CL3436 HOMER (IN TRANSLATION)

ABOUT THE COURSE

A detailed exploration of the two Homeric epics and their artistic and historical background, combining broad discussion of the poems’ themes, techniques, architecture, and values with close study of the text in translation. The main focus will be on developing a close familiarity with the text of the epics and a confident engagement with their literary qualities, but there will also be general introductions to the circumstances of composition and to the historical world of the poems’ roots.

ASSESSMENT

There are two elements:
• a 3-hour exam in May, which carries 80% of the assessment;
• two essays of 2500–3500 words, of which the better counts for 20%.

FORMAT

The course consists of three strands:
• a weekly one-hour lecture
• a weekly one-hour seminar (but a second lecture for the first three weeks)
• about six hours per week of private study, which will include:
  - reading the text
  - preparation for lectures and seminars
  - follow-up and general secondary reading
  - the writing of two essays.

The first term will deal with the Iliad and issues of background and composition, while the second term will centre on the Odyssey. The lectures will guide you through a reading of the text, while the seminars will discuss wider issues. Whether or not you’re doing an essay for a particular seminar (see below), all members of the class should prepare for all seminars. You’ll find guidance on reading on pages 8–16 below, and assigned preparation for the seminars on pages 2–7. Full-length companions to each poem, with detailed outline and running commentary, are available as PDFs and ebooks on Moodle from 13 June.

ESSAYS

You’re required to submit two essays during the year; as well as counting towards your course assessment, they’re an opportunity for you to develop your own ideas and skills with feedback. Titles should be chosen from the list on pages 2–7, though others can be negotiated. To help you manage your own essay timetable relative to other courses, the essays are tied to the seminars, with a pair of essays falling due each week. You can submit essays at (or ahead of) whichever seminars you choose – the only stipulations are that (i) you must have submitted at least one essay by the last deadline in first term; (ii) any essay on a set topic must be submitted before or at the start of the seminar indicated. Because the essays are directly linked to the seminars, there will be no extensions; instead, if you miss the deadline for a particular essay, you simply submit a different essay in a later week. (You can, however, apply for an exemption from the end-of-term quota deadlines under the normal essay-extension procedures set out in the Undergraduate Handbook.) Don’t forget that all coursework essays (for this and any other course where the essays count towards the
assessment) need to be submitted in two copies – we have to keep one back for the external examiner.

**SEMINAR TOPICS AND ESSAY TITLES: TERM 1**

1. **Narrative**  
   14 October  
   What techniques of Homeric storytelling strike the modern reader as peculiar (or “archaic”, or “oral”), and how does the poem use them? Imagine, as you read, that the poem is a film: how does the narrative manipulate the image presented “on screen”? Where and why does it use the equivalent of closeups, longshots, zooms and cuts? What sorts of thing does it do to vary the pace, deal with several things happening at once, and organise the story into “scenes”? How “objective” is the poem’s narrative voice, and how does it use the pose of objectivity to evoke an emotional response?  
   **USEFUL STARTING-POINTS** (in addition to Edwards 1987 and Silk 1987, who have sections on most of these topics): Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (esp. chs. 1, 4); Edwards 1991: 1–41; S. Richardson 1990; De Jong 1988; Moulton 1977; Thalmann 1988.  
   **Essays** (due):  
   (a) Write a detailed critical appreciation of a narrative passage (not a speech) of around 100–150 lines.  
   (b) Discuss the form, content, and function of the similes in the *Iliad*.  
   (c) How “realistic” is the *Iliad’s* narrative technique?

2. **Characterisation**  
   21 October  
   How much real complexity is there in Homeric characterisation – and what exactly do we mean by “characterisation” and “complexity” here? How do we come to know what’s going on inside a Homeric character’s head, when the poet hardly ever tells us so explicitly? How are the major characters differentiated? Are they consistent? Do they “develop”, and if so in what sense? Do they always say what they’re thinking, and if not how can we tell? Is the formulaic language a barrier to individuality? or are there things the poem can do to get round it?  
   Griffin, *HLD* ch. 2; Schein 89–127; Collins 1988; Taplin 1990; Parry 1972.  
   (a) Discuss the characterisation of women in the *Iliad*.  
   (b) How, if at all, does the character of *either* Achilles *or* Agamemnon change over the course of the poem?  
   (c) Analyse the development of thought and tone in a speech or sequence of speeches up to 200 lines in length.

3. **Structure**  
   28 October  
   How does the poem keep a sense of shape? Does it fall into clearly-defined blocks? What kinds of symmetry and patterning do you notice between episodes, sequences, or parts of the poem? How does the poem use chronology and geography to shape the narrative? Are there passages or sections that don’t really advance things, and if so why are they there? Why is Achilles in so little of the poem? How does our sense of events to come develop as the poem unfolds? Why does it end the way it does, and what alternative possibilities have been rejected and why?  
   (a) What use does the *Iliad* make of events outside the timespan of the poem?  
   (b) Discuss the role of either time or space in the narrative structure of the *Iliad*.
(c) What do you understand by “ring-composition”, and how important is it to the architecture of the Iliad?

4. Outlook

Why should we be interested in the activities of a 3000-year-old warrior elite that was already long obsolete when the poem was composed? Does the Iliad deal in “universal” issues, and if so what? How does it invite us to view the issues of war, death, and relations between men and gods? What makes the figure of Achilles so central and significant here? How do the techniques covered under 1-3 contribute to this sense of a particular way of seeing the human condition in general? Would it be possible to do an Iliad in a modern war setting, or are there things about bronze-age warfare that make it especially useful for the purpose? What would it mean to say the Iliad is the prototype of “tragedy”, and what elements in Greek tragedy itself seem to show the Iliad’s influence?


(a) Illustrate and discuss the means the Iliad uses to evoke pathos.
(b) What tragic patterns can be seen in the plot of the Iliad?
(c) Does the Iliad glorify violence or condemn it?

5. Gods and the supernatural

Why are the gods in this poem at all? What would it look like without them? How much of their personality and status is rooted in Greek religion as such, and how much is poetic invention? What can the gods do, and what can they not do? To what extent, and in what ways, are they concerned with right and wrong? How does the poet limit their role, and why? What is the status of Zeus among the other Olympians, and what are its limits?

(a) How does the audience’s perception of the Homeric gods differ from that available to the mortal characters?
(b) Have the gods of the Iliad anything to do with religion?
(c) Does the Iliad present a coherent view of fate?


6. Composition

What do we mean when we say that the Homeric poems are the product of an oral tradition, and how, if at all, can we prove it? How could a poem the length of the Iliad come into being in such a tradition? Can we say anything about what came before it? Can we put a date to it, and if so how? Is it the product of a single act of composition, or are there signs of different layers and versions? How, when, and by whom did the text come to be written down, and in what form and by whom had it been preserved until then? What happened to the text between then and the Alexandrian editors? How and where does the Odyssey fit into this picture, and why were there two monumental epics rather than none, one, or several? Does the name “Homer” mean anything? And what are the implications of all this for the way we ought to read the text?

See section (b), and also Kirk 1962, 1990:1-14; Shive 1987; Fenik 1968.

