The Odyssey of Homer

Lecture 1: Heroes' Homecomings
Lecture 2: Guests and Hosts
Lecture 3: A Goddess and a Princess
Lecture 4: Odysseus Among the Phaiakians
Lecture 5: Odysseus Tells His Own Story
Lecture 6: From Persephone's Land to the Island of Helios
Lecture 7: The Goddess, the Swineherd, and the Beggar
Lecture 8: Reunion and Return
Lecture 9: Odysseus and Penelope
Lecture 10: Recognitions and Revenge
Lecture 11: Reunion and Resolution
Lecture 12: The Trojan War and the Archaeologists

1-800-TEACH-12
1-800-832-2412

The Teaching Company

883 Homer V
Vandiver, Elizabeth
The Odyssey of Homer
1436178
(6)

DMC
Elizabeth Vandiver, Ph.D.
Visiting Assistant Professor of Classics, Northwestern University

Elizabeth Vandiver did her undergraduate work at Shimer College, Mt. Carroll, Illinois, where she matriculated in 1972 as a 16-year-old “early entrant.” After receiving her B.A. in 1975, she spent several years working as a librarian before deciding to pursue graduate work in Classics at the University of Texas at Austin. She received her M.A. in 1984, and her Ph.D. in 1990.

In addition to teaching at Northwestern University, Professor Vandiver has held visiting professorships at the University of Georgia; The Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome, Italy; Loyola University, New Orleans; and Utah State University. She has taught at Northwestern since 1996; her course on Classical Mythology, which features the Iliad and the Odyssey, has been particularly successful.

In 1998, Dr. Vandiver received the American Philological Association’s Excellence in Teaching Award, the most prestigious teaching award available to American classicists. Other awards include the Northwestern University Department of Classics Excellence in Teaching award for 1998, and the University of Georgia’s Outstanding Honors Professor award in 1993 and 1994.

Dr. Vandiver has published a book, Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History, and several articles, as well as delivering numerous papers at national and international conferences. She is currently working on a second book, examining the influence of the Classical tradition on the British poets of WWI.

Dr. Vandiver is married to Franklin J. Hildy, Ph.D., Professor of Theatre History at the University of Georgia.
This course is dedicated to the memory of Gareth Morgan, teacher of Greek, lover of Homer.
The Odyssey of Homer

Scope:
Just as knowledge of the Trojan War legend is necessary for understanding the Iliad, so too the Odyssey assumes that its audience knows how the war ended and what happened next. Lecture One of this course sketches out the events that took place between the two epics, and then considers two primary types of epic, kleos and nostos (or “return”) epic. The lecture also looks at the opening lines of the Odyssey and discusses the effect of its complicated chronology and narrative structure. Lecture Two introduces another key cultural concept, xenia (the “guest-host relationship”) and explains its importance both for the Odyssey as a whole and for the first four books, which focus on Odysseus’ son Telemachos, in particular. In Lecture Three, we get our first view of Odysseus himself, and are introduced to key elements in his character, particularly his caution, his great rhetorical skill, and his longing for his own homecoming (nostos). Lecture Four analyzes Odysseus’ interactions with the Phaiakians, the people who will help him on his journey home. This lecture also covers the opening of Odysseus’ great first-person narrative of his travels since leaving Troy, a narrative which continues for four full books of the Odyssey. Lectures Five and Six continue our examination of that narrative, identifying and analyzing Odysseus’ motivations in telling the story and its effect on his audiences both inside and outside the epic. In Lecture Seven, we look closely at Odysseus’ long-delayed return to Ithaka and his meeting there with the goddess Athena. His reunion with his son Telemachos and its implications are the main focus of Lecture Eight, which also covers Odysseus’ return to his palace in disguise as an old beggar. Lecture Nine provides a close analysis of Odysseus’ conversation with his wife Penelope, and considers the crucial critical question of whether Penelope recognizes this “beggar” as her husband. This lecture also explores the narrative significance of the scene in which Odysseus’ old nurse, Eurykleia, recognizes him from a scar on his thigh. In Lecture Ten we consider the scene of vengeance in which Odysseus kills the suitors who have been plaguing his wife Penelope, and in Lecture Eleven we discuss the final reunion of Odysseus and Penelope and the end of the Odyssey.

Lecture Twelve provides an epilogue to this course and its companion, The Iliad, by addressing the issue of the historicity of the Trojan War. This final lecture surveys the recent archaeological evidence for an actual conflict, and discusses the possible relationship between that event in the 12th century BC and the legendary war as described in the 8th century BC epics.

Lecture One
Heroes’ Homecomings

Scope:
In this lecture, we turn from the Iliad to the Odyssey. The lecture begins with an overview of those events in the traditional Trojan War story which took place after the Iliad. Just as the Iliad constantly refers outside itself to other episodes in the Trojan War story, so the Odyssey too assumes in its audience complete familiarity with the story (including the events of the Iliad). After this overview of the background story, we examine the difference between kleos epic, with its primary focus on glory, and nostos epic, which focuses instead on homecoming. We then turn to an examination of the structure of the Odyssey itself, and discuss its very complicated chronological arrangement. The lecture concludes by considering the overall narrative effect of Odysseus’ delayed entry into the epic.

Outline

I. Just as a knowledge of Achilles’ inevitable death and the destruction of Troy are essential for understanding the Iliad, so the events of the end of the War and its aftermath are essential for appreciating the Odyssey.

II. The events following the Iliad were told in a series of epics, no longer extant, called the Epic Cycle. These included events that are directly referred to in the Odyssey.

A. The Aethiopis (five books) picked up the action immediately after the funeral of Hektor. This epic told of Achilles’ death.

B. The Little Iliad (four books) told of the after-effects of Achilles’ death and of the Sack of Troy.

1. Ajax the Greater killed himself after the Greeks voted to award Achilles’ armor to Odysseus.
2. The Greeks built the Trojan Horse and used it to gain entry to Troy. This was Odysseus’ idea.

C. The Ilioupersis (two books) overlapped somewhat with the Little Iliad in telling the story of the Sack of Troy. It described several outrages committed by the Greeks during the Sack. These influenced subsequent events, including those in the Odyssey.

1. Achilles’ son Neoptolemos killed Priam at his household altar.
2. Astyanax (son of Hektor and Andromache) was thrown from the walls of Troy.
3. Ajax the Lesser raped Priam’s daughter Cassandra in the temple of the goddess Athena, a major sacrilege.
D. The *Nostoi* or *Returns* (five books) told the story of the Greek warriors’ voyages homeward.
1. Agamemnon was killed by his wife Klytaimestra and her lover Aigisthos when he reached home.
2. Menelaos and Helen were driven off course and spent several years in Egypt, finally reaching Greece only in the eighth year after the Sack.
3. Aias the Lesser was drowned at sea for his sacrifice in the temple of Athena.

III. *Nostos* (i.e., “homecoming” or “return”) is the obvious theme of the *Odyssey*, just as *kleos* is of the *Iliad*.

A. Epic can be divided into *kleos* epic and *nóstos* epic.

B. An equally valid distinction might be between war epic and peace epic. *Kleos* is still very important in the *Odyssey*, but no longer depends on death in battle.

IV. Like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* begins in *medias res*. But the fact that this is a *nóstos* epic is stressed from the very beginning.

A. In the prelude, the bard runs through a brief resume of Odysseus’ adventures after the fall of Troy.
   1. Although Odysseus is not named until line 21, he is identified in the very first line by the epithet *poluutropos*. This sets his “character note” for the epic, as well as establishing that this epic is about one man’s struggles to get home, not about warfare.
   2. The first thirteen lines contain the word *nóstos* in some form three times.

B. After identifying Odysseus by summarizing his adventures, the bard asks the Muse to start the story “from some point.”

C. The bard then implies that the Odyssey will start in the tenth year after the Trojan War, when Zeus (at Athena’s insistence) sends the messenger god Hermes to tell the nymph Kalypso that she must let Odysseus go.

D. After sketching out Odysseus’ history and placing him on Kalypso’s island, the bard changes direction and takes us on a side-journey to Ithaka. Odysseus does not actually appear in the *Odyssey* until Book V.

V. The narrative structure of the *Odyssey* is complicated and anything but straightforward.

A. The first four books are concerned primarily with Odysseus’ son Telemachos.
   1. Books I and II show Telemachos at home on Ithaka.
   2. Books III and IV show Telemachos traveling to visit Nestor and Menelaos.

B. Books V–VIII take up Odysseus’ story as he leaves Kalypso’s island and journeys to Scheria, land of the Phaiakians, a people who will help him home to Ithaka.

C. Books IX–XII are a flashback to Odysseus’ adventures from the time he left Troy until he arrived at Kalypso’s island. This section of the *Odyssey* is narrated in the first person by Odysseus himself.

D. With Odysseus’ arrival on Ithaka in Book XIII, the structure returns to straightforward chronology.

E. Thus, a purely chronological arrangement of the *Odyssey* would put Books IX–XII first, followed by V–VIII, followed by XIII–XXIV. Telemachos’ adventures in Books I–IV happen at the same time as Books V–VIII.

VI. By delaying Odysseus’ entrance for four full books, the bard lets us see how badly Odysseus is needed on his home island of Ithaka, both by his family and his society.

A. Odysseus’ absence causes great problems for his family.
   1. Odysseus’ wife Penelope is left not knowing whether she is wife or widow.
   2. Odysseus’ son Telemachos is left not knowing if he should guard the kingdom for his father or assert his own right to be king.
   3. Thus, both Penelope and Telemachos are left in a kind of limbo in which their proper courses of action are unclear.

B. Odysseus’ absence causes great problems for his society, which like all the societies shown in the *Odyssey* is unquestioningly monarchical.
   1. The *Odyssey* takes for granted that a country must have a king.
   2. Ithaka has been without its king for twenty years, and has suffered great disarray as a consequence.

C. The suitors of Penelope are the focal point for these troubles in both family and society.
   1. As suitors, they are destroying Odysseus’ household and threatening his marriage.
   2. Implicit in their suit is the idea that whichever one of them marries Penelope will become ruler of Ithaka. They are thus threatening Telemachos’ rights as well.
   3. Their wanton disregard of the proprieties can be seen as a result of the disordered state of Ithaka.

VII. Homer starts the *Odyssey* at the precise moment when the situation on Ithaka is coming to a head and something must give.

A. Telemachos is grown, and so should assert himself as master of his household.
B. While Telemachos was a child, Penelope could concentrate on rearing him and waiting for Odysseus. But now, she should allow her son to act as a grown man.

C. Penelope had held the suitors at bay for three years with a trick, weaving a shroud during the day and unweaving it at night. But they have found her out, so this trick will work no longer.

D. Thus, the situation has become desperate; Odysseus is needed back on Ithaka now.

Essential Reading:
*Odyssey*, Book I.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the impact of the *Odyssey's* complicated chronological structure, with its doubling back on itself and extended flashback? Would the impact of the story be different if the *Odyssey*, like the *Iliad*, were told in straight chronological order?
2. Compare the poems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. What differences of tone and approach, if any, do you find in them?

Lecture Two
Guests and Hosts

Scope: This lecture defines and examines *xenia*, a concept which is of key importance for understanding the *Odyssey*. Often translated as “the guest-host relationship,” *xenia* is a major theme throughout Odysseus’ wanderings. This lecture concentrates on the way in which *xenia* permeates the first four books of the *Odyssey* and the effect this has on the audience’s understanding of the characters of Telemachos and the suitors. Finally, the lecture examines how the conventions of *xenia* allow the bard to integrate Nestor and Menelaos into his narrative, by sending Telemachos to visit them and establish a bond of *xenia* with them. In addition to examining *xenia*, the lecture also highlights two other important narrative elements that are established in the *Telemachy*; the use of Agamemnon’s story as a parallel for Odysseus’ own, and Telemachos’ need to assert his maturity.

Outline

I. The first four books of the *Odyssey* highlight one of its key themes, the concept of *xenia*.

A. *Xenia* is usually translated “guest-host relationship.” It is a reciprocal relationship between two xenoi—a word which means guest, host, stranger, friend, and foreigner.
   1. It is not based on friendship, but rather on obligation.
   2. It works only if each side does not violate the terms of *xenia*. To do so is to offend Zeus himself.

B. Throughout the *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ homecoming and regaining of his family and kingdom are either helped or hindered by the kind of *xenia* he meets on his journeys.

C. The primary importance of *xenia* is established throughout the first four books of the *Odyssey*, where Telemachos experiences it from every possible angle.

II. Telemachos is the most important character in these first four books; in fact, they are often called the *Telemachy*. *Xenia* is a crucial element in the bard’s characterization of Telemachos.

