

Aeneid Book 3:

820

Following the destruction of Troy, Aeneas --Trojan warrior and son of Venus -- and his men wander the Mediterranean looking for a new home. They stop in Sicily and are met by one of Odysseus's (=Ulysses) men who had been left behind after Odysseus blinded Polyphemus the cyclops.

Aeneas is the narrator of this section

We came upon

A harbor large enough for our ships to enter,

Protected from the wind; but close to us

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Was dreadful thundering Aetna, a cloud of smoke

And fiery ashes boiling up to the heavens,

Carrying up great globes of flaming stuff,

High as to lick at the stars; and from the lowest

Deep inside of the mountain its viscera,

Roaring and belching, vomit up rocks and molten

Slag as high as high can ever be. They say

The giant Encèladus was struck down by

A bolt of lightning and the whole enormous weight

Of Aetna lies upon him, and fire breathes forth

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From all her broken chimneys, and every time,

In anguish he turns from one side to the other,

All Sicily shakes, and the sky is covered with smoke.

All the night long we hid ourselves in the woods

And endured our awareness of monstrous things abroad,

Not knowing what the sounds were coming from.

There were no stars to be seen, no light from them,
Nor any from the moon; mists covered the skies;
In the dead of the night the moon was held in a cloud.

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And now the very first star of the morning was 850
Visible as Aurora began to disperse
The dewy shadows of the night before,
When suddenly, coming from the woods, there is
A stranger, miserable-looking, filthy, wildly
Bearded, emaciated, wearing only
A rag of a garment held together with thorns,
And he held out his hands to us imploringly.
We stare at him in wonder at what we see.
It is a Greek who had fought at Troy. When he
Sees who we are by our dress and our Trojan arms, 860
Afraid, he stops, then, hesitantly, comes
Toward where we are, then suddenly rushes headlong
To the shore, weeping and beseeching, crying out,
‘By the stars, by the gods who live up there, by the light
Of day and the air you can breathe, you Trojans, help me,
Take me away to anywhere but here!
It’s true that I am a Greek from the Grecian fleet
And that I fought against the Trojan gods.
For all the wrongs I may have done to you,
Scatter the parts of my body on the waves, 870
Throw me into the sea. If I die this way,
At least I will have died by human hands.’

He falls down to the ground and grovels there,
In desperation clinging to our knees.
We ask him who he is and where he comes from,
What is his tribe, and what has happened to him,
And my father Anchises unhesitatingly

Shakes hands with him and pledges his safety, thus
Assuaging his fear so he can tell us his story:

'Achaemenides is my name. Ithaca is 880
The island where I was born. My father is poor,
So I joined Ulysses' army and went to Troy
—Would I had stayed home safe and sound from this.
My fellow soldiers heedlessly left me here
In the vast cave of the Cyclops when, in terror,
They got themselves through his doorway and ran away.
His enormous cave is dark, slimy with gore,
And with the leavings of bloody gorging, and he
Is immense, towering high as high as the stars—
Oh, gods, take this monster away from this earth we're on— 890
The sound of his voice unbearable to hear,
The sight of his body unbearable to look at.
He makes his meal of the flesh of miserable men,
And of their black flowing blood. With my own eyes
I saw it happen, when lying there taking his ease
At dinner time, in his enormous hand
He picked up two of our soldiers and broke them open
By smashing them on a rock, and the gore was spattered
Everywhere around. I saw him crunching
Their bloody dripping quivering arms and legs 900
Between his jaws and teeth as he ate his dinner.
This did not go unpunished. At such a moment
Ulysses knew that he was still Ulysses,
For when the monster had his monstrous fill,
And having drunk himself into oblivion,
Lay with his monstrous length stretched out throughout
The giant cave, and throwing up in his sleep
Vomit of gore and gobbets of human meat
All mixed with blood and wine, we said our prayers
To the gods and chose our parts, and gathered around 910
On every side of him, and with the point
Of a weapon drilled a hole in the giant single

Eye that was there like an Argive shield or the lamp
Of Phoebus underneath his monstrous brow.
And so we had the joy of taking revenge
For our fellows he had eaten.