(a) What, in your view, are the principal weaknesses in current theories about the composition of the Homeric poems?
(b) In what sense, if any, can the Iliad be described as a unity?
(c) What do we know about early Greek epic other than the Iliad and the Odyssey?
7. History

Is the world of the *Iliad* one that existed in history? If so, when and where? Is it consistent, or are there elements from different periods conflated (and if so, why)? What elements of social organisation and material culture can be paralleled in the archaeological and documentary record? Think especially about technology, economy, warfare, social institutions, religion, values. Do the events of the poem itself have any basis in history, and if so what? Was there a Trojan War? If so, when, where, and between whom? Is the *Iliad* of any use as a historical source, and if so for what?
(a) What are the problems with the term “heroic code”?  
(b) What striking inconsistencies do you find in the world of the *Iliad*, and how would you account for them?  
(c) Does the *Iliad*’s picture of early Greek warfare make any historical sense?  
See section (d) of the bibliography.

**SEMINAR TOPICS AND ESSAY TITLES: TERM 2**

1. **From the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey***

How would you sum up your first impressions of the most striking differences and similarities between the two poems in structure, subject matter, outlook? Think especially about the treatment of time and place, of plot and resolution, of character and situation, of gods and the supernatural, of morality and society. Why are the differences so pronounced, and to what extent can they be explained away as merely a consequence of different subject-matter? Conversely, what similarities or parallels do you find especially striking, and what significance would you see in them? In what ways do you feel the *Odyssey* is a more or a less sophisticated poem than the *Iliad*?

2. **Ithaca**

Why is so much of the poem set in Ithaca (and why Ithaca, anyway)? What do we learn about the island’s topography, society, and culture, and in what ways is each of these important to the narrative? Is the picture a coherent one? Does it seem to reflect a particular historical epoch (and if so, which)? How clearly is Odysseus’ status defined, and what aspects are problematic or blurry? What is Penelope’s and Telemachus’ status in Odysseus’ absence, and in what ways does that absence test the accepted order of things? What exactly is the suitors’ offence (if any), and do they deserve their fate?

**USEFUL STARTING-POINTS** *(all of these are from section (d) of the bibliography unless specified)*: Jones 1992, 1991 (introduction); Finley 1978 [in section (e) of bibliography]; Halverson 1985; Hankey 1990.

**Essays:**
(a) What has gone wrong in Odysseus’ absence, and how (if at all) might it have been righted?  
(b) Discuss the role of Telemachus.  
(c) What reflections of history can be seen in Homer’s Ithaca?  

3. **The supernatural**

In what ways is the *Odyssey* more and less “realistic” than the *Iliad*? How does the divine cast of the *Odyssey* differ from that of the *Iliad*? Which gods are involved in the action, and how and why? What is distinctive (and what is different from the *Iliad*) about the nature of their involvement in human affairs, their relations with individual mortals, their moral role, and the nature and frequency of divine scenes? How does the *Odyssey*’s use of magic,
monsters, and minor deities differ from the *Iliad’s*, and how does the poem attempt to reconcile these ingredients with more realistic elements? What is meant by “folktales” elements in the *Odyssey*, and do you find the notion useful? In what ways does the presentation of death and the afterlife differ from that in the *Iliad*, and what do the underworld scenes in 11 and 24 add?

Kullmann 1985; Griffin, *HLD* ch. 5; Clay 1983; Friedrich 1987; Segal 1994; Page 1972; Powell 1977.

**Essays:**

(a) Is the *Odyssey’s* view of divine justice more or less sophisticated than the *Iliad’s*?
(b) Discuss ways in which the *Odyssey* seeks to rationalise the supernatural.
(c) Assess the function of book 11 in the *Odyssey* as a whole.

### 4. Culture and savagery 3 February

What different levels of civilisation are distinguished among the various peoples of the *Odyssey*, and why is the poem so preoccupied with them? What criteria are used to distinguish different cultural levels? The Phaeacians are sometimes described as “hypercivilised”: on what grounds, and would you agree? Why is there so much in the *Odyssey* about feasting, and about the codes and rituals of hospitality associated with it? When, by whom, and with what significance are those codes varied, violated, or perverted? How are all these issues focussed in the Cyclops episode?


**Essays:**

(a) Trace the use of type-scenes associated with hospitality and feasting.
(b) In what ways is the Cyclops episode central to the *Odyssey*?
(c) Discuss the importance of the Phaeacians to the themes of the poem.

### 5. Structure 10 February

How does the *Odyssey* differ from the *Iliad* in the techniques it uses to shape its story? How does it impose a sense of form and direction on a storyline that spans the whole of the known Mediterranean and ten years in time? Why is Odysseus introduced so late, and why does so much of the action take place on islands? Modern retellings of the story tend to present 9–12 as its nucleus, but the ancient world took it for granted that 13–24 were the essential *Odyssey*: who is right, and why? What specific thematic links or narrative parallels can be found between incidents in the two halves? Is the end as we have it satisfactory?


**Essays:**

(a) Discuss the use of flashback and foreshadowing in the *Odyssey*.
(b) What does any one block of four books (1–4, 4–8, etc.) contribute to the poem as a whole?
(c) “The reader feels at times that bulk is being sought for its own sake” (Griffin). Would you agree with this verdict on books 14–20?

### 6. The hero 24 February

How and by what means is Odysseus characterised? Does his character or behaviour alter over the course of the poem? Why is his presentation so preoccupied with issues of identity, disguise, and intrigue? What heroic qualities are especially prized in the *Odyssey’s* world, and why? In what ways do they differ from the values of the *Iliad*, and are there points in the
poem where the two systems seem to be compared? Is there a genuine difference, or does it merely reflect differences of subject matter and setting?


**Essays:**

(a) In what ways, if any, does the character of Odysseus “develop”?
(b) Discuss the plotting and significance of recognition in the *Odyssey*.
(c) Illustrate and analyse the workings of Odysseus’ qualities of *metis* (“cunning intelligence”) and persuasive speech.

### 7. Stories & storytelling

3 March

What aspects of storytelling are thematically or narratively important in the *Odyssey*, and in what ways? What social and narrative role is played by the bards Phemius and Demodocus, and what functions do their individual songs serve in their context? What do we learn from these scenes about the status, role, and activity of the Homeric bard? When, and to what effect, is Odysseus compared to a bard himself? What function is served by the repeated references to the story of Agamemnon? What difference does it make to the texture and content of books 9–12 that they are told in the first person? What do Odysseus’ Cretan fictions contribute, both collectively and in their individual variations? What is implied about the ethics of lying in Odyssean society?


**Essays:**

(a) Discuss the content and function of Odysseus’ Cretan tales in Books 13–20.
(b) What parallel stories to Odysseus’ are adduced in the course of the poem, and to what effect?
(c) Discuss the role of bards in the *Odyssey*.

### 8. Women

10 March

Why is the *Odyssey* so interested in women (mortal, immortal, and monstrous)? How are the individual major and minor female characters (Penelope, Helen, Nausicaa, Calypso, Circe, Eurykleia, Melantho, Arete, Anticleia, the female monsters like Scylla and the Sirens) presented, and are there aspects of their characterisation that are distinctively “gendered”? What does the catalogue of heroines contribute in book 11? How intelligible is Penelope’s own personality, motivation, and thinking, and what particular touches make her characterisation complex or problematic? How much of the techniques and interests on display here can be paralleled in the *Iliad*, and what elements are new?


**Essays:**

(a) Discuss the element of ambiguity in Penelope’s characterisation.
(b) In what ways, if any, does the characterisation of any two of the following exemplify general aspects of the *Odyssey*’s presentation of women? Helen, Nausicaa, Calypso, Circe, Eurykleia, Athene.
(c) What new insights and problems are raised by feminist readings of the *Odyssey*?