A. In Books I and II, we see Telemachos dealing with issues of *xenia* from the host’s perspective, at home on Ithaka.

B. In Books III and IV, we see Telemachos experiencing *xenia* from the guest’s perspective, in the courts of Nestor and Menelaos.
III. Xenia is also crucial for our understanding of the suitors. Their wrongdoing is couched almost entirely in terms of a violation of xenia.

A. Telemachos himself stresses this in Book II, when he calls an assembly of the men of Ithaka.

B. The suitors ignore the essentially reciprocal nature of xenia.

IV. The first two books, set on Ithaka, use the concept of xenia to highlight the conflict between Telemachos and the suitors.

A. Our first view of Telemachos shows him receiving the disguised Athena as a guest. He shows her proper xenia, in the first of the Odyssey's many “host-greeting-guest” scenes.
   1. Telemachos greets his guest at the door, and takes her spear away from her.
   2. He bids her welcome, and tells her that her needs will be seen to.
   3. He offers her food, a bath, and a bed for the night.
   4. Only after her immediate physical needs have been attended to does he ask her who she is.

B. Telemachos has two main concerns: his grief over his absent father and his anger at the suitors’ behavior. Athena advises Telemachos to go visit Nestor and Menelaos to seek news of his father. She also tells him to call a council of all the men of Ithaka, and to assert himself to the suitors.

C. In the council, Telemachos directly accuses the suitors of violating xenia. He is backed up by the prophet Halitherses, who predicts misfortune for the suitors if they do not mend their ways.

D. The spokesman of the suitors, Eurymachos, makes it very clear that the suitors do not care about xenia or any other mores of their society.

E. The contrast between Telemachos and the suitors is enhanced by the fact that most of the suitors, too, are sons of absent fathers. The disorder in Ithakan society is represented by the disorder in xenia.

V. Books III and IV present a view of xenia working properly, with Telemachos in the role of guest.

A. In Book III, Telemachos visits Nestor at Pylos.
   1. Nestor receives Telemachos properly, as a good host should.
   2. Nestor suggests that Telemachos should visit Menelaos, recently returned home to Sparta. He provides Telemachos with horses and a chariot so that he can make the journey.
   3. Nestor's son Peisistratos joins Telemachos as a traveling companion.

B. In Book IV, Telemachos and Peisistratos visit Menelaos and Helen, recently returned to Sparta after seven years’ wandering.
   1. Again, they are greeted and entertained properly.
   2. They are given gifts when they leave.

VI. Books III and IV also provide crucial background information and set up narrative elements that will be important throughout the rest of the epic.

A. At Telemachos’ request, Nestor recounts events after the fall of Troy.
   1. He tells about the homecoming of several Greeks, but does not know what has happened to Odysseus.
   2. He describes Agamemnon’s murder at the hands of his treacherous wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos, and how Agamemnon was avenged by his son Orestes. This story appears over and over in the Odyssey as a parable for Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachos’ situation.

B. In Sparta, the conversation turns to Troy, and Telemachos weeps when Menelaos praises Odysseus.
   1. Helen recognizes Telemachos. She gives the three men an Egyptian drug, nepenthe, so that they will stop grieving.
   2. Helen tells a story about how she helped Odysseus once during the Trojan War. Menelaos counters with a story about how only Odysseus’ cunning kept Helen from betraying all the Greek soldiers when they were inside the Trojan Horse.
   3. Finally, Menelaos recounts his conversation with the sea-god Proteus, who told him about the deaths of Ajax the Lesser and Agamemnon, and about Odysseus’ captivity on Kalypso’s island.

C. Thus, Telemachos now knows his father was alive as recently as two years ago, and he has renewed reason to hope for his return.

D. Telemachos has also had the chance to assert himself as an adult in his own right before his father’s return.

VII. The Telemachy ends with a brief look back at Ithaka.

A. The suitors scheme to murder Telemachos when he returns.

B. Penelope weeps for Odysseus.

C. The situation on Ithaka is set firmly enough in our minds that the bard can now put it “on hold” for the next several books, and turn to Odysseus’ own story.

Essential Reading:

Odyssey, Books II–IV.

Supplementary Reading:

Norman Austin, Helen of Troy, Chapter 3.
S. Douglas Olson, Blood and Iron, Chapter 2.
Richard Seaford, Reciprocity and Ritual, Chapter 1.

Questions to Consider:
1. Telemachos is often described as being unrealistically immature; on any reckoning, he must be 20 years old by the time the *Odyssey* opens. Does the charge of immaturity seem valid, or is Telemachos a realistic portrait of a young man in his situation?

2. Why does Athena send Telemachos off to visit Nestor and Menelaos, instead of simply telling him that his father is almost home?

---

**Lecture Three**

**A Goddess and a Princess**

**Scope:** In this lecture, we turn to Odysseus himself as a character in the *Odyssey*. We examine Odysseus’ first appearance in Book V and his interaction with Kalypso, as well as his encounter with the Phaiakian princess Nausikaa in Book VI. The lecture concentrates on the aspects of Odysseus’ character that are foregrounded in these two books. In Book V, we see his desire to return home as a desire to reestablish his own identity; in both books, we see him as a superbly skilled rhetorician, who is able to craft his speech to appeal to whomever he is addressing. Finally, we discuss the ongoing thematic importance of *xenia* in Nausikaa’s welcome of Odysseus in Book VI.

**Outline**

I. Book V opens with a restatement of the gods’ plans for Odysseus.
   A. Athena again reminds Zeus of Odysseus’ plight, and also mentions the suitors’ plan to murder Telemachos.
   B. Zeus sends Hermes to Kalypso’s island to tell her that she must let Odysseus go.

II. Our first view of Odysseus himself comes when Kalypso goes to take him Hermes’ message. He is sitting by the seashore, looking out over the water and weeping.
   A. In Book I, Athena had said that Odysseus was longing to see even the smoke rising from his own country, and that he wanted to die.
   B. Here in our first view of him, this sense of profound longing and helplessness is reiterated. On Kalypso’s island, Odysseus is largely passive, and thus unlike his true self.

III. Odysseus’ first interaction with another character, his conversation with Kalypso, sets up several crucial points about his character and about themes of the *Odyssey*.
   A. He is cautious. He makes Kalypso swear by the River Styx that she is not plotting some trick against him before he trusts her.
   B. He understands what it means to be human. Kalypso has offered him immortality, but he rejects it.
      1. Greek mythology is filled with stories of humans who try for immortality; these attempts almost always end disastrously. By rejecting Kalypso’s offer, Odysseus indicates that he accepts and desires the human condition.
2. Odysseus' desire to return home is a desire to return to his full humanity and selfhood. He cannot truly be Odysseus away from Ithaka, Penelope, and Telemachos.

C. One of the most important aspects of Odysseus' character is his skill in rhetoric and persuasion. His speech to Kalypso in which he explains why he wants to return to Penelope is a masterpiece of tact.

IV. With Kalypso's help, Odysseus builds a raft and leaves her island. However, Poseidon wrecks his raft at sea. Odysseus washes up on the shores of the island Scheria, naked, battered, starved, and more dead than alive. He falls asleep in a pile of leaves by the bank of a river as Book V ends.

V. The people of Scheria are called the Phaiakians. They are dedicated to xenia, and particularly to providing ships for stranded travelers. They will help Odysseus on his way home, though he does not know this himself.

A. Athena appears in a dream to the Phaiakian princess Nausikaa, and inspires her to go do the family's laundry by the river where Odysseus is sleeping.

B. After Nausikaa and her serving maidens do the laundry, they pass the time by playing ball. They wake Odysseus.

C. Upon waking, Odysseus first wonders where he is, then analyzes and reacts to his situation.

1. Odysseus wonders where he is and if the people there know xenia.

2. He then ponders how best to approach Nausikaa without terrifying her.

3. There is an implicit threat of rape underlying this scene, which Odysseus recognizes and has to work against.

4. He plucks a branch to cover his genitals and then comes out of the bushes. The other girls run, but Nausikaa stands still to talk to him.

VI. Odysseus' interaction with Nausikaa once again demonstrates his skill in rhetoric and his ability to fit his words to his audience. She responds in kind.

A. He carefully constructs his speech to reassure her that he will not assault her (alluding to the virgin goddess Artemis), while never directly mentioning that possibility.

B. Nausikaa responds properly, promising him clothing and gifts and whatever he needs. She also calls her attendants to help him bathe.

C. Odysseus' refusal of the attendants' help while he bathes reiterates his recognition of the abnormal nature of this encounter.

D. Athena beautifies Odysseus after he bathes, and Nausikaa comments to her maidens that she would be happy to marry him if he would stay on Scheria.

E. Nausikaa gives Odysseus instructions about going to the city, in a speech which demonstrates that she, too, is skilled in rhetoric.

VII. The interaction with Nausikaa assures both Odysseus and the audience that he has arrived in a highly civilized country where he can expect proper xenia.

Essential Reading:
Odyssey, Books V and VI.

Supplementary Reading:
H. A. Shapiro, "Coming of Age."
Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Refusal of Odysseus."

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the point of including Nausikaa's story in the epic? Is she purely incidental to the narrative, or does her encounter with Odysseus serve some thematic function?

2. Consider the implications of Odysseus' refusal to accept Kalypso's offer of immortality. What does this refusal imply about Odysseus' view of what it means to be human, as compared to Achilles in the Iliad?
Lecture Four

Odysseus among the Phaiakians

Scope: This lecture continues to follow Odysseus’ interactions with the Phaiakians, and moves on into the beginnings of his own great narrative of his past adventures. The lecture addresses several key themes, including the continued importance of xenia as offered by the Phaiakians and how the conception of kleos in the Odyssey differs from that of the Iliad. We discuss the role of the bard Demodokos in Book VIII, and how his appearance at this point of the narrative may reflect the original three-day performance structure of the Odyssey. Moving on into Book IX and Odysseus’ first-person narrative, we see how the encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemos both shows Odysseus at his most clever and quick-thinking and causes all his subsequent troubles.

Outline

I. With Athena’s assistance, Odysseus reaches the palace of Alkinoos and Arete, and asks for their assistance.
   A. Disguised as a young girl, Athena leads Odysseus, concealed in a mist, through the city to the palace.
   B. Athena stresses the importance of Arete, the queen, in Phaiakian society. As we will see, Odysseus takes this into account in his later interactions with the royal couple.

II. The Phaiakians make a point of providing xenia and transportation to any shipwrecked travelers who land upon their island. Odysseus is thus entertained royally, with athletic games and with a bard’s songs.
   A. The athletic games show us Odysseus in his past aspect of warrior, as he was in the Iliad.
      1. Athletic games are, in effect, practice for battle.
      2. When the young Euryalos says that Odysseus does not look like an athlete, therefore, he is in effect saying “you’re no warrior.”
      3. This insult so angers Odysseus that he reveals who he is—if anyone is listening carefully.
   B. The songs of the bard Demodokos reiterate some of the crucial themes of the Trojan war story.
      1. Demodokos’ first song tells of a quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, which in essence honors Odysseus.
      2. Demodokos’ second song recounts the love affair of Ares and Aphrodite.
      3. Demodokos’ third song, at Odysseus’ explicit request, tells the story of the Trojan Horse.

III. As Demodokos sings of the Trojan Horse, Odysseus weeps.
   A. The bard uses one of the most memorable similes of the Odyssey to describe his weeping.
   B. This song, which proves to Odysseus that his deeds have not been forgotten, that he has earned kleos (as though dead), also leads to his revelation of his identity to the Phaiakians after Alkinoos asks why he is weeping.

IV. Performance time is worth considering again. If the Odyssey was originally performed over three days, the end of Book VIII would coincide with the end of the first day’s performance.
   A. In this context, Odysseus’ compliment to the bard Demodokos is noteworthy.
   B. The end of Book VIII would make an excellent stopping point; the audience would certainly come back the next day!

V. As Book IX begins, Odysseus again praises Demodokos, then introduces himself to the Phaiakians and begins his story.
   A. Odysseus’ words, “I am Odysseus, son of Laertes...and my kleos reaches the sky,” stress the difference in kleos as it is conceived of in the Iliad and in the Odyssey. In nostos poetry, the hero’s kleos does not depend upon his death.
   B. Odysseus’ introduction begins a four-book section of first-person narrative, often called “The Great Wanderings.” This is the section of the Odyssey in which Odysseus’ memorable adventures with monsters, sorceresses, and so on are recounted.

VI. Odysseus begins his narrative with the Greeks’ departure from Troy. The first adventures he narrates are straightforward, every-day acts of warfare. But very soon, he leaves the realm of the every day and moves into the realm of marvels, where every adventure presents danger to him and his companions.
   A. The lotus-eaters offered forgetfulness and pleasure.
   B. The Cyclops Polyphemos kills six of Odysseus’ men and threatens to kill the rest.

