

### **Fiction Excerpt 3: "Odysseus and the Cyclops," from Homer's *Odyssey***

*Written by Homer, the *Odyssey* tells the story of Odysseus, a hero of the Trojan War, as he makes his way home. During the war, Odysseus proved himself to be clever and resourceful. The Trojan Horse, for example, had been his idea. When the war ended, Odysseus wanted nothing more than to return to his home of Ithaca, but his journey was not as quick as he'd hoped. It took ten years and required all of his cleverness and resourcefulness. In this excerpt, Odysseus describes what happened after he and his crew landed on an unknown island and encountered one-eyed creatures called Cyclops.*

I started with twelve men, the crew of my own ship, to find out what kind of men inhabited the country opposite us. . . . When we sailed up the coast of the mainland, we heard the voices of giants, and the bleating of their sheep and goats. And we saw a cave with a high roof, over whose entrance grew laurel shrubs, and many cattle, sheep, and goats were lying around at rest. We found an enclosure of rough stone in the form of a court, with tall pines and leafy oaks at the mouth of the cave. . . .

We were soon inside the cave, but we did not find the owner at home. We had carried with us a wineskin full of wine, which a priest of Apollo had given us. . . .

As we looked around the cave we wondered at what we saw. There were baskets all about heaped with cheeses, and pens of lambs separated into three folds. . . . And there were pails full of whey, and buckets of milk. My companions ate as much of the cheese as they liked, after which they begged to drive all the lambs and kids down to the ship.

But I would not allow this. It was my wish to stay there and see the cave dweller and find out what kind of a man he was. I thought he would give me a handsome present, according to the laws of hospitality. It was cold in the cave, so we lit a fire and sat down to wait for the owner to arrive.

He came toward evening, carrying a load of wood on his back, which he threw down with such a crash that my men ran with terror into the corners of the cave. The giant drove all such sheep and goats as would give him milk into the cave, leaving the others in the outside court, and then closed up the entrance with a rock so large that twenty-four four-wheeled wagons could not have moved it. . . .

When he had ended this work he lit a fire, and seeing the strangers he began to ask them questions, to find out who they were. His voice was deep and frightful, like the rumbling of a volcano, and our hearts trembled, but I found words to answer him: "We are Greeks, and come from Troy. It was our intention to return home, but contrary winds have driven us on this shore.

"We belong to the army of Agamemnon. . . . But now we throw ourselves at thy feet and pray that thou wilt receive us as guests, or else give us the gifts that are due to strangers, lest the gods avenge us."

. . . [The] Cyclops told us that we were fools to believe in the gods. "The Cyclops," he said, "care nothing for the gods. We are better than they are. If I spare thee, it will be of my own free will, and not for fear of the gods. But where are thy ships? Are they near here or far off?" This he said hoping to deceive us, but I saw through his trick and replied: "The storm has thrown our ships upon the cliffs and broken them to pieces. . . ."

The cruel monster did not answer me again, but he seized two of my companions and dashed them to the ground with such force that they died. . . .

We passed the night in mourning. . . . As soon as daylight appeared, the Cyclops woke up and lit a fire and milked his sheep again. . . . When his morning meal was done, he rolled the stone back from the door and drove his beasts out, not forgetting to secure the entrance. We could hear his noisy shouts a far way off as he led his flocks over the grassy heights, and we began to make plans to destroy him.

We found a great club of green olive wood in the cave. . . . It was as large as the mast of a ship. . . . I cut off a fathom's length [six feet] from this club and handed the piece to my companions, who smoothed off the sides and sharpened it at one end. This being done, I put the sharp end of it into the fire. The stick became very hard, and then I hid the weapon under a heap of litter that was piled up in the cave. We cast lots to see who should assist me to put out the eye of the Cyclops when he was asleep.

When evening came, the Cyclops returned to the cave with his fat sheep and kids. He seemed to suspect that there was mischief afoot, for he did not leave any of them outside. . . . I filled a large drinking vessel with the wine from our wineskin and stepped boldly out and said to him: "Here is a cup of wine which I brought, hoping that thou wouldst spare my life, O Cyclops, for thy wrath [anger] is boundless." He took the cup and drank. The wine delighted him greatly, and he handed me the cup after emptying it and said: "Give me another draught and tell me thy name. I will give thee a generous gift, such as becomes a host. . . ."