### 9. From the *Odyssey* to the *Iliad*

17 March

What use is made in the *Odyssey* of characters from the *Iliad* and incidents from the Trojan war? Think especially of books 3, 4, 11 and 24, of the bards’ songs in 1 and 8, and of Odysseus’ cloak tale in 14. What does the war mean to the survivors, and what significance
has the background of the war for the postwar world that the poem explores? Does the *Odyssey* seem to know and allude to the *Iliad* in a form at least recognisably like the poem we have? If so, why doesn’t it do so more directly? Would you say it was trying to be a sequel to the *Iliad*? to rival it? to improve on it? to subvert it? and if any of these, how would you rate its success?


**Essays:**

(a) Compare the different ways in which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* present any TWO of the following characters: Agamemnon, Achilles, Helen, Menelaus, Nestor, Zeus, Athene, Poseidon. What do the similarities and contrasts reveal about the wider differences between the two poems’ aims and outlook?

(b) Was the *Odyssey* composed with the *Iliad* in mind?

(c) Compare the images of peace versus war presented in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey.*
**SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR READING**

* = particularly useful or important; † = copy in Restricted Loan collection.

A. TRANSLATIONS

For the *Iliad*, the translation we’ll be using is the one by Richmond Lattimore, published in paperback by the University of Chicago Press, and available online at the Chicago Homer website (see p. 16 below). There are other and cheaper translations around, including no fewer than three in Penguin, but this is by far the most student-friendly: it’s extremely close and reliable, it follows the line-numbering of the Greek (as Fagles and Fitzgerald, for instance, don’t, making them near-impossible to refer to), it’s available in Kindle; and it’s the translation on which the very good commentaries by Willcock and Posththwaite are based.

I don’t insist that everybody use Lattimore, but be warned it won’t be practical to make concessions to those that don’t – you’ll be expected to be able to use the Greek line-numbers, for instance, in referring to the text in class and in essays, and the Lattimore translation will be the one used for passages set in the exam. Other translations do have their fans, particularly those of Robert Fitzgerald (World’s Classics, 1984), Martin Hammond (subtitled *A New Prose Translation*, Penguin 1987), and Robert Fagles (Penguin, 1991, with good introduction and notes by Bernard Knox). It’s always worth having a second translation around to compare.

For the *Odyssey*, we’ll be using the prose translation by Walter Shewring, published in paperback by World’s Classics (and also on Kindle). If you want a second translation, the most useful is Lattimore’s; the old Penguin translation by E.V. Rieu is rather quirky and not to be trusted, though the reissue has good introduction and notes by Peter Jones.

B. BACKGROUND AND CRITICISM

Obviously, you’re not expected to read all of this, and you couldn’t even if you wanted to; it’s simply a reference bibliography of useful items available. Nevertheless, it’s a selective list; just because a title doesn’t appear here doesn’t mean you won’t find it useful. Two rules of thumb: (a) don’t bother with anything not published in your lifetime unless you’re referred to it by something more recent (including this list, obviously); and (b) don’t read anything by Paolo Vivante. (I won’t explain why; just trust me on this.) I’ve included a few books and periodicals that aren’t currently held in College, but which you can get from the Senate House or Institute of Classical Studies libraries if you use them. These are marked in smaller type, so just ignore them if you don’t use the central London libraries – anything essential will be in the library here.

(a) General and miscellaneous

Elton T. E. Barker, *Entering the Agon: Dissent and Authority in Homer, Historiography and Tragedy.* (2009)
C.M. Bovra, *Homer* (1972) 883.01 HOM/B†
W.A. Camps, *An Introduction to Homer* (1980) 883.01 HOM/C†
Kevin Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey* (1994) 883.01 HOM/C
Bernard G. Fenik (ed.), *Homer: Tradition and Invention* (1978) 883.01 HOM/H


Jasper Griffin, *Homer* (1980) 883.01 HOM/G†
*———, Homer on Life and Death* (1980) 883.01 HOM/G†
———, “Words and Speakers in Homer”, *JHS* 106 (1986) 36–57
J.B. Hainsworth, *Homer* (G&R New Surveys 3, 1969) 883.01 HOM/H†
Johannes Haubold, *Homer’s People* (2000) [on order]

Ahuvia Kahane, *The Interpretation of Order: A Study in the Poetics of Homeric Repetition* (1994) 883.01 HOM/K

*———, Homer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2012) 883.01 HOM/G†

G.S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (1962) 883.01 HOM/K†
———, *Homer and the Epic* (1965; abridgement of the above) 883.01 HOM/K

Joachim Latacz, *Homer: His Art and his World* (1996) 883.01 HOM/L


N.J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (2000) 103-56 880.09 LOW

*Ian Morris & Barry Powell (edd.), A New Companion to Homer* (1997) 883.01 HOM/N

Carroll Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (1977) 883.01 HOM/M† / XIK Hom,H


Adam Parry, “Language and Characterisation in Homer”, *HSCP* 76 (1972) 1–22


Scott Richardson, *The Homeric Narrator* (1990)

R.B. Rutherford, *Homer* (G&R New Surveys 26, 1996) 888HOM/R†

Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (1994) 880.9 SEA


George Steiner & Robert Fagles (edd.), *Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1962) 883.01 HOM/S†


W.G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (1984) 883 THA

C.A. Trypanis, *The Homeric Epics* (1977) 883.01 HOM/T


Tom Winnifrith, Penelope Murray, & K.W. Gransden (edd.), *Aspects of the Epic* (1983) 809.13 ASP

Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (1958) 883.01 HOM/W†

G.M. Wright & P.V. Jones (edd. & trr.), *Homer: German Scholarship in Translation* (1997)

(b) Composition and tradition


C.M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (1952) 809.13 BOW

Andrew Dalby, “The Iliad, the Odyssey and their Audiences”, *CQ* 45 (1995) 269–79
Malcolm Davies, *The Epic Cycle* (1989) 883 DAV†
Ken Dowden, “Homer’s Sense of Text”, *JHS* 116 (1996) 47-61
Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (1976) 809.1 FIN
*———*, “Oral tradition and its Implications”, in Morris & Powell 1997 146–73
*———*, *Homer’s Traditional Art* (1999)
*Jasper Griffin*, “The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer”, *JHS* 97 (1977) 39–53
J.B. Hainsworth, “The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula” (1968) 883.01 HOM/H
*———*, *The Idea of Epic* (1991) 883 HAI
*——— et al.*, “Dividing Homer: When and How were the Iliad and Odyssey Divided into Songs?”, *SO* 74 (1999) 5-91
G.S. Kirk (ed.), *The Language and Background of Homer* (1964) 883.01 HOM/K
*———*, *Homer and the Oral Tradition* (1976) 883.01 HOM/K
A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (1960) 883.01 HOM/L
*———*, “Homer as Oral Poet”, *HSCP* 72 (1968) 1–46
*Milman Parry*, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, edited by Adam Parry (1971) 883.01 HOM/P
*Steve Reece*, “Orality and Literacy: Ancient Greek Literature as Oral Literature”, in Martin Hose & David Schenker (edd.), *A Companion to Greek Literature* (2016) 43–57
Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (1992) 301.21 THO
*———*, “The Invention of Homer”, *CQ* 49 (1999) 364-382

