Homer, Odyssey. Epic of Loss, Adventure, and Return

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*Sing to me of the man, O Muse, the man of twists and turns*

*driven time and again off course, once he had plundered*

*the hallowed heights of Troy.*

*Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds,*

*many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea,*

*fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home.*

So begins the *Odyssey*, an epic account of survival and homecoming – the poem that we shall explore in depth throughout this course (24 books in 6 weeks). Odysseus is the most complex of all Greek heroes, showing courage and endurance, on the one hand, but a master of tricks, disguises, and lies, on the other. The poem conveys the most normative ideal – a return to house, land, wife, and kingship. But it also leads outward to adventure, risk taking, encounters with the strange and supernatural, and secret pleasures. Throughout we will be attentive to the characteristics of oral poetry (e.g., traditional epithets, type scenes, formulaic descriptions) along with narrative strategies of story-telling. At the same time, we shall grapple with the larger issues of gendered strategies, family and society, disguise and recognition, death and immortality, the role of the gods, and more, according to contemporary concerns. The *Odyssey*, it is fair to say,has shaped our imagination and cultural values, whether for imitation, extension, revision, allegory, or even parody. Moreover, as one critic observes, “the *Odyssey* is a *generic* shape-shifter, changing from a heroic epic into a quest narrative, a revenge tragedy, a domestic comedy, a romance, *Bildungsroman* and biography.” Students may, if they wish, pursue any one aspect of the *Odyssey’*s legacy in their final papers – whether in literature, art, or film.

**Course Outline**: We will read 4 books each week, along with **suggested** secondary material for each session which will be posted on Canvas. Weekly written responses to the reading. A more comprehensive bibliography will also be available along with books on reserve. Students are advised to acquaint themselves before the course begins with the first of Homer’s epics, the *Iliad*, which tells of the Trojan War itself. (any translation) and urged to bring to class any supporting material (ancient to modern) that they like.

*Texts:* **Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles** (Penguin). NB: students may consult other contemporary translations (e.g, Lattimore, Fitzgerald, Lombardo, Wilson), but Fagles is the one we will use.

**PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS**

**June 29.** ***Odyssey* books 1 & 2:** Introduction. Homeric Epic and its Conventions. [Review: *Iliad*]

The proem: Council of the gods. Telemachus, Athena in disguise. Meet the suitors.

Eckert, C. W. “Initiatory Motifs in the Story of Telemachus”: *The Classical Journal* 59.2 (1963) 49-57.

Murnaghan, S. “The Trials of Telemachus: Who Was the ‘Odyssey’ Meant For,” *Arethusa* 35.1 (2002) 133-53.

Saïd, S. *Homer and the Odyssey*, ch 10, “The World of the Gods,” 315-54. (Oxford 2011)

**July 4. *Odyssey* books 3 & 4.** Telemachus abroad. Home of Nestor; palace of Menelaus Helen

Murnaghan, S. “Introduction,” from *Homer: Odyssey*, trans. S. Lombardo; 2000,

Van Nortwick, T. “The Hero Emerges,” ch. 1, *Unknown Odysseus* (Michigan 2009) 3-23.

Doyle, A. “’Unhappily Ever After:’ The Problem of Helen in *Odyssey* 4,” *Akroterion* 55 (2010) 1-18.

Bergren, A. 'Helen's "good drug": *Odyssey* iv 1-305,” *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Homer’s Odyssey*, ed. L. Doherty, 336-53 (revised) (Oxford 2009).

**July 6. *Odyssey* books 5 & 6.** Calypso, Arrival at Phaeacia. Nausicaa. At the palace of Alcinoous.

Austin, N. “From Cities to Mind,” ch. 4 *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (UCal 1975), 175-200 [rest of chapter, for book 23. 203-28]

Van Nortwick, N. ch.2. “Odysseus at Work,” *Unknown Odysseus* (Michigan 2009) 22-44.

**July 11. *Odyssey* books 7 & 8**. In Phaeacia.: Song of Ares and Aphrodite, Trojan Horse

Newton, R. “Odysseus and Hephaestus in the *Odyssey*,” *CJ* 83.1 (1987) 12-20.

Braswell, B. 'The song of Ares and Aphrodite...', Hermes 90 (1982) 129-37.

Segal, C. “The Phaeacians and the Odysseus’ Return,” part 1; rev.version in *Singers, Heroes, and Gods in the* Odyssey (Cornell 1962:1994) 12-36.

Race, W. “Phaeacian Therapy in Homer’s *Odyssey*,” in *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks* Meineck, P. and D. Konstan, eds. (Palgrave 2014) 47–66.

**July 13. *Odyssey* books 9-10**. Odysseus, the bard. Apologoi. Cyclops, Lotus Eaters, Circe,

Austin, N. “Intimations of Order,” ch 3, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (UCal 1975) 130-78.

\*Christensen, J. “The Clinical *Odyssey*: Odysseus's *Apologoi* and Narrative Therapy,” *Arethusa* 51.2 (2018) 1-31

Simon, B. “The Hero as an Only Child, An Unconscious Fantasy Structuring Homer’s *Odyssey*”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 55 (1974) 555-62.

Van Nortwick, T. “Subversive Anonymity,” ch. 3, *Unknown Odysseus* (Michigan 2009) 45-64.

