

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



‘Cyclops, try some wine.

Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men.

125 Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried
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?

130 He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,
how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.

135 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!

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:

Notes _____

PREDICT

Pause at line 126. Why do you think Odysseus offers the Cyclops wine?

WORD STUDY

Underline the **alliteration**—repetition of consonant sounds in words close together—in line 138. Here *fuddle* means “drunkenness.”

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 143. Odysseus doesn't tell the Cyclops his real name. Underline the name he uses. What word does the name sound like?

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

What happens in lines 146–167?

WORD STUDY

Underline the **extended similes** in lines 160–163 and 166–171, which use gruesome comparisons to help you see how the eye is gouged out.

'Cyclops,

140 you ask my honorable name? Remember
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
everyone calls me Nohbdy.'

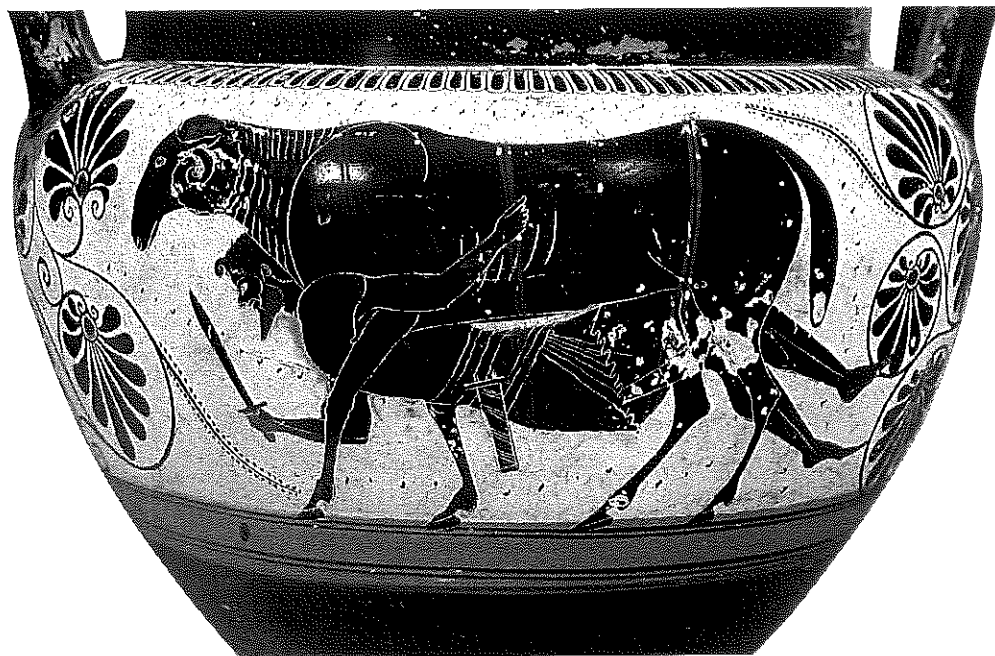
And he said:

'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
145 Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

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.

150 Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike
deep in the embers, charring it again,
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,
155 reddened and glowed as if about to catch.
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
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
160 deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
in planking, having men below to swing
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket
165 while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

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.



HERO

Pause at line 202. What character trait helps Odysseus defeat the Cyclops?

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
195 for any silly beast or man who bolted—
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?
200 I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics,
reasoning as a man will for dear life,
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.
The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

205 I tied them silently together, twining
cords of willow from the ogre's bed;
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
210 the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,

Copyright © by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. All rights reserved.

and hung myself under his kinky belly,
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

215 When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
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,
220 the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece¹⁰
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,
weighted by wool and me with my meditations.
225 The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'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
230 leading along the streams, until at evening
you run to be the first one in the fold.
Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving
over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue¹¹
and his accurst companions burnt it out
235 when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
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
240 his brains would strew the floor, and I should have
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'

**MONITOR YOUR
COMPREHENSION**

Pause at line 214. What is Odysseus's plan to save himself and his men?

**COMPARE &
CONTRAST**

Re-read lines 226–232. How is the Cyclops's treatment of his ram different from his treatment of the Greeks?

10. **pectoral fleece:** wool on an animal's chest.
11. **carrion rogue:** rotten scoundrel. *Carrion* is decaying flesh.

**MONITOR YOUR
COMPREHENSION**

What is happening in lines
242–255?

VOCABULARY

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

**MONITOR YOUR
COMPREHENSION**

Pause at line 271. What hap-
pens when Odysseus taunts
the Cyclops?

- 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.
- 245 With many glances back, we rounded up
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
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
- 250 tallying those who had not fled from death.
I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,
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
- 255 and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,
as far offshore as shouted words would carry,
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:
- 'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a Caveman's hands?
- 260 How do you like the beating that we gave you,
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!
- The blind thing in his doubled fury broke
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.
- 265 Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave
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
- 270 to put their backs into a racing stroke—
row, row or perish. So the long oars bent
kicking the foam sternward, making head
until we drew away, and twice as far.
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
- 275 in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!
Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’

‘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,
280 he’ll get the range and lob¹² a boulder.’

‘Aye
He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,
if ever mortal man inquire
285 how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him
Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:
Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird¹³ upon me, spoken of old.
290 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,¹⁴
a son of Eurymus;¹⁵ great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.
295 Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.
But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—
you put me down with wine, you blinded me.

12. **lob** (läb) *v.*: toss.

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

14. **Telemus** (tel’ə-məs).

15. **Eurymus** (yōō’rē-məs).

IDENTIFY

Odysseus’s men speak for the first time in lines 275–281. What is their reaction to their captain’s behavior?

HEROES

Odysseus ignores his men’s advice and continues to taunt the Cyclops in lines 282–287. What does Odysseus’s behavior reveal about him?

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Pause at line 298. Polyphemus had been warned by a wizard that Odysseus would blind him. In what ways is Odysseus different from the attacker the Cyclops had imagined?
