

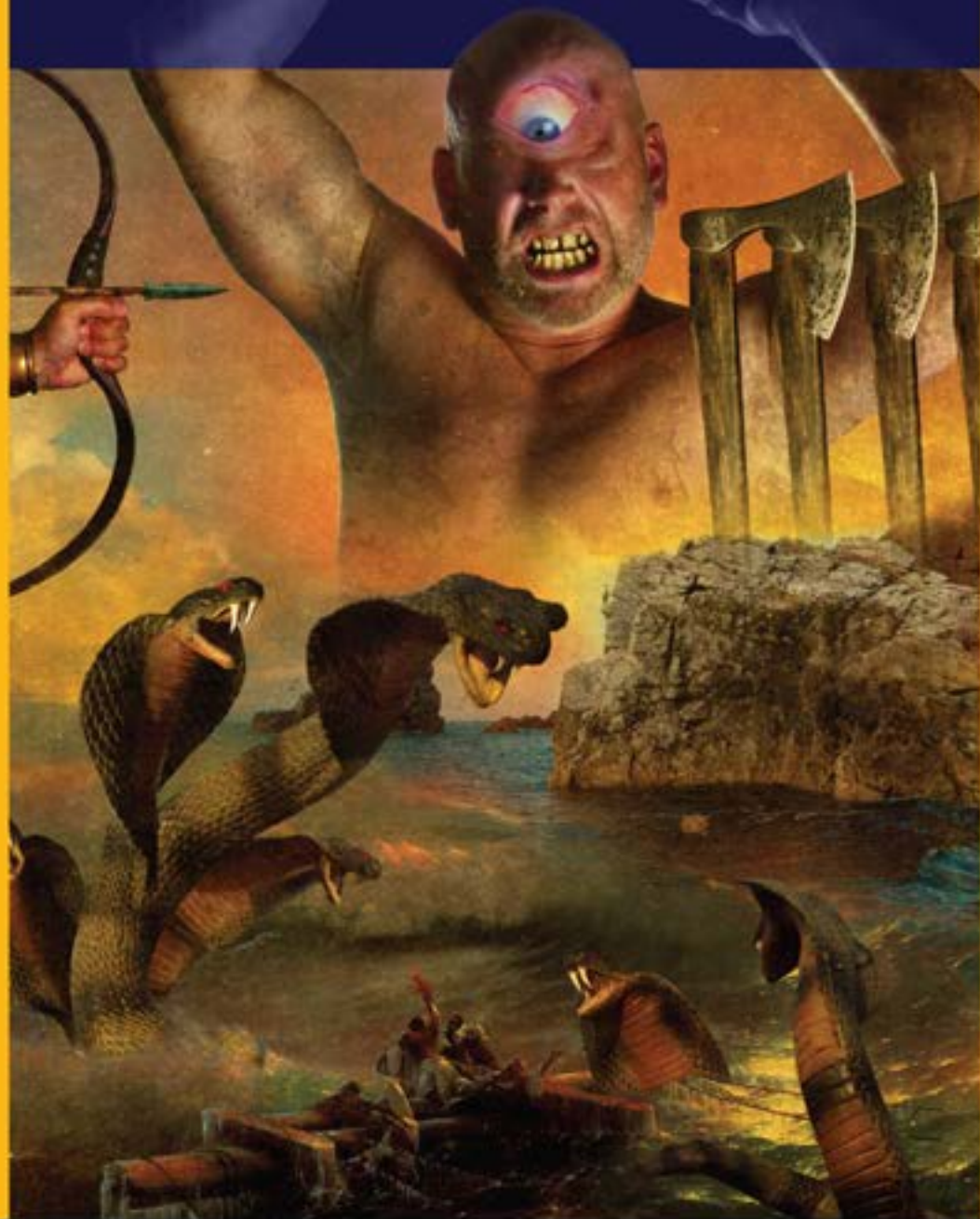
The Odyssey

Homer

Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics

# THE ODYSSEY

Homer



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UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

# THE ODYSSEY



H o m e r



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**SENIOR EDITOR:** Paul Moliken

**EDITORS:** Lisa M. Miller and Pete Boysen

**COVER DESIGN:** Larry Knox

**PRODUCTION:** Larry Knox



**Prestwick House**

LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS™

P.O. BOX 658 • CLAYTON, DELAWARE 19938

TEL: 1.800.932.4593

FAX: 1.888.718.9333

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# THE ODYSSEY

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Homer

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# Notes

**What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?**

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

What is known about the life of Homer is based primarily on scholarly speculation, not hard facts. His birth has been dated as far back as 1200 B.C., but based on the style evident in his two major poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, some historians think he lived much later. In fact, a few ancient Greek writers who investigated his life believe that the works attributed to him were actually written by a woman. Some modern critics and others come to a different conclusion: a group of Homer's students or followers, who adapted and lengthened popular ballads of the time, composed both epic poems.