VII. Odysseus’ encounter with Polyphemos is perhaps the most famous of all his adventures. Certainly it is one of the most important; it highlights xenia, shows Odysseus at his most quick-thinking, and motivates all his further troubles.
   A. The episode’s importance is marked out at its beginning by Odysseus’ repetition of the formulaic lines he spoke at his arrival on Scheria, identifying xenia as the hallmark of civilization.
      1. On Scheria Odysseus receives the best imaginable xenia, but from Polyphemos he receives its exact opposite.
2. Polyphemus obeys none of the protocols of proper behavior, and in fact eats six of Odysseus' men.

B. This adventure shows Odysseus at his quick-thinking, clever best.
1. He devises a successful plan to blind the Cyclops. He gets Polyphemus drunk, and then blinds him while he is asleep.
2. He tells the monster that his name is "Ouitis," or "Nobody." Thus, when the Cyclops calls out for help to his friends, they all think that "nobody" is hurting him.
3. Once the Cyclops is blinded, Odysseus and his companions escape from the cave by clinging to the bellies of Polyphemus' sheep.

C. But this adventure also causes all the rest of Odysseus' troubles, because as he sails away he calls out his true name to Polyphemus. This allows the Cyclops to curse him. There are two possible explanations for why Odysseus reveals his name.
1. He does so through excessive pride.
2. He does so through a desire to perpetuate his own kleos.

Essential Reading:

Odyssey, Books VII-IX.

Supplementary Reading:


Steven Lowenstam, Scepter and Spear, Chapter 3, Section 1, pp. 149-173.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Demodokos' second song, the story of the love affair between Ares and Aphrodite, merely entertainment, or is it connected thematically with the rest of the Odyssey?
2. Do you think Odysseus' telling Polyphemus his name is an instance of reckless pride, or is he justified in doing so?

Lecture Five
Odysseus Tells His Own Story

Scope: We continue following Odysseus' own narrative of the Great Wanderings in this lecture. We see how quickly Polyphemus' curse takes effect, and how Odysseus is tormented by sailing within sight of Ithaka, but then being driven away from it again. The lecture examines Odysseus' encounter with Circe, and discusses some of the implications of the sexual double standard reflected in it and in the rest of the Odyssey. Finally, the lecture looks at the first half of the pivotal episode in the Great Wanderings, Odysseus' narrative of his trip to Hades. We examine Odysseus' conversations there, especially those with the prophet Teiresias and with his own mother Anticlea, and note how for the first time in the Odyssey Odysseus himself is warned about the suitors. The lecture ends with a discussion of the abrupt break in the narrative where the poem returns briefly to the third-person narrative, and examines the reasons for and effects of that break.

Outline

I. The Cyclops' curse takes effect almost immediately.
   A. Odysseus' next stop is at the island of Aiolos, king of the winds. Aiolos gives him all the winds in a bag, but unfortunately Odysseus' comrades open the bag just before they reach Ithaka.
   B. The released stormwinds blow them back to Aiolos, who refuses to help them a second time.
   C. The next place Odysseus lands is the country of the Laistrygones, where he loses all his ships but one.

II. The next adventure is another very famous one. Odysseus' encounter with the goddess Circe, an enchantress who turns half his men into pigs.
   A. One-half of the men go to Circe's palace under the command of Eurylochus, Odysseus' second-in-command.
   B. The encounter with Circe stresses one sub-theme of the Odyssey, Odysseus' ongoing danger from seductive females. Circe, Calypso, and even Nausikaa all present a threat to his homecoming. since each of them offers Odysseus the possibility of staying on with her.
   C. Circe is in many ways a doublet of the other goddess, Calypso. However, the two are opposites in their interactions with Odysseus.
      1. Circe is threatening at first, but becomes helpful after Odysseus proves invulnerable to her magic. She tells him what he needs to do to leave, and does not try to detain him longer than he wants to stay.
2. Kalypso is helpful at first, but becomes a jailer of an unwilling prisoner. She detains Odysseus for much longer than he wants to stay and only lets him go at Zeus’ direct command.

D. Both of these encounters reflect a sexual double standard. Penelope must remain faithful to Odysseus, but Odysseus is not expected to remain sexually faithful to Penelope during his travels. This double standard can be explained in at least two ways.
   1. The Homeric epics assume a masculine viewpoint throughout, and this may simply be an example of narrative wish-fulfillment for a male audience.
   2. In a traditional patriarchal society, female infidelity threatens the family structure in a way that male infidelity simply does not.

III. After one year, Odysseus decides to resume his journey. Circe tells him that he must first undertake another journey, to the Land of the Dead. There he must consult the soul of Teiresias the Theban, a great seer, to find out what he must do to reach home safely.
   A. A journey to the land of the dead seems to be one element that the greatest heroes have in common; Theseus, Herakles, and Orpheus all undertook such journeys.
   B. On a more psychological reading of the myth, Odysseus’ journey (often called “The Nekuia”) can be seen as marking the “death” of the warrior Odysseus and the “rebirth” of the Ithakan Odysseus.

IV. Within the context of the Odyssey, the Nekuia serves several purposes.
   A. It allows Odysseus to gain knowledge of the state of affairs on Ithaka.
   B. It allows the audience to see some of the main characters of the Trojan War, and thus provides a fitting pivotal point for the epic’s turn from Odysseus’ past to his future.
   C. Within the narrative itself, it enchants and astounds Odysseus’ Phaiakian audience.

V. Circe tells Odysseus to sail on the “streams of Ocean” to Persephone’s land. Once there, he must sacrifice two sheep and pour their blood into a pit.
   A. The “streams of Ocean” refers to the belief that the disk of the world was surrounded by an ever-flowing river.
   B. “Persephone’s land” is located only very vaguely, but provides an entrance to the Underworld.

VI. After following Circe’s instructions, Odysseus meets and speaks with several ghosts during the Nekuia. The first main group includes Elpenor, Teiresias, Odysseus’ mother Antikleia, and a whole list of great heroines.
   A. The ghost of Odysseus’ young companion Elpenor speaks to him first.
   B. Teiresias gives Odysseus explicit instructions about what he must do to return home safely. He also warns Odysseus about the suitors.

C. Next, Odysseus speaks to the ghost of his mother.
   1. This lets him have news of Penelope, Telemachos, and Laertes.
   2. His mother tells him that longing for him caused her death.
   3. Odysseus tries to embrace her, but cannot.

D. Odysseus describes a long list of heroines who appeared to him, then abruptly breaks off his narrative.
   1. The break allows the bard to remind the audience of where Odysseus is and whom he is addressing.
   2. The break shows Arete responding very favorably to Odysseus’ words; once again, Odysseus the clever rhetorician has considered his audience in crafting his speech.
   3. Alkinoos begs Odysseus to continue, and asks if he saw any of his comrades from Troy.

Essential Reading:

Odyssey, Books X and XI, lines 1–375.

Supplementary Reading:


Questions to Consider:

1. Odysseus stays a year with Circe, and apparently is not particularly eager to leave her. Contrast this with the image we get of him in Books I and V, where he longs desperately to return to Ithaka; is the mere passage enough to explain the difference, or is his character simply inconsistent in this regard?

2. Does Teiresias’ prophecy about Thrinakia and Helios’ cattle in effect offer Odysseus and his men a choice of two fates, similar to the two fates Achilles chose between in the Iliad? In a wider sense, is the overall picture of moira consistent between the two epics?
Lecture Six

From Persephone’s Land to the Island of Helios

Scope: This lecture continues to look at Odysseus’ narrative of his journey to Hades. We note elements in the Hades narrative that seem particularly designed to enchant Odysseus’ Phaiakian audience, and then consider the vexed question of Odysseus’ veracity in these accounts of his adventures. The lecture moves on to the final episode of the “Great Wanderings,” the killing of Helios’ cattle and the death of all Odysseus’ remaining companions. We see how Odysseus manages to explain his status as sole survivor without losing his audience’s sympathy by implying that he bears no responsibility for his companions’ deaths; thus, once again Odysseus’ skill in rhetoric is foregrounded by the bard.

Outline

I. At Alkinoos’ request, Odysseus resumes his narrative with descriptions of speaking to the ghosts of his former comrades and to the ghost of Herakles. He then ends the Nehukait narrative very abruptly.
   A. Odysseus resumes his story, and tells of meeting the souls of Agamemnon, Achilles, and Aias.
      1. Agamemnon tells the story of his own murder, and warns Odysseus not to trust even Penelope.
      2. Achill claims that he would prefer to be even a poor man’s slave than king over all the dead, thus apparently rejecting the choice of fates he made in the Iliad.
      3. Aias, still angry over the issue of Achilles’ armor, refuses to speak.
   B. Odysseus’ last encounter in the Nehukait is with the ghost of Herakles.
      1. Herakles greets Odysseus almost as an equal.
      2. After speaking to Herakles, Odysseus was suddenly overcome with fear of the hordes of ghosts, and set sail again.
   C. The effect on the Phaiakian audience is crucial here. Odysseus presents himself as someone who has returned alive from Hades, someone whom gods and seers address, and someone whom the great Herakles himself greets as a peer.
   D. Since these adventures are all narrated in Odysseus’ own voice, and since his purpose is to charm the Phaiakians so that they will give him gifts and help him home, we cannot take everything he says at face value as being unquestionably true.
   E. The whole Nehukait interweaves news for Odysseus with reminders of his past. Odysseus is truly “in limbo,” neither dead like his comrades, nor truly living with his family.

II. Odysseus then ends the story of his wanderings with the description of the adventure in which all his remaining comrades were killed, their arrival on Thrinakia, the island of the Sun God Helios.
   A. After leaving “Persephone’s land,” Odysseus returns to Circe’s island.
      1. Odysseus and his men bury Elpenor.
      2. Circe greets Odysseus and his comrades as twice-dying men, since they have gone to Hades.
      3. Circe tells Odysseus about the next dangers he will encounter: he must sail past the Sirens; he must navigate between the Stymphalas, or “Clashing Rocks,” and he must find a way between the monster Skylla and the whirlpool Charybdis.
      4. Circe then repeats Teiresias’ warning about the cattle of Helios.
   B. In due course, Odysseus comes to Thrinakia. He wants to sail past it without stopping, but Eurylochos persuades him to stop for one night.
   C. The winds blow against them for an entire month, so they cannot leave Thrinakia. Finally, Eurylochos and the other companions kill and eat some of Helios’ cattle. Odysseus shapes the account to show that he was not responsible, and could not have stopped his men.
      1. Odysseus has gone off alone to pray, and has fallen asleep.
      2. Eurylochos and the others sacrifice the cattle reverently and promise to build a temple to Helios.
      3. Odysseus wakes to the smell of roasting meat.
      4. The men eat, but Odysseus does not.
   D. The winds change and the ship sets sail. But at Helios’ request, Zeus sends a storm to wreck the ship, and only Odysseus escapes alive. Again, Odysseus includes details that stress his blamelessness in the disaster.
      1. Odysseus recounts how he knows what Helios said to Zeus; he heard it from Kalypso, who heard it from Hermes.
      2. The storm blows the ship back to Charybdis, where it is destroyed and all the companions drowned. Odysseus barely escapes with his life, and then floats on some wrecked timbers to Kalypso’s island.

III. Odysseus’ first person narrative ends here, with his arrival on Ogygia. Thus, halfway through the Odyssey we have circled back to its beginning, and are now ready for another beginning, this time on Ithaka.

Essential Reading:

Odyssey, Book XI, lines 375–end; Book XII.
Supplementary Reading:
Lillian Doherty, “Sirens, Muses, and Female Narrators.”
S. Douglas Olson, Blood and Iron, Chapter 3.
Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Death with Two Faces.”

Questions to Consider:
1. Is it possible to make sense out of the narrative of the Odyssey if we assume that every supernatural adventure Odysseus narrates in the Great Wanderings is a lie? Are there any elements of the story that are vouched for by “Homer” as narrator of the Odyssey? Can you work out any consistent standard to judge when Odysseus is telling the truth and when he may be lying?

2. In the proem of the Odyssey, the poet says that Odysseus’ comrades were “fools,” destroyed by “their own reckless actions,” because they ate Helios’ cattle. Does this seem consistent with their story as it is presented in Book XII?

Lecture Seven
The Goddess, the Swineherd, and the Beggar

Scope: This lecture begins our study of the second half of the Odyssey by discussing the change in pace and subject matter in the “Ithakan” books. From Book XIII onward, the narrative pace is much slower, and the challenges Odysseus faces are very different from those we have seen earlier. The lecture looks in detail at Odysseus’ arrival on Ithaka, the significance for xenia of the formulaic lines he speaks here for the third time, his encounter with the disguised Athena, and their plan for his vengeance on the suitors. We also discuss Odysseus’ arrival, in disguise, at the hut of his loyal swineherd, Eumaios, and the xenia he receives there.

