

CLCV 2000 Classical Mythology

Odyssey

I. The Greatness of the *Odyssey*

- A. Odysseus was the subject of many stories outside of the *Odyssey*, Homer gathers these together and gives them a unique shape.

At the beginning of the western literary tradition, we find an epic tale that the oral tradition has molded from a chaotic group of folk tales into a unified whole.

- B. Big themes: justice; truth/deception; the ordering, cohesion and disruption of society and its institutions, pity and the common suffering of humanity.

- B. Judgment of the Greeks

- B. Judgment of history

- C. Universality: great literature with the quality of universality
“A work of the past . . . may treat so directly of what is permanent in the human condition that time can get no hold on it.”

- D. Entertaining, accessible, already familiar because of fairy-tale like episodes; but at the same time one of Homer’s aims is keep the audience guessing what comes next.

1. The homecoming husband
2. the son avenges his father
3. playing for time
4. the bride must sew a garment for the groom’s father
5. a drink causes magic forgetfulness
6. a man disguises himself as an animal
7. a wizard undergoes successive transformations
8. a man has a fairy wife for seven years
9. a fairy mistress surrenders a man to his mortal wife

10. the husband outwits his adulterous wife and her lover
11. recognition by a person's tears at the recital of his own exploits
12. a voyage to an earthly paradise
13. enchantment by eating fairy food
14. the ogre blinded
15. the captor beguiled by an equivocal name
16. escape from death under a ram's belly
17. the taboo against looking into a bag of winds
18. the ogre and his wife
19. a sorceress transforms men into animals
20. a magic object keeps off enchantment
21. a journey to the lower world
22. a summoned dead man prophesies
23. unremitting torture as punishment
24. female creatures and their magic song
25. ears stopped up to avoid an enchanting song
26. the slaughter of sacred cattle
27. ship turned to stone
28. the disguised man recognized by a dog
29. the husband returns in humble disguise
30. recognition by a scar
31. the husband arrives home just as his wife is about to marry another
32. the suitors' contest
33. recognition by the unique ability to bend a bow
34. the archery competition
35. recognition by describing a unique bed
36. identity tested by recounted shared experiences

II. Some things to look for as you read

A. The notion of **propriety**

B. The theme of **recognition** (*anagnorisis*)

1. Dio Chrysostom 'the entire epic is a recognition scene'.
2. Revelation, falsification, investigation, recognition between father-son, husband-wife, master-servant, friend and foe, even the mockery of identity.

3. Irony – characters often do not understand the true significance of what they are saying; disguise, despair, deception and ignorance prominent features of the narrative.
4. Is the *Odyssey*, as has been claimed, a deep philosophical sounding of the first problem of human existence?

C. The theme of **Community**

1. How does this poem handle the notion of order/disorder and the re-establishment and maintenance of the community?
2. Some concepts to work with:
 - a. *oikos* and *philos* (plurals *oikoi* and *philoï*)

The *oikos* is the highest form of political and economic or social organization, command of it was responsibility of the local warrior-chieftain.

The household was the center of a Greek's life, Odysseus' kingdom. Except for the field of battle, the most important sphere of action. It reflected social standing, the wealthier the more powerful.

Preservation of the *oikos* required the martial abilities of the chieftain.

- b. *xenia*

Nagler, “. . . the guest-host relationship contracted between social equals and embodied in reciprocal gift exchanges was the most important social relation beyond the extended family in Homer's world, the pre-state world of freely interacting but independent households (*oikoi*).”

Violations of *xenia* were considered illegal and unholy, punishable by Zeus.

D. A different concept of the **Hero**

1. Homer's primary concern is with the world of humanity and its uniqueness.
2. It is what is done in life that is important
Note 11:482-491, Odysseus' conversation with Achilleus
3. Homeric concept emphasizes individuality, individual performance and choice. This constitutes one's own *arete* 'merit', 'excellence', one's individual prowess/pride/reputation.
4. The motivation for action is 'glory' *kleos* and 'honor' *time*. Greek value-system, shame culture, puts greatest value on successful performance in the eyes of others rather than in inner consciousness of right and wrong.
5. The denial of 'honor' *time* due one's *arete* was the greatest tragedy.
6. The hero represents humanity in supreme form, a combination of physical strength, intellectual ability, and will to survive.

