

# Handout for "Classical Masterpieces of the Ancient Mediterranean: Homer's *Odyssey*"

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## A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

Passages from the *Odyssey* are from the translation of Richmond Lattimore (the translation still used in Columbia's core Literature Humanities course), first published in 1965, current edition published by Harper-Collins. It is not the most beautiful or exciting translation, but by and large it comes closest to the Greek without crossing the line into unreadability or translator interpretive prejudice. The passage from Apollodorus' *Library* is from the translation of Robin Hard published in 1997 by Oxford University Press in their World's Classics series.

## 1. THE ODYSSEY LOOKING BEYOND THE END OF ITS ODYSSEY

### Od.11.119ff (Teiresias' underworld prophecy to Odysseus)

But after you have killed these suitors in your own palace, either by treachery, or openly with the sharp bronze, then you must take up your well-shaped oar and go on a journey until you come where there are men living who know nothing of the sea, and who eat food that is not mixed with salt... And I will tell you a very clear proof, and you cannot miss it. When, as you walk, some other wayfarer happens to meet you, and says you carry a winnow-fan on your bright shoulder, then you must plant your well-shaped oar in the ground, and render ceremonious sacrifice to the lord Poseidon

### Note the tradition in Apollodorus' so-called *Library* (ep.7.33-35)

[Odysseus] shot down the suitors . . . and he revealed his identity to his wife and father. After sacrificing to Hades, Persephone, and Teiresias, he traveled on foot through Epirus, and arrived in the land of the Thesprotians, where he propitiated Poseidon by offering the sacrifices that Teiresias had advised in his prophecy. Callidice, who was queen of the Thesprotians at the time, asked him to remain and offered him the throne; and she slept with him and bore him a son, Polypoites. After he had married Callidice, he became king of the Thesprotians, and defeated in battle the neighbouring peoples who attacked them. When Callidice died, he transferred the throne to his son and returned to Ithaca.

### See also

Thesprotia in Odysseus' lies of 14.192ff & 19.268ff (see below\*)  
The tradition of Odysseus' sons by Kalypso (Nausithoos and Nausinoos) vs. the genealogy of the Phaiakians at 6.3ff (Nausithoos > Alkinoos > Nausikaa)

### \**Odyssey* 19.269ff (one of Odysseus' lies to Penelope)

. . . for I say to you without deception, without concealment, that I have heard of the present homecoming of Odysseus. He is near, in the rich land of the men of Thesprotia, and alive, and bringing many treasures back to his household. He collects this about the district. His eager companions were lost to him, with his hollow ship, on the wine-blue water as he left the island of Thrinakia, for Zeus and Helios hated him, since his companions killed the cattle of Helios. So they all perished in the wash of the great sea; only Odysseus, riding the keel, was cast ashore by the sea swell on the land of the Phaiakians, who are near the immortals; and they honored him in their hearts as if he had been a divinity, and gave him much, and they themselves were willing to carry him home without harm. So Odysseus would have been home a long time before this, but in his mind he thought it more profitable

to go about and visit much country, collecting possessions. For Odysseus knew profitable ways beyond all other men who are mortal, no other man could rival him at it. So Pheidon, king of the Thesprotians, told me the story....

## 2. THE OPENING 10 LINES OF THE ODYSSEY

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel. Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of, many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea, struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions. Even so he could not save his companions, hard though he strove to; they were destroyed by their own wild recklessness, fools, who devoured the oxen of Helios, the Sun God, and he took away the day of their homecoming. From some point here, goddess, daughter of Zeus, speak, and begin our story.

andra moi ennepe, mousa, polutropon, hos mala polla plagchthê, epei Troiês hieron ptoleithron eperesen: pollôn d' anthrôpôn iden astea kai noon egnô, polla d' ho g' en pontô pathen algea hon kata thumon, arnumenos hên te psuchên kai noston hetairôn. all' oud' hôs hetarous errusato, hiemenos per: autôn gar spheterêsîn atasthalîêsîn olonto, nêpioi, hoi kata bous Huperionos Êelioio êsthion: autar ho toisin apeileto nostimon êmar. tôn hamothen ge, thea, thugater Dios, eipe kai hêmîn.

