

THE ODYSSEY

Homer



Edited by Ben Quine
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HOMER

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FROM THE WORLD VIEW LIBRARY
Edited by Ben Quine

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Every great work of art will communicate not just beauty but also ideas about the world we live in. And so, we encourage you to think carefully and ask questions while reading: What ideas are presented in this work? What do the characters and situations say about the nature of man and the universe? Is there a God, according to the text? If so, what is He like? And what happens to man after death?

It is our desire to help bring this classic literature to life, and we hope that the World View Library will lead you to a deeper understanding of the living God and His creation.

BEN QUINE
AUGUST 2007

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Book I

Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who travelled 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 Helios; so the god prevented them from ever reaching home. 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, who are at the world's end, 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

Muse: The Muses (though they are often referred to in singular), who were daughters of Zeus, were believed to inspire music, dance and poetry. The Iliad similarly begins by invoking the Muse.

sacked: overthrown and plundered

10 **reaching home:** homecoming is one of the main themes of the *Odyssey*

Zeus: god of thunder and lightning. Butler used the Roman names for the gods, but their Greek names have been used here.

Odysseus: king of the island of **Ithaca**; regarded among the wisest and best speakers of all the Greeks and also one of the main characters in the Iliad.

Calypso: goddess of the island Ogygia. Her name appropriately means "hidden," since Odysseus was hidden from the world on her island.

Poseidon: brother of Zeus, lord of the sea, earthquakes, and horses

30 **hecatomb:** a large offering to a god. See note on pg. 37

THE GODS IN COUNCIL

Since the end of the Iliad much has occurred: Achilles was killed by Paris; the Trojan Horse led to the capture and destruction of Troy; the Greeks committed many outrages (including the violent killing of King Priam and Hector's son Astyanax, and the rape of Cassandra by Aias the lesser); Aias the greater committed suicide over shame when Achilles' armor was given to Odysseus.

Athena: daughter of Zeus, goddess of arts and war; she was also the patron goddess of Athens

Cronos: father of Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Hades and other gods; ruler of the Titans

girt: surrounded, encircled
daughter of Atlas: Calypso
blandishments: gently flattering speeches or actions (OEDs)

see the smoke of his own chimneys: see the day of his homecoming

propitiate: satisfy

liberal: generous, unrestrained

of Aegisthus, who had been killed by Agamemnon's son Orestes; 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 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 Cronos, King of kings, it served Aegisthus right, and so it would any one 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. 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 Cronos, 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, 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, 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 playing draughts 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

cyclops: a giant one eyed man

Polyphemus: see Book 9

pacified: calmed or appeased (OEDs)

of a mind: of one mind

Achaeans, Daanians, or

Argives: the Greeks

Penelope: wife of Odysseus and daughter of Icarus king of Sparta. The characters in the *Odyssey* and the narrative frequently question whether she will remain faithful to Odysseus.

70

ATHENA’S VISIT TO ITHACA

80

90 **redoubtable:** to be feared or dreaded, formidable (OEDs)

bronze-shod: tipped or covered in bronze

forthwith: immediately

draughts: idle games

100

TELEMACHUS GREETSS
ATHENA

Welcome: (*Welcome Xenos!*)
the Greek word *xenia* means
“guest-friendship” or
hospitality. In a world without
real cities or centralized
authority, and riddled with
pirates, all travel depended
upon the mutual obligations
of *xenia*. [When] Athena visits
Ithaca in the guise of Mentor,
Telemachus spots him tarrying
at the door, and is irked that
this *xenos*, guest-friend, has
been waiting. He invites him
to a generous feast before
inquiring his name and home.
The appearance of a *xenos*,
then, demands certain rights
and behaviors. It is the closest
thing in the world of Homer to
an absolute moral mandate:
one of Zeus’ epithets is *Zeus*
xenios, protector of strangers.
Much of the *Odyssey*
concentrates on the fulfillment
and perversion of the demands
of *xenia*.

Bloom SG 17-18

vexed: distressed, annoyed
bade: asked, entreated
ewer: a pitcher with a wide
spout, used to bring water for
washing the hands (OEDs)
carver: one who carves the
meat at a feast

down the tables with wet sponges and laying them out again, and some cutting up great quantities of meat.

Telemachus saw her long before any one 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 honoured 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. 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

Book II

Now when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared Telemachus rose and dressed himself. He bound his sandals on to his comely feet, girded his sword about his shoulder, and left his room looking like an immortal god. He at once sent the criers round to call the people in assembly, so they called them and the people gathered thereon; then, when they were got together, he went to the place of assembly spear in hand—not alone, for his two hounds went with him. Athena endowed him with a presence of such divine comeliness that all marvelled at him as he went by, and when he took his place in his father's seat even the oldest councillors made way for him.

Aegyptius, a man bent double with age, and of infinite experience, was the first to speak. His son Antiphus had gone with Odysseus to Ilius, land of noble steeds, but the savage Cyclops had killed him when they were all shut up in the cave, and had cooked his last dinner for him. He had three sons left, of whom two still worked on their father's land, while the third, Eurynomus, was one of the suitors; nevertheless their father could not get over the loss of Antiphus, and was still weeping for him when he began his speech.