Seven different Greek cities claim that Homer was born within their boundaries, but since scholars cannot even agree whether Homer was an actual person, there is much doubt about these claims.

In the sixth century B.C., the stories of the Trojan War and Odysseus' long journey home were gathered and arranged in the order they are in at present so they could be recited at an Athenian festival. The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, as we know them, both date from these oral presentations.

# Pointers

## READING POINTERS

### Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

Homer's two poems, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, are among the first epics ever written. To better appreciate the *Odyssey*, it is essential to understand the nature of the genre. Epics generally contain the following elements:

- a hero on a quest
- legends of the past
- long speeches and elevated, flowery language
- epithets, epic similes, and other literary devices
- continuing battles between good and evil
- supernatural elements

As you read the *Odyssey*, take note of the following thematic concepts:

- **Hospitality as a serious and important obligation in Greek culture.** Openness and offers of friendship to strangers will become pivotal to the action of the story. In Greek society, however, it was also necessary to be a polite and considerate guest. Both types of obligations will play a role in Odysseus' attempts to return home.
- **The dangers of *hubris*.** This Greek word translates loosely as excessive pride that leads to destruction. Odysseus would certainly have fallen victim to the gods because of his *hubris*, had not Athena intervened a few times on his behalf. For example, when Odysseus brazenly taunts the Cyclops, the one-eyed monster almost destroys Odysseus' ships.
- **The importance of moderation.** Giving in to excess or temptation, whether food, drink, or other sensory pleasures, will cause a person harm. The Sirens' song leads to destruction, and the suitors' desire for Penelope and the home of Odysseus causes their deaths.
- **The expected roles for men and women in Greek society.** Notice the demanding and superior manner that the suitors use with Penelope. Telemachus' relationship with his mother and with the suitors changes, both as he grows older and as Odysseus' return seems less certain.

# Greek Gods and Goddesses

\* = *appears in the Odyssey*

- \* **Aphrodite** – goddess of beauty and love (Roman: Venus)
- \* **Apollo** – god of music, healing, and light (Roman: Apollo)
- \* **Ares** – god of war (Roman: Mars)
- \* **Artemis** – goddess of the moon, hunting, and the protector of women  
(Roman: Diana)
- Asclepius** – god of medicine
- \* **Athena** – goddess of wisdom, justice, art, invention, and industry  
(Roman: Minerva)
- \* **Circe** – a goddess well versed in sorcery, drugs, and herbs
- \* **Demeter** – goddess of the harvest and fertility (Roman: Ceres)
- \* **Dionysus** – god of wine and fertility (Roman: Bacchus)
- Eileithyia** – goddess of childbirth
- Eirene** – goddess of Peace
- Enyo** – goddess of war (Roman: Bellona)
- Erida** – goddess of hatred
- \* **Eos** – goddess of the wind and the dawn  
(Roman: Aurora)
- Eris** – goddess of strife (Roman: Discordia)
- Eros** – god of love and lust (Roman: Cupid)
- \* **Gaia** – earth; mother earth; primary goddess of fertility
- \* **Hades** – god of the underworld (Roman: Pluto)
- \* **Hebe** – goddess of youth
- Hecate** – goddess of the moon, witchcraft, night, and the underworld
- \* **Hephaestus** – god of fire (Roman: Vulcan)
- \* **Hera** – Queen of the gods; goddess of marriage and childbirth  
(Roman: Juno)
- \* **Hermes** – the messenger for the gods; god of wealth, luck, and travelers  
(Roman: Mercury)
- Hestia** – goddess of the hearth and domestic joy (Roman: Vesta)
- Hygeia** – goddess of health
- Hymen** – god of weddings
- Hypnos** – god of sleep (Roman: Somnus)
- Iris** – goddess of the rainbow and messenger for the gods
- Mnemosyne** – goddess of memory; mother of the muses
- Morpheus** – god of dreams
- Nemesis** – goddess of moderation
- Nyx** – ancient goddess of night (Roman: Nox)
- \* **Oceanus** – god of the ocean
- Pan** – god of pastures, flocks, and shepherds (Roman: Faunus)
- \* **Persephone** – Queen of the underworld; goddess of vegetation  
(Roman: Proserpine)
- Pontus** – ancient sea god