Pay attention to how this works out in the *Odyssey* with Odysseus and how this differs from the *Iliad*.

III. Broad outline of the *Odyssey*

- A. The Telemachy, bks. 1-4
- B. The Homecoming of Odysseus, bks. 5-8, 13.1-187
- C. The Wanderings of Odysseus, bks. 9-12
- D. Odysseus in Ithaka, bks. 13.187-24.548

IV. Outline of books 1-4

The Telemachy, bks. 1-4

Book One: Olympos and Ithaka

- I. Invocation of the Muses (lines 1-10)
- II. Background (11-21); Odysseus retained by Kalypso
- III. Assembly of the gods (22-95)
- IV. Athene visits Telemachos in Ithaka, disguised as Mentos (96-324)
- V. Phemios' song and the introduction to Penelope (325-364)

VI. Discussion between Telemachos and the Suitors (365-444)

Book Two: Ithaka

- I. Telemachos holds an assembly (1-259)
- II. Athene appears to Telemachos as Mentor (260-295)
- III. Telemachos speaks with Antinoös and is mocked by the Suitors (296-336)
- IV. Telemachos prepares for his journey with Eurykleia (337-381)
- V. Athene makes sailing preparations and Telemachos sets off with his comrades (382-434)

Book Three: Pylos

- I. Arrival at Pylos, Telemachos and Peisistratos entertained by Nestor over two days (1-403, 404-490)
- II. Telemachos and Peisistratos continue the journey to Lakedaimon (491-497)

Book Four: Lakedaimon and Ithaka

- I. Telemachos and Peisistratos entertained by Menelaos Helen at Lakedaimon over two days (1-305, 306-624)
- II. Meanwhile in Ithaka the Suitors plot to ambush Telemachos (625-847)

V. Some questions

A. At what point does the story told in the *Odyssey* start and what possibilities does that create?

1. To show the plight of Ithaka and Penelope, the difficulties of his return, character of the Suitors.
2. To show the situation in Ithaka and the need for Odysseus' return.
3. All this increases anticipation of his return and general suspense.
4. To give the background of the Trojan story.
5. To show the growth of Telemachos, who is not yet ready to face his duties. Telling his struggles makes the narrative richer and more complex.

6. Telemachus' coming of age has to take place away from Ithaka since he is not, and cannot be seen to be equal to the suitors (if so there would be no pressing need for Odysseus' return). Telemachos encounters his father's past and wins *kleos* 'good reputation' in his encounters with Nestor and Menelaos.
7. Allows Homer to put the details of Odysseus' travels from Troy to Kalypso's cave into Odysseus' own mouth. Deepens Odysseus' characterization, telling of the tales more immediate first person narrative.

B. How is background material communicated?

1. Look at the themes alluded to in the invocation
2. 1.20 Poseidon mentioned but the reason for his anger is not told until 68ff.
3. 1.29ff. Why is Zeus thinking of the story of Aigisthos/Orestes?
4. The *Nostoi*
5. The House of Atreus:
Tantalos serves son Pelops to the gods to test omniscience
Pelops has two sons, Atreus and Thyestes. Thyestes sleeps with
Atreus' wife, Atreus gets back by serving him his children.
Atreus has sons Menelaos and Agamemnon
Thyestes has a son Aigisthos
Agamemnon is killed by Aigisthos when he returns from Troy
Agamemnon's son, Orestes, kills Aigisthos

C. What other stories are alluded to by the narrator and how do they relate to the *Odyssey*?

1. House of Atreus (1.29ff, 1.298ff., 3.193ff., 255ff.)
2. Stories of Menelaos and Helen.

D. How do we learn about Odysseus in books 1-4? What is the effect of this? Mainly through the reports of Nestor (3.102ff.), Menelaos, and Helen.

E. How would you characterize the following?

1. Telemachos

- a. Still necessary to assert authority (Penelope end of bk. 1, assembly bk. 2)
- b. Still young and petulant, at 2.80 throws down the scepter and bursts into tears

2. Penelope

- a. The Penelope pattern:
 - i. Appear veiled and accompanied by servants
 - ii. Make a complaint
 - iii. Get rebuked by someone
 - iv. Retire to the women's quarters
 - v. Create a stir.
- b. This stresses negative aspects of Penelope's character. Homer balances this by having others assert her value, desirability, beauty, faithfulness, intelligence.
- c. 1.356 the correct place for Penelope is in her room weaving
- d. How are we to view the weaving trick of Penelope in 2.85ff.?
- e. Main qualities are beauty and prudence
Main emotions are longing for Odysseus, loathing the Suitors
Main activities are weeping and sleeping

f. a match in cunning for Odysseus, the trick of weaving Laertes' shroud, and especially evident later.

