



PENGUIN



CLASSICS

HOMER

The Odyssey

Translated by E. V. Rieu

Introduction and Notes by BERNARD KNOX

H O M E R

The
Odyssey

TRANSLATED BY

Robert Fagles

INTRODUCTION AND

NOTES BY

BERNARD KNOX



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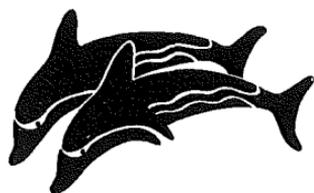
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Athena Inspires the Prince

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns
driven time and again off course, once he had plundered
the hallowed heights of Troy.

Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds,
many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea,
fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home.
But he could not save them from disaster, hard as he strove—
the recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all,
the blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the Sun
and the Sungod wiped from sight the day of their return.

10

Launch out on his story, Muse, daughter of Zeus,
start from where you will—sing for our time too.

By now,

all the survivors, all who avoided headlong death
were safe at home, escaped the wars and waves.

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But one man alone . . .
 his heart set on his wife and his return—Calypso,
 the bewitching nymph, the lustrous goddess, held him back,
 deep in her arching caverns, craving him for a husband.
 But then, when the wheeling seasons brought the year around,
 that year spun out by the gods when he should reach his home, 20
 Ithaca—though not even there would he be free of trials,
 even among his loved ones—then every god took pity,
 all except Poseidon. He raged on, seething against
 the great Odysseus till he reached his native land.

But now

Poseidon had gone to visit the Ethiopians worlds away,
 Ethiopians off at the farthest limits of mankind,
 a people split in two, one part where the Sungod sets
 and part where the Sungod rises. There Poseidon went
 to receive an offering, bulls and rams by the hundred—
 far away at the feast the Sea-lord sat and took his pleasure. 30
 But the other gods, at home in Olympian Zeus's halls,
 met for full assembly there, and among them now
 the father of men and gods was first to speak,
 sorely troubled, remembering handsome Aegisthus,
 the man Agamemnon's son, renowned Orestes, killed.
 Recalling Aegisthus, Zeus harangued the immortal powers:
 "Ah how shameless—the way these mortals blame the gods.
 From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes,
 but they themselves, with their own reckless ways,
 compound their pains beyond their proper share. 40
 Look at Aegisthus now . . .
 above and beyond *his* share he stole Atrides' wife,
 he murdered the warlord coming home from Troy
 though he knew it meant his own total ruin.
 Far in advance we told him so ourselves,
 dispatching the guide, the giant-killer Hermes.
 'Don't murder the man,' he said, 'don't court his wife.
 Beware, revenge will come from Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
 that day he comes of age and longs for his native land.'
 So Hermes warned, with all the good will in the world, 50

but would Aegisthus' hardened heart give way?
Now he pays the price—all at a single stroke."

And sparkling-eyed Athena drove the matter home:

"Father, son of Cronus, our high and mighty king,
surely he goes down to a death he earned in full!
Let them all die so, all who do such things.

But my heart breaks for Odysseus,

that seasoned veteran cursed by fate so long—
far from his loved ones still, he suffers torments
off on a wave-washed island rising at the center of the seas.

A dark wooded island, and there a goddess makes her home,
a daughter of Atlas, wicked Titan who sounds the deep
in all its depths, whose shoulders lift on high
the colossal pillars thrusting earth and sky apart.

Atlas' daughter it is who holds Odysseus captive,
luckless man—despite his tears, forever trying
to spellbind his heart with suave, seductive words
and wipe all thought of Ithaca from his mind.

But he, straining for no more than a glimpse
of hearth-smoke drifting up from his own land,
Odysseus longs to die . . .

Olympian Zeus,

have you no care for *him* in your lofty heart?

Did he never win your favor with sacrifices

burned beside the ships on the broad plain of Troy?

Why, Zeus, why so dead set against Odysseus?"

"My child," Zeus who marshals the thunderheads replied,

"what nonsense you let slip through your teeth. Now,
how on earth could I forget Odysseus? Great Odysseus
who excels all men in wisdom, excels in offerings too
he gives the immortal gods who rule the vaulting skies?"

No, it's the Earth-Shaker, Poseidon, unappeased,
forever fuming against him for the Cyclops
whose giant eye he blinded: godlike Polyphemus,
towering over all the Cyclops' clans in power.

The nymph Thoosa bore him, daughter of Phorcys,
 lord of the barren salt sea—she met Poseidon
 once in his vaulted caves and they made love.
 And now for his blinded son the earthquake god—
 though he won't quite kill Odysseus—
 drives him far off course from native land. 90
 But come, all of us here put heads together now,
 work out his journey home so Odysseus can return.
 Lord Poseidon, I trust, will let his anger go.
 How can he stand his ground against the will
 of all the gods at once—one god alone?"

Athena, her eyes flashing bright, exulted,
 "Father, son of Cronus, our high and mighty king!
 If now it really pleases the blissful gods
 that wise Odysseus shall return—home at last—
 let us dispatch the guide and giant-killer Hermes 100
 down to Ogygia Island, down to announce at once
 to the nymph with lovely braids our fixed decree:
 Odysseus journeys home—the exile must return!
 While I myself go down to Ithaca, rouse his son
 to a braver pitch, inspire his heart with courage
 to summon the flowing-haired Achaeans to full assembly,
 speak his mind to all those suitors, slaughtering on and on
 his droves of sheep and shambling longhorn cattle.
 Next I will send him off to Sparta and sandy Pylos,
 there to learn of his dear father's journey home. 110
 Perhaps he will hear some news and make his name
 throughout the mortal world."

So Athena vowed
 and under her feet she fastened the supple sandals,
 ever-glowing gold, that wing her over the waves
 and boundless earth with the rush of gusting winds.
 She seized the rugged spear tipped with a bronze point—
 weighted, heavy, the massive shaft she wields to break the lines
 of heroes the mighty Father's daughter storms against.
 And down she swept from Olympus' craggy peaks
 and lit on Ithaca, standing tall at Odysseus' gates, 120

the threshold of his court. Gripping her bronze spear,
she looked for all the world like a stranger now,
like Mentès, lord of the Taphians.

There she found the swaggering suitors, just then
amusing themselves with rolling dice before the doors,
lounging on hides of oxen they had killed themselves.
While heralds and brisk attendants bustled round them,
some at the mixing-bowls, mulling wine and water,
others wiping the tables down with sopping sponges,
setting them out in place, still other servants
jointed and carved the great sides of meat.

130

First by far to see her was Prince Telemachus,
sitting among the suitors, heart obsessed with grief.
He could almost see his magnificent father, here . . .
in the mind's eye—if only *he* might drop from the clouds
and drive these suitors all in a rout throughout the halls
and regain his pride of place and rule his own domains!
Daydreaming so as he sat among the suitors,
he glimpsed Athena now
and straight to the porch he went, mortified
that a guest might still be standing at the doors.
Pausing beside her there, he clasped her right hand
and relieving her at once of her long bronze spear,
met her with winged words: "Greetings, stranger!
Here in our house you'll find a royal welcome.
Have supper first, then tell us what you need."

140

He led the way and Pallas Athena followed.
Once in the high-roofed hall, he took her lance
and fixed it firm in a burnished rack against
a sturdy pillar, there where row on row of spears,
embattled Odysseus' spears, stood stacked and waiting.
Then he escorted her to a high, elaborate chair of honor,
over it draped a cloth, and here he placed his guest
with a stool to rest her feet. But for himself
he drew up a low reclining chair beside her,
richly painted, clear of the press of suitors,

150

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P E N G U I N



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