

The Odyssey (LT237)

Seminar Leader: Dr. David Hayes

Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 17:30-19:00

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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. The library possesses some (7) copies of this translation for loan. 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 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.

The use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software is not permitted in assignments for this course. Indeed, since this class is nothing but a sustained close reading and discussion of a single work, it would be especially inappropriate to export any task of understanding to a machine.

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. **Students should not attend class when sick with any symptoms.**

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

For each absence over 2, I will deduct from the final grade according to the following ascending scale: -.05, -.05, -.1, -.1, -.15, -.15.

I will excuse absences with a doctor's note (excused absences still count against the 30% rule) or a German bureaucratic appointment confirmation. Every other absence is simply counted as an absence. There is no need to send me any email messages if you will be absent.

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 read for speed; read with your imagination. Homer's 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.)

The class participation grade will be based on the following criteria: consistency of participation, quality of contributions (especially of questions), and capacity for engaging in meaningful dialogue with other students.

Assignments

This class requires three short papers and a longer final paper in which you will develop your thought about the poem as a whole. Final paper topics will be provided. You are also free to devise your own topic, but this should happen in consultation with me. Other short in-class or ad hoc writing assignments may be given throughout the term. The visualization exercise asks you to produce an image (in any medium) of a scene in the poem, or to closely read an already existing image of a scene in the poem.

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.

Handies/Smartphones

In order to facilitate an environment that is constructive for seminar discussion, do not enter the classroom until you have put your smartphone away in a bag or backpack. This means: **do not sit at the seminar table with your phone out, even before class has begun.** Please also make sure that your ringer is turned off before you enter the room.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar participation grade: 25%
3 short papers (500, 800, 1200 words): 10%, 10%, 15%
Visualization presentation: 15%
Final essay (2500 words): 25%

Schedule

Tues, September 5: Proems of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (and to *Odyssey* 1.177: “For many were the men who came to our house as strangers, since he, too, had gone to and fro among men.”)

Thurs, September 7: finish Book 1

Tues, September 12: Book 2

Thurs, September 14: Book 3

Short paper due on a line or detail in Book 4 by Monday, September 18, 11:59pm

Tues, September 19: Book 4

Thurs, September 21: Book 5

Short paper due on Book 6 by Monday, September 25, 11:59pm.

Tues, September 26: Book 6

Thurs, September 28: Book 7

Tues, October 3: Holiday

Thursday, October 5: Book 8

Tues, October 10: Book 9, lines 1-306

Thurs, October 12: Book 9, lines 307-566

Tues, October 17: Book 10

Thurs, October 19: Book 11

October 23 – Oct 28: Fall Break

Tues, October 31: Book 12

Thurs, November 2: Book 13

Short paper due on the “Apologoi” [Books 9-12] by Sunday, November 5, 11:59pm.

Tues, November 7: Book 14

Thurs, November 9: Book 15

Tues, November 14: Book 16

Thurs, November 16: Book 17

Tues, November 21: Book 18

Thurs, November 23: Book 19

Tues, November 28: Visualization presentations

Thurs, November 30: Book 20

Tues, December 5: Book 21

Thurs, December 7: Book 22

Tues, December 12: Book 23

Thurs, December 14: Book 24

December 18 - 22: Completion Week (no classes)

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