3. Eurykleia: a faithful nurse who keeps her word (2.344ff.)

4. The suitors

5. Nestor

6. Menelaos

7. Helen

F. Nestor, Menelaos and Helen appear in the *Iliad* and in the first 4 books of the *Odyssey*. Would you say they are the same characters in both epics or are there differences in characterization between the two?

G. How do we learn the proper way for one to receive guests and to act as a guest? What examples are given?

1. Proper way is to receive guests with food and drink, sometimes a bath and entertainment, ask questions of identity later, provide quick conveyance.

2. Nestor 3.36ff., 69ff.

H. What other examples of (im)proper conduct can we infer from the text?

1. Suitors who eat up the goods of another's house and will not pay bride price for Penelope,

2. Suitors rarely acknowledge the gods at their feasting.

3. Eurymachos belittles the seer Halitherses (2.177ff.)

4. The regular citizens accused of inaction by Mentor in 2.224ff.

I. What can we learn about heroic poetry from the representation of Phemios?

1. 1.155, 325ff.
2. Sung to the lyre (1.155), sung at the banquet
3. 325ff. epic themes, the Achaians' bitter homecoming from Troy (a theme suitably pleasing to the Suitors)
4. Singer called 'divine' 336
5. 351ff. popularity of the current song

J. How does each book open and close? How does this affect the movement of the narrative and how does it affect the reader/listener? Why were these divisions made? By whom?

- Bk 1: open: invocation to the Muses, ring structure
close: Telemachos in bed, pondering
- Bk 2: open: dawn
close: Telemachos sailing into the night
- Bk 3: open: dawn
close: sunset
- Bk 4: open: Telemachos received by Menelaos at Lakedaimon
close: suitors wait in ambush at night
- Bk 5: open: dawn
close: Odysseus falls asleep at Scheria
- Bk 6: open: Nausikaa roused from sleep
close: sunset, Odysseus waits outside the city
- Bk 7: open: Odysseus makes his way into the city
close: sleep
- Bk. 8: open: dawn
close: Alkinoös makes Odysseus reveal his identity

K. What are some of the standard, recurring epithets or phrases you come across?

Son of Kronos, gray-eyed Athene, Pallas Athene, godlike Odysseus, Hermes slayer of Argos, thoughtful Telemachos, circumspect/prudent Penelope, Nestor the Gerenian horseman

L. How are women portrayed and what features make up an ideal woman?

Extended Outline of *Odyssey* bks. 1-4

Book One: Olympus and Ithaka

- I. Invocation of the Muses (lines 1-10)
- II. Background (11-21); Odysseus retained by Kalypso
- III. Assembly of the gods (22-95)
 - A. Zeus recalls the story of the House of Atreus
 - B. Athene calls attention to Odysseus
 - C. Poseidon's grudge
- IV. Athene visits Telemachos in Ithaka, disguised as Mentos (96-324)
 1. Introduction to the Suitors
 2. Introduction to Telemachos
 3. Athene/Mentos advises Telemachos
- V. Phemios' song and the introduction to Penelope (325-364)
- VI. Discussion between Telemachos and the Suitors (365-444)

Book Two: Ithaka

- I. Telemachos holds an assembly (1-259)
 - A. Telemachos states the case against the Suitors (35-83)
 - B. Antinoös responds, blames Penelope's tricks (84-128)
 - C. Telemachos refuses to make Penelope marry (129-145)
 - D. The bird omen sent from Zeus (146-207)
 1. Halitherses' interpretation
 2. Eurymachos' interpretation
 - E. Telemachos announces his trip to Sparta and Pylos to inquire after his father (208-223)
 - F. Mentor finds fault with the citizens, who refuse to check the Suitors (224-241)
 - G. Leokritos rebukes Mentor and dissolves assembly (242-259)
- II. Athene appears to Telemachos as Mentor (260-295)
- III. Telemachos speaks with Antinoös and is mocked by the Suitors (296-336)
- IV. Telemachos prepares for his journey with Eurykleia (337-381)
- V. Athene makes sailing preparations and Telemachos sets off with his comrades (382-434)