Three times I filled the cup and brought it to him, and three times the Cyclops drank it like a madman. When the wine had overpowered him, I said to him: "Cyclops, thou dost wish to know my name, and I will tell it, but thou must give me the present thou has promised. My name is Nobody. My father and mother gave

me this name and my friends all call me by it." "Then," said the Cyclops, "I shall eat Nobody last of all. This is my present."

After these words he fell asleep. . . . I took the piece of olive wood that my men had sharpened and put the point of it into the fire and held it there until it was a glowing coal. My comrades stood near me and I encouraged them with brave words. We thrust the burning stick into the Cyclops's eye and blinded him. He howled with pain, and, stung to madness, he seized the stick and flung it across the cave.

He called to the other Cyclops, who lived in [other] caves on the surrounding mountains, while we hid ourselves in fear in the most remote corners of the cave. The giants heard him and came running to help him, but they could not get into the cave. They stood near the stone, close to the door, and called out: "What ails thee, Polyphemus?" . . . "Woe is me!" cried Polyphemus. "Nobody is trying to kill me!" "Then why does thou shout and cry for help?" said they. "If nobody hurts thee, then thou art not hurt."

With these words they went off, and we rejoiced greatly that my trick had deceived them.

Polyphemus, groaning with pain, tried to feel his way with his hands to the mouth of the cavern. Having succeeded in this, he rolled back the stone and sat down at the entrance and stretched out his hands in order to catch us if we should happen to try to get out among the sheep.

But we were not so foolish as to be caught in this way. There were in the cave a number of stout and woolly rams. Of these I put three abreast and tied them together with twigs that happened to be in the cave. Under each middle ram I tied one of my companions. The two sheep, one each side of him, hid the man completely. For myself I selected the stoutest ram of the flock, and seizing his shaggy wool in my hands, held fast to him with my knees and arms.

The sun rose and the animals began to hasten out to the pastures. The Cyclops, though nearly exhausted with pain, passed his hands over the backs of the sheep. . . . He did not find out our trick, and my companions all escaped safely. Last of all, the ram that carried me came to the door, because I was so heavy that he could hardly walk with me hanging on to him.

Polyphemus felt his back and recognized him at once as his favorite ram, and said: "Dearest of all my sheep, why dost thou go last? Commonly thou wert the first of

the flock to hasten to the rich pasture and the cool spring. . . . But today thou art last of all. Does thou grieve because thy master hath lost his eye, which Nobody has put out? But wait a little. He shall not escape death. Couldst thou only speak, my ram, thou wouldst tell me at once where the scoundrel is; and then thou shouldst see how I would dash him against the rocks."

Speaking such words as these, he let the ram go. When we were safely out of the cave, we gladly took to our feet and drove the fat sheep down to our boat with all haste. . . .

When we were beyond the reach of the Cyclops, I called out to tease him, "Ha! Cyclops, Cyclops, thou has not been entertaining a coward. Zeus and the other gods have avenged the brave men whom thou didst so cruelly destroy."

The Cyclops heard my words and grew furious. He seized a large rock and threw it with all his might toward the place where he had heard my voice.

The rock fell in front of my ship, and the waves which it raised carried us back on shore. I seized a large pole and shoved the boat back into the water, commanding my men to ply their oars vigorously, that we might escape destruction. My companions begged me not to excite the dangerous monster further; but when we were a long way out I shouted to him: "Cyclops, if ever anybody asks thee who put out thine eye, tell him it was Odysseus, the son of Laertes, conqueror of Troy."

. . . As soon as Polyphemus heard this, he raised his hands to heaven and prayed to Poseidon. "My father," he said, "hear me, if in truth I am thy son. Grant me this prayer. May Odysseus never return to his own country, or, if it be thy will that he reach home and friends again, let his return be late and sorrowful."