## 3. NARRATIVE ORDER VS CHRONOLOGY OF O'S ADVENTURES

11. Kalypso (book 5)
12. Phaiakians (books 6-13), last stop before returning home to Ithaca and where Odysseus narrates his adventures in chronological order in books 9-12
  1. Kikonians (9.39-81)
  2. Lotus Eaters (9.82-104)
  3. Cyclops (9.105-566)
  4. Aiolos and Winds (10.1-79)
  5. Laistrygonians (10.80-132)
  6. Circe (before & after Underworld, 10.132-574 & 12.1-164)
  7. Underworld (book 11)
  8. Sirens (12.165-200)
  9. Skylla and Charybdis (12.201-259)
  10. Thrinakia and the Cattle of the Sun (12.260-446)

## 4. NARRATIVE ORDER VS CHRONOLOGY RE: O'S DEVELOPMENT

### Od.8.521ff (Odysseus after the Phaiakian bard tells of Troy's fall)

So the famous singer sang his tale, but Odysseus melted, and from under his eyes the tears ran down, drenching his cheeks. As a woman weeps, lying over the body of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people as he tried to beat off the pitiless day from city and children; she sees him dying and gasping for breath, and winding her body about him she cries high and shrill, while the men behind her, hitting her with their spear butts on the back and the shoulders, force her up and lead her away into slavery, to have hard work and sorrow, and her cheeks are wracked with pitiful weeping. Such were the pitiful tears Odysseus shed....

### Od.11.561ff (Odysseus' in the underworld with Aias)

"Come nearer, my lord, so you can hear what I say and listen to my story; suppress your anger and lordly spirit."  
So I spoke. He gave no answer, but went off after the other souls of the perished dead men, into the darkness. There, despite his anger, he might have spoken, or I might have spoken to him, but the heart in my inward breast wanted still to see the souls of the other perished dead men.

### **See also** (especially in light of the complicated chronologies)

Odysseus' reactions to the Demodokos' 1<sup>st</sup> 2 tales (8.83ff, 8.367ff)  
Odysseus' narrations of his failures to control his companions (e.g., Kikonians 9.39ff, Aiolos 10.1ff, Thrinakia 12.261ff)  
Odysseus' narration about forgetting home at Kirke's (10.469ff)  
O's willingness at "break" to extend stay in Phaiakia (11.354ff)  
Odysseus' narration of meeting Achilles in Hades (11.467ff)  
Cf. also stage-setting at 1.9-10: "from some point...begin our story"

## **5. THE PERVASIVENESS OF POSEIDON**

### Od.9.492ff (O vengefully taunting Poseidon's son, the Cyclops)

...again I started to call to the Cyclops, but my friends about me checked me, first one then another speaking, trying to soothe me

\* \* \*

but once again in the anger of my heart I cried to him:  
"Cyclops, if any mortal man ever asks you who it was that inflicted upon your eye this shameful blinding, tell them you were blinded by Odysseus, sacker of cities...."

\* \* \*

[And] I answered him again and said to him:

"I only wish it were certain I could make you reft of spirit and life, and send you to the house of Hades, as it is certain that not even the Shaker of the Earth will ever heal your eye...."  
So I spoke, but he then called to the lord Poseidon in prayer....

### **See also**

Zeus dismissing Poseidon's unilateral power (1.64ff) vs. Zeus kowtowing to Poseidon at 13.140ff (see also *Il.*15.185ff)  
Telemachos' first stop interrupts sacrifices to Poseidon (3.4ff)  
Poseidon as progenitor of the Phaiakians (7.56ff)  
Poseidon and the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite (8.266ff\*\*)  
Poseidon in the underworld's catalogue of women (11.235ff)  
The Phaiakians having ignored Poseidon's orders (13.172ff)  
Poseidon in the reverse simile of 23.232ff (see below\*\*\*)

### **\*\*Od.8.334ff (Poseidon and the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite)**

. . . the lord Apollo son of Zeus said a word to Hermes:  
'Hermes, son of Zeus, guide and giver of good things, tell me, would you, caught tight in these strong fastenings, be willing to sleep in bed by the side of Aphrodite the golden?'

Then in turn the courier Argeiphontes answered:

'Lord who strike from afar, Apollo, I wish it could only be, and there could be thrice this number of endless fastenings, and all you gods could be looking on and all the goddesses, and still I would sleep by the side of Aphrodite the golden.'

He spoke, and there was laughter among the immortals, only there was no laughter for Poseidon, but he kept entreating Hephaistos, the famous craftsman, asking him to set Ares free, and spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words: 'Let him go, and I guarantee he will pay whatever you ask, all that is approved among the immortal deities.'  
Then in turn the renowned smith of the strong arms answered: 'Shaker of the earth, Poseidon, do not urge this on me.'

