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"I Am Odysseus"

Odysseus is in the banquet hall of Alcinous (āl-sīnˈō-əs), King of Phaeacia (fē-āˈshə), who helps him on his way after all his comrades have been killed and his last vessel destroyed. Odysseus tells the story of his adventures thus 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.
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,
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
in her smooth caves, to be her heart's delight,
as Circe of Aeaea, 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
his own home and his parents? In far lands
he shall not, though he find a house of gold.
A re-creation of Odysseus' ship. The voyage of Odysseus from the site of Troy (in present-day Turkey) to Ithaca was re-created in 1985 in a trip led by British navigator Tim Severin.

What of my sailing, then, from Troy? What of those years of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? The wind that carried west from Ilion brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore, 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! 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. This was an army, trained to fight on horseback or, where the ground required, on foot. They came

25. Cicones (sɪˈkoʊnɛz).
30
35

600 AN EPIC POEM
with dawn over that terrain like the leaves
and blades of spring. So doom appeared to us,
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;
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:
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.

The Lotus-Eaters

Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north
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,
unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee:°
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,
letting the steersmen and the breeze take over.

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.°
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth
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 midday meal.