Book Three: Pylos

- I. Arrival at Pylos
 - A. Mentor/Athene encourages Telemachos (1-35)

- B. Peisistratos' greeting (36-66)
 - C. Nestor's greeting (67-74)
 - D. Telemachos asks after his father (75-101)
 - E. Nestor recalls the war at Troy and the returns (102-200)
 - F. Telemachos, Nestor and Athene/Mentor discuss Odysseus' fate (201-252)
 - G. Nestor tells the story of Agamemnon's return (253-328)
 - H. Athene bids them all to sleep and they retire for the night (329-370)
 - I. Nestor and Telemachos recognize Athene by her departure (371-384)
 - J. Everyone returns to Nestor's dwelling to sleep (385-403)
- II. The next day (404-490)
- A. Nestor's counsel (404-429)
 - B. A sacrifice and meal are prepared (430-472)
 - C. Telemachos and Peisistratos journey to Lakedaimon (473-486)
 - D. They stay overnight at the house of Diokles in Pherai (487-490)
- III. Telemachos and Peisistratos continue the journey to Lakedaimon (491-497)

Book Four: Lakedaimon and Ithaka

- I. Telemachos and Peisistratos are received by Menelaos at Lakedaimon (1-305)
- A. The wedding of Neoptolemos (3-19)
 - B. Menelaos tells of his wanderings (76-112)
 - C. Helen's entrance (120-146)
 - D. Telemachos recognized as son of Odysseus (147-218)
 - E. Helen's medicine (219-232)
 - F. Helen and Menelaos recall the exploits of Odysseus (233-289)
 - G. Preparations for bed are made (290-305)
- II. The following day (306-624)
- A. Menelaos learns of the Suitors (306-331)
 - B. He tells Telemachos the story of Eidothea and Proteus (332-592)
 - 1. Aias' death (499-511)
 - 2. Agamemnon's death (512-537)
 - C. Menelaos agrees to send Telemachus on his way (593-624)
- III. Meanwhile in Ithaka (625-847)
- A. The Suitors plot to ambush Telemachos upon his return (625-674)
 - B. Medon informs Penelope of the plot (675-714)
 - C. Penelope is distraught but calmed by Eurykleia (715-767)
 - D. The Suitors set sail and wait in ambush (768-786),(842-847)
 - E. Athene sends Penelope a dream in the form of her sister, Iphthime (787-841)

The Homecoming of Odysseus, bks. 5-8

Bks. 1-4 concerned with Telemachos establishing his identity, bks. 5-8 concerned with Odysseus establishing his.

Book Five: Odysseus leaves Ogygia

- I. The assembly of the gods (1-42)
- II. Hermes sent to Kalypso in Ogygia (43-147)
- III. Kalypso tells Odysseus he may depart (148-227)
- IV. The next day travel preparations are made (228-261)
- V. Odysseus sails to Phaiakia (262-493)
(spotted by Poseidon but aided by Ino and her veil)

Book Six: Nausikaa

- I. In the palace of Alkinoös, Athene comes to Nausikaa in a dream (1-47)
- II. Nausikaa washing at the river discovers Odysseus (48-331)

Book Seven: The court of Alkinoös

- I. With Athene's help Odysseus makes his way to the palace of Alkinoös (1-81)
- II. Description of the palace (81-132)
- III. Odysseus appears before Alkinoös and Arete (133-347)

Book Eight: The Games of the Phaiakians

- I.
 - A. Agora: the assembly in the court of Alkinoös (1-45)
 - B. Palace: the ship put to sea and a feast set by Alkinoös (46-95)
 - C. Demodokos sings of the Quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus (62-95)
Odysseus weeps
- II.
 - A. Open air: the Phaiakians compete in athletic contests (96-233)
 - B. Alkinoös calls for dancing and singing (234-384)
 - C. Demodokos sings about the love of Ares and Aphrodite (266-369)
- III.
 - A. Palace: gifts of friendship and reconciliation with Euryalos (385-456)
 - B. Farewell to Nausikaa (457-468)
 - C. Wine drinking (469-534)