Outline
I. The second half of the Odyssey differs noticeably from the first half in its pace and in the type of challenges Odysseus faces.
   A. The pace of the narrative slows down markedly. The events narrated in Books XIII through XXIV would barely fill one book of the “Great Wanderings.”
   B. Odysseus is still in constant danger, but it is no longer danger from monsters and goddesses and supernatural forces. Rather, he is now in danger of being killed by Penelope’s suitors.

II. Odysseus must continue to be polutropos, skilled at reading his interlocutors, and above all self-controlled.
   A. Once back on Ithaka, Odysseus faces a number of situations in which his own human emotions threaten to betray him. In order to reconstitute himself as ruler of Ithaka, he must stay in disguise; therefore, any betrayal of emotion when he sees Penelope or Telemachos for the first time, for instance, would be highly dangerous.
   B. These new challenges are no less exacting than the swashbuckling adventures of the first half of the epic.

III. The change in pace and type of adventures means that in some sense Book XIII signals a new beginning, or a second opening, of the Odyssey. This is signaled by Odysseus’ arrival on Ithaka.
   A. He arrives asleep. The Phaiakian sailors put him down on the shore without waking him.
   B. When he wakes, he does not know where he is.
C. Once again, as he did on Scheria and on the Cyclops' island, Odysseus speaks the same formulaic lines about wondering where he is and if the people there know xenia.

1. These three occurrences are the only times Odysseus says these precise lines in the Odyssey.

2. This is an excellent example of how a bard working in a formulaic tradition can use that tradition to give heightened effect to his work.

IV. Athena appears in disguise and tells Odysseus he is on Ithaka. He responds by lying to her, pretending to be a stranger to the island, which pleases her. She then tells him who she is and says that she had always been looking out for him.

A. Athena's identification of Ithaka is the first emotional trial Odysseus faces. As Athena herself says, anyone else would have immediately run to see his wife and palace, but Odysseus contains himself and is cautious.

B. Athena explicitly says that Odysseus' craftiness, and skill in lying are why she favors him. She then reveals her identity to him, saying that she is known for mētis (wisdom, skill, craft) among the gods as he is among mortals, and that she will devise a mētis (plan) for him to defeat the suitors.

C. Athena says that she always watched over Odysseus: Odysseus' response, that he was not aware of her after they left Troy, and her answer are indicative of the gulf between gods and humans.

1. To Odysseus' objection that she had left him alone for nearly ten years, Athena simply responds that she did not want to argue with her father's brother Poseidon, and that she knew Odysseus would reach Ithaka some day.

2. However, Athena's anger over the rape of Kassandra caused her to abandon all the Greeks. During this time, Odysseus blinded Polyphemus and incurred the wrath of Poseidon. Thus, her answer is not entirely straightforward.

3. The difference, in human terms, of reaching Ithaka ten years earlier or ten years later seems utterly lost on Athena.

V. Together, Athena and Odysseus plot how he will regain his kingdom.

A. Athena disguises Odysseus as an old beggar and advises him to go stay with his loyal swineherd, Eumaios. This will help Athena engineer a meeting between Odysseus and Telemachos.

B. As a beggar, Odysseus will be able to enter his own palace unnoticed by the suitors, and without raising any suspicions about what he is doing there.

VI. Odysseus is received with proper xenia by the swineherd Eumaios. The two men tell one another their stories; Odysseus lies, saying that he is from Crete. Eumaios recounts that he himself is a king's son, kidnapped in early childhood.

A. The xenia Eumaios offers Odysseus works on two levels. On the surface, the slave entertains the beggar; on a deeper level, the king's son entertains a king.

B. As one of the few loyal slaves left in Odysseus' household, Eumaios serves as a foil for the disloyal slaves and the hubristic suitors.

C. Eumaios' descriptions of the state of Odysseus' household and Ithaka in general work both within the narrative, to provide crucial information to Odysseus, and outside the narrative, to remind the audience of how badly Odysseus is needed on Ithaka.

VII. Meanwhile, while Odysseus and Eumaios talk, Athena has traveled to Sparta to summon Telemachos home. The scene is thus set for the reunion of father and son.

Essential Reading:

Odyssey, Books XIII–XV.

Supplementary Reading:

Jenny Strauss Clay, Wrath of Athena, Chapter 4. This reading provides a close analysis of Athena and Odysseus' meeting on Ithaka in Book XIII.

S. Douglas Olson, Blood and Iron, Chapter 6 (on Eumaios).

Laura Slatkin, "Composition by Theme and the Mētis of the Odyssey."

Questions to Consider:

1. Compare Athena's conversation with Odysseus with gods' interactions with humans in the Iliad. What similarities and differences do you see?

2. Odysseus lies about who he is to Athena, and again to Eumaios. What do you make of his willingness to resort to lies as soon as he is back on Ithaka? Does it have any significance for our understanding of Odysseus' character in the first half of the Odyssey?
Lecture Eight
Reunion and Return

Scope: The two books covered in this lecture, XVI and XVII, include Odysseus' reunion with his son Telemachos and his entry, still disguised as a beggar, into his own palace. Throughout this section of the Odyssey the poet stresses Odysseus' emotional trials; he must not show joy at the sight of Telemachos, anger at the evil goatherd Melanthios, or sorrow at the death of his dog Argos. Each encounter reiterates Odysseus' supreme self-control and moves him closer to his utmost danger, being in the palace with the suitors, and his utmost trial, reunion with Penelope.

Outline

I. Book XVI opens at dawn in Eumaios' hut. Following Athena's instructions, Telemachos arrives and is fondly greeted by Eumaios.
   A. Homer stresses the emotional impact on Odysseus' of Telemachos' arrival in two main ways.
      1. A simile compares Eumaios' reaction to a father's reaction upon seeing his son.
      2. Telemachos calls Eumaios atta ("papa"), and refers to Odysseus as a xenos (stranger).
   B. Odysseus behaves properly for a beggar, and Telemachos behaves graciously in return.
   C. Odysseus asks Telemachos to describe the situation in the palace to him.
      1. Telemachos says that Penelope can neither bring herself to marry nor bring an end to the matter.
      2. He adds that the suitors are devouring all his goods and destroying his household.

II. Telemachos sends Eumaios to the palace to tell Penelope that he has returned safely. This leaves father and son alone.
   A. Athena appears to Odysseus and summons him out to the courtyard.
   B. She instructs him to reveal his true identity to Telemachos.
   C. She taps him with her wand, and he becomes younger and handsome again.

III. Odysseus goes back into the hut, and tells Telemachos who he is.
   A. Telemachos is astonished at Odysseus' changed appearance, and thinks that he must be a god.
   B. In a remarkably short and straightforward speech, Odysseus tells his son "I am your father."
   C. Telemachos refuses to believe him at first.
   D. Odysseus can offer no proof; Telemachos has to decide to accept him "as is."

IV. Telemachos accepts Odysseus' identity, and the two weep in each other's arms.
   A. This is the first time on Ithaka that Odysseus lets his emotions show.
   B. Another remarkable simile stresses what Odysseus and Telemachos have lost. Their weeping is compared to the cries of birds whose young have been stolen from their nest.

V. Odysseus begins to plot his return to the palace. He invests great trust and responsibility in Telemachos.
   A. Odysseus asks how many suitors there are, and if he and Telemachos can fight them alone or will need more help.
   B. Odysseus tells Telemachos to return to the palace the next morning and wait for him there; he will come later, in disguise, with Eumaios. He gives Telemachos three crucially important instructions.
      1. If the suitors abuse Odysseus, Telemachos must not react.
      2. When Odysseus looks at Telemachos and nods to him, Telemachos must remove the weapons that hang on the walls of the great dining hall and put them away in a storeroom.
      3. Telemachos must not tell anyone at all, not even Penelope, that "the beggar" is Odysseus.
   C. These instructions imply that Odysseus accepts Telemachos as fully mature, trustworthy, and capable of restraint and cunning equal to his own.

VI. Book XVII brings Odysseus at last to his own palace. On the way, he has two significant encounters.
   A. Odysseus and Eumaios meet the disloyal goatherd Melanthios on their way into town. This meeting has two functions; it is another emotional trial for Odysseus, and it provides him with information about Melanthios' disloyalty.
   B. In the courtyard of his palace, Odysseus sees his aged dog Argos, lying on a heap of dung. Argos dies the instant he sees Odysseus. Again, this meeting has two primary functions.
      1. Argus, again, it is an emotional trial. Odysseus dares not show any emotion at the sight of his loyal dog. Argos is too weak to crawl, but he wags his tail and lays his ears back. Odysseus secretly wipes away a tear, walks past Argos to enter the palace, and Argos dies.
2. The Argos scene also reminds us of the state of Odysseus' palace and society. Odysseus asks Eumaios about the dog, and Eumaios says he is neglected because the servants are careless in their master's absence.

3. The once-splendid dog dying on a dungheap is a visual representation of what has happened to Odysseus' palace in his absence.

4. Argos' death the instant Odysseus enters his palace stresses the irrevocable consequences of that entry.

VII. Once inside his palace, Odysseus begins to interact with the suitors. Antinoos abuses Odysseus by throwing a footstool at him, and this gains Penelope's attention.

A. Penelope summons Eumaios, and asks him to send the beggar to her.

B. Odysseus sends back a message that he will speak to her later, in the evening.

Essential Reading:

*Odyssey*, Books XVI and XVII.

Supplementary Reading:


Questions to Consider:

1. Do symbolic readings, such as my explanation of the Argos scene, depend on there being one "author" of the *Odyssey*? Could such symbolism develop in a traditional system such as posited by theAnalysts?

2. Why does Odysseus say so little to Telemachos when he identifies himself? Would this not be a time for a long, fluent, rhetorically brilliant speech if ever there was such a time?

Lecture Nine

Odysseus and Penelope

Scope: This lecture looks in close detail at the two lengthy conversations between the disguised Odysseus and Penelope in Book XIX, and the scene that separates those conversations, in which Eurykleia recognizes Odysseus. It analyzes the setting of Odysseus' and Penelope's encounter, and the implications of the fact that they are not alone as they speak. Turning to the Eurykleia scene, the lecture offers an interpretation of it that explains the significance both of Odysseus' scar and of his name, and the importance of his name's meaning ("Giver/Receiver of Pain") for the entire *Odyssey*. Finally, the lecture addresses the great critical issue of Book XIX: whether or not Penelope recognizes that the beggar is her husband.

Outline

I. Book XVII builds the suspense between Penelope's request to speak to the beggar and her actual meeting with Odysseus. The book also introduces the character Melantho, sister of Melanthios and lover of Eurymachos; it also reiterates the suitors' insolence and their corruption of Odysseus' slaves.

A. Penelope comes downstairs to beguile gifts from the suitors; this is Odysseus' first sight of her.

B. Telemachos tells the suitors to go home for the night. They are astonished at his assertion, but they do as he suggests.

II. Book XIX opens with Telemachos and Odysseus storing away the weapons from the great hall. After this, Penelope comes downstairs and speaks to Odysseus.

A. The time and place of this first conversation between Odysseus and Penelope are crucial in several ways.

1. They are sitting on either side of their hearth, the symbolic center of the household.

2. Since it is evening, the likelihood of Penelope immediately recognizing Odysseus is less.

3. They are not alone in the room. Eurykleia, Eurynome, Melantho (sister of Melanthios, the unfaithful goatherd) and, quite possibly, other female servants are there.

B. Penelope begins by asking "the beggar" who he is.

1. He tells her to ask him anything else, but not to ask his identity.

2. She responds with a description of her own troubles, including the famous weaving trick which allowed her to keep the suitors at bay for over three years, and then asks again who he is.
3. He responds with a lying story, saying that he comes from Crete and that he met Odysseus before the Trojan War.

C. This conversation is the most intense emotional trial that Odysseus has yet encountered. This is stressed by a simile describing Penelope's weeping and his reaction.

D. Penelope then offers Odysseus a bath; he responds by asking for an "aged woman" to wash only his feet. Penelope summons Eurykleia to wash the guest's feet.

III. Eurykleia bathes Odysseus' feet, and recognizes him by a scar on his thigh.

A. Eurykleia's sight of the scar leads to a long description of how and when Odysseus got both the scar and his name, the two essential signs of his identity.
1. While visiting his grandfather, the young Odysseus took part in a boar hunt and was wounded by the boar's tusk.
2. This grandfather had given Odysseus his name, a name which seems to mean "giver/receiver of pain."
3. The physical sign of Odysseus' identity, the scar, thus enacts the meaning of his name.

