

**HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM, Spring 2017**  
**“HOMER’S *ODYSSEY*” SYLLABUS**  
**Taught by Dr. BELLA VIVANTE, Professor Emerita of Classics**

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**<http://classics.arizona.edu/node/109>**

**WELCOME** to this exploration of Homer’s 2nd phenomenal, epic poem, *The Odyssey*. A *nostos* tale that relates the warriors’ return from the Trojan War, Homer’s poem sings of Odysseus’ adventures as he returns home to his wife Penelope and son Telemakhos and strives to reclaim his community standing. Odysseus is shown to be responsible for his long journey home, which becomes his journey of self-learning and transition from warrior to a man of society. The principal themes reflect the concerns of domestic society and include: concepts of man- or womanhood; gender relations, especially in marriage; re-evaluating concepts of heroism; creation of poetry; factors of a well-functioning society; fantastical journeys; and more. The appreciation gained of another culture’s views on the complexity of familial and social issues can provide valuable insights into our own thinking about these fundamental domestic concerns and their numerous effects.

**Required text:** Homer’s *Odyssey*, trans. by Charles Stein, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, 2008, ISBN 978-1-55643-728-1.

**Week**

- 1** Introduction to the course; *Odyssey* Books 1–2
  - ◆ **Background to** Homer, the Oral Tradition, Epic Poetry and the Trojan War
  - ◆ ***Odyssey* Book 1:** Setting the plot in motion: Council of the gods, Zeus, Athena; Odysseus’ son Telemakhos—what he experiences; his wife Penelope; her suitors; the situation at home
  - ◆ **Book 2:** Assembly—the situation in town governance; Telemakhos; Penelope
  
- 2** *Odyssey* Books 3–5:
  - ◆ **Book 3:** Telemakhos sails to Pylos, home of King Nestor, eldest chief at Troy, the visit framed by prayers and sacrifices; Nestor’s account of what happened when they left Troy and what happened to other warriors
  - ◆ **Book 4:** Nestor’s son Peisistratos and Telemakhos travel to Sparta, home of Helen and Menelaos; Helen’s and Menelaos’ stories; Menelaos and the Old Man of the Sea
    - ◆ Books 1–4, the “Telemakheia” Telemakhos’ story; why the poem about Odysseus starts with the story of the son
  - ◆ **Book 5:** Council of the gods, Hermes to Ogygia, home of goddess Kalypso; description of her home; interactions between Hermes and Kalypso, Kalypso and Odysseus; what Kalypso offers Odysseus, his response
  
- 3** *Odyssey* Books 6–8: Coming to Phaiakaia
  - ◆ **Book 6:** Odysseus lands at island of Phaiakaia; interaction between Odysseus and princess Nausikaa: what he tells her, his requests, her assistance
  - ◆ **Book 7:** Description of the Phaiakaian palace and gardens; how Athena helps Odysseus; Queen Arētē’s role; King Alkinoös’ hospitality
  - ◆ **Book 8:** Songs and entertainment at the palace: respect for the singer; his 3 popular songs related to the themes of the poem: Akhilleus, the Trojan horse, and the extra-marital love affair between the goddess of eroticism Aphrodite and god of war Ares

- 4 ***Odyssey* Books 9–10:** Books 9–12, Odysseus tells his story to the Phaiakians, a story that reveals his transition from warrior to a man of society
  - ◆ **Book 9:** Odysseus begins the story of his adventures since leaving Troy, 1<sup>st</sup> 3: Thracians, Lotos Eaters, focus on the Kyklopes—Odysseus' cleverness, his folly, Polyphemos' curse
  - ◆ **Book 10:** Encounters 4-6: god of winds Aiolos: what Odysseus keeps from his men and why; Laistrygonians; goddess Kirke: what she does to the men; what Odysseus experiences; her instructions
  
- 5 ***Odyssey* Books 11–12:**
  - ◆ **Book 11:** #7: Odysseus and the shades of the dead: Teiresias' prophecy; Odysseus' encounters with his mother Antikleia, female shades, male shades—what each tells him and what he learns from them
  - ◆ **Book 12:** #s 8-11: Kirke again, her further instructions; the Sirenes; Skylla and Kharybdis; the sun god Helios' island, his cattle, and consequences; story end
  
- 6 ***Odyssey* Books 13–14:**
  - ◆ **Book 13:** Parting gifts, passage home; how he lands; what happens to the Phaiakians; interaction between Odysseus and Athena, her instructions
  - ◆ **Book 14:** Odysseus, disguised as a foreign beggar, at hut of his swineherd Eumaios: how they treat each other; Odysseus' stories, Eumaios' responses
  
- 7 ***Odyssey* Books 15–17:**
  - ◆ **Book 15:** Helen's, Menelaos' parting gifts; Telemakhos' return home; Eumaios' story; Telemakhos lands, heads to Eumaios' hut
  - ◆ **Book 16:** Father and son; suitors snookered; Penelope upbraids suitors
  - ◆ **Book 17:** Disguised Odysseus goes to his palace, the suitors' treatment of him
  
- 8 ***Odyssey* Books 18–20:**
  - ◆ **Book 18:** Omens: Telemakhos sneezes, Penelope laughs, she elicits gifts from the suitors; Odysseus laughs
  - ◆ **Book 19:** Penelope, not knowing who he is, questions the disguised Odysseus; what they tell each other; his old nurse's Eurykleia's recognition; story of his scar; Penelope's dream; the contest she proposes. What does Penelope know?
  - ◆ **Book 20:** Omens, prayers; more taunting of Odysseus; Telemakhos takes charge
  
- 9 ***Odyssey* Books 21–22:**
  - ◆ **Book 21:** Penelope sets up the decisive contest; how Odysseus handles the bow
  - ◆ **Book 22:** Killing of the suitors: who gets killed first, who gets saved; how dead suitors, treacherous maids, and polluted house are dealt with
  
- 10 ***Odyssey* Books 23–24:**
  - ◆ **Book 23:** Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus: her tests, their secret sign; equivalency of their experiences
  - ◆ **Book 24:** Shades in the underworld tell of Akhilleus' funeral; Odysseus with his father and son; the final battle line—grandfather, father and son: one killing, Athena brings peace