But you must flee,
Unfortunates, untie your mooring ropes,
And get away. For it isn't only huge
Polyphémus, keeping his woolly flock 920
In his cave, pressing their udders to milk them. There are
A hundred other huge monster Cyclopes, living
Along this winding shore and wandering,
Monsters together, along these mountain ridges.
The horns of the moon have filled with light three times
Since I have been here alone in the frightening woods,
Day after day, dragging my life out, living
On nuts and berries I scabble from trees and bushes,
And green weeds that I pull up out of the ground,
In woods where wild beasts have their nests and lairs, 930
And sometimes in a hiding place on a cliff
Seeing huge Cyclopes there and hearing the sound
Of their heavy feet and hearing their voices bawling.
One day when from my hiding I was looking
Everywhere to see what I might see,
I saw the fleet of ships come in to the beach,
And so I sent myself, no matter what,
To give myself up to you. No matter what,
To have gotten myself away from the monster crowd.
Better that you should take my life away 940
Than what the monsters would have done to me.'

He had hardly finished speaking when, there, we saw,
All of us saw, high up on a mountaintop
The monster shepherd Polyphémus, huge,
Blind, enormous horrifying body
Moving slowly among his flock of sheep,

And slowly making his way toward the shore with which
His eyesight formerly had been familiar.
He had a torn-up pine tree in his hand
To guide him and to steady him as he went, 950
His fleecy flock beside him and around him,
The only pleasure he had, his only comfort
In his misfortune. As soon as he got himself down
To the water's edge and felt the touch of the breaking
Waves of the sea, he washed the leaking blood
From the socket of his blind eye into the brine,
Gnashing his teeth and groaning all the while;
And then with giant steps he walks out into
The deeper water; so tall he is, that most
Of his towering body is dry because unreached 960
Above the highest waves. We're terrified.
We take on board with us the suppliant so
Deserving of our rescue and we loose
Our mooring lines as quietly as we can,
And bending to our desperate oars, we sweep
Across the waters eager to escape.
The monster heard, and turned himself to the sound
Of our splashing oars, but when he knew he had
No power to lay his hands on us, no longer
Follow us farther among the Ionian waves 970
That were coming in against him, he let out a roar.
The ocean and all its billows shuddered and shook,
And Italy, hearing it, was terrified
To its most inland self, and Aetna bellowed
Through all its winding caverns underground.
And the Cyclopean race, aroused by their brother's roar,
Came rushing out of the woods and from the high mountains
Down to the shore of the port, and stood there, glaring,
Dread gang of helpless one-eyed Aetnean brothers,
Heads high as tall as the sky, like a congress of 980
Great oak trees standing upon a mountaintop,

Or a congregation of coniferous cypress,
Or like a grove of Diana or forest of Jove.

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Fear made us open our sails as fast as we could,
Striving to catch whatever wind we could,
And in whatever direction there was that we could.
I remember Helenus' warning to keep away
From the narrow passage between Charybdis and Scylla,
On either side of which there's death. And so
We go back, avoiding the way where the North Wind blows 990
Through that narrow Pelorian channel, and sailing past
The living rocks at the mouth of the river Pantagias,
The bay of Megaera and low-lying Thapsus. These
Were the shores that luckless Ulysses' soldier,
Achaemenides, had come along before.
There is, against the wave-washed headland of
Plemyrium, in Sicily, an island
Called from ages long ago Ortygia.
They say that Alpheus the river god,
In love, had made his secret fluent way 1000
Beneath the ground and under the sea from where
He was in Peloponnesian Ilia
To where your fountain, Arethusa, is,
And mingled there himself with Sicilian waters.

As we were told to do, we venerate
The deities of the place, and then sail on,
Past Helorus with its rich marsh soil, and past
Pachynus's rocks and cliffs, and Camerina,
Whom the Fates ordained should never be disturbed;
And, stretching far, the Gelo plains, and Gela, 1010
Named for its tumultuous river; then
The great high walls of Acragas, where once

They bred those famous marvelous horses; and,
With favored winds the gods had granted me,
I leave Selinus's palms behind, and pass
Lybeis's shoals and treacherous hidden rocks.
And then I reach Drepanum's mournful shore,
And here it was that I, whom so many storms
Have beaten upon, alas, I lost my father,
The solace of all my troubles and my cares.

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'O best of fathers, you have left me here,
Abandoned, weary, rescued from so many
Perils undergone, now all for nothing.
Helenus the seer, who foretold,
In prophecy, so many horrors to be,
Did not foretell this sorrow, and dire Celaeno
Told nothing of this grief that was to come.
This was the final trial, since I began,
And now the god has driven me to this place.'"

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Thus father Aeneas, alone before them all,
Who were intently listening, told the story
Of his long wanderings, what it was
The Fates had ordained for him. And so the story
Came at last to a close, and he was quiet.

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