B. Odysseus' name is enacted throughout the Odyssey. In all his adventures, he both suffers and causes physical and/or emotional pain.
1. We see this very obviously with the Cyclops.
2. But we also see it with good characters such as the Phaiakians, whom Poseidon punishes for their encounter with Odysseus.
3. Eurykleia's reaction here stresses the same idea; she is seized by grief and joy together as she recognizes Odysseus.

IV. One of the great critical questions of the Odyssey is whether or not Penelope recognizes the beggar as her husband. Their entire conversation in Book XIX, especially the part following the foot-washing scene, can be interpreted to support either interpretation, that she does or that she does not.

A. Since the two are not alone, even if Penelope suspects that the beggar is Odysseus she must be very careful in her words to him.
1. At the very beginning of their conversation, she tells him about her weaving trick, and the anguish that the suitors have caused her. This makes good sense if she knows who he is, but is harder to explain if she does not.
2. She presses him to reveal his identity and to tell her if he has ever seen Odysseus. Her copious weeping at his reply makes good sense if she does not know who he is, but is harder to explain if she does.

B. The most important conversation for this question is Penelope's account of her dream, and Odysseus' reaction.

1. Penelope says that she had a dream that an eagle killed her pet geese, then spoke to her and said that he was Odysseus and the geese were the suitors. She asks her guest to interpret the dream for her.
2. Odysseus tells her that the dream can bear only one meaning; Odysseus is about to return.
3. Penelope then immediately suggests an archery contest with Odysseus' old bow, to determine which suitor she should marry.
4. If we assume Penelope knows who the beggar is, this scene can be read as a kind of coded plan, in which she ascertains his intentions and provides him with a weapon.
5. If she does not know, the scene still makes sense; she is setting the suitors a test which she has good reason to think they cannot pass.

C. The ambiguity itself—"what does Penelope know and when does she know it?"—provides a large part of the interest and drama of this section of the Odyssey.

Essential Reading:
Odyssey, Books XVIII and XIX.

Supplementary Reading:
Norman Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon, Chapter IV. This reading examines similarities in the scenes between Telemachos and Helen, Odysseus and Nausikaa, Odysseus and Arete, and finally Odysseus and Penelope.
Jenny Strauss Clay, Wrath of Athena, Chapter 2, pp. 54–74. Clay provides a close analysis of the significance of Odysseus' name in the scar episode, taking the basic meaning of the name as "curse" rather than "pain."
S. Douglas Olson, Blood and Iron, Chapter 7.
Uvo Hölscher, "Penelope and the Suitors."

Questions to Consider:
1. Since Odysseus' scar is so distinctive and Eurykleia is bound to recognize it, many readers have been troubled by Odysseus' asking for "an old woman" to wash his feet. Can you think of an explanation?
2. Choose one side of the "what does Penelope know and when does she know it?" controversy and construct the strongest argument you can to support your position. Is there any narrative element still left unaccounted for by your analysis?
Scope: This lecture, which covers Books XX–XXII, examines the “contest of the bow,” Odysseus’ revelation of his identity to the loyal slaves Eumaios and Philoitos, and the slaughter of the suitors. We continue our consideration of Penelope’s knowledge and motives, as well as focusing on the narrative strategies the bard uses for increasing the sense of inevitability as the suitors’ doom approaches. The importance of ken is noted once again, as we consider whether Odysseus’ slaughter of the suitors and the disloyal slave women is justified or not.

Outline

I. The bow contest which Penelope proposed in Book XIX is actually undertaken in Book XXI. Thus, Book XIX creates narrative suspense and heightens the inevitability of the suitors’ doom.
   A. Penelope brings Odysseus’ bow down from the storeroom. She weeps as she holds it.
   B. Penelope tells the suitors that she will marry whichever one of them can string the bow most easily and shoot an arrow through twelve axes.
   C. Telemachos sets up the axes.

II. The suitors try to string the bow, but fail.
   A. Telemachos tries first, and would have succeeded on the third attempt had Odysseus not caught his eye.
   B. Leodes, a young suitor, tries next, and tears his soft palms in the attempt.
   C. Antinoos warms the bow by the fire and rubs it with tallow to soften it, but even so cannot string it.
   D. There is magnificent irony in this scene of the suitors conditioning the weapon that will kill them.

III. While the suitors are engaged with the bow, Eumaios goes outside, accompanied by Philoitos (a loyal oxherd). Odysseus goes out to join them, and reveals his identity to them.
   A. He proves his identity by showing them his scar.
   B. He promises to free them and give them houses and wives if they succeed against the suitors.
   C. He gives each of them instructions.

IV. Odysseus reenters the house, to find the suitors still unable to string the bow. He asks to be given a chance with it.
   A. Eurytachos remarks that he does not do so much regret missing marriage with Penelope as he is ashamed at the thought that “men unborn” will be told of the suitors’ inability to string the bow. He is clearly concerned about his kleos.
   B. Odysseus asks to be given a chance, and the suitors are highly indignant at the idea.
   C. Penelope intervenes, and says to let the beggar try. Once again, her words are capable of double interpretation.
      1. If she does not know the beggar is Odysseus, letting him try is simply a show of contempt for the suitors.
      2. If she does know, he is ensuring that he will get the bow into his hands.
      3. Either way, the audience would find a wonderful irony in her words.
   D. Telemachos speaks up and claims authority over the bow. He tells Penelope to go upstairs and tend to her own, womanly duties.

V. Eumaios brings the bow to Odysseus, who strings it easily. The poet compares Odysseus’ stringing of the bow to a bard’s stringing of a lyre. He plucks the bowstring and Zeus’ thunder strikes fear in the hearts of the suitors.
   A. Odysseus shoots through the axes, and nods to Telemachos, who comes to stand close beside him.
   B. Odysseus then shoots Antinoos.

VI. The suitors do not immediately realize that this is Odysseus, but he declares himself to them.
   A. Odysseus’ words to the suitors stress their position as “beyond the pale” due to their violations of xenia.
   B. Eurytachos blames all the suitors’ wrongdoing on Antinoos, and offers to pay recompense to Odysseus.
   C. Odysseus refuses to accept the offer; it is too little, too late.

VII. With Athena’s help, Odysseus and Telemachos kill all the suitors.
   A. While Odysseus holds the suitors at bay with his arrows, Telemachos runs to get armor for himself. Odysseus, Eumaios, and Philoitos. By mistake, he leaves the door to the storeroom open.
B. Melanthios climbs through the vents in the wall to get armor for the suitors.

C. Telemachos admits to Odysseus that it was his mistake in leaving the door open that allowed Melanthios access to the armor. This moment can be seen as Telemachos’ final maturation.

D. Odysseus sends Eumaios and Philoitos to overpower Melanthios, while he and Telemachos hold off the suitors.

E. After appearing briefly disguised as Odysseus’ friend Mentor, Athena makes most of the suitors’ spear-throws useless. The ones that do hit cause only minor injury, such as a scratch on Telemachos’ wrist.

F. Finally Odysseus and his comrades kill all the suitors. At Telemachos’ request, Odysseus spares the bard Phemios and the herald Medon, who had been forced to cooperate with the suitors.

VIII. In the aftermath of the slaughter, Odysseus cleanses his palace and kills the disloyal female slaves.

A. Odysseus sends Telemachos to fetch Eurykleia. She starts to rejoice over the dead suitors, but Odysseus stops her. Eurykleia reports that of the fifty female slaves, twelve were disloyal.

B. The disloyal women are forced to clean the hall and carry the suitors’ bodies outside.

C. With Eumaios’ and Philoitos’ aid, Telemachos hangs the women in the courtyard.

D. Odysseus purifies the palace with fire and sulphur.

IX. The killing of the suitors, and especially of the disloyal slavewomen, strikes many readers as too grim; at this point they lose sympathy for Odysseus. But within the context of the society the Odyssey depicts, these actions are justifiable.

A. From their very first entry into the epic, the suitors have been portrayed as knowingly disregarding proper behavior and being unamenable to reason.

B. The Odyssey takes for granted that slaves owe obedience to their masters, as subjects do to their king. The disloyal women have betrayed Odysseus in both those aspects.

Essential Reading:

Odyssey, Books XX–XXII.

Supplementary Reading:

Norman Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon, Chapter V. Austin presents a very interesting reading of the bow-contest based on the positions of the sun and moon.
Lecture Eleven
Reunion and Resolution

Scope: This last lecture on the Odyssey discusses the final reunion of Odysseus and Penelope in Book XXIII, and the resolution of several themes in Book XXIV. The lecture analyzes the famous “sign” of Odysseus’ and Penelope’s bed in detail, and considers the symbolic and narrative importance that it holds. Moving on to Book XXIV, the lecture addresses the issue of whether or not that book belongs to the original Odyssey, and identifies several key ways in which Book XXIV resolves issues that would otherwise be left incomplete. After looking briefly at the “Second Nekula” that opens Book XXIV, the lecture concentrates on Odysseus’ encounter with his father, Laertes, and discusses the two forms of proof Odysseus uses to establish his identity in all his reunions. Finally, we look at the ending of the Odyssey, and discuss whether or not it is effective.

Outline

I. Book XXIII begins with Eurykleia going to tell Penelope that Odysseus has returned and has killed the suitors.

A. Penelope refuses to believe Eurykleia, but says that some god must have killed the suitors.
   1. However, she will come downstairs to see the dead suitors and the man who killed them.
   2. Neither Eurykleia nor Penelope is shocked by the sight of the slaughter of the suitors.

B. This scene is the strongest evidence that Penelope does not recognize the beggar as her husband before this point.

II. When Penelope comes downstairs, she sits down across from Odysseus and looks at him rather than immediately greeting him.

A. Telemachos scolds her for this, but Penelope says that if he is truly Odysseus, they have ways of recognizing one another that only they know.

B. Odysseus tells Telemachos to have Phemios play his lyre and have the slaves dance, so that any passers-by will think the suitors are alive and celebrating Penelope’s choice to marry one of them.

III. Odysseus bathes, and Athena makes him look younger and more beautiful. He then returns to sit by Penelope again, and reproaches her for not recognizing him. She sets him a test which leads to their true reunion.

A. Odysseus repeats Telemachos’ words of reproach, and then asks Eurykleia to make a bed up for him outside the bedroom.

B. Penelope responds by telling Eurykleia to move “his own bed, which he himself built,” outside their bedroom and make it up for him.

C. Odysseus reacts with anger, and describes the bed he made in terms that prove his identity.
   1. The bed was constructed around a living olive-tree, which serves as one of its posts.
   2. Odysseus built his bedchamber around the bed and his house around the chamber.
   3. The bed serves as a symbol of Odysseus’ and Penelope’s marriage, of Athena’s patronage, and of Penelope’s fidelity.

D. Penelope recognizes that this is indeed Odysseus, rushes to him, and kisses him. She asks him not to be angry at her caution, explaining that she was always afraid someone would deceive her into believing he was Odysseus.

E. The bard uses one of the most famous similes in the Odyssey to describe their reunion.

IV. Odysseus and Penelope, reunited at last, go to bed together and then lie awake telling one another their stories.

A. Athena lengthens the night so that they will have time for sex, talk, and sleep.

B. Odysseus tells Penelope of Teiresias’ prophecy about his future travels (Book XI).

C. Eurykleia and the housekeeper Eurynome make up the bed, and Odysseus and Penelope go to bed together.

D. After making love, they lie awake talking.
   1. Penelope tells Odysseus about the suitors.
   2. Odysseus tells Penelope all his adventures, in order, just as he told them to the Phaiakians.
   3. Penelope listens “with delight,” again indicating the sexual double standard assumed by the poet.

E. Finally they fall asleep.

V. Some critics have argued that the Odyssey originally ended here, with Odysseus’ and Penelope’s reunion. But there is one more book, which ties up many themes of the epic.

A. Book XXIV opens with a “Second Nekula,” which begins with a conversation between Achilles and Agamemnon and then shows the souls of the suitors arriving in Hades.
   1. Some critics think this is spurious, since it shows the ghosts in Hades conversing with one another, unlike the picture we saw in Book XI.
2. However, it picks up once again, and puts to rest, the parallel between Agamemnon and Odysseus, as Agamemnon himself praises Penelope.

B. After the scene in the Underworld, the poem turns back to Ithaka, where Odysseus goes to visit his father, Laertes.
1. When Odysseus sees his father, he is distressed at how unkempt the old man looks, and sheds tears for him.
2. However, instead of immediately identifying himself to his father, Odysseus lies to him, saying that he is a traveler who met Odysseus five years ago.
3. When Laertes reacts with grief, Odysseus identifies himself. Once again, we see him enacting his name by giving and receiving pain.
4. Laertes refuses to believe him without proof, so Odysseus shows him his scar and describes the trees they planted together when Odysseus was small.

