

and she alone is denied a plunge in the Ocean's baths.
Hers were the stars the lustrous goddess told him
to keep hard to port as he cut across the sea.
And seventeen days he sailed, making headway well;
on the eighteenth, shadowy mountains slowly loomed ...
the Phaeacians' island reaching toward him now,
over the misty breakers, rising like a shield.

But now Poseidon, god of the earthquake, saw him—
just returning home from his Ethiopian friends,
from miles away on the Solymi mountain-range
he spied Odysseus sailing down the sea
and it made his fury boil even more.
He shook his head and rumbled to himself,
“Outrageous! Look how the gods have changed their minds
about Odysseus—while *I* was off with my Ethiopians.
Just look at him there, nearing Phaeacia's shores
where he's fated to escape his noose of pain
that's held him until now. Still my hopes ride high—
I'll give that man his swamping fill of trouble!”

With that he rammed the clouds together—both hands
clutching his trident—churned the waves into chaos, whipping
all the gales from every quarter, shrouding over in thunderheads
the earth and sea at once—and night swept down from the sky—
East and South Winds clashed and the raging West and North,
sprung from the heavens, roiled heaving breakers up—
and Odysseus' knees quaked, his spirit too;
numb with fear he spoke to his own great heart:
“Wretched man—what becomes of me now, at last?
I fear the nymph foretold it all too well—
on the high seas, she said, before I can reach
my native land I'll fill my cup of pain! And now,
look, it all comes to pass. What monstrous clouds—
King Zeus crowning the whole wide heaven black—
churning the seas in chaos, gales blasting,
raging around my head from every quarter—
my death-plunge in a flash, it's certain now!

Three, four times blessed, my friends-in-arms
who died on the plains of Troy those years ago,
serving the sons of Atreus to the end. Would to god
I'd died there too and met my fate that day the Trojans,
swarms of them, hurled at *me* with bronze spears,
fighting over the corpse of proud Achilles!
A hero's funeral then, my glory spread by comrades—
now what a wretched death I'm doomed to die!"

At that a massive wave came crashing down on his head,
a terrific onslaught spinning his craft round and round—
he was thrown clear of the decks—
the steering-oar wrenched
from his grasp—

and in one lightning attack the brawling
galewinds struck full-force, snapping the mast mid-shaft
and hurling the sail and sailyard far across the sea.
He went under a good long while, no fast way out,
no struggling up from under the giant wave's assault,
his clothing dragged him down—divine Calypso's gifts—
but at last he fought his way to the surface spewing
bitter brine, streams of it pouring down his head.
But half-drowned as he was, he'd not forget his craft—
he lunged after her through the breakers, laying hold
and huddling amidships, fled the stroke of death.
Pell-mell the rollers tossed her along down-current,
wild as the North Wind tossing thistle along the fields
at high harvest—dry stalks clutching each other tightly—
so the galewinds tumbled her down the sea, this way, that way,
now the South Wind flinging her over to North to sport with,
now the East Wind giving her up to West to harry on and on.

But someone saw him—Cadmus' daughter with lovely ankles,
Ino, a mortal woman once with human voice and called
Leucothea now she lives in the sea's salt depths,
esteemed by all the gods as she deserves.
She pitied Odysseus, tossed, tormented so—
she broke from the waves like a shearwater on the wing,

lit on the wreck and asked him kindly, “Ah poor man,
why is the god of earthquakes so dead set against you?
Strewing your way with such a crop of troubles!
But he can’t destroy you, not for all his anger.
Just do as I say. You seem no fool to me.
Strip off those clothes and leave your craft
for the winds to hurl, and swim for it now, you must,
strike out with your arms for landfall there,
Phaeacian land where destined safety waits.
Here, take this scarf,
tie it around your waist—it is immortal.
Nothing to fear now, neither pain nor death.
But once you grasp the mainland with your hands
untie it quickly, throw it into the wine-dark sea,
far from the shore, but you, you turn your head away!”

With that the goddess handed him the scarf
and slipped back in the heavy breaking seas
like a shearwater once again—
and a dark heaving billow closed above her.
But battle-weary Odysseus weighed two courses,
deeply torn, probing his fighting spirit: “Oh no—
I fear another immortal weaves a snare to trap me,
urging me to abandon ship! I won’t. Not yet.
That shore’s too far away—
I glimpsed it myself—where *she* says refuge waits.
No, here’s what I’ll do, it’s what seems best to *me*.
As long as the timbers cling and joints stand fast,
I’ll hold out aboard her and take a whipping—
once the breakers smash my craft to pieces,
then I’ll swim—no better plan for now.”

But just as great Odysseus thrashed things out,
Poseidon god of the earthquake launched a colossal wave,
terrible, murderous, arching over him, pounding down on him,
hard as a windstorm blasting piles of dry parched chaff,
scattering flying husks—so the long planks of his boat
were scattered far and wide. But Odysseus leapt aboard

one timber and riding it like a plunging racehorse
stripped away his clothes, divine Calypso's gifts,
and quickly tying the scarf around his waist
he dove headfirst in the sea,
stretched his arms and stroked for life itself.
But again the mighty god of earthquakes spied him,
shook his head and grumbled deep in his spirit, "Go, go,
after all you've suffered—rove your miles of sea—
till you fall in the arms of people loved by Zeus.
Even so I can hardly think you'll find
your punishments too light!"

With that threat

he lashed his team with their long flowing manes,
gaining Aegae port where his famous palace stands.

But Zeus's daughter Athena countered him at once.
The rest of the winds she stopped right in their tracks,
commanding them all to hush now, go to sleep.
All but the boisterous North—she whipped him up
and the goddess beat the breakers flat before Odysseus,
dear to Zeus, so he could reach the Phaeacians,
mingle with men who love their long oars
and escape his death at last.