(e) Iliad: general and literary studies
Öivind Andersen, “The Making of the Past in the Iliad”, *HSCP* 93 (1990) 25–45
*———*, *Helen of Troy and her Shameless Phantom* (1994) 880.9 AUS
C.M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (1930) 883.01 HOM/B†
Jenny Strauss Clay, Homeric’s Trojan Theater: Space, Vision, and Memory in the Iliad (2011)
Andrew Dalby, “The Iliad, the Odyssey and their audiences”, CQ 45 (1995) 269–
Irene J.F. de Jong, Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad
(1988) 883.01 HOM/D
* — — —, Homer: Poet of the Iliad (1987) 883.01 HOM/E
Bernard G. Fenik, Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad (Hermes Einzelschriften 21, 1968) Arts
pers.
John Gould, “Homer’s Epic and the Tragic Moment”, in Winnifrith/Murray/Gransden
1983:32–45 809.13 ASP
Dean C. Hammer, , The Iliad as Politics: The Performance of Political Thought (2002)
387–400
James P. Holoka (ed.), Simone Weil’s The Iliad or The Poem of Force: A Critical Edition
(2003)
Ahuvia Kahane, The Interpretation of Order (1994) 883.01 HOM/K
Colin Macleod, Collected Essays (1983) 1-15 880.09 MAC
Judith Maitland, “Poseidon, walls, and narrative complexity in the Homeric Iliad”, CQ 49
(1999) 1-13
883.01 HOM/M
James V. Morrison, “Alternatives to the Epic Tradition: Homer’s Challenges in the Iliad”,
TAPA 122 (1992) 61-72
———, Homeric Misdirection: False Predictions in the Iliad (1992) 883.01 HOM/M
Leonard Muellner, The Anger of Achilles: Menis in Greek Epic 883 MUE
Adam Parry, “The Language of Achilles”, TAPA 87 (1956) 1–7, reprinted in Kirk, Language and
Background 48–54 and Parry, The Language of Achilles and Other Papers (1989)
883.01 HOM/K
Pietro Pucci, Odysseus Polytropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad (1987)
Jonathan L. Ready, Character, Narrator, and Simile in the Iliad (2011)
James M. Redfield, Nature and Culture in the Iliad (1975) 883.01 HOM/R
Brian Satterfield, “The Beginning of the Iliad: The ‘Contradictions’ of the Proem and the
Burial of Hektor”, Mnemosyne 64 (2011) 1-20
*Michael Silk, Homer: The Iliad (1987) 883.01 HOM/S†
Laura M. Slatkin, The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad (1991) 883.01
HOM/S
T.A. Stroud & Elizabeth Robertson, “Aristotle’s Poetics and the Plot of the Iliad”, CW 89
(1996) 179–96
———, “Agamemnon’s Role in the Iliad”, in C.B.R. Pelling (ed.), Characterization and
Individuality in Greek Literature (1990) 60–82 880.9 CHA
* — — —, Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad (1992) 883.01 HOM/T
Agathe Thornton, Homer’s Iliad: Its Composition and the Motif of Supplication (1984) 883.01
HOM/T
Peter Toohy, Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives (1992) 883 TOO
*Simone Weil, “The Iliad, Poem of Might” in Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient
Greeks, ed. & tr. E.C. Geissbuhler (1957) [photocopies in †]
Donna F. Wilson, Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad (2002)
John Wright (ed.), Essays on the Iliad: Selected Modern Criticism (1978)
Graham Zanker, The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the Iliad
(1994) 883.01 HOM/Z

(d) Odyssey: general and literary studies

Frederick Ahl & Hanna M. Roisman, The Odyssey Re-formed (1996) 883.01 HOM/A
Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar”, ch. 1 of Mimesis (1946, tr. 1953) 809.912AU†
Norman Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer’s Odyssey
(1975) 883.01 HOM/A
Ann Bergren, “Odyssean Temporality: Many (Re)turns”, in Rubino & Shelmerdine 1983 [see
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(h) Shopping list
If you’re thinking of buying your own copy of books other than the translations, my suggestions in descending order of priority would be, for the *Iliad*:
- Silk, *The Iliad* (CUP)
- Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Clarendon Press; also has stuff on *Odyssey*)
- Cairns, *Homer’s Iliad* (OUP, in their Oxford Readings in Classical Studies series)

… and, for the *Odyssey* (though only the first couple are as good as the above):
- Dougherty, *Homer’s Odyssey* (OUP – the partner to Cairns above)
- Griffin, *Homer: The Odyssey* (CUP)
- Tracy, *The Story of the Odyssey* (Princeton)

You certainly won’t regret having your own copy of any or all of these.

**JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS** (* = available online through JSTOR)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Journal Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>AJP*</td>
<td><em>American Journal of Philology</em></td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td><em>Classical Antiquity</em></td>
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<td>CJ*</td>
<td><em>Classical Journal</em></td>
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<td>CQ*</td>
<td><em>Classical Quarterly</em></td>
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<td>CP*</td>
<td><em>Classical Philology</em></td>
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<td>CW</td>
<td><em>Classical World</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>G&amp;R*</td>
<td><em>Greece and Rome</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GRBS</td>
<td><em>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HSCP*</td>
<td><em>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</em></td>
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<td>JHS*</td>
<td><em>Journal of Hellenic Studies</em></td>
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READING THE EPICS

Here are some questions you might want to be thinking about as you work through the Iliad and Odyssey. Few of them admit of straightforward or definitive answers, but I hope you’ll find they help to focus your reading and sharpen your appreciation of the text. It’s particularly valuable to familiarise yourself with what happens in which book, and to this end I’ve included the “chapter titles” made up for each book in Rieu’s old Penguin translations. (Fagles’, Shewring’s, and Hammond’s newer and better translations each have a pretty similar set of titles, but I slightly prefer the ones given here.)

READING THE ILIAD

Book 1: The Quarrel
What do the opening lines tell us about the themes of the poem (and is there anything you might expect them to say that they don’t)? What is at stake for Agamemnon in Chryses’ supplication, and why does he reject it? What does the assembly scene tell us about each of the characters it introduces? The 13 main speeches make this one of the longest exchanges in Homer: what does each individual speech contribute to its overall development? What are the turning-points? What are the key issues in the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, and could it have been avoided? What does Achilles’ scene with his mother contribute to our sense of his character? What do we learn about the nature and personality of the gods from the Olympian scene that closes the book, and how does it use parallels and contrasts with the mortal action that has preceded?

Book 2: The Forces are Displayed
Achilles now disappears from the poem for seven books: why? What functions are served by the episode of Agamemnon’s false dream and backfiring bluff, and why do they come at this point in the poem? What does the book do to give a sense of (a) the history of the war as a whole (b) the masses of the army? What do the similes contribute, and why are there so many? Does the Catalogue of Ships serve any poetic purpose here? What contrasts do we notice between the Greek and Trojan armies?

Book 3: A Truce and a Duel
Why does the duel between Menelaus and Paris come here, and what do we learn about their characters? What is striking about the way Helen is presented, and what purpose is served by her scene on the walls with Priam? Pay close attention to the terms of the truce: how does the duel’s actual outcome fit with this? How do the pacing and choice of detail contribute to the dramatic effect of the duel itself? What is striking about the final scenes between Helen and (i) Aphrodite (ii) Paris?

Book 4: Pandarus Breaks the Truce
Why is there an Olympian scene at this point, and how does it advance (a) the plot (b) our understanding of the gods involved? What is impressive about the way the episode of Menelaus’ wounding is told, and why is it so significant? What does Agamemnon’s tour of the army contribute at this point, and what do we learn about the characters involved? What does the narrative do to sustain variety and drama in the first scenes of fighting?

