

How does Homer make his description of the actual voyage through Scylla and Charybdis terrifying?

The scene with Charybdis and Scylla is one of the best depicted scenes in the whole Odyssey, aiming not to build tension into the readers but to scare or even terrify them.

▲Actually, the whole story does not begin when Odysseus faces the danger but a bit earlier. When Circe tells him what kind of monster he will meet, this anticipates us to get ready for real horror and builds up the tension as they are sailing. But when the Trojan heroes reach the place the horror is even bigger than what we are ready for. Only the first sentence contains more than enough to see the high seriousness of the situation. Odysseus' men are "wailing in terror" i.e. all the braveness and manhood are gone and they look more like women or babies.

But all this seems to be quite logical when we read the effective description of Charybdis that Homer uses. ▲Adjectives such as "awesome", "fearful" and "dreadful" give the reader the impression that the ship is doomed to disappear forever. Moreover, Charybdis does not just throw away the water but it "vomits it" and it "rains down" – verbs showing how massive and powerful the whirlpool is. The simile with "a cauldron" is not long or detailed, but actually it gives the best possible image of what danger Odysseus and his men are. If they get even one inch closer probably all will be boiled. What completes the picture is the fearful sound Homer includes "the rocks re-echoed to her fearful roar" – Charybdis resembles a lion ready to swallow everything on his way.

Once again the reaction of Odysseus' men draws an exact image of the terror – "my men turned pale" – helpless fearing for their lives, afraid to move or say a word. Thus frozen, now Odysseus' men face even a bigger surprise and terror with Scylla having grabbed 6 of them. The unexpected change throws the reader in even greater tension, but what is worse is that Odysseus loses his "strongest men". Now Homer draws us into one sense – helplessness. First the description of Scylla is skillfully made to show how doomed is the whole situation – she "snatched" and "whisked"

Odysseus' comrades while they are "dangling" in the air. The choice of words is not random, but aims to build up senses of power and violence on the one side and fear and death on the other. Once again Homer uses sounds but this time in a different way. The "dangling" men are calling Odysseus, who he can't do anything but standing and looking at them. Just a silent witness.

Homer uses a precise simile to draw the way in which Scylla swallows the men. She is like an "angler" and they are like fish –description that crates the feeling that the sailors are small and insignificant and this is the natural order: the angler must catch his dinner. The reader by now feels more than pity but Homer goes on showing us how the "little fishes" are suffering and "struggling" and "shrieking" in "desperate throes", all of this action looking worthless but showing will for life, life that they will lose very soon.

Odysseus is sad for his men and admits that he has never seen "a more pitiable sight". That makes even bigger impression knowing about Odysseus meetings with the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, the Sirens etc. He has endured much and seen even more but that is the only moment he feels so helpless, useless and wordless.