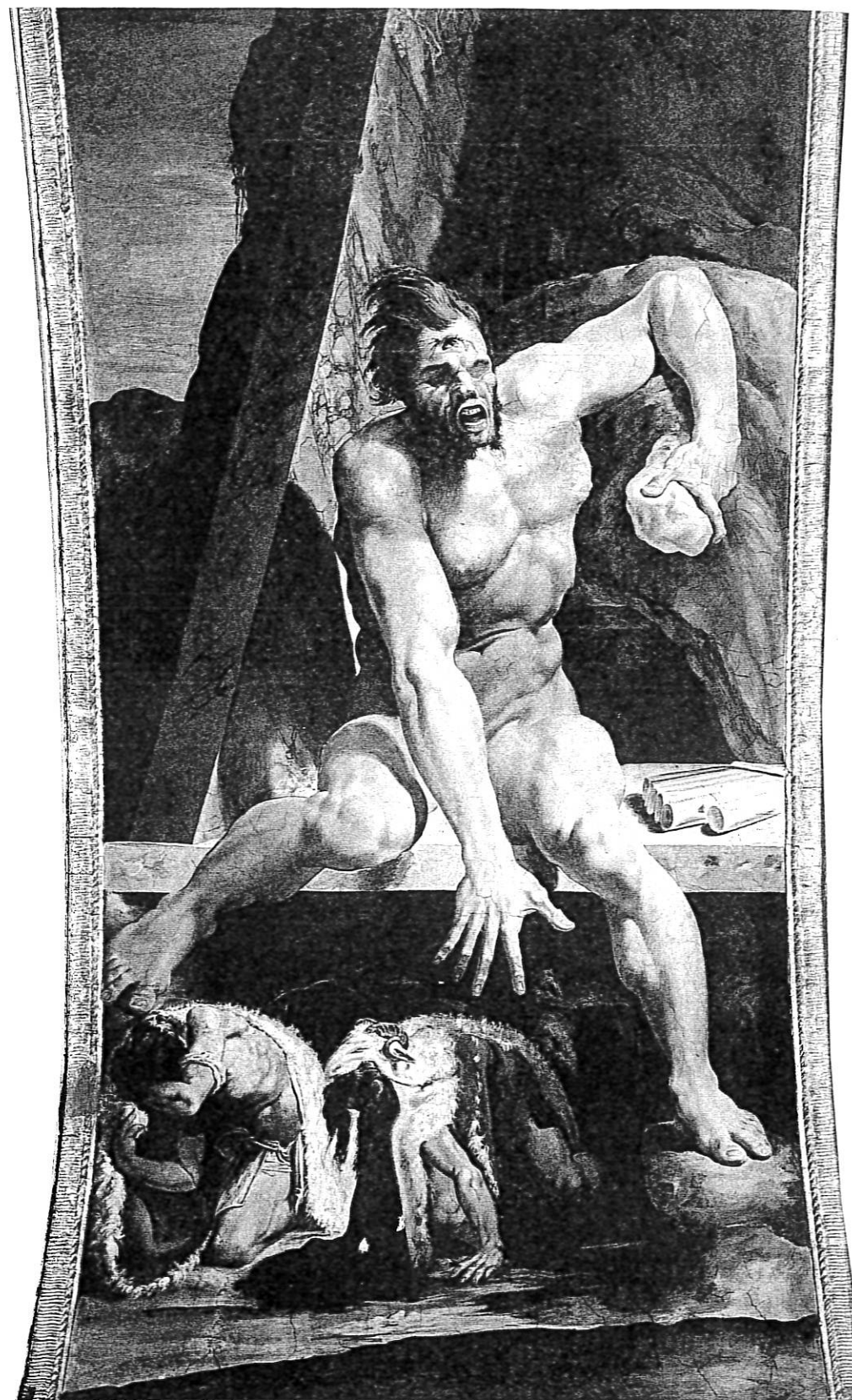
'You are a ninny,  
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,  
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes

### Vocabulary

**ravage** (rav'ij) v.: destroy violently; ruin.

237. **withy baskets:** baskets made from willow twigs.

253. **Agamemnon**  
(ag'ə·mem'nān'). **Atreus** (ā'trē·əs).



*Ulysses and His Companions on the Island of the Cyclops* (16th century) by Pellegrino Tibaldi.

Palazzo Poggi, Bologna, Italy.

265 care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus  
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.  
270 Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—  
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

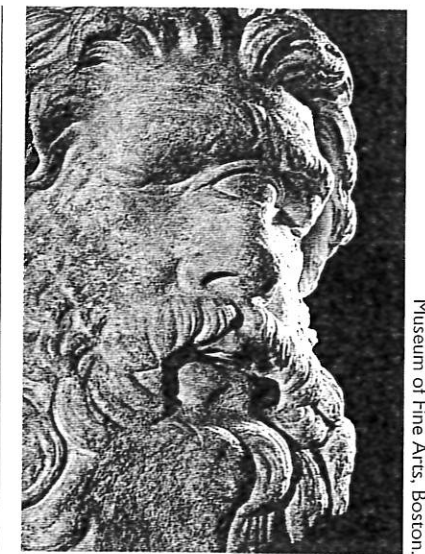
He thought he’d find out, but I saw through this,  
and answered with a ready lie:

‘My ship?’

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


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  
280 to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.  
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,  
285 powerless, looking on at this, appalled;  
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,  
290 and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went  
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  
295 move his ponderous doorway slab aside.  
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  
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,  
300 putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,  
his chores being all dispatched, he caught  
another brace<sup>o</sup> of men to make his breakfast,  
and whisked away his great door slab  
to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,  
305 reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.<sup>o</sup>



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The Cyclops Polyphemus. Detail from a marble statue (2nd century B.C.).

 289–295. Why doesn’t Odysseus kill the Cyclops at this moment? What factors must Odysseus consider in devising a successful plan of escape?

302. brace (brās) *n.*: pair.

305. quiver (kwiv’ər) *n.*: case for arrows.

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.

310 Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

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<sup>o</sup> of twenty oars, broad in the beam—  
315 a deep-seagoing craft—might carry:  
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  
320 to make a stake with pointed end. I held this  
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.

325 Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured  
along with me? Whose hand could bear to thrust  
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.

330 At evening came the shepherd with his flock,  
his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,  
entered the cave: by some shepherding 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  
335 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  
340 holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,  
looking up, saying:

'Cyclops, try some wine.

Here's liquor to wash down your scraps of men.  
Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried

#### Vocabulary

**profusion** (prō·fyōō'zhən) *n.*: large supply; abundance.

314. **lugger** (lug'ər) *n.*: type of sailboat.

Odysseus handing the drink to Polyphemus. Relief on a Grecian marble sarcophagus (1st century A.D.).  
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy.



345 under our planks. I meant it for an offering  
if you would help us home. But you are mad,  
unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,  
will any other traveler come to see you?'  
He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down  
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

350 'Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,  
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!'

355 Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.  
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.  
360 My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,  
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.'

365 Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,  
his great head lolling to one side; and sleep  
took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccuping,  
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,  
370 and cheered my men along with battle talk  
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  
375 gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops  
as more than natural force nerved them; straight  
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it  
deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it  
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill  
380 in planking, having men below to swing  
the two-handed strap that spins it in the groove.  
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket



Odysseus and three companions blinding Polyphemus. Detail from a Cyrenean cup (6th century B.C.).  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.