"Men of Ithaca," he said, "hear my words. From the day Odysseus left us there has been no meeting of our councillors until now; who then can it be, whether old or young, that finds it so necessary to convene us? Has he got wind of some host approaching, and does he wish to warn us, or would he speak upon some other matter of public moment? I am sure he is an excellent person, and I hope Zeus will grant him his heart's desire."

ASSEMBLY OF THE PEOPLE
OF ITHACA

Book II: the book divisions of the *Odyssey* were not original to Homer, but were probably added by scholars at the library of Alexandria sometime between the 5th and 2nd centuries BC. Instead, the *Odyssey* is a continuous song possibly initially intended to be sung on consecutive days at a week-long festival.

Dawn: goddess of the morning
comely: attractive, beautiful
girded: put on, prepared for action

round: around or on all sides
got together: assembled
Ilius: another name for Troy
cooked his last dinner for him: So we vulgarly say "had cooked his goose." Aegyptius cannot of course know of the fate Antiphus had met with, for there had as yet been no news of or from Odysseus.

Butler

moment: importance, weight

TELEMACHUS' SPEECH

omen: An Omen in Greek and Roman thought, was a phenomenon or circumstance foreboding good or evil.

Omens were seen notably in the flight and song of birds, and in lightning or thunder, according to the direction in which these were seen or heard. As early as the time of Homer we know that the Greeks paid attention to such signs; vultures seen on the left were an unlucky omen; the cry of a heron, or lightning, on the right was lucky. The Greeks drew omens from the reluctance or willingness of the sacrificial victim to approach the altar, and from the condition of its entrails when slaughtered.

Harvey 294-295

Telemachus stood in the middle of the assembly as a sign of authority.

ere: before

aggrieved: hurt, aggravated

Themis: the second wife of Zeus, given the task of calling the gods to assembly

Telemachus took this speech as of good omen and rose at once, for he was bursting with what he had to say. He stood in the middle of the assembly and the good herald Pisenor brought him his staff. Then, turning to Aegyptius, "Sit," said he, "it is I, as you will shortly learn, who have convened you, for it is I who am the most aggrieved. I have not got wind of any host approaching about which I would warn you, nor is there any matter of public moment on which I would speak. My grievance is purely personal, and turns on two great misfortunes which have fallen upon my house. The first of these is the loss of my excellent father, who was chief among all you here present, and was like a father to every one of you; the second is much more serious, and ere long will be the utter ruin of my estate. The sons of all the chief men among you are pestering my mother to marry them against her will. They are afraid to go to her father Icarius, asking him to choose the one he likes best, and to provide marriage gifts for his daughter, but day by day they keep hanging about my father's house, sacrificing our oxen, sheep, and fat goats for their banquets, and never giving so much as a thought to the quantity of wine they drink. No estate can stand such recklessness; we have now no Odysseus to ward off harm from our doors, and I cannot hold my own against them. I shall never all my days be as good a man as he was, still I would indeed defend myself if I had power to do so, for I cannot stand such treatment any longer; my house is being disgraced and ruined. Have respect, therefore, to your own consciences and to public opinion. Fear, too, the wrath of heaven, lest the gods should be displeased and turn upon you. I pray you by Zeus and Themis, who is the beginning and the end of councils, do not hold back, my friends, and leave me singlehanded—unless it be that my brave father Odysseus did some wrong to the Achaeans which you would now avenge on me, by

180 you think he will give you something for your family, but I tell you—and it shall surely be—when an old man like you, who should know better, talks a young one over till he becomes troublesome, in the first place his young friend will only fare so much the worse—he will take nothing by it, for the suitors will prevent this—and in the next, we will lay a heavier fine, sir, upon yourself than you will at all like paying, for it will bear hardly upon you. As for Telemachus, I warn him in the presence of you all to send his mother back to her father, who will find her a husband and provide her with all the marriage gifts so dear a daughter may expect. Till then we shall go on harassing him with our suit; for we fear no man, and care neither for him, with all his fine speeches, nor for any fortune-telling of yours. You may preach as much as you please, but we shall only hate you the more. We shall go back and continue to eat up Telemachus’s estate without paying him, till such time as his mother leaves off tormenting us by keeping us day after day on the tiptoe of expectation, each vying with the other in his suit for a prize of such rare perfection. Besides we cannot go after the other women whom we should marry in due course, but for the way in which she treats us.”

190 “Eurymachus has here shown disrespect for, disregard for, and contempt for just about every important element of the mores of his society... everything that ought to be respected in this society: the old, prophecy, the gods, the king, all of those in one speech Eurymachus simply spits on.”
200 Vandiver

Then Telemachus said, “Eurymachus, and you other suitors, I shall say no more, and entreat you no further, for the gods and the people of Ithaca now know my story. Give me, then, a ship and a crew of twenty men to take me hither and thither, and I will go to Sparta and to Pylos in quest of my father who has so long been missing. Some one may tell me something, or (and people often hear things in this way) some heaven-sent message may direct me. If I can hear of him as alive and on his way home I will put up with the waste you suitors will make for yet another twelve months. If on the other hand I hear of his death, I will return at once,

will bear hardly on you: *be painful for you*
vying: *competing*

“Eurymachus has here shown disrespect for, disregard for, and contempt for just about every important element of the mores of his society... everything that ought to be respected in this society: the old, prophecy, the gods, the king, all of those in one speech Eurymachus simply spits on.”

Vandiver

but for: *because of*

hither and thither: *to this place and that; in various directions (OEDs)*

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