Book 5: Diomedes Fights the Gods
Why is the spotlight now cast on a single warrior, and why Diomedes? What particular touches of colour and pathos are contributed by the details of each individual kill, and how (both here and elsewhere) does the poem prevent this sort of sequence becoming shapeless and monotonous? What are the key points, and what do they contribute to the overall movement? Why are Aeneas and Sarpedon brought in here, and what is special about each? How are Aphrodite and Ares depicted, and why does the poem allow their wounding here? Keep an eye on the links between individual episodes in the second half of the book, and the stages by which it builds to its divine crescendo.
**Book 6: Hector and Andromache**

How do the different narrative strands in this book intertwine? What is the tone of the Diomedes/Glaucus encounter, and what function (if any) does the Bellerophon story serve? What do we learn about Hector and his city from his successive encounters with Hecuba, Helen, and Andromache, and what contrasts are drawn in the characters of the three heroines? What does the famous exchange between Hector and Andromache tell us about the pressures and obligations upon him, and the values by which he lives? How would you characterise his relationship with Paris?

**Book 7: Ajax Fights Hector**

In what ways is this book important to the overall structure of the poem? Why is there another formal duel here, what are the significant parallels and contrasts with that in Book 3, and why this particular choice of duellists? How do the preliminaries build up the tension, and what do we expect to be the outcome? How do the councils, truce, negotiations, and funerals fit into the threads of the plot so far? Why is Nestor’s wall seen as so important?

**Book 8: The Trojans Reach the Wall**

In what ways does this book mark a turning-point? Why does Zeus lay this condition on the gods at this point in the poem? How does the narrative convey a sense of the tide of battle turning, and what is significant about the way Hector reacts? What do the Olympian scenes contribute, and what is new about the situation at the end of the book? What expectations does it raise for the coming day?

**Book 9: Overtures to Achilles**

What parallels and contrasts does the Greek council evoke with earlier scenes (both recent and more distant)? Why does Nestor handle things the way he does, and why does he pick these particular three spokesman? How do their three speeches to Achilles contrast in the means they use to attempt the same end, and how do Achilles’ replies to each significantly contrast? His reply to Odysseus is often seen as the most important speech in the poem: why does he refuse Agamemnon’s terms? Is he right to? Does his position make coherent sense? Is it compatible with a “heroic code” (if there is such a thing)? What crucial new information do we learn about Achilles’ background and motivation? What does Phoenix’s use of the Meleager story contribute to our sense of events to come? What does Odysseus significantly edit out in reporting Agamemnon’s speech to Achilles and vice-versa?

**Book 10: Night Interlude**

There is an old tradition that this episode was a late addition to the text of the Iliad: do you see signs of this? could it have been inserted just anywhere? what would be lost if it were cut? Are the Menelaus and Nestor scenes just padding, or do they serve a purpose? What significant parallels and contrasts are developed between the Greek and Trojan councils? How are the unusual setting and tactics exploited for dramatic effect? How does the narrative modulate between different moods, and how would you describe the overall tone of the episode?

**Book 11: Achilles Takes Notice**

Why does the poem choose this point to spotlight Agamemnon as warrior, and how does the series of his kills avoid monotony? Three key Greek fighters are wounded in this book: how does the narrative build up to each, and how does it avoid repetitiousness? Why is Ajax the one left in play? The Achilles scene initiates a long and careful series of scenes in camp extending over the next few books: keep a close eye on how this strand develops, and on what it reveals about the character of Patroclus. How does Nestor’s long reminiscence help the purpose of his speech, and what does the Eurypylus scene contribute to the plotting?

**Book 12: Hector Storms the Wall**

Why the renewed emphasis on the Greek fortifications here, and why the curious flashback at the start of the book? The narrative now splits into five or six strands: how successfully does the poem juggle this complex tangle of storylines? How do the Hector/Polydamas scenes contribute to our sense of Hector’s character and the future direction of events? What does the
Glaucus/Sarpedon exchange have to say about heroic values? How does the book retain a sense of shape and direction as it moves towards its climactic breakthrough?

**Book 13: The Battle at the Ships**

How does the poem now exploit the tension of the Trojan assault, and why is Poseidon now brought in? What function, if any, does the Idomeneus/Meriones conversation serve, and what special use is made of each in the montage of fighting scenes that follows? How is that montage organised, and does it succeed in keeping a sense of structure and direction? How does the Polydamas scene here advance the sequence already established?

**Book 14: Zeus Outmanoeuvred**

How does the conversation of the crippled Greeks extend their characterisations established so far, and has it any impact on the plot? Why does the long episode of Hera’s beguilement of Zeus come at this point, and how does it extend our picture of the gods and their natures? How would you sum up the tone of the episode, and what touches contribute especially to that effect? What does the battle narrative that follows do to reflect the changed situation on earth?

**Book 15: The Achaeans at Bay**

In what ways do the opening scenes among the gods mark a turning-point, and what do Zeus’s dealings with Hera and Poseidon tell us about the nature of his authority? What new information does he give about the course of events to come, and why does he give it now? What expectations are raised with Hector’s return to battle, and how does the narrative of his advance on the ships exploit the new crisis? How does the Patroclus scene fit into the sequence?

**Book 16: Patroclus Fights and Dies**

How, if at all, does Achilles’ assessment of his situation and options here differ from that in Book 9? How does the narrative bring together the scenes at the ships and at Achilles’ compound, and how do the preparations for battle build tension and foreshadow the outcome? What does the narrative do to convey a sense of the impact of Patroclus’ entry to the fighting? How and where is his death foreshadowed in what followed, and to what effect? How does the Sarpedon episode build on what we have seen of him so far, and in what ways does it represent a climax in the plot so far? What does it reveal about the nature and limits of Zeus’s authority, and his relationship with the forces of fate? Why is Sarpedon’s corpse so important to the plot? How does the narrative of Patroclus’ final surge develop the intimations of impending doom? What is particularly effective about the narrative of his death, and how does the final exchange with Hector (a) deepen the emotional resonance of the scene (b) advance our anticipation of the sequel?

**Book 17: The Struggle over Patroclus**

Is this the immediate sequel we expected to the events of 16? What is effective about it? How does the battle-narrative exploit the special significance of the two corpses as a focus for the fighting, and how does the struggle advance the overall plot? What does the narrative do to try and impose a sense of coherence and shape on this more than usually confused and unpredictable section of the fighting?

**Book 18: Armour for Achilles**

How does the scene with Thetis build on its predecessor in Book 1, and what new information do we learn about the terms of Achilles’ destiny, the options he faces, and the course of events to come? What does the Hector/Polydamas scene contribute? How would you summarise the effect of the interlude on Olympus, and what is the function of the extended description of the shield? Is there a principle and/or pattern to the choice of images? What is striking about the way they are described?

**Book 19: The Feud is Ended**

How do the speeches of Achilles and Agamemnon lay the feud to rest? Do they deal with the real issues, or have those simply receded in importance? What concessions, if any, are made, and what is interesting about what each does and does not say? What is the effect of
Agamemnon’s long excursus on Delusion? Why is so much space given to the issue of supper? Why is Briseis’ brief scene so effective? What is the point of the strange final scene?

**Book 20: The Gods Go to War**

Why are the gods sent down to the battlefield at this point, and what is interesting about the way they involve themselves? How does the Achilles/Aeneas encounter build on the characters of both, and what is the point of Aeneas’ digression on his ancestry? What special touches throughout the book help to evoke the unprecedented violence of Achilles’ surge?

