

The Adventures of Odysseus

In the opening verses, Homer addresses the muse of epic poetry. He asks her help in telling the tale of Odysseus.

Sing in me, Muse,¹ and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,
the wanderer, harried for years on end,
after he plundered the stronghold
5 on the proud height of Troy.²

He saw the townlands

and learned the minds of many distant men,
and weathered many bitter nights and days
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them,
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Helios,³ the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return.
Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,⁴
tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

Note: In translating the *Odyssey*, Fitzgerald spelled Greek names to suggest the sound of the original Greek. In these excerpts, more familiar spellings have been used. For example, Fitzgerald's "Kirkê," "Kyklops," and "Seirênês" are spelled here as "Circe," "Cyclops," and "Sirens."

1. **Muse** (myōōz) any one of the nine goddesses of the arts, literature, and sciences; the spirit that is thought to inspire a poet or other artist.
2. **Troy** (trōi) city in northwest Asia Minor; site of the Trojan War.

Vocabulary

plundered (plun' dærd)

v. took goods by force; looted

3. **Helios** (hē' lē äs') sun god.
4. **Zeus** (zōōs) king of the gods.