

The Odyssey

By Richard Lattimore

Chapter One

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven
far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel.
Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of,
many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea,
5 struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.
Even so he could not save his companions, hard though
he strove to; they were destroyed by their own wild recklessness,
fools, who devoured the oxen of Helios, the Sun God,
and he took away the day of their homecoming. From some point
10 here, goddess, daughter of Zeus, speak, and begin our story.
Then all the others, as many as fled sheer destruction,
were at home now, having escaped the sea and the fighting.
This one alone, longing for his wife and his homecoming,
was detained by the queenly nymph Kalypso, bright among goddesses, in her
15 hollowed caverns, desiring that he should be her husband.
But when in the circling of the years that very year came
in which the gods had spun for him his time of homecoming
to Ithaka, not even then was he free of his trials
nor among his own people. But all the gods pitied him
20 except Poseidon; he remained relentlessly angry
with godlike Odysseus, until his return to his own country.
But Poseidon was gone now to visit the far Aithiopians,
Aithiopians, most distant of men, who live divided,
some at the setting of Hyperion, some at his rising,
25 to receive a hecatomb of bulls and rams. There
he sat at the feast and took his pleasure. Meanwhile the other
Olympian gods were gathered together in the halls of Zeus.
First among them to speak was the father of gods and mortals,
for he was thinking in his heart of stately Aigisthos,
30 whom Orestes, Agamemnon's far-famed son, had murdered.
Remembering him he spoke now before the immortals:
'Oh for shame, how the mortals put the blame upon us
gods, for they say evils come from us, but it is they, rather,
who by their own recklessness win sorrow beyond what is given,
35 as now lately, beyond what was given, Aigisthos married
the wife of Atreus' son, and murdered him on his homecoming,
though he knew it was sheer destruction, for we ourselves had told him,
sending Hermes, the mighty watcher, Argeiphontes,
not to kill the man, nor court his lady for marriage;
40 for vengeance would come on him from Orestes, son of Atreides,

whenever he came of age and longed for his own country.
So Hermes told him, but for all his kind intention he could not
persuade the mind of Aigisthos. And now he has paid for everything.'

Then in turn the goddess gray-eyed Athene answered him:
45 'Son of Kronos, our father, O lordliest of the mighty,
Aigisthos indeed has been struck down in a death well merited.
Let any other man who does thus perish as he did.
But the heart in me is torn for the sake of wise Odysseus,
unhappy man, who still, far from his friends, is suffering
50 griefs, on the sea-washed island, the navel of all the waters,
a wooded island, and there a goddess has made her dwelling place;
she is daughter of malignant Atlas, who has discovered
all the depths of the sea, and himself sustains the towering
columns which bracket earth and sky and hold them together.
55 This is his daughter; she detains the grieving, unhappy
man, and ever with soft and flattering words she works to
charm him to forget Ithaka; and yet Odysseus,
straining to get sight of the very smoke uprising
from his own country, longs to die. But you, Olympian,
60 the heart in you is heedless of him. Did not Odysseus
do you grace by the ships of the Argives, making sacrifice
in wide Troy? Why, Zeus, are you now so harsh with him?'

Then in turn Zeus who gathers the clouds made answer:
'My child, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier?
65 How could I forget Odysseus the godlike, he who
is beyond all other men in mind, and who beyond others
has given sacrifice to the gods, who hold wide heaven?

It is the Earth Encircler Poseidon who, ever relentless,
nurses a grudge because of the Cyclops, whose eye he blinded;
70 for Polyphemos like a god, whose power is greatest
over all the Cyclopes. Thoosa, a nymph, was his mother,
and she was daughter of Phorkys, lord of the barren salt water.
She in the hollows of the caves had lain with Poseidon.
For his sake Poseidon, shaker of the earth, although he does not
75 kill Odysseus, yet drives him back from the land of his fathers.
But come, let all of us who are here work out his homecoming
and see to it that he returns. Poseidon shall put away
his anger; for all alone and against the will of the other
immortal gods united he can accomplish nothing.'

Then in turn the goddess gray-eyed Athene answered him:
80 'Son of Kronos, our father, O lordliest of the mighty,
if in truth this is pleasing to the blessed immortals
that Odysseus of the many designs shall return home, then
let us dispatch Hermes, the guide, the slayer of Argos,
85 to the island of Ogygia, so that with all speed
he may announce to the lovely-haired nymph our absolute purpose,

the homecoming of enduring Odysseus, that he shall come back.
But I shall make my way to Ithaka, so that I may
stir up his son a little, and put some confidence in him
90 to summon into assembly the flowing-haired Achaians
and make a statement to all the suitors, who now forever
slaughter his crowding sheep and lumbering horn-curved cattle;
and I will convey him into Sparta and to sandy Pylos
to ask after his dear father's homecoming, if he can hear something,
95 and so that among people he may win a good reputation.'

Speaking so she bound upon her feet the fair sandals,
golden and immortal, that carried her over the water
as over the dry boundless earth abreast of the wind's blast.
Then she caught up a powerful spear, edged with sharp bronze,
100 heavy, huge, thick, wherewith she beats down the battalions of fighting
men, against whom she of the mighty father is angered,
and descended in a flash of speed from the peaks of Olympos . . .