**Book 21: Achilles Fights the River**

What is especially powerful about the Lycaon episode? What is the point of the strange scenes with the river, and what does the narrative do to make this bizarre flight of fancy seem credible and effective? What purpose, if any, is served by the series of divine faceoffs that follow, and how does the sequence exploit telling contrasts between the five successive combats? What is the function of the Agenor episode at the end of the book, and in what ways is the ground being laid for the showdown with Hector?

**Book 22: The Death of Hector**

Why does the poem switch to a Trojan vantage at this point, and how does it build on the Trojan scenes in 3 and 6? Why does Hector reject the appeals of Priam and Hecuba, and what dimensions to his character are newly highlighted here? What is particularly effective in the narrative of Achilles’ pursuit of Hector, and what does the behaviour of the gods contribute to our sympathies? What issues are raised by the exchange of speeches before the combat, and by Hector’s soliloquy before his death? What does the death-scene exchange do to foreshadow the events of Book 24 and beyond? What do the Trojan scenes add to this? What does the Andromache scene do to develop its emotional impact to the full?

**Book 23: The Funeral and the Games**

What does the scene with Patroclus’ ghost contribute to our sense of what is resolved and unresolved, and what touches especially bring out its pathos? How does the narrative of the funeral develop the dramatic and emotional opportunities in the occasion? Why does the poem give so much space here to the games? How do the events build on the characterisations already established, and where did we last see each of these heroes in action? What parallels and contrasts are developed between the activities of war and athletics? How do Achilles’ decisions as judge bring out his qualities as a leader? Is the plot of the poem advanced in any way by all this?

**Book 24: Priam and Achilles**

What episodes and sequences in this book seem to echo Book 1, and to what effect? How do the Olympian and Trojan scenes prepare us for what is coming, and how do the latter build on what we have previously seen of Priam and Hecuba? Why is the encounter with Hermes drawn out to such length, and what emerges from it? How does Priam’s speech of supplication to Achilles target the right emotional nerves, and what exactly is Achilles saying in his first reply? What issues are stressed in the followup exchange? What emotions and tensions are brought out in the banquet scene, and what does the Niobe story contribute? What is going on between the lines of the bedtime conversation? How do the laments of Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen complement one another and build on their earlier presentation (especially in 6); what aspects of Hector’s character are brought out by each; and why is Helen given the last word? After the closing line of the poem, what do we know is going to happen (a) now (b) soon (c) eventually, and how does it affect the way we respond to this close?

**READING THE ODYSSEY**

**Book 1: Athene Visits Telemachus**

What do we learn from this first book about (a) the story ahead; (b) the rules by which it’s going to be played? How do the introductory scenes help to define the world of the story, and what details would be alien to the *Iliad*? Equally important, what does the poet leave open at this
stage? What is said between the lines of the dialogue between Telemachus and (a) Athene (b) Penelope (c) the suitors, and how is it signalled to us? Can we be sure it’s there? It’s generally felt Telemachus “develops” during his adventures: but is this perhaps too modern an idea? How would you trace it in the text? Keep an eye on: the wrath of Poseidon; the Orestes saga; hospitality scenes; developments in Telemachus’ speech and behaviour; and above all, confirmation and demonstration of the moral rules outlined in this book.

Book 2: The Debate in Ithaca

Why is this assembly scene here? What would be lost if it were cut? Does it fill any long-term function? What do we learn about the political structure of Ithaca? Why is the uncertainty over Odysseus’ fate such a problem? What ought to happen over Penelope, and why isn’t it happening? What exactly is the suitors’ crime? How does the differentiation of the individual suitors extend the characterisations in Book 1? Look carefully at the nine speeches. Do you see signs of a deliberate sequence and progression? Once again, what’s being said between the lines in each case? What do the post-assembly scenes contribute, and how do they gain from being read after Book 1?

Book 3: Nestor

What contrasts strike us between Pylos and Ithaca, and how does the poet exploit Telemachus’ reaction? Why is the scene a sacrifice to Poseidon, and what does the elaborate ritual detail contribute? In the Iliad, Nestor’s seemingly irrelevant ramblings generally convey some shrewd and highly-relevant under-meaning: in what ways do the apparent digressions here serve this purpose? More generally, what details in this book and the next gain in significance if we assume the poet expects familiarity with the Iliad? What kinds of contrast with, and comment upon, the Iliad can we detect? Do we need this book and 4? What would be lost if one were cut? Is 3 in any way a necessary preliminary to 4?

Book 4: Menelaus and Helen

In what ways is Sparta different from Pylos? Again, what implicit reflections on Ithaca do we see? How, again, does the book seem to gain if knowledge of the Iliad is assumed? What kind of picture is emerging of the aftermath of the war and its legacy (a) for the survivors (b) for the postwar world? What are we to make of Helen’s personality, and her attitudes to (a) Menelaus (b) the past (c) herself? What touches recall her characterisation in the Iliad? What on earth is going on between her and Menelaus at 235-89? What elements in Menelaus’ narrative anticipate Odysseus’ in 9-12, and how does this passage prepare the ground? This is the third time the Agamemnon story has been told; why are we still interested? Why are the Ithacan scenes that close the book needed here? What would be lost if we cut straight to 5?

Book 5: Calypso

Why is this second council needed, and how does it build on what we have seen and learned in 1-4? What new information about the story do we learn, and why now? Equally, what are we left not knowing, but waiting to find out? What purpose does the famous description of Calypso’s cave serve? What’s going on between the lines in the Hermes-Calypso scene, and what do we learn about the mind of Odysseus from it? Why doesn’t she tell Odysseus about this conversation? What is going on beneath the dialogue between the two of them? How is drama sustained in the storm narrative? Why are there so many soliloquies and similes in this book and the next? What do each of the similes contribute beyond their explicit point of contact with the situation? What does the use of Poseidon here contribute to his role in the poem as a whole? Why does he leave off? What do we expect to happen next?

Book 6: Nausicaa

By what stages does the poet gradually reveal the relevance of the Nausicaa scenes? What details, casually introduced here, serve crucial plot functions? Why does Athene intervene and exit at the points she does in this and subsequent books? What do we learn about Nausicaa’s character in the scenes with Athene and Alcinous, and how is it built on later? What’s the tone of Odysseus’ first speech on waking, and of the ensuing lion simile? What is characteristically Odyssean about his choices of action? What does he guess about Nausicaa from his first glance, and how does he exploit it in his speech? What messages does he manage to convey between the lines? What does Nausicaa convey between the lines of her answer? How is it developed in the
following scene? What do we learn in this book about Phaeacian culture, and its place in the world of the poem? Why does the poet bring Odysseus here at all, rather than straight back to Ithaca?

Book 7: The Palace of Alcinous

What does the encounter with Athene add? (As usual, what would be lost if it were cut?) What purpose does the extended description of the palace and gardens serve? Why is the whole supplication episode spun out to such length? What does Odysseus leave out of his story to Alcinous, and why? What role does Arete play, after all this buildup, and why is it played by her rather than her husband? How does Odysseus’ version of book 5 differ from the poet’s, and why?