- D. Demodokos sings of the wooden horse (469-520)
Odysseus weeps
- IV. Alkinoös asks Odysseus to reveal his identity (535-586)

The Wanderings of Odysseus, bks. 9-12

Trojan War	10 years
Travels (bks. 9-12)	3 years (1 with Circe)
Calypso	7 years

Book Nine

- I. Odysseus reveals his identity (1-38)
- II. Odysseus tells his adventures (39-566)

- A. Kikonians (39-61)

Odysseus' companions are too foolish to escape; drinking

- B. Lotus-Eaters (62-104)

Only Odysseus appears with self control; similar to the incident with the cattle of the sun, Sirens

- C. Cyclopes and Polyphemos (105-566)

1. line 172, general them of travels/epic
2. no agriculture, no ships, no builders, no laws, outrageous people (line 106), no institutions, counsels (215): no *xenia*.
3. immediate questioning 252f.
4. Polyphemus kills two companions (287f.), sort of inverse sacrificial scene
5. Recklessly drinking potent wine (cf. 208)
6. Outis trick: 422 'combining all my resources and treacheries'

7. Misleading appearance pays off for Odysseus
8. Cyclops tale common in antiquity and throughout world.
 - a. *Odyssey* version a combination of two different common motifs, the one-eyed flesh eating monster and the 'Nobody' theme.
 - b. Common Folk-tale Cyclops pattern:
 - i. Hero and companions are imprisoned in the cave of a one-eyed giant shepherd.
 - ii. Some/all of the companions are cooked by the giant on a spit over the fire.
Odyssey: the men are eaten raw.
 - iii. The giant falls asleep after his heavy meal.
Odyssey: Polyphemus falls asleep after drinking wine.
 - iv. The hero takes the spit, heats it in the fire and plunges it in the giant's eye.
Odyssey: A wooden stake is used to blind the cyclops.

Odyssey: Hero tricks the cyclops by calling himself 'Nobody'.
 - v. In the morning the giant opens the cave to let out the sheep and the hero escapes by walking out on all fours under a sheepskin, or by clinging to the underside of a sheep.
 - vi. The hero is located when he puts on a magic ring which shouts 'Here I am', and escapes only by cutting off his finger.
Odyssey: Hero located when he taunts the cyclops.

Book Ten

- D. Aiolos and the bag of winds (1-79)
- E. Laistrygones (80-132)
- F. Circe (133-574)

Same pattern as last book, 2 shorter incidents followed by longer 3rd encounter

D. Aiolos and the bag of winds (1-79)

- Stays with Aiolos for a month
- l. 27 'ruined by our own folly'
- Companions open the bag of winds, carried back to Aiolian island
- Odysseus partly to blame because he fell asleep

E. Laistrygones (80-132)

- Cannibalistic people, inverse of Phaiakians
- Huge mother Artakie, father Antiphates
- Odysseus flees, abandons companions—only his ship survives

F. Circe (133-574)

- Eurylochos leads party, doesn't enter her home
- Description of circe's house with drugged animals
- Odysseus aided by Hermes; *moly* line 305 (Captain Marvel 1940? Shazam: wisdom of Solomon, strength of Hercules, stamina of Atlas, power of Zeus, courage of Achilles, speed of Mercury)
- At the end of a year Circe agrees to let Od. go home, but only after he travels to the underworld to consult with Teiresias
- The strange death of Elpenor

Book Eleven: *Nekyia* or trip to the underworld

G. First half of trip to the underworld (1-332)

Teiresias, Antikleia, the Heroines

H. Request and promise to be sent home (333-376)

I. Second half of trip to the underworld (377-640)

Agamemnon, Achilleus, Aias, Minos, Orion, Tityos, Tantalus, Sisyphus, Heracles

alternate arrangement:

1-50 journey to the entrance of Hades, blood offering to the dead

51-224 meetings with Elpenor, Teiresias and Antikleia

225-332 meetings with the Catalogue of women

333-384 intermezzo: Alkinoos and Arete urge Odysseus to continue

385-567 meetings with heroes from Troy; Agamemnon, Achilles and Aias

568-635 visions of the rewards and punishments in Hades

636-640 return journey from Hades

Book Twelve

J. Circe sends off Odysseus and his crew (1-141)

K. Odysseus and crew sail (142-453): Sirens, Roving Rocks, Skylla, Charybdis, the herds of Helios, Kalypso

The Homecoming of Odysseus, 13.1-187

Book Thirteen

I. The Phaiakians escort Odysseus home to Ithaka (1-125)

II. Poseidon turns the Phaiakian ship into stone (125-187)

Odysseus in Ithaka, bks. 13.187-24.548

III. Athene visits Odysseus on the Ithakan shore (187-440): 1st Cretan tale (256-286), they hide the treasure, plot against the suitors, Athene retrieves Telemachos

Book Fourteen

Odysseus visits Eumaios, the swineherd (1-533)

2nd Cretan tale (191-359)

3rd Cretan tale (457-506)

Book Fifteen

I. Athene urges Telemachos to leave Lakedaimon (1-42)

- II. Menelaos sends Telemachos on his way with many gifts (43-184)
- III. The Theoklymenos story (220-300)
- IV. Odysseus questions the swineherd (301-388)
- V. The Swineherd's tale (389-484)
- VI. The arrival of Telemachos on Ithaka (495-557)

Book Sixteen

- I. Telemachos arrives at the swineherd's lodging (1-134)
- II. Eumaios sent to Penelope (135-155)
- III. Odysseus reveals himself to Telemachos and they plot revenge (156-320)
- IV. The herald and swineherd report to Penelope (321-341)
- V. The assembly of the Suitors (342-408)
- VI. Penelope rebukes the Suitors (409-451)
- VII. Odysseus, Telemachos and Eumaios spend the night at Eumaios' lodging (452-481)

Book Seventeen

- I. Telemachos and Odysseus make their separate ways to the palace (1-30)
- II. Telemachos gives orders to the women of the house, receives Theoklymenos (31-98)
- III. Telemachos recounts for Penelope his travels (99-165)
- IV. Odysseus arrives at the palace (166-335)
 - A. Intro. to Melanthios (212-260)
 - B. Argos the dog (290-327)
- V. Odysseus enters the palace and begs from the Suitors (336-504)
 - 4th Cretan tale (415-444)
- VI. Odysseus agrees to be questioned by Penelope after the Suitors leave (505-606)

Book Eighteen

- I. Odysseus fights with Iros (1-157)
- II. Penelope stirs up the Suitors (158-303)
- III. The wicked servant Melanthe (304-345)
- IV. Eurymachos and Odysseus quarrel (346-428)

Book Nineteen

- I. Odysseus and Telemachos store away the weapons (1-52)
- II. Harsh words between Odysseus and Melanthe (53-95)

- III. Penelope questions Odysseus (96-360)
 - 5th Cretan tale (164-202, 220-248, 261-307)
- IV. Eurykelia recognizes Odysseus (361-507)
- V. Penelope tells Odysseus of her dream, announces a contest (508-604)

Book Twenty

- I. Odysseus and Penelope each have a restless night (1-121)
- II. Morning preparations for the Suitors (122-159)
- III. Eumaios, Melanthios and Philoitios greet Odysseus (160-239)
- IV. The Arrival of the Suitors (240-394)
 - A. Ktesippos' mockery (284-319)
 - B. Strange omens recognized by Theoklymenos (345-370)

Book Twenty-One

- I. Penelope announces the contest of the bow to the Suitors (1-135)
- II. The Suitors try unsuccessfully to string the bow (136-187)
- III. Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaios and Philoitios outside and they plot against the Suitors (188-244)
- IV. The bow is strung by Odysseus, who shoots through the axes (245-434)

Book Twenty-Two

- I. Odysseus and Telemachos slay the Suitors (1-392)
- II. The serving women and Melanthios are killed (393-476)
- III. The house is purified (477-501)

Book Twenty-Three

- I. Eurykleia awakens Penelope and tells her of Odysseus' arrival (1-84)
- II. Penelope and Odysseus are reunited (85-372)

Book Twenty-Four

- I. Hermes leads the souls of the Suitors to the underworld, where they encounter Agamemnon and Achilles (1-204)
- II. Odysseus visits his father Laertes in the countryside (205-411)
- III. Odysseus and his followers fend off the families of the Suitors (412-548)