VI. In all the recognition scenes we have seen, Odysseus has two available strategies for identifying himself: his scar and shared emotional memories.
A. Eurykleia, Eumaios, and Philoitios recognize him through the scar alone.
B. Penelope recognizes him through a shared emotionally significant memory alone.
C. Laertes is offered both types of proof, the scar and a shared memory.
D. Only Telemachos is offered no proof at all, but has to accept his father on trust.

VII. After their reunion, Laertes and Odysseus return to town, where with Telemachos, they battle the suitors’ relatives. Athena allows Laertes one kill, but then brings the battle to a halt.
A. Athena requires both sides to pledge peace.
B. The conflict is thus ended, but in a rather artificial manner, which some critics find unsatisfactory.

Essential Reading:
Odyssey, Books XXIII and XXIV.

Supplementary Reading:
Jenny Strauss Clay, Wrath of Athena, Chapter 5. A thought-provoking summary of the interaction of gods and humans in the Odyssey.
Steven Lowenstam, Scepter and Spear, Chapter 3, Sections 6 and 7, pp. 207–244.
Sheila Murnaghan, “The Plan of Athena.”
Michael N. Nagler, “Dread Goddess Revisited.”

Richard Seaford, Reciprocity and Ritual, Chapter 2, Sections A–B (pp. 30–42). Froma Zeitlin, “Figuring Fidelity.”

Questions to Consider:
1. If Penelope has recognized the beggar as her husband, her refusal to believe Eurykleia’s words at the beginning of Book XXIII is very puzzling. Can you think of any way to reconcile that refusal with an interpretation arguing that Penelope has already recognized the beggar?
2. When Odysseus encounters Laertes, there is no longer any danger and no longer any need for him to be careful or deceitful. Why, then, does the bard make Odysseus decide to lie to his father?
Lecture Twelve
The Trojan War and the Archaeologists

Scope: In this final lecture, we turn to the question of whether the Trojan War has any historical basis. After looking at the history of this question, the lecture recounts the story of Heinrich Schliemann’s 19th-century excavations at Hisarlik and Mycenae, and examines some of the issues still left unresolved by those excavations. We touch briefly on some of the reasons for Schliemann’s controversial status both in his own day and among modern archaeologists, and then trace the later discoveries made at Troy by Dörpfeld, Blegen, and the current excavators.

Outline

I. Was there ever a Troy, and a Trojan War?
   A. The ancient Greeks themselves assumed that the story was historical.
   B. The Romans considered the Trojans their ancestors through Aeneas, a Trojan prince.
   C. The assumption of historicity continued throughout the Middle Ages. But after the Renaissance, scholars were no longer certain that the Trojan War had ever occurred.
   D. By the 18th century, many scholars believed that the Trojan War was purely mythical, while others were certain that there was a historical basis to the legend.

II. The general location of Troy, whether mythical or historical, was never in doubt. The city was in the Troad, the northwest corner of Turkey, near the Dardanelles (or the Hellespont, as it was called in the ancient world).
   A. Around 700 BCE, Greek colonists built a small town on Hisarlik, a large flat-topped hill on the Trojan plain. They called their town “Ilium,” another name for Troy. Much later, the Romans built a town there called “Ilium Novum,” or “New Ilium.”
   B. Ancient visitors to the site included the Persian king Xerxes in the early 5th century BC, Alexander the Great in the late 4th century, and Julius Caesar in the 1st century.
   C. Interest in finding the exact site began in the 18th century but came into its own only in the 19th century, with the development of archaeology.

III. The burgeoning science of archaeology made it feasible, for the first time, for scholars to study the possible sites of Troy and try to determine where, if anywhere, the ancient city had stood.

A. In 1822, Charles McLaren suggested that Hisarlik, the site of the Greek Ilios and Roman Ilium Novum, was the site of Homer’s Troy as well. His suggestion received little attention from classicists.
   1. One problem was its size.
   2. Another problem was the existence of other equally likely sites for Troy.

B. In the 1860s, Frank Calvert, a British subject who lived at Troy and owned part of Hisarlik, began preliminary excavations on the site. He found artifacts from a period later than the Homeric era.

C. In 1870, perhaps at Calvert’s suggestions, Heinrich Schliemann, a self-taught German archaeologist, began extensive excavations at Hisarlik.

IV. Heinrich Schliemann is widely recognized as the discoverer of Troy. Controversial in his own day, he remains so today. However, there is little doubt that he correctly identified at Hisarlik the remains of the major prehistoric city of the area, with layers dating back to c. 3000 BC.

   A. Schliemann is controversial for several reasons.
      1. It has been demonstrated beyond question that he lied about many of the details of his own biography and about the details of his excavation of Hisarlik.
      2. Some scholars have even questioned the authenticity of some of his most spectacular finds, both at Hisarlik and at the Greek site of Mycenae. However, the balance of scholarly opinion seems to indicate that the objects Schliemann found are genuine, though perhaps the circumstances in which he says he found them have been exaggerated.
      3. Schliemann’s method of excavation was highly destructive and would never be tolerated on a modern archaeological dig. However, archaeology was in its infancy during his excavations, and he cannot fairly be faulted for not abiding by guidelines that did not yet exist.
      4. Schliemann can be faulted for unscrupulousness in his dealings with the Turkish government. He smuggled many of his finds, including the “Treasure of Priam,” out of Turkey despite having explicitly agreed to turn over any artifacts to the Turkish government.

   B. Without question, Schliemann found the remains of a great and important civilization. He was looking for Homer’s Troy; both there and at Mycenae, he found the first evidence of prehistoric Bronze Age civilization.
      1. Schliemann’s excavations at Hisarlik uncovered a site that was constantly occupied from around 3000 BC to around 1100 BC. The traditional date for the Sack of Troy most commonly accepted by ancient Greeks was 1184 BC.
2. Schliemann interrupted his excavations at Troy to excavate Mycenae, the Greek site traditionally associated with Agamemnon. There too he found evidence of a great prehistoric civilization.

V. Schliemann had thus found evidence of flourishing civilizations at Troy and at Mycenae; but had he found "Homer's Troy"? Opinion is still divided on that question.

A. The successive settlements at Hisarlik are numbered Troy I through Troy IX, starting at the bottom with the oldest and working up.

B. Schliemann thought that Troy II was Homer's Troy; actually, it is nearly 1,000 years too early.

C. Schliemann's first successor, Wilhelm Dörpfeld, identified Troy VI (c. 1270) as the Homeric city. However, this site apparently was destroyed by an earthquake, not a siege.

D. Dörpfeld was succeeded by Carl Blegen, who found evidence that Troy VI was destroyed by an earthquake, not a siege. Blegen identified Troy VIIa, which was destroyed by fire c. 1190 BC, as the site of Priam.

E. Excavations have been resumed at Hisarlik, under the auspices of the University of Tubingen and the University of Cincinnati. Attention is once again being paid to Troy VI and its possible interactions with the Mycenaecans.

F. One other strand of evidence concerns 13th-century BC Hittite documents that contain references to kingdoms called Ahhiyawa and Wilusa, and imply that the two went to war.

1. Some scholars think these names represent "Achaia" (one of Homer's terms for Greece) and "Ilios," another name for Troy.

2. Other scholars reject these identifications. The relevance of the Hittite documents to the Trojan War thus remains uncertain.

VI. Most modern scholars agree that Schliemann found the city that gave rise to the legends of the Trojan War.

A. But controversy remains about whether the war itself ever took place.

B. Notwithstanding, our appreciation of the Iliad and Odyssey does not depend on the historicity of the city of Troy.

Supplementary Reading:

Susan Hueck Allen, Finding the Walls of Troy.

J. Lesley Fitton, The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age, Section 2, Chapter [3], "Schliemann at Troy and Mycenae."


Michael Wood, In Search of the Trojan War, Chapters 1-2, 6, 8, Postscript.

Questions to Consider:
Timeline

3000–c. 1000 BC: Successive cities occupy Hisarlik; one of them may have been "Homer's Troy."

1600–c. 1100: Mycenaean civilization flourishes in Greece.

1270: Destruction of Troy VI; Dörpfeld thought this was Homer's Troy.

1300–1200: Hittite documents mention Ahhiyawa and Wilusa, which may be references to Achaia and Ilion, and imply a war between the two.

1190: Destruction of Troy VIIa; Blegen identified this as Homer's Troy.

1184: The most commonly accepted traditional date for the Fall of Troy.

800?–780?: The alphabet introduced into Greece.

750?–700: The Iliad and Odyssey are perhaps transcribed into writing.

530: Peisistratos, tyrant of Athens, perhaps orders a "recesson" or standardization of the Homeric epics.

334 BC: Alexander the Great visits the site of Troy, and offers sacrifices to Achilles.

3rd–2nd c. BC: The Alexandrian scholars edit the epics, writing copious marginal notes or "scholia" on them. The epics are probably divided into their standard book-divisions at this time.

48 BC: Julius Caesar visits the site of Troy.

297–19 BC: Virgil writes the Aeneid, modeled on the Homeric epics but taking the viewpoint of the Trojans (whom the Romans considered their ancestors). Book II of the Aeneid gives the fullest extant account of the Sack of Troy. The Aeneid was left incomplete when Virgil died in 19 BC.

1054 AD: Permanent break between Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches leads to rapid loss of knowledge concerning Greek language and literature in the West.

c. 1170: Le Roman de Troie by Bevoit de Saint-Maure brings the Trojan War story into the troubadour tradition.

c. 1313–1321: Dante writes The Divine Comedy.

1396: Manuel Chrysoloras offers classes in Greek in Florence. This begins the revival of interest in Greek literature in Europe.

1450: The Vatican Library is founded; it had acquired nine copies of the Iliad and four of the Odyssey by 1475.

1453: The Sack of Constantinople by the Ottomans. At this point, a great many Greek scholars flee to Italy, bringing manuscripts with them. This is when the study of Greek becomes important in Europe.

1495: Aldus Manutius founds the Aldine Press in Venice and begins printing editions of Greek classics.

1498: Erasmus begins teaching Greek at Oxford. He becomes professor of Greek at Cambridge in 1511.

1508: Girolamo Aleandro begins courses in Greek in Paris.

1795: F. A. Wolf publishes Prolegomena to Homer.

1822: Charles McLaren suggests that Hisarlik is the site of Troy.

1865: Frank Calvert does trial excavations at Hisarlik.

1870–1873: Heinrich Schliemann conducts his first excavations at Hisarlik. He finds the "Treasure of Priam" in 1873.

1874–1878: Schliemann conducts excavations at Orchomenos, Mycenae, and Ithaka.

1878: Schliemann's second excavation at Troy.

1882–1883: Schliemann's third excavation at Troy.

1888–1890: Schliemann's final excavation at Troy, which ended with his death.
1928. . . . . . . . . . . . Milman Parry publishes his “oral composition” theory of Homeric verse.

1945. . . . . . . . . . . . The “Treasure of Priam” disappears from Berlin’s Museum for Prehistory and Early History, and is presumed destroyed.

1988–present. . . . . . . Joint German-American excavations carried out at Troy.

1993. . . . . . . . . . . . Official confirmation that the “Treasure of Priam” is in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, as had been reported in 1991.

1996. . . . . . . . . . . . The “Treasure of Priam” goes on exhibition in Moscow.

Glossary

ambrosia: The food of the gods. In the Iliad the gods anoint the dead bodies of Patroklos and Hektor with ambrosia to protect them from corruption. See also nektar.

Analysts (or Separatists): In Homeric studies, scholars who argue that the Iliad and the Odyssey are compilations of many separate, shorter poems.

aristeia: A “type scene” in which a particular hero fights with exceptional valor. An aristeia may be only a few lines long (for instance, Agamemnon’s in II. XII) or may extend for several books (for instance, Achilles’ in II. XIX–XXII).

athanatoi: “Deathless ones.” A term used to refer to the gods, particularly as contrasted to mortals, or thanatoi.

bard: The singer of epic poetry. In a preliterate culture, a bard recreates his song in each performance, using traditional formulas and type scenes as building blocks of his poetry.

dactylic hexameter: The meter of epic. It is constructed of six “feet,” each consisting of either a dactyl (one long syllable followed by two short syllables) or a spondee (two long syllables). The resulting line is flexible and varied in Greek, though it tends to sound pedestrian in English.

