

The Odyssey (LT237)

Seminar Leader: Dr. David Hayes

Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 15:45-17:15

Email: d.hayes@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

We will closely read Homer's epic poem, with special attention to the theme of the difficult restoration, even rehabilitation, of its hero after twenty years of suffering in war and wandering. We will aim to understand the poem's numerous fairy-tale or fantasy elements as meaningful parts of this story of a man's struggle to "win his soul." Concepts important to the poem that we will be discussing throughout the course include: hospitality, anger, eating, storytelling, comradeship and friendship, sex and marriage, heroism and post-heroism; humanity, monstrosity, and divinity; coming-of-age and growing old; violence and intelligence; and the values of travel and home. It is recommended that students taking this class read Homer's *Iliad* as preparation.

Requirements

Text: Homer, *The Odyssey*, vols. I and II, trans. A.T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library.

Note on the translation. Students are required to use the Loeb Classical Library edition of the *Odyssey* in two volumes, translated originally in 1919 by A.T. Murray and revised in 1995 by George Dimock. Murray's scrupulous word-by-word fidelity makes this a superior choice for close academic work.

Please order this edition as soon as possible! It can take some time to acquire. If you cannot get the revised (1995) edition, the original (1919) will also work, although you may find its archaizing style a little more challenging to read.

The *Odyssey* is obviously inter-textual with the *Iliad*. That is, its meaning often depends upon its concord or contrast with the *Iliad*, which it expects its audience to know. (The reverse may also be also true, but is less obvious.) While the *Iliad* is not an assignment for this class, students are highly encouraged to read or re-read it.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: All students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Alternatives to in-person attendance will be provided.

Assessment

This is a discussion class. You should come to class not only having done the reading, but also already having taken time to think about what you have read. Do not wait for the seminar to begin your thinking. Also, the shortness of the reading assignments means that a high standard will be set for mastery of the facts in the reading, such as the names and identities of characters and the details of the plot.

I will evaluate class participation according to the following criteria:

- 1) Ready to discuss the reading from the beginning of the class
- 2) Manifestly prepared for each and every class
- 3) Capacity to connect the discussion in the current class with the discussion in previous classes
- 4) Capacity to converse with other students about their concerns, and to contribute to lines of discussion that other students have initiated
- 5) Quality of the student's contributions

An interesting or important thought matters much more than quantity. Dominating the discussion is a negative. If you have a lot to say, for the sake of the general discussion you may need to exercise some restraint by picking your spots.

6) Quality of the student's questions

A good question is also an excellent contribution to a discussion—often even better than a good point.

Assignments

This class requires two short papers (approximately 1250 words) and longer final paper (approximately 2500 words), in which you will develop your thought about the poem as a whole. Paper topics will be provided. You are also free to devise your own topic, but this should happen in consultation with me.

The visualization exercise asks you to yourself produce an image (in any medium) of a scene in the poem. There is a long tradition of visual artistic inspiration from the *Odyssey*. This is no accident. Homer does not spell out his meanings abstractly; rather, he often conveys them through techniques involving images, such as close-ups, long shots, juxtapositions, and significant cutting from scene to scene. Reading Homer well, therefore, requires visualization. Do not read for speed; read with your imagination. The meaning is often in the selection of details. Try to see in your mind's eye what Homer is showing. (When you get good at this, you will also be able to see what he is *not* showing.)

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

I freely give extensions—but the request must be made at least 24 hours before the deadline. Late papers will be downgraded a third of a letter grade (e.g., from A- to B+) for every 24 hours that passes.

Use of Electronics

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion, the use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. Using electronics in class will negatively affect your seminar grade. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform me at the beginning of the semester.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar grade: 30%

2 Short papers (1250 words): 15% x 2

Visualization exercise presentation: 10%

Final essay (2500 words): 30%

Schedule

Tues, Feb 2 Proems of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (and to line 1.95)

Thurs, Feb 4 Book 1

Tues, Feb 9 Book 2

Thurs, Feb 11 Book 3

Tues, Feb 16 Book 4

Thurs, Feb 18 Book 5

Paper due on the "Telemachy" [Books 1-4] by Sunday, Feb 21, 11:59pm.

Tues, Feb 23 Book 6

Thurs, Feb 25 Book 7

Tues, Mar 2 Book 8

Thurs, Mar 4 Book 9, lines 1-306

Tues, Mar 9 Book 9, lines 307-566

Thurs, Mar 11 Book 10

Tues, Mar 16 Book 11

Thurs, Mar 18 Book 12

Paper due on the "Apologoi" [Books 9-12] by Sunday, Mar 21, 11:59pm.

Tues, Mar 23 Seminar with Glenn Most (University of Chicago / Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa)
on the "Apologoi"

Thurs, Mar 25 Book 13

Spring break March 29-April 5

Tues, Apr 6 Book 14

Thurs, Apr 8 Book 15

Tues, Apr 13 Book 16

Thurs, Apr 15 Book 17

Tues, Apr 20 Book 18

Thurs, Apr 22 Visualization exercise presentations

Tues, Apr 27 Book 19

Thurs, Apr 29 Book 20

Tues, May 4 Book 21

Thurs, May 6 Book 22

Tues, May 11 Book 23

Thurs, May 13 Book 24

Final paper due by 11:59 pm, Friday, May 21