Yes, but now,

adrift on the heaving swells two nights, two days—
quite lost—again and again the man foresaw his death.
Then when Dawn with her lovely locks brought on
the third day, the wind fell in an instant,
all glazed to a dead calm, and Odysseus,
scanning sharply, raised high by a groundswell,
looked up and saw it—landfall, just ahead.
Joy ... warm as the joy that children feel
when they see their father's life dawn again,
one who's lain on a sickbed racked with torment,
wasting away, slowly, under some angry power's onslaught—
then what joy when the gods deliver him from his pains!
So warm, Odysseus' joy when he saw that shore, those trees,
as he swam on, anxious to plant his feet on solid ground again.

But just offshore, as far as a man's shout can carry,
he caught the boom of a heavy surf on jagged reefs—
roaring breakers crashing down on an ironbound coast,
exploding in fury—

the whole sea shrouded—

sheets of spray—

no harbors to hold ships, no roadstead where they'd ride,
nothing but jutting headlands, riptooth reefs, cliffs.
Odysseus' knees quaked and the heart inside him sank;
he spoke to his fighting spirit, desperate: "Worse and worse!
Now that Zeus has granted a glimpse of land beyond my hopes,
now I've crossed this waste of water, the end in sight,
there's no way out of the boiling surf—I see no way!
Rugged reefs offshore, around them breakers roaring,
above them a smooth rock face, rising steeply, look,
and the surge too deep inshore, no spot to stand
on my own two legs and battle free of death.
If I clamber out, some big comber will hoist me,
dash me against that cliff—my struggles all a waste!
If I keep on swimming down the coast, trying to find
a seabeach shelving against the waves, a sheltered cove—
I dread it—another gale will snatch me up and haul me
back to the fish-infested sea, retching in despair.
Or a dark power will loose some monster at me,
rearing out of the waves—one of the thousands
Amphitrite's breakers teem with. Well I know
the famous god of earthquakes hates my very name!"

Just as that fear went churning through his mind
a tremendous roller swept him toward the rocky coast
where he'd have been flayed alive, his bones crushed,
if the bright-eyed goddess Pallas had not inspired him now.
He lunged for a reef, he seized it with both hands and clung
for dear life, groaning until the giant wave surged past
and so he escaped its force, but the breaker's backwash
charged into him full fury and hurled him out to sea.
Like pebbles stuck in the suckers of some octopus
dragged from its lair—so strips of skin torn

from his clawing hands stuck to the rock face.
A heavy sea covered him over, then and there
unlucky Odysseus would have met his death—
against the will of Fate—
but the bright-eyed one inspired him yet again.
Fighting out from the breakers pounding toward the coast,
out of danger he swam on, scanning the land, trying to find
a seabeach shelving against the waves, a sheltered cove,
and stroking hard he came abreast of a river's mouth,
running calmly, the perfect spot, he thought ...
free of rocks, with a windbreak from the gales.
As the current flowed he felt the river's god and
prayed to him in spirit: "Hear me, lord, whoever you are,
I've come to you, the answer to all my prayers—
rescue me from the sea, the Sea-lord's curse!
Even immortal gods will show a man respect,
whatever wanderer seeks their help—like me—
I throw myself on your mercy, on your current now—
I have suffered greatly. Pity me, lord,
your suppliant cries for help!"

So the man prayed

and the god stemmed his current, held his surge at once
and smoothing out the swells before Odysseus now,
drew him safe to shore at the river's mouth.
His knees buckled, massive arms fell limp,
the sea had beaten down his striving heart.
His whole body swollen, brine aplenty gushing
out of his mouth and nostrils—breathless, speechless,
there he lay, with only a little strength left in him,
deathly waves of exhaustion overwhelmed him now ...
But once he regained his breath and rallied back to life,
at last he loosed the goddess' scarf from his body,
dropped it into the river flowing out to sea
and a swift current bore it far downstream
and suddenly Ino caught it in her hands.
Struggling up from the banks, he flung himself
in the deep reeds, he kissed the good green earth
and addressed his fighting spirit, desperate still:

“Man of misery, what next? Is this the end?
If I wait out a long tense night by the banks,
I fear the sharp frost and the soaking dew together
will do me in—I’m bone-weary, about to breathe my last,
and a cold wind blows from a river on toward morning.
But what if I climb that slope, go for the dark woods
and bed down in the thick brush? What if I’m spared
the chill, fatigue, and a sweet sleep comes my way?
I fear wild beasts will drag me off as quarry.”

But this was the better course, it struck him now.
He set out for the woods and not far from the water
found a grove with a clearing all around and crawled
beneath two bushy olives sprung from the same root,
one olive wild, the other well-bred stock.
No sodden gusty winds could ever pierce them,
nor could the sun’s sharp rays invade their depths,
nor could a downpour drench them through and through,
so dense they grew together, tangling side-by-side.
Odysseus crept beneath them, scraping up at once
a good wide bed for himself with both hands.
A fine litter of dead leaves had drifted in,
enough to cover two men over, even three,
in the wildest kind of winter known to man.
Long-enduring great Odysseus, overjoyed at the sight,
bedded down in the midst and heaped the leaves around him.
As a man will bury his glowing brand in black ashes,
off on a lonely farmstead, no neighbors near,
to keep a spark alive—no need to kindle fire
from somewhere else—so great Odysseus buried
himself in leaves and Athena showered sleep
upon his eyes ... sleep in a swift wave
delivering him from all his pains and labors,
blessed sleep that sealed his eyes at last.