Book 8: The Phaeacian Games

How does this book bring out Odysseus’ past? What light does it shed on our unfolding picture of Phaeacian culture, and why is Odysseus out of place in it? What function, in particular, does the athletic contest serve? How does the book exploit our acquaintance with (a) books 1-4 (b) the Iliad? Why is there so much feasting in the Phaeacian books? What purpose does Demodocus’ second song, the tale of Ares and Aphrodite, serve? Has it any wider significance for the themes of the poem? Why is it placed here? Why does Odysseus weep at the Trojan Horse song (and what light does the simile shed)? What’s the tone of Alcinous’ speech in response, and is there some Nestorian purpose behind his apparent rambling?

Book 9: The Cyclops

What general themes of the poem are marshalled in Odysseus’ introduction to his tale? Why doesn’t he ever mention Penelope? The book has the usual pattern of two short episodes followed by a long one; are the three patterned and/or connected in any way? More generally, do the ten episodes that make up Odysseus’ tale in 9-12 follow a purposeful sequence? Could they be rearranged without making a difference? Is there a reason why these particular four (one per book) are singled out for extended treatment? How does the poem contrive to integrate the fantasy world of these books with the rational world of the rest of the poem? Why is the Cicones episode placed first? What’s special about it, and what more general themes does it demonstrate? Similarly, what’s significant in the Lotus-Eaters episode for the pattern of events in subsequent books? The Cyclops episode has been more foreshadowed than any other; why? What makes it so special? Why is so much introduction spent on details of Cyclops culture, and what function do the individual details serve (a) thematically (b) in the plot? How does the narrative build tension and drama out of such leisurely actions? How does the poet exploit his narrator’s hindsight? How do the scene-setting details of the Cyclops’ cave function in plot and themes? What is going on between the lines of Odysseus’ first exchange with the Cyclops? How does Odysseus’ stratagem exploit previously-seeded details? How are the moral conclusions demonstrated? Exactly what is Odysseus’ mistake in the final scene? Is it his first? Does he learn from it?

Book 10: Circe

What themes are played out by the Aeolus episode? Why is the Laestrygonians episode needed, especially after the Cyclops? Why, given that eleven times as many comrades are killed as in any other episode, isn’t it given more prominence? How does the Circe episode exploit the emerging tensions between Odysseus and his crew? What dramatic tricks are played with narrative point of view in the first phase, before Odysseus intervenes? Why is Hermes’ help needed? (And why him?) Is Circe’s behaviour psychologically intelligible? Why do they stay so long with her? Why does the underworld episode require such elaborate setting-up? Why, in fact, is the whole Tiresias business really needed?

Book 11: The Book of the Dead

Have the individual underworld encounters a coherent overall pattern? (Could any be cut or reordered without loss?) Is the Elpenor episode just a gimmick, or is there a deeper point? What does Teiresias reveal that Odysseus needs to know, and why the bizarre sequel with the winnowing-fan? What does he learn from Anticleia (and why has Laertes been left alive)? Has the catalogue of heroines any justification here? Does it serve a purpose? Are there signs of pattern, order, and structure, or is it just a ragbag? Why does Odysseus break off his narrative,
and why here of all places? How does the way Agamemnon’s story is told to Odysseus differ from other versions, and what special implications is it given here? What does the Achilles scene say about heroic values, and in what ways does it seem to pass comment on the world and story of the Iliad? Why is the Ajax scene chosen to end the sequence? Do the apparently interpolated scenes from Minos to Heracles contribute anything to the design or meaning? Why end on Heracles rather than Ajax?

**Book 12: The Cattle of the Sun**

Why are we treated to such elaborate instructions from Circe? How does Odysseus vary them in relaying them to his crew, and why? How does the book sustain and develop the established theme of Odysseus’ relations with his crew? How does the narrative technique of the Scylla episode maximise the dramatic impact, and why should this episodeseem “most pitiful of all”? And why doesn’t Odysseus’ neglect of Circe’s advice have any disastrous consequences? In what respects is the Thrinacian episode climactic (apart from the obvious)? How does it build on and culminate earlier themes? Why the final Charybdis episode? Is it an afterthought, or does it show signs of having been planned for this position? What would we miss if it were cut?

**Book 13: Odysseus Lands in Ithaca**

Is the Phaeacian coda just a necessary narrative bridge, or does it have a wider function? How do the narrative details evoke the simultaneous sense of an end and a beginning? How does the poet further develop the book’s transitional character in the Ithacan scene? What’s the effect of the Poseidon scene? Has the oracle been fulfilled, or what? The Athene scene is the fullest episode of divine/human interaction in either poem; why is it here (and not somewhere else), and how does the interplay bring out their individual characters and unique relationship? Odysseus’s improvisation is his first Cretan tale: what details reveal the skeleton of fact beneath the flesh of fiction? What do we now learn about the story ahead that has been hidden up to now, and what’s gained in choosing this moment to reveal it? In what respects is the world of the Ithacan Odyssey going to be different from the Phaeacian, and what touches here help to convey this?

**Book 14: In Eumaeus’ Hut**

The stretch of the poem from 14-20 tends to be the least-rated section, with critics complaining especially of leisurely pace, repetitiousness, and padding; would you agree? To what extent do these books show signs of careful planning and construction? Do we tend too much to think of the “essential” Odyssey as 9-12 and 21-2? Is our sense of anticlimax based on a fundamental underappreciation of the kind of poem the Odyssey wants to be? How does the opening scene use details to signal the changes of world, tone, and texture? Keep an eye on these dogs in future books: they’re one of many series of linked episodes in the Ithacan Odyssey that assemble into a significant pattern (but what?). What other parts of the poem does the Eumaeus scene recall, and with what implications? The dialogue here is the longest single conversation in Homer: why? Does it just meander, or are there signs the poem knows just what it’s doing? How does the relationship between Eumaeus and his guest change subtly? What purpose do Odysseus’ elaborate fictions serve, and how does this longest Cretan tale (a) mould fiction around fact (b) adapt itself to context? There’s a lot in this book about truth and lies; does it add up to anything? The book’s closing scene (cadging a cloak) is singled out by Kirk as “one of the poorest digressions in the whole poem”; would you agree? What use does it make of multiple levels of meaning, irony, and audience? In what respects might it seem a fitting close to this book?

**Book 15: Telemachus Returns**

What parallels do you notice between the opening scene and the start of 6, and have they any point? How does the Sparta segment generally recap and tie up themes from 1-4? What does they gain from being read in the wake of 5-14? The Theoclymenus episode is a notorious seeming irrelevance; but is it perhaps more relevant than superficially appears? How does it build on the part of Melampus’ story told in 11? The second half of the book is built around Eumaeus’ autobiography; what makes this remarkable piece of storytelling so unusual and effective, and how does it gain in significance from echoes and cross-references of episodes elsewhere in the poem? The ambush plot seems rather peremptorily junked; is this clumsy storytelling, or has the poet sound reason?
Book 16: Odysseus Meets his Son

The reunion of Odysseus and Telemachus, like Odysseus’ arrival on Ithaca and the events of 22-3, is one of the most eagerly-awaited moments in the poem; how (in all these instances) does the poet rise to the occasion, and what special tricks does he pull from his bag to make the predictable piquant? How do the three characters’ exchanges prior to the recognition exploit tension, irony, and emotion? What additional plot functions will Eumaeus’ mission fulfil? What does the planning scene add to the picture emerging since 13, and what crucial gaps or weaknesses remain? What issues are raised in the suitors’ dialogue, and in what ways have the stakes been raised since 4? Amphinomus is a new voice; is there a reason for introducing him now? The reintroduction of Penelope completes the reassembly of the cast, how does her scene reflect the changing mood and approaching crisis?