# B O O K I

*The gods in council  
Athena's visit to Ithaca*

*The challenge from Telemachus to the suitors*

**T**ELL ME, O MUSE,<sup>†</sup> of that ingenious hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy. Many cities did he visit, and many were the nations with whose manners and customs he was acquainted; moreover he suffered much by sea while trying to save his own life and bring his men safely home; but do what he might he could not save his men, for they perished through their own sheer folly in eating the cattle of the Sun-god Apollo; so the god prevented them from ever reaching home.<sup>†</sup> Tell me, too, about all these things, oh daughter of Zeus, from whatsoever source you may know them.

So now all who escaped death in battle or by shipwreck had got safely home except Odysseus, and he, though he was longing to return to his wife and country, was detained by the goddess Calypso, who had got him into a large cave and wanted to marry him. But as years went by, there came a time when the gods settled that he should go back to Ithaca; even then, however, when he was among his own people, his troubles were not yet over; nevertheless all the gods had now begun to pity him except Poseidon, who still persecuted him without ceasing and would not let him get home.

Now Poseidon had gone off to the Ethiopians,<sup>†</sup> who are at the world's end,

<sup>†</sup>Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.



and lie in two halves, the one looking West and the other East. He had gone there to accept a hecatomb of sheep and oxen, and was enjoying himself at his festival; but the other gods met in the house of Olympian Zeus, and the sire of gods and men spoke first. At that moment he was thinking of Aegisthus, who had been killed by Agamemnon's son Orestes;<sup>†</sup> so he said to the other gods:

"See now, how men lay blame upon us gods for what is after all nothing but their own folly. Look at Aegisthus; he must needs make love to Agamemnon's wife unrighteously and then kill Agamemnon, though he knew it would be the death of him; for I sent Hermes to warn him<sup>†</sup> not to do either of these things, inasmuch as Orestes would be sure to take his revenge when he grew up and wanted to return home. Hermes told him this in all good will but he would not listen, and now he has paid for everything in full."

Then Athena said, "Father, son of Cronus, King of kings, it served Aegisthus right, and so it would anyone else who does as he did; but Aegisthus is neither here nor there; it is for Odysseus that my heart bleeds, when I think of his sufferings in that lonely sea-girt island, far away, poor man, from all his friends.<sup>†</sup> It is an island covered with forest, in the very middle of the sea, and a goddess lives there, daughter of the magician Atlas, who looks after the bottom of the ocean, and carries the great columns that keep heaven and earth asunder. This daughter of Atlas has got hold of poor unhappy Odysseus, and keeps trying by every kind of blandishment to make him forget his home, so that he is tired of life, and thinks of nothing but how he may once more see the smoke of his own chimneys. You, sir, take no heed of this, and yet when Odysseus was before Troy did he not propitiate you with many a burnt sacrifice? Why then should you keep on being so angry with him?"

And Zeus said, "My child, what are you talking about? How can I forget Odysseus than whom there is no more capable man on earth, nor more liberal in his offerings to the immortal gods that live in heaven? Bear in mind, however, that Poseidon is still furious with Odysseus for having blinded an eye of Polyphemus king of the Cyclopes. Polyphemus is son to Poseidon by the nymph Thoosa, daughter to the sea-king Phorcys; therefore though he will not kill Odysseus outright, he torments him by preventing him from getting home. Still, let us lay our heads together and see how we can help him to return; Poseidon will then be pacified, for if we are all of a mind he can hardly stand out against us."

And Athena said, "Father, son of Cronus, King of kings, if, then, the gods now mean that Odysseus should get home, we should first send Hermes to the Ogygian island to tell Calypso that we have made up our minds and that he is to return. In the meantime I will go to Ithaca, to put heart into Odysseus' son Telemachus; I will embolden him to call the Achaeans in assembly, and speak out to the suitors of his mother Penelope, who persist in eating up any number of his sheep and oxen; I will also conduct him to Sparta and to Pylos,<sup>†</sup>

to see if he can hear anything about the return of his dear father—for this will make people speak well of him.”

