

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM  
Spring 2025

“WOMEN REWEAVE HOMER”  
SYLLABUS

Taught by Dr. BELLA VIVANTE  
Professor Emerita of Classics  
[bvivante@email.arizona.edu](mailto:bvivante@email.arizona.edu)



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

**Fridays**, 10am – 12 noon; Jan. 31, Feb. 7, 14, 21, 28, March 7, 21, 28, April 4, and 11, 2025

**Course Description:**

This course will explore four contemporary novels by four women authors inspired by Homer’s two great epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Inheriting an almost 3000-year-old literary legacy, the last 25+ years have seen an astonishing profusion of Homer-inspired creative works in film, television and literature. Equally notable is the profusion of novels by women authors, twice as many as by male authors, and which includes the first two female-authored translations of Homer’s epics. This female-authored fiction tells their stories through the eyes of secondary characters, often female, whereby they foreground the women’s lives sidetracked in the ancient tales and they illuminate aspects of the tales not previously noted. In so doing they enrich the ancient legacy with imaginative new versions, and they enrich our appreciation of the themes raised both in Homer’s tales and in their own.

**Reading list:**

Natalie Haynes, *A Thousand Ships*. Mantle, 2019.  
Madeleine Miller, *The Song of Achilles*. Harper Collins, 2012.  
Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*. Doubleday, 2018.  
Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

**Syllabus, by week:**

- 1 **Introduction** to the course: Online: Timeline, Background, Homeric summaries
  - ◆ **Background** to Ancient Greek Oral Traditions and Epic Poetry
  - ◆ **Summary** of relevant characters, events and themes of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
- 2-3 **Natalie Haynes, *A Thousand Ships***; book assignments divided in half across two weeks
  - ◆ This novel provides a good introduction to the ancient female and male characters and the themes central to this course’s explorations.
- 4-5 **Madeleine Miller, *The Song of Achilles***
  - ◆ Focusing on two male heroic characters, this novel explores the principal Greek hero Achilles through the eyes of his companion Patroklos, highlighting the multi-faceted intimacy of their relationship.
- 6-7 **Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls***
  - ◆ This novel describes the events through the eyes of Briseis, Achilles’ female captive whose Iliadic role sparks Achilles’ monumental anger and the epic’s plot.
- 8-9 **Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad***
  - ◆ This re-visioning of *Odyssey*-inspired tales explores that epic’s themes from the perspectives of both Penelope and the twelve maids brutally hung at the end of Homer’s epic.
- 10 **Crystallization and review** of the course’s works and themes