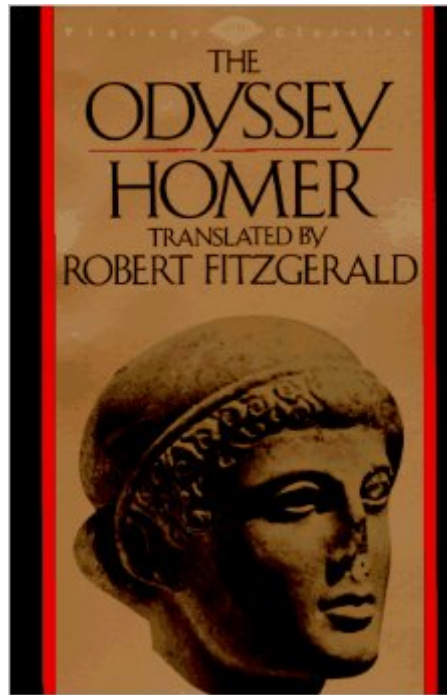


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The Odyssey (Vintage Classics)



Synopsis

Translated by Robert Fitzgerald, this is the most acclaimed translation of THE ODYSSEY of our time.

Book Information

Paperback: 509 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reissue edition (June 16, 1990)

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (34 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

It is clear from reading "The Aeneid" that there is one author: there's a unity and a consistency throughout. It is clear from reading "The Bible" that there are many authors: there's conflict and contradictions throughout. It's not clear whether "The Odyssey" has one or many authors, but it's clear that it comes from a Greek oral tradition. That's because there are stand-alone stories throughout, two major strands (the travails of Odysseus in seeking home and the journeys of his son Telemakhos in seeking news of Odysseus) that come together in a seemingly redacted ending. "The Odyssey" is about the power of story-telling, as exemplified by the hero Odysseus, who the Greek bards must have thought their patron saint and that's why they rhapsodized him so. When Alkinoos gives treasures to Odysseus and a ship to send him home, it seems these gifts are less the will of the Gods or even the acknowledgement of a legendary warrior but simply because Odysseus was able to tell such great stories. It is probably with "The Odyssey" more than the Sophists in mind that Plato wrote that all art was artifice. Odysseus dissembles throughout through the power of his words to distort reality. He somehow transforms from a liar of necessity (as when he lies to escape the clutches of the Kyklops) to a liar of circumstance (as when he deceives his servants, his son, and his wife in order to plan the killing of his enemies) to a liar of compulsion (as

when he lies even to his frail father). Modern psychology would suggest that at the root of Odysseus' compulsive lying are trust issues. But character in the eyes of the ancient Greeks is much different from our conception of character. There is no agency, no identity, and no individual per se in the Odyssey.

"The Odyssey", as with other Greek poetry, was poetry intended to be recited orally as opposed to being read. Fitzgerald's background in poetry brings out the lyrical passion of the Odyssey so prized by the Greeks as no other translation has done. The sequel to "The Iliad", it represents the last phase of what is known as Greece's Heroic Age in which human events are governed by gods, demi-gods, and heroes. The mortal heroes are endowed with godlike gifts and are mostly tragic. They interact with emissaries from the gods who aid them to their destinies and forewarn them of the fates. Tales such as Jason and the Argonauts, the labors of Hercules, Perseus, Theseus, etc., are also of that period. The uncertainties in Fate, glory, and mortality are always the dominant themes in these tales. The setting of "The Odyssey" is c. 1200 B.C. at the close of the Bronze Age. The Greeks are actually Myceneans, a Greek-speaking group that dominated Greece prior to the Doric invasions several centuries later. The story poetically recites a time of Mycenaean geopolitical expansion across the Mediterranean and its coasts and encounters with hitherto unknown civilizations after the fall of legendary Troy. "The Odyssey" starts many years after the Trojan war where, after many ordeals, Odysseus is reciting his travels to Princess Nausica: the young heiress of a kingdom upon which Odysseus washed ashore after being shipwrecked. He recites his departure from Troy after its sacking and how, having angered Poseidon, the god of the sea, he has been condemned to wander across the Mediterranean away from his wife and son, Penelope and Telemachus.

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