So saying she bound on her glittering golden sandals, imperishable, with which she can fly like the wind over land or sea; she grasped the redoubtable bronze-shod spear, so stout and sturdy and strong,<sup>†</sup> wherewith she quells the ranks of heroes who have displeased her, and down she darted from the topmost summits of Olympus, whereon forthwith she was in Ithaca, at the gateway of Odysseus' house, disguised as a visitor, Mentès, chief of the Taphians, and she held a bronze spear in her hand. There she found the lordly suitors seated on hides of the oxen which they had killed and eaten, and gambling in front of the house. Men-servants and pages were bustling about to wait upon them, some mixing wine with water in the mixing-bowls, some cleaning down the tables with wet sponges and laying them out again, and some cutting up great quantities of meat.

Telemachus saw her long before anyone else did. He was sitting moodily among the suitors thinking about his brave father, and how he would send them flying out of the house, if he were to come to his own again and be honored as in days gone by. Thus brooding as he sat among them, he caught sight of Athena and went straight to the gate, for he was vexed that a stranger should be kept waiting for admittance.<sup>†</sup> He took her right hand in his own, and bade her give him her spear. “Welcome,” said he, “to our house, and when you have partaken of food you shall tell us what you have come for.”

He led the way as he spoke, and Athena followed him. When they were within he took her spear and set it in the spear-stand against a strong bearing-post along with the many other spears of his unhappy father, and he conducted her to a richly decorated seat under which he threw a cloth of damask. There was a footstool also for her feet, and he set another seat near her for himself, away from the suitors, that she might not be annoyed while eating by their noise and insolence, and that he might ask her more freely about his father.

A maid servant then brought them water in a beautiful golden ewer and poured it into a silver basin for them to wash their hands, and she drew a clean table beside them. An upper servant brought them bread, and offered them many good things of what there was in the house, the carver fetched them plates of all manner of meats and set cups of gold by their side, and a manservant brought them wine and poured it out for them.

Then the suitors came in and took their places on the benches and seats. Forthwith men servants poured water over their hands, maids went round with the bread-baskets, pages filled the mixing-bowls with wine and water, and they laid their hands upon the good things that were before them. As soon as they had had enough to eat and drink they wanted music and dancing, which are the crowning embellishments of a banquet, so a servant brought a

lyre to Phemius, whom they compelled perforce to sing to them. As soon as he touched his lyre and began to sing Telemachus spoke low to Athena, with his head close to hers that no man might hear.

“I hope, sir,” said he, “that you will not be offended with what I am going to say. Singing comes cheap to those who do not pay for it, and all this is done at the cost of one whose bones lie rotting in some wilderness or grinding to powder in the surf. If these men were to see my father come back to Ithaca they would pray for longer legs rather than a longer purse, for money would not serve them; but he, alas, has fallen on an ill fate, and even when people do sometimes say that he is coming, we no longer heed them; we shall never see him again. And now, sir, tell me and tell me true, who you are and where you come from. Tell me of your town and parents, what manner of ship you came in, how your crew brought you to Ithaca, and of what nation they declared themselves to be—for you cannot have come by land. Tell me also truly, for I want to know, are you a stranger to this house, or have you been here in my father’s time? In the old days we had many visitors for my father went about much himself.”

And Athena answered, “I will tell you truly and particularly all about it. I am Mentos, son of Anchialus, and I am King of the Taphians.† I have come here with my ship and crew, on a voyage to men of a foreign tongue being bound for Temesa† with a cargo of iron, and I shall bring back copper. As for my ship, it lies over yonder off the open country away from the town, in the harbor Rheithron under the wooded mountain Neritum. Our fathers were friends before us, as old Laertes will tell you, if you will go and ask him. They say, however, that he never comes to town now, and lives by himself in the country, faring hardly, with an old woman to look after him and get his dinner for him, when he comes in tired from pottering about his vineyard. They told me your father was at home again, and that was why I came, but it seems the gods are still keeping him back, for he is not dead yet not on the mainland. It is more likely he is on some sea-girt island in mid ocean, or a prisoner among savages who are detaining him against his will. I am no prophet, and know very little about omens, but I speak as it is borne in upon me from heaven, and assure you that he will not be away much longer; for he is a man of such resource that even though he were in chains of iron he would find some means of getting home again. But tell me, and tell me true, can Odysseus really have such a fine looking fellow for a son? You are indeed wonderfully like him about the head and eyes, for we were close friends before he set sail for Troy where the flower of all the Argives† went also. Since that time we have never either of us seen the other.”