**July 18. *Odyssey* books 11-12.** Descent to the Underworld; Sirens, Scylla & Charybdis; Cattle of the Sun, end of *Apologoi*.

Austin, N. “Unity in Multiplicity,” ch. 2, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (1975) 81-129.

Felson, N. & L. Slatkin, “Gender and Homeric Epic.” In *Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. R. Fowler (CUP 2005) 91-114.

Segal, C. “Transition and ritual in Odysseus' Return,” in *Singers, Heroes & Gods in the* Odyssey(Cornell 1994; originally 1962), PP 22 (1967-1994) 65-84.

\*Vernant, J.-P., “Food in the Countries of the Sun,” in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, 1989, 164-69.

**July 20.** ***Odyssey* books 13-14**. Home to Ithaca. Odysseus, the beggar, at the hut of the swineherd, Eumaeus.

Vidal-Naquet, P. 'Religious and Mythic Values of Land and Sacrifice', in *Myth, Religion, Society*, ed. R. Gordon (Cambridge, 1981) 80-94.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre, “Odysseus in Person,” *Representations* 67 (1999) 1-26.

Murnaghan, S. “The Plan of Athena” in B. Cohen (ed.), *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer’s Odyssey* (Oxford 1996) 61-80.C

king, Ben, “The Rhetoric of the Victim: Odysseus in the Swineherd's Hut.” *Classical Antiquity* 18 (1999), 74-93.

**July 25. *Odyssey* books 15-16**

Telemachus’ return from Sparta. Reunion with Odysseus at the hut of Eumaeus. Strategies.

Van Nortwick, T. ch. 4: “Constructed Lives,” *Unknown Odysseus* 65-82.

Emlyn-Jones, C**. "**True and Lying Tales in the Odyssey" *G&R* 33 (1986) 1-10.

Trahman, C. 'Odysseus' lies', *Phoenix* 6 (1952) 31-43.

**July 27. *Odyssey* books 17-18**

Odysseus disguised goes to his palace and meets the suitors. Penelope before the suitors.

Murnaghan, S. “Penelope’s *Agnoia*,” *Helios* NS 13 (1986) 103-15

Lowe, N. “Epic Myth II: *Odyssey*, “ ch, 7, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge 2000) 129-56.

**Aug 1. *Odyssey* books 19-20**

Meeting of Penelope and the disguised beggar Odysseus. The nurse Eurycleia and the scar.

Suitors turn ugly. Telemachus takes charge,

Auerbach, E. “Odysseus’ Scar,” in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 1953, 3-23

Bakker, E., “Mimesis as Performance. Re-Reading Auerbach’s First Chapter, *Poetics Today* 20 (1999) 11-26

Dimock, G., “The Name of Odysseus,”

Van Nortwick, T. “The Ward of Hermes: Odysseus Trickster, *Unknown Odysseus*, 83-97.

Segal, C. 'Kleos and its ironies in the Odyssey', *AC* 52 (1983) 22-47.

Russo, J., 'Interview and aftermath.: Dream, Fantasy, and Intuition in Odyssey 19 and 20'," *AJP* 103 (1982) 4-18.

**Aug 3. *Odyssey* books 21-22**

Penelope sets up the contest of the bow. Killing of the suitors and aftermath.

Ready, J. “Why Odysseus Strings his Bow,” *GRBS* 50 (2010) 133–157

Russo, J. “Odysseus’ Trial of the Bow as Symbolic Performance,” in A. Bierl et al. (eds.), *Antike Literatur in neuer Deutung* (Leipzig 2004) 95–101.

Zervou, A. “The *Mnesterophonia* (Killing of Suitors) and the Game of Receptions(s): Conflictual Readings, Opposite Versions and Other Narratives,” in *Crime and Punishment* (Ithaca 2014) 309-336.

Burgess, J. “Framing Odysseus: The Death of the Suitors,” in *Crime and Punishment* (Ithaca 2014) 337-54

**Aug 3. *Odyssey* books 23-24**

**Bk. 23**. Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus: her tests, their secret sign; equivalency

of their experiences

Foley, H. "Reverse similes" and sex roles in the Odyssey', *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 7-26.

Zeitlin, F. “Figuring Fidelity in Homer’s *Odyssey*,” in F. Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, Chicago 1995.

Van Nortwick, T. ch 6. “Sleepers Awake: The Return of Odysseus,” *Unknown Odysseus,* 98-120.

Austin, N. “Archery at the Dark of the Moon,” ch. 5, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (1975) 239-285.

Starobinski, J. “The Inside and the Outside, “ *Hudson Revi*ew: 28:3 (1975), 333-351.

**Bk 24.** a. Revisiting Hades: Hermes brings the souls of the dead suitors to the Land of the Dead, where they meet the heroes of the Trojan War.

Whitehead, O. "The Funeral of Achilles; an Epilogue to the Iliad in Book 24 of the Odyssey" *G&R* 31 (1984) 119-125 -

b. Reunion at last of Odysseus and his father Laertes.

Selis, N. “The Untold Death of Laertes. Revaluating Odysseus’ Meeting with His Father,” *Mnemosyne* 66 (2003), 181-205. [Translations of Greek Passages in Selis” H]

c. The families of the slain suitors seek revenge on Odysseus, but Athena intervenes

Butler, Samuel. *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897). Excerpts.