Epic Cycle: A series of epics, no longer extant, which told the story of those episodes of the Trojan War not contained in the Iliad and the Odyssey.

epithet: An adjective or group of adjectives closely associated with a character’s name. Examples include “Hektor of the shining helmet,” “swift-footed Achilles,” and so on.

formula: In Parry’s definition, “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.”

gerus: A “prize of honor”; a particularly valuable or esteemed token of distinction conferred on a warrior by his peers. Chryseis is Agamemnon’s gerus; Briseis is Achilles’. 

guzlar: A South Slavic bard, such as those studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord. The guzlar chants his songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument called a guzle.

Hittites: Indo-European people whose kingdom flourished in Anatolia from c. 1650–c. 1200 BC. Some scholars believe that Hittite documents mention Greece (Achaia) and Troy (Ilion), and even imply a war between the two.

“The Homeric Question”: The great scholarly question of whether the Homeric epics were written by a single author (or perhaps by two authors) or are
compilations of various shorter, traditional poems. See also *Analysts* and *Unitarians*.

**in medias res:** “In the middle of the subject.” This phrase describes the typical opening of an epic.

**Indo-European:** The prehistoric parent language of Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, most modern languages of Europe, and many modern languages of India. Indo-European was never written down, but scholars have made hypothetical reconstructions of some of its words and forms by comparative study of the languages which descended from it. The people who spoke this language are referred to as “Indo-Europeans.”

**Hisarlik or Hissarlik:** The flat-topped hill in the Troad where Schliemann located the prehistoric ruins of Troy.

**Ithaka:** Odysseus’ home island.

**kleos, pl. klea:** Glory or fame; that which others say about one, particularly after one’s death. Kleos is what epic conveys upon its heroes. The phrase kleos apthition, “imperishable glory,” exactly parallels the Sanskrit sravas aksitam and may reflect an original Indo-European poetic phrase for imperishable glory.

**ménis:** Wrath; the first word of the *Iliad*, where it refers especially to Achilles’ anger. Elsewhere in Homer, the word is used only in association with gods.

**mētis:** Wisdom, skill, cunning, craftiness. Odysseus’ most common epithet is polumētis, “of much mētis.”

**Mycenaean culture:** The name given by archaeologists to the prehistoric Bronze Age culture discovered by 19th-century archaeologists.

**Myrmidon:** Soldiers under the command of Achilles.

**nektar:** The drink of the gods. See also *ambrosia*.

**Nekuia:** Odysseus’ visit to the Underworld, *Od.* XI. The scene that opens *Od.* XXIV, which shows the souls of the suitors arriving in Hades, is often called “the second Nekuia.”

**nostos:** Return or homecoming. Throughout the *Odyssey*, Odysseus strives for his own nostos and the nostos of his companions. Some scholars think that nostos-poetry was a whole subcategory of epic, to which the *Odyssey* belonged. One poem of the Epic Cycle was entitled *Nostoi* or returns. The English word *nostalgia* literally means “longing for return/homecoming.”

**Ogygia:** The island of the nymph Kalypso, where Odysseus was held captive for seven years.

**polutropos:** “Of many turns.” This ambiguous epithet, used to identify Odysseus in the first line of the *Odyssey*, refers both to his wanderings and to his cleverness.

**proem:** The opening lines of an epic, which introduce the main theme of the poem.

**psyche:** Often translated as “soul,” this word originally seems to have meant “breath.” It is what leaves the body at death. Though it survives in some sense in Hades, its existence there is vague and shadowy.

**Scherlia:** The island of the Phaiakians, where Odysseus is treated with marvelous xenia.

**Telemachy:** The first four books of the *Odyssey*, which concentrate on Odysseus’ son Telemachus.

**thnētai:** “The dying ones.” A term used to refer to human beings, particularly as contrasted to the immortal gods, or *athanatoi*.

**thrift:** In discussing Homeric verse, this refers to the fact that different phrases used to describe one character will occupy different metrical positions in the line. Sometimes also called “economy.”

**timē:** Honor, especially the external, visible tokens of honor bestowed on a warrior by his peers. See also *geras*.

**type scenes:** Standardized scenes that are repeated with minimal variation in the epics. They include short, fixed descriptions of feasting, of setting sail, etc., as well as longer and more flexible accounts of battle. See also *aristeia*.

**xenia:** “The guest/host relationship.” Our term “hospitality” does not adequately convey the seriousness of the concept. *Xenia* was protected by Zeus, and covers the whole range of obligations that guests and hosts (xenoi, see next entry) have to one another. Violations of these obligations bring dire consequences: Paris’ theft of Helen was, among other things, a violation of xenia, as are the suitors’ actions throughout the *Odyssey*.

**xenos:** A guest, host, friend, stranger, or foreigner (cf. * xenophobia*). The range of this word’s meanings reflects the essential nature of xenia (see previous entry), which does not depend upon prior acquaintance but operates between strangers. Once two men have entered into a relationship of xenia by one of them staying in the other’s house, they are “guest-friends” and have obligations to one another.

**Unitarians:** Scholars who believe that the Homeric epics were composed in their present form by one poet, not assembled from various much shorter poems.
I. Real People

Blegen, Carl (1887–1971). American archaeologist, who directed the University of Cincinnati’s excavations at Troy (Hissarlik) from 1932 to 1938. He argued strongly that Troy VIa, from c. 1250 BC, should be identified as Homer’s Troy.

Calvert, Frank (1928–1980). A British citizen who lived in the Troad (and worked as American consul). His family owned part of Hissarlik, and Calvert probably directed Schliemann’s attention to it as the most likely site of Troy. Calvert had done some trial excavating in 1865, before Schliemann arrived in Turkey, and perhaps should be recognized as the actual discoverer of Troy.

Dörpfeld, Wilhelm (1853–1940). Schliemann’s successor as excavator of Troy and Mycenae. He thought that Homer’s Troy should be identified with Troy VI (c. 1300).

Homer (c. 700 BCE?). The name traditionally given to the bard of the Iliad and the Odyssey. But there is little to no agreement about when or where such a person lived, or even if it is reasonable to refer to one bard for the epics at all.


Parry, Milman (1902–1935). An American scholar whose 1928 doctoral dissertation for the University of Paris was the first clear demonstration of the importance of formulas and oral compositional techniques in the Homeric epics. Just before his early death, he was engaged in fieldwork on oral poetics in Yugoslavia, where he traveled in 1933 and 1934–35.

Schliemann, Heinrich (1822–1890). German archaeologist; the “discoverer of Troy” and excavator of Mycenae. He began excavations at Hissarlik in 1871 and discovered the “Treasure of Priam” in 1873. From 1874–1876 he ran excavations in Greece, notably at Mycenae and Orchomenos, and returned to Troy in April 1876. Though he did not understand the complexity or age of the ruins he excavated, misidentifying Troy II (c. 2200 BC) as Homer’s Troy, Schliemann deserves great credit for his pioneering work.

Wolf, Friedrich August (1759–1824). Author of Prolegomena to Homer (1795), which gave rise to the 19th-century controversy over “the Homeric Question.”

II. Epic Characters: Humans, Monsters, and Gods

(Note on transliteration of names: With one exception, I have followed the transliteration used in Richmond Lattimore’s translations, since those are the versions I recommend that students buy. The one exception is the name Achilles. While Achilleus is certainly more correct, Achilles has become the standard English spelling to such a degree that I find it hard to adjust to any other.)

Achilles. Greatest Greek warrior. His withdrawal from battle because Agamemnon takes his concubine Briseis, and his subsequent return to avenge the death of his friend Patroklos, form the framework of the Iliad.

Agamemnon. Commander-in-chief of the Greek forces. Brother of Menelaos, husband of Klytaimestra. In the Iliad, his initial refusal to surrender his concubine Chryseis and subsequent appropriation of Achilles’ concubine Briseis motivate Achilles’ withdrawal from battle. In the Odyssey, the story of his murder by Aigisthos and Klytaimestra, and the vengeance taken by his son Orestes, is frequently cited as a parallel to Odysseus’ family situation.

Aigisthos. Cousin of Agamemnon and Menelaos, who seduces Klytaimestra while Agamemnon is away at war. He murders Agamemnon upon his return from Troy, and is himself killed by Agamemnon’s son Orestes. This story is frequently cited in the Odyssey as a parallel to Odysseus’ family situation.

Aiolos. The “king of the winds.” He gives Odysseus a bag with all the contrary winds in it, but unfortunately the companions open the bag just before they reach Ithaka.

Aias the Greater. Son of Telamon; the greatest Greek warrior after Achilles. He figures prominently in the Iliad. According to the Epic Cycle, he committed suicide out of shame after the Greeks voted to ward the dead Achilles’ armor to Odysseus rather than to him. His ghost is still angry over this slight when it appears in Od. XI and refuses to speak to Odysseus. (His name may be more familiar in the Latinized form Ajax.)

Aias the Lesser. Son of Oileus. He raped Kassandra in Athena’s temple during the sack of Troy, thus bringing down Athena’s anger on all the Greeks. Menelaos recounts how he was drowned by Poseidon (Od. IV).

Alexandros. See Paris.

Alkinoos. King of the Phaiakians, husband of Arete, father of Nausikaa.

Andromache. Wife of Hektos, mother of Astyanax. She appears several times in the Iliad, most notably in her conversation with Hektos (II. VI) and her lament over his corpse (II. XXIV).

Anticleia. Odysseus’ mother, whose ghost he sees in the Nekuia.

Antinoos. With Eurytaches, one of the two ringleaders of the suitors. The first suitor to be killed by Odysseus (Od. XXII).
Aphrodite. Daughter of Zeus and Dione; wife of Hephaistos (in the Odyssey, though not in the Iliad); mother (by the mortal Anchises) of the Trojan Aeneas; lover of Ares. Goddess of sexual passion. She motivates Paris’ abduction of Helen, favors the Trojans.

Apollo. Son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis. In the Iliad, he appears mainly as the god of prophecy and as the bringer of plague and sudden death. Later authors would stress his association with reason, healing, and music. His identification with the sun is much later than Homer.

Ares. Son of Zeus and Hera; god of war; particularly associated with the physical, bloody, distressing aspects of war (cf. Athena).


Argos. 1) Agamemnon’s city. 2) Odysseus’ old dog, who dies upon seeing his master (Od. XVII).

Artemis. Daughter of Zeus and Leto; twin sister of Apollo. A virgin goddess. She is the patron of hunters, of wild animals, and girls before their marriage. She brings sudden death to women. Her identification with the moon is later than Homer.

Astyanax. Baby son of Hektor and Andromache; appears with his parents in II. VI. During the Sack of Troy, he is thrown from the walls of the city and killed.

Athena. Daughter of Zeus, who sprang from his brow fully grown and wearing armor. She is the goddess of warfare in its noble aspects (cf. Ares). A virgin goddess, she is associated with wisdom, cleverness, and weaving. In the Odyssey, she appears as Odysseus’ special patron. Usually favors the Greeks, but becomes enraged with them during the Sack of Troy.

Briseis. Achilles’ concubine and geras. Agamemnon’s taking her motivates Achilles’ withdrawal from battle in II. I.

Charybdis. A very dangerous whirlpool, personified as a female entity. Odysseus has to sail between her and Skylla.

Chryses. An old priest of Apollo. Agamemnon’s refusal to return his daughter Chryses motivates the opening episode of the Iliad.

Chryseis. Daughter of Chryses; concubine and geras of Agamemnon. His refusal to return her to her father motivates the opening episode of the Iliad.

Circe (Kirke). Goddess, daughter of Helios the sun-god, enchantress. She turns half of Odysseus’ companions into swine. Odysseus spends one year with her as her lover.

Demodokos. The bard of the Phaiakians, who sings three songs in Od. VIII.

Diomedes. A Greek warrior, who wounds Ares and Aphrodite during his aristeia in Iliad V. Exchanges armor as a token of xenia with Glaukos (II. VI).

Eumaios. Odysseus’ swineherd, who remains loyal to his master. The disguised Odysseus goes to his hut and receives xenia from him in Od. XIV. Eumaios fights with Odysseus and Telemachos to defeat the suitors.

Euryalo. A young Phaiakian, son of Alkinos, who insults Odysseus by saying he does not look like an athlete.

Eurykleia. Odysseus’ and Telemachos’ old nurse. She recognizes Odysseus by the scar on his thigh (Od. XIX).

Eurylochos. Odysseus’ second-in-command; often opposes or argues against Odysseus’ commands. Encourages his companions to kill and eat Helios’ cattle (Od. XII).

Eurymachos. With Antinoos, one of the two ringleaders of the suitors; his words to the seer Halitherses in Od. II illustrate the suitors’ rejections of their society’s most important mores.

Eurynome. Odysseus’ and Penelope’s housekeeper.

Glaukos. Trojan ally, close friend of Sarpedon. Exchanges armor with Diomedes as a token of xenia (II. VI).

Hades. Brother of Zeus, husband of Persephone. Ruler of the Underworld (Tartaros), which comes to be called Hades after him.