The business of wretches is wretched even in guarantee giving. To what could I hold you among the immortal gods, if Ares were to go off, avoiding both his debt and his bondage?'  
Then in turn Poseidon, shaker of the earth, answered: 'Hephaistos, if Ares goes off and escapes, not paying anything he may owe you, then I myself will pay it'  
Then in turn the renowned smith of the strong arms answered: 'It cannot be, and it is not right, that I should deny you.'

### **\*\*\*Od.23.232ff (the simile after the Odysseus-Penelope recognition)**

He wept as held his lovely wife, whose thoughts were virtuous. And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them, and gladly they set foot upon the shore, escaping the evil; so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him, and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms.

## **6. ODYSSEUS AT THE END OF HIS ODYSSEY**

### Od.23.254ff (O to Penelope the morning after their reunion)

But now that we have come to our desired bed together, you look after my possessions which are in the palace, but as for my flocks, which the overbearing suitors ruined, many I shall restore by raiding, others the Achaians shall give me, until they have filled up all of my sheepfolds. But now I shall go to our estate with its many orchards, to see my noble father who has grieved for me constantly. But I tell you this, my wife, though you have your own understanding. Presently, when the sun rises, there will be a rumor about the men who courted you, whom I killed in our palace. Then go to the upper chamber with your attendant women, and sit still, looking at no one, and do not ask any questions.'

### Od.24.232ff (Odysseus deciding how to approach his father)

Now when much-enduring great Odysseus observed him, with great misery in his heart, and oppressed by old age, he stood underneath a towering pear tree and shed tears for him, and deliberated then in his heart and his spirit whether to embrace his father and kiss him and tell him everything, how he was come again to his own dear country, or question him first about everything, and make trial of him. In the division of his heart this way seemed best to him, first to make trial of him and speak in words of mockery.

### **See also**

Athena to the lying Odysseus upon his return to Ithaka (13.291ff)  
Odysseus in Penelope's dream of the eagle and geese (19.535ff)  
Odysseus' failure to stop fighting in the poem's final lines (24.472ff)  
The poem's "etymology" of Odysseus' name (19.405ff) – cf. *odússomai* at *Od.*1.62, 5.340, 5.423, 19.275, 19.407, and *Il.*6.138, 8.37, 8.468, 18.292

## **7. PENELOPE AT THE END OF HER ODYSSEY**

### Od.23.209ff (Penelope's speech to O. after the trick of the bed)

'Do not be angry with me, Odysseus, since, beyond other men, you have the most understanding. The gods granted us misery, in jealousy over the thought that we two, always together, should enjoy our youth, and then come to the threshold of old age. Then do not now be angry with me nor blame me, because I did not greet you, as I do now, at first when I saw you.'

For always the spirit deep in my very heart was fearful  
that some one of mortal men would come my way and deceive me  
with words. For there are many who scheme for wicked advantage.  
For neither would the daughter born to Zeus, Helen of Argos,  
have lain in love with an outlander from another country,  
if she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaians would bring  
home again to the beloved land of her fathers.        her  
It was a god who stirred her to do the shameful thing she  
did, and never before had she had in her heart this terrible  
wildness, out of which came suffering to us also.

Od.23.232ff (the simile after the Odysseus-Penelope recognition)

(see also section #2)

He wept as held his lovely wife, whose thoughts were virtuous.  
And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming  
after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open  
water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy  
seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward  
by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them,  
and gladly they set foot upon the shore, escaping the evil;  
so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,  
and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms.

**See also**

Penelope's simile of Pandareos' daughter, the nightingale (19.509ff)

Penelope's reactions in her dream of the eagle the geese (19.535ff)

Penelope setting up the contest of the bow and axes (19.570ff)

Penelope's trick-of-the-bed (23.174ff)

Penelope's absence in book 24

Note also Penelope's perceptiveness from beginning (e.g., re: nóstos  
poetry at 1.336ff, her unraveling trick, her out-foxing of  
Athene at 4.830ff), as well as Kalypso's articulation of  
Olympian double-standard (5.118ff)

**8. AN ODYSSEAN EPILOGUE**

Od.24.303ff (Odysseus to his father in book 24, his final lie)

See, I will accurately answer all that you ask me.

I am from Alybas, where I live in a famous dwelling,

and am the son of Apheidas, son of the lord Polypemon.

My own name is Eperitos.