“My mother,” answered Telemachus, “tells me I am son to Odysseus, but it is a wise child that knows his own father. Would that I were son to one who had grown old upon his own estates, for, since you ask me, there is no more

## Glossary

### Book I

**O Muse** – Muses were given credit for inspiring all artistic genres of Greek and Roman culture. According to mythology, the muses were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory). There were nine all together, and each was responsible for a specific area of art. Calliope is the muse alluded to here, as she was the muse of epic poetry. The other eight Muses and their domains are: Clio (history), Erato (love poetry), Euterpe (music), Melpomene (tragedy), Polyhymnia (sacred poetry), Terpsichore (dance), Thalia (comedy), and Urania (astronomy).

“...but do what...ever reaching home.” – Time and time again, Odysseus and his men are delayed, injured, killed, or enchanted by yielding to desire. Even though the gods behave similarly, Odysseus is ultimately rewarded for heeding his mind, rather than following his base desires. Even at the end of their long journey, Odysseus’ men could not overcome their sensual instincts.

**Ethiopians** – The precarious nature of travel in those days made the world much less secure for the Greeks. India, Ethiopia, and the end of the Mediterranean Sea surrounded the known world.

“...**Aegisthus...Orestes...**” – Aegisthus was the lover that Clytemnestra took after Agamemnon left for the Trojan War, and he murdered Agamemnon upon his return. In Aegisthus’ defense, Agamemnon *did* sacrifice his own daughter to the gods to gain favorable winds for the return to Troy.

“...I sent **Hermes to warn him...**” – Hermes, the gods’ messenger, will carry several warnings throughout this epic.

“...**Athena said...from all his friends.**” – Athena’s favorite is Odysseus—his cunning is compelling to the goddess of wisdom.

“...**Sparta and to Pylos...**” – Sparta and Pylos are ruled by Menelaus (whose wife, Helen, was the cause of the Trojan War) and Nestor, two of the kings who went with Odysseus to fight against Troy.

“...**stout and sturdy and strong...**” – Note the alliteration (the repetition of sounds at the beginning of words). This is not the work of Homer, but of the translator, who has worked diligently to preserve the poetic nature of this epic.

“...**he was vexed...for admittance.**” – Here, Telemachus is roused from his anger by thoughts of hospitality, which is a crucial Greek virtue that will appear throughout the *Odyssey*.

“**I am Mentès...Taphians.**” – Athena disguises herself here (as she will throughout the epic) to appear as a respected Ithacan.

**Temesa** – a city on Italy’s western coast, famous for its copper mines

**Argives** – Argives, Achaeans, and Danaans are virtually interchangeable here—

## Vocabulary

### Book I

**acquainted** – familiar or knowledgeable

**asunder** – apart

**atrociously** – horribly, terribly

**bard** – a poet

**barrow** – a mound of dirt or stones placed over a burial site

**bearing-post** – a post that is vital to holding up a building

**clamorous** – loud, riotous

**counsel** – advice

**embellishments** – final touches

**ewer** – an oval pitcher with a base and wide spout and decorations on the body

**fleece** – a soft, woolen blanket

**havoc** – chaos, ruin

**hecatomb** – a great sacrifice; in Greek times, one involving 100 oxen

**hied** – hurried

**insolence** – rudeness, disrespect

**lyre** – a small harp with two curved arms, connected by a bar across the top

**mettle** – courage

**nymph** – a minor goddess who usually either lives in or personifies water, a tree, or a mountain

**pacified** – calmed, soothed

**partaken** – eaten

**persecuted** – harmed unfairly

**pretext** – an excuse

**propitiate** – to appease; to gain forgiveness

**quells** – subdues, silences

**redoubtable** – causing fear, awe

**renown** – fame, glory

**sea-girt** – surrounded by the sea

**sheer** – pure, absolute

**short shrift** – rude treatment

**soothsayer** – a fortune-teller

**spunging** – living at another person's expense

**staid** – dignified, serious

**suitors** – men seeking to marry a woman

**tongue** – a language

**torments** – tortures

**weal** – well-being