Halitherses. Ithalian seer, who tries to reason with the suitors in Od. II.

Hekabe. Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hektor, Paris, and Kassandra. (May be more familiar in the Latinized spelling of her name, “Hecuba.”)

Hektor. Crown prince of Troy, son of Priam and Hekabe, husband of Andromache, father of Astyanax. He kills Patroklos and is killed by Achilles.

Helen. Daughter of Zeus and Leda, sister of Klytaimnestra, wife of Menelaos; the most beautiful woman in the world. Her seduction (or kidnapping?) by Paris is the cause of the Trojan War.

Helios. The sun god. Father of Circe. Owner of the cattle on the island Thrinakia, which Odysseus’ companions eat although they have been warned not to do so.

Hephaistos. Son of Zeus and Hera, or perhaps of Hera alone. In the Iliad, he is married to Chaire; in the Odyssey, to Aphrodite. He is lame and ugly. The smithgod, who forges Achilles’ new armor in Iliad XVIII and to some extent represents fire itself.

Hera. Wife and sister of Zeus, mother of Hephaistos and Ares. She is the patron goddess of marriage and married women. In the Iliad, hates the Trojans and favors the Greeks.

Herakles. Greatest Greek hero, son of Zeus and the mortal woman Alkmene. He lived (probably) two generations before the Trojan War. He is cited as a
paradigm of the hero throughout both epics; Odysseus speaks to his spirit in the Underworld (Od. XI).

Kachas. Seer/sorcerer for Agamemnon and the entire Greek army.

Kalypto. Nymph (or minor goddess) who keeps Odysseus captive on her island Ogygia for seven years.

Kassandra. Daughter of Priam and Hekabe; sister of Hektor and Paris. During the Sack of Troy, Aias the Lesser rapes her in the temple of Athena. This outrage motivates the goddess' anger at the Greeks.

Klytaimestra. Wife of Agamemnon, mother of Orestes, half-sister of Helen. She takes Aigisthos as her lover while Agamemnon is away at Troy, and assists Aigisthos in murdering him upon his return. This story is frequently cited in the Odyssey as a parallel to Odysseus' family situation.

Laertes. Father of Odysseus, father-in-law of Penelope, grandfather of Telemachos. Appears in Od. XXIV.

Laistrygones. Monstrous cannibals who destroy eleven of Odysseus' twelve ships (Od. X).

Leodes. Young suitor, the first to try to string Odysseus' bow.

Lykaon. Young son of Priam; half-brother of Paris and Hektor. He fruitlessly begs Achilles for mercy in II. XXI.

Medon. Odysseus' herald, who served the suitors unwillingly. Odysseus spares his life at Telemachos' request.

Melandhlos. Odysseus' goatherd, who is disloyal to his master; brother of Melantho. He brings armor and weapons to the suitors in Od. XXII.

Melench. One of Odysseus' slavewomen, disloyal to her master; lover of Eurymachus; sister of Melanthios.

Menelaos. Brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen. Prominent figure in the Iliad; appears briefly in Od. IV.

Nausikaa. Young Phaiakian princess who befriends Odysseus when he washes up on the shores of Scheria (Od. VI).

Nestor. Oldest and wisest of the Greeks; appears in both the Iliad and (briefly) in Od. III.

Odysseus. Husband of Penelope, father of Telemachos, son of Laertes and Antiklea. Cleverest and craftiest of the Greeks; an important character in the Iliad, where he takes part in the Embassy to Achilles (II. IX). Main character of the Odyssey.

Orestes. Son of Agamemnon and Klytaimestra. He avenges his father's murder by killing Aigisthos and Klytaimestra. This story is frequently cited in the Odyssey as a parallel to Odysseus' family situation.

Outis: "Nobody," or "Noman," the name by which Odysseus identifies himself to the Cyclops Polyphemos.

Paris (also called Alexandros). Son of Priam and Hekabe, brother of Hektor; prince of Troy. His abduction or perhaps seduction of Helen from her husband Menelaus motivates the Trojan War.

Patroklos. Achilles' dearest friend, who goes into battle wearing Achilles' armor and is killed by Hektor.

Peleus. Achilles' father; husband of Thetis. He does not appear in the Iliad, but is alluded to very frequently.

Penelope. Wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachos. One of the main themes of the Odyssey is her courting by 108 suitors and the difficulties this causes her. The question of whether or not she will remain faithful to Odysseus permeates the epic.

Persephone. Wife of Hades, queen of the Underworld.

Phemios. Odysseus' bard, who served the suitors unwillingly. Odysseus spares his life at Telemachos' request.

Philoketos. The greatest Greek archer in the Trojan War. Odysseus says that he himself was "second only to Philoketes" as an archer (Od. VIII).

Philoctetes. Odysseus' cowherd, who is loyal to his master. He fights with Odysseus and Telemachos to defeat the suitors in Od. XXII.

Phoinix. Achilles' old "foster-father," takes part in the Embassy to Achilles in II. IX.

Polyphemos. Cyclops, son of the god Poseidon (Od. IX). His curse of Odysseus, who blinded him, motivates most of Odysseus' troubles in the Odyssey.

Poseidon. Brother of Zeus, god of the sea. In the Iliad he favors the Greeks; in the Odyssey he hates Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemos.

Priam. King of Troy, father of Hektor and Paris, husband of Hekabe. He visits Achilles in II. XXIV to ransom Hektor's body.

Sarpedon. Trojan ally from Lykia, son of Zeus. Close friend of Glaukos. He is killed by Patroklos in II. XVI.

Skamandros. A river of Troy; personified, it battles Achilles in II. XXI.

Skylla. A six-headed, human-devouring monster. Odysseus has to sail between her and Charybdis.
**Bibliography**

I. Essential Readings: A Selection of Translations of the Homeric Epics

Lattimore, Richmond, trans. *The Iliad of Homer*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1951; *The Odyssey of Homer*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. These are my preferred translations for several reasons. First, Lattimore translates the Greek line by line; thus, line references to the original make sense for this translation as well. This is very helpful to the student who is reading supplementary materials that include line references. Second, Lattimore preserves Homer’s formulas in his translation; whenever Homer repeats precisely the same words, Lattimore repeats precisely the same words. This goes a long way toward preserving the “feel” of Homer in English. Third, Lattimore’s language is somewhat archaic and difficult sounding. Again, this is truer to the original than a more idiomatic rendering would be, since the dialect of the epics is itself an artificial, poetic dialect. Fourth, Lattimore’s meter consistently gives as adequate a sense of Homer’s hexameters as can well be done in English, and at times is magnificent.

**Acknowledgement:** Quotes in these lectures from *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, copyright 1965/1967 by Richmond Lattimore, were used with permission by arrangement with HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

Fitzgerald, Robert. *The Iliad*. New York: Anchor Press, 1989; *The Odyssey*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Many people prefer these translations for their readability. They are very good modern English poetry; however, in my estimation they do not accurately convey the feeling of Homer’s style. Fitzgerald’s meter does not even attempt to convey the hexameter, and he does not preserve the formulas.

Fagles, Robert. *The Iliad*. New York: Penguin USA, 1998; *The Odyssey*. New York: Penguin USA, 1997. These new translations received a great deal of critical attention when they appeared, most of it very favorable. Although I prefer them to Fitzgerald’s versions, in my view they are marred by excessive use of colloquial language (e.g., phrases such as “cramping my style”). Similarly, Fagles’ meter does not capture the feeling of the Homeric hexameter.

II. Supplementary Readings

(Note: The amount of scholarly writing on Homer is staggering; hundreds of books have appeared in the past ten years alone. In fact, it is a common lament among classicists that no one individual could possibly be familiar with everything that has been written about Homer. Faced with this vast amount of scholarship, I have tried to winnow out a representative selection of useful and interesting studies. I have avoided books that assume knowledge either of Greek

---

**Teiresias.** The great Theban seer whose spirit Odysseus consults in the Underworld (*Od. IX.*).

**Telemachos.** Son of Odysseus and Penelope. The first four books of the *Odyssey* (the *Telemachy*) focus on him. In Books XVI–XXIV, he helps his father defeat the suitors.

**Thetis.** Sea-goddess; mother of Achilles; wife of Peleus.

**Xanthos.** 1) One of Achilles’ immortal horses, who speaks to him in a human voice at the end of *Il. XIX.*. 2) Another name for Skamandros.

**Zeus.** The ruler of the Olympian gods. Brother and husband of Hera; brother of Hades and Poseidon; father of Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena, and perhaps Hephaistos. Originally a sky-god, he controls thunder and lightning. The patron of justice, suppliants, and *xenia.*
or of complicated modern theoretical approaches. I have also included several works that disagree, at least to some extent, with my own view of some of the issues raised by the epics, so that students may gain some sense of the range of possible interpretations that the epics elicit. Finally, I have tried to pick works that have good bibliographies, to aid those students who wish to continue their journey through the thickets of Homeric scholarship.

Allen, Susan Hueck. *Finding the Walls of Troy: Frank Calvert and Heinrich Schliemann at Hisarlik*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1999. A fascinating, well-written, and meticulously documented account of the work and interactions of these two archaeologists, which argues that Calvert deserves credit as the actual discoverer of Troy.


———. *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994. Discusses Helen's role in Homer and other Greek authors, including the version of her story that said only a phantom went to Troy. Explores Helen's fundamental dual nature as both woman and goddess.


Doherty, Lilian Ellen. “Sirens, Muses, and Female Narrators in the *Odyssey,*” in *Cohen, Distaff Side*, pp. 81–89. A thought-provoking examination of the importance of the Sirens in the epic.


Fitzton, J. Lesley. *The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. A readable and entertaining account of the pioneering archaeologists who excavated the most important Bronze Age sites.


Hölscher, Uvo. “Penelope and the Suitors,” in Schein, *Reading the Odyssey*, pp. 133–140. An examination of Penelope’s motivations for coming down to see the suitors in *Odyssey XVIII*.


Morrison, James V. *Homerian Misdirection: False Predictions in the Iliad*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992. As the title indicates, this book examines false or misleading predictions in the *Iliad* and argues that they are a method for building suspense among an audience that already knows the basic outlines of the traditional story.


———. *Greek Mythology and Poetics*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990. A collection of essays on a wide range of subjects, which examines Greek poetry and mythology in its wider Indo-European context, particularly through comparison with Indic mythology and poetics. Chapters 2 (Formula and Meter) and 4 (Patroklos, Concepts of Afterlife, and the Indic Triple Fire) are particularly relevant for this course.


Powell, Barry. Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. A highly controversial work, which argues that the alphabet’s adaptation for the Greek language was motivated by the desire to record the Homeric epics. This argument has not found wide acceptance among scholars, but the book is thought-provoking and lucidly written. It also provides a great deal of information about early non-alphabetic writing systems.


Seaford, Richard. Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. As the title indicates, Homer is only part of this book’s subject matter. However, there are several chapters on the Homeric epics that are thought-provoking and useful.


Shapiro, H. A. “Coming of Age in Phaiakia: The Meeting of Odysseus and Nausikaa,” in Cohen, Distaff Side, pp. 155–164. Compares Homer’s description of the Odysseus-Nausikaa scene with its representations in Athenian art of the 5th century BCE, and concludes that an implicit threat of rape was very much part of the 5th-century audience’s understanding of the scene.

Shay, Jonathan. Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character. New York: Atheneum, 1994. A fascinating and deeply disturbing book. Dr. Shay, a psychiatrist who treats Vietnam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, reads the Iliad against the background of those veterans’ experiences. The book contains a great deal of profanity (in quotations of veterans’ statements to Dr. Shay) and some extremely graphic descriptions of combat violence, and so may not be appropriate for all students. But those who can stomach its uncompromising portrait of the reality of war will find it intensely thought-provoking.

Slatkin, Laura M. “Composition by Theme and the Mētis of the Odyssey,” in Schein, Reading the Odyssey, pp. 223–237. Discusses the importance of the concept of mētis for the narrative and thematic structure of the Odyssey.


Vernant, Jean-Pierre. “Death with Two Faces,” in Schein, Reading the Odyssey, pp. 55–61. A discussion of Homer’s depiction of death, with close attention to Achilles’ words to Odysseus in Odyssey XI.


Wood, Michael. In Search of the Trojan War. A fascinating, well-written, and well-documented examination of the evidence for the historicity of the Trojan War. Includes many illustrations, maps, etc.


Zeitlin, Froma I. “Figuring Fidelity in Homer’s Odyssey,” in Cohen, Distaff Side, pp. 117–152. An extremely detailed examination of the depiction of female fidelity in the Odyssey, focusing primarily on Odysseus’ and Penelope’s bed and its connections with the rest of the epic.