Book 17: Odysseus Goes to Town

Odysseus’ move to the palace marks a new phase of the story; how is this new departure marked? There are a lot of complicated cuts and scene-changes in this first section; is there a purpose to them? How does the Telemachus/Penelope interaction reestablish old patterns and introduce new? What function does the Melanthius episode serve, and in what respects is it a prelude to the palace action? What is going on beneath the surface of the Argus episode, and how does the characteristic Homeric understatement contribute to the effect? What main threads are developed in the banquet scene, and by what stages? How do the variations in this third Cretan tale serve its context? In what respects does the stoof-chucking episode seem a culmination? (Keep an eye out for further developments in the next books!) The final section turns attention from the suitors to Penelope. How are the transitions managed, and what should we make of Odysseus’ response?

Book 18: The Beggar in the Palace

Has the Irus episode a function at this particular point, or is it just an interlude? What messages does it express, and in what way is the longer-term situation transformed by it? Why is it followed by the exchange with Amphinomus – is there a connection? The Penelope episode is notoriously suspect; what would be gained if it were deleted, and what conversely would be lost? Is it a better first encounter between Odysseus and Penelope than the one in 19? Does that one gain or lose from being preceded by this? How do the book’s closing scenes extend the threads already spun? What impression does the end of the book leave of the timing and nature of the showdown, and how has that impression been created?

Book 19: The Queen and the Beggar

How does this book sustain the sense of imminent crisis? The plan outlined in the opening scene has been criticised for inconsistencies with that in 16; can they be explained and justified? Why is there a second scene between the beggar and Melanthio? The Penelope scene is the third of the long conversations; as usual, what’s going on beneath the surface of the words, and how do mood, tone, and relations shift as the scene unfolds? How does this Cretan tale shape itself to context, and what should we read into Odysseus’ seeming reluctance to tell it? Why does the normally sceptical Penelope believe it, and how is the tension between credulity and scepticism exploited in the final exchanges? By this stage the echoes of earlier moments in the poem are extremely dense and complex; which particularly strike you, and what do they add to this scene? How does the narrative of the recognition by Eurycleia exploit the dramatic opportunities? The scar flashback suspends narrative time at a cliffhanger moment, but what does the content contribute? Is it possible to make psychological sense of the closing Penelope scene? What’s really going on in the dream-interpretation exchange? Why does she announce the bow test now, and what do we and Odysseus make of it?

Book 20: Prelude to the Crisis

How does this book increase the sense of approaching crisis further? How does the structure of the book assist this? What’s unusual about the narrative of the final night before the slaughter, and how does the alternation between Odysseus and Penelope contribute? Why is the morning so fully reported? Is the character of Philoetius merely a redundant twin of Eumaeus, or does he have a differentiated function? This is the third and final banquet scene in the palace; how does it gain in significance from the contrast with its predecessors, and what other notable series in
these books come in threesome? How does the scene build to its extraordinary crescendo, and what thematic signals are being sent out?

**Book 21: The Contest of the Bow**

How do we much do we know at this point of what has to happen? By what degrees is Odysseus’ full plan signalled to us? And as usual, how does the book draw substance from its reminiscences of earlier episodes? Is the history of the bow merely related to emphasise its value and significance, or do elements of the story itself hold some bearing on the action? How does the narrative of the preliminaries to the contest exploit the associations of this crucial prop? What use is made of contrasts between individual suitors in the contest, and how does it move the drama forward? What will happen if nobody succeeds? Why is Odysseus’ unveiling to Eurymachus handled when and how it is? How does the argument over the beggar’s participation confirm and extend the main characters’ attitudes? What incidental details prepare the scene for the slaughter?

**Book 22: The Battle in the Hall**

In what ways is the battle narrative like and unlike the Iliad? How does the narrative exploit the unusual setting, and how does it avoid monotony? What main phases does it fall into, and what is distinctive about each? How is the moral basis for Odysseus’ extreme action invoked (a) intellectually (b) emotionally? What do the numerous similes add? The topography of the palace is hard to reconstruct, but does it at least make narrative sense? What elements are new? Why is Athena brought in, and why is she so little used? Do any oedaths of minor suitors exploit earlier appearances? To what extent do the mopping-up scenes demonstrate a consistent pattern of justice? Why is the punishment of the women here at all, and why is it given to Telemachus?

**Book 23: Odysseus and Penelope**

How does the opening scene play on Penelope’s established psychology? What is gained by the choice of viewpoint in the narrative of the Odysseus/Penelope reunion, and (conversely) what’s left enigmatic? What’s remarkable about the first encounter and the use of Telemachus? Is the bath-and-party interlude just a gratuitous suspense-stretcher, or has it a broader purpose here? Why does Odysseus ask for a bed to be made? Why doesn’t he just show her the scar? What does Penelope’s apology add to our picture of her complex personality and motives? Some Alexandrian critics thought the Odyssey should end at line 297; what would be gained and lost if it did? What remains unresolved, and what indications does the poem offer that the events of 24 were always planned as part of the ending? Does the synopsis of Odysseus’ adventures justify itself here, or is it just self-indulgent padding? Is the final scene a surprise, or should we have been expecting some such action as this all along? Is this dismissal of Penelope from the final scenes a weakness or a strength?

**Book 24: The Feud is ended**

What is gained by the second underworld episode? Does it diminish or complete the one in 11? Why is this a suitable place for the funeral of Achilles to be narrated? How does Amphimemnon’s narrative differ from the poet’s version, and why? Is Agamemnon’s closing moral banal or essential? How does the Laertes meeting exploit the new locale? Why is it necessary for Odysseus to spin him a tale? What touches individualise Laertes, and what later touches mark his transformation? What makes the orchard device so effective as a recognition token? Why haven’t we heard of the threat from the suitors’ kin before now? or have we? Is the Dolois scene improved or confounded by identifying him with the father of Melanthius and Melantho? How does the scene of the kinsmen’s deliberations exploit earlier episodes in its plotting? Is the finale impossibly rushed, or is there a reason for the acceleration of pace? Do you think this ending is the poem’s “original” one? If not, where would have been better?
# Programme

## Term 1 (Iliad) – NJL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lectures (Fridays at 11)</th>
<th>Seminars (Fridays at 12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 September</td>
<td>30 Iliad: intro &amp; Books 1–2</td>
<td>Books 3–4 (lecture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 October</td>
<td>7 Books 5–6</td>
<td>Books 7–8 (lecture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 Books 9–10</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21 Books 13–14</td>
<td>Characterisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>28 Books 11–12</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 November</td>
<td>4 Reading Week</td>
<td>Reading Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11 no lecture</td>
<td>no seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18 Books 15–16</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>25 Books 17–19</td>
<td>Gods and the supernatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 December</td>
<td>2 Books 20–22</td>
<td>Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>9 Books 23–24</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Term 2 (Odyssey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lectures</th>
<th>Seminars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 January</td>
<td>13 Odyssey: overview</td>
<td>From the Iliad to the Odyssey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20 books 1–3</td>
<td>Ithaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27 books 4–6</td>
<td>The supernatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 February</td>
<td>3 books 7–9</td>
<td>Culture and savagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10 books 10–12</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17 Reading Week</td>
<td>Reading Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>24 books 13–15</td>
<td>The hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March</td>
<td>3 books 16–18</td>
<td>Stories and storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10 books 19–21</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>17 books 22–24</td>
<td>from the Odyssey to the Iliad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>24 revision I</td>
<td>revision II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>