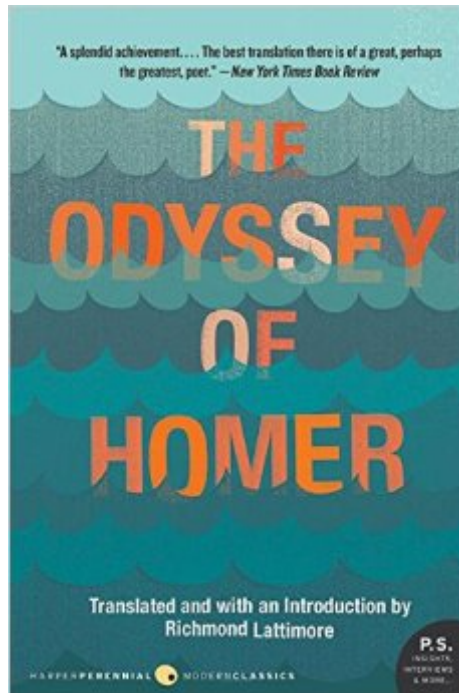


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The Odyssey Of Homer



Synopsis

The most eloquent translation of Homer's epic chronicle of the Greek hero Odysseus and his arduous journey home after the Trojan War

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Since you ask me, you word-hungry ians,How I came solate in life to the end of a taleThat schoolchildren read in comicbooks,A tale that is one of the sturdy legsOf the table on which our culture restsSince you ask, I will tell you, and gladly, too.My journey started, though you grin in disbelief,In ninth-grade Latin class, where "Ulysses"Duped the cyclops by calling himself "Nemo."Then a deep sleep fell over me,And I knew no more Homer, not in Greek or LatinOr English or even the strange tongueOf the network miniseries, while SunDrove his blazing chariot round EarthOne hundred hundred times.In this sleep I wandered the world of letters,Homerless but unable to avoid the homeric:Achilles' heel, the Sirens' song,Calypso, the Trojan Horse, and swinemaking Circe--Crouched like Scylla, aswirl like Charybdis,Threatening cultural death to epic ignorance.At last I found my literary Tiresias,The New York Times Book Review.I shook from this seer the name Fagles,And so guided, I made my way home at last,Through a translation that rings of a heroic time,A time when men were stronger and grander than we,When women were more beautiful,And when, granted, sexual equality wantedA few millennia's labor;But even so, a rendering as modernAs anything DeLillo, new god of the underworld,Or the infinitely jesting WallaceCan lay before us.The best, in fine, of both worlds, an epic worthyOf the blind bard and of his heroes, his heroines,And the deathless denizens of Olympus.

Fagles's translation of THE ODYSSEY in the Penguin edition is an almost perfect act of publishing. The translation itself manages to be enormously readable, highly poetic, and extremely accurate, all at the same time. The Introduction by Bernard Knox should serve as a model for all scholars who are called upon to write critical introductions for classic works of literature. And the book design is extraordinary; this edition of Homer's classic is easily one of the most attractive paperback books in my library. I had read this once before in translation (in the old Rieu version), and then later translated much of it in a second year Greek class. But in neither instance did I enjoy it as much as reading the Fagles's translation. Aristotle did not think that people should study philosophy too early in life, and perhaps that is also true of reading Homer. Part of me feels that we make a mistake in our education systems by making students read THE ODYSSEY before they are in a position to appreciate it. If one looks through the reviews here, a very large number of very negative reviews by a lot of high school students can be found. I find this unfortunate. In part I regret that we are forcing younger readers to read this book before they have fully matured as readers. Perhaps the book and the students themselves would be better served if we allowed them time to grow a bit more as readers before asking them to tackle Homer. THE ODYSSEY is so enormously enjoyable (at least for this adult reader) that it is easy to forget just how very old it is. What impresses me is how readable it is, despite its age. There are very, very few widely read works older than THE ILIAD and THE ODYSSEY. And the gap between how entertaining these works are and those that come before them is gigantic. Try reading THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH or even THE HESIOD and then turning to THE ODYSSEY, and one can grasp my point. This is a very, very old work of literature, but it wears its age lightly. In the end, the greatest praise one can pay THE ODYSSEY is the fact that it can be read for fun, and not just because it is a classic.

Most everybody knows about the Odyssey of Homer (the story and all that), so this review is about this particular translation by Stanley Lombardo. You have the classic English verse translations (Chapman, Pope, Cowper) and the classic prose translations (Butcher and Lang, Palmer), then you have the twentieth century crowd (Lattimore, Fitzgerald, Mandelbaum, Fagles, Rieu, Rouse, Shewring etc...) Some of these are verse and some prose, some literal and some poetic. Some are easy to read and some more difficult. Lombardo's translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey are somewhat unusual in that they are both verse and very clear and easy to read. Very much modern-day speech. Not that Fagles or Fitzgerald or Mandelbaum, for instance, (all verse translations) are difficult to read, but Lombardo's verse translation is really in a different category.

His translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey sort of stand alone in their simple style and may be worth reading for that reason alone. I think also there is an unselfconsciousness in Lombardo's effort - and attitude - as well as a "very well then hang me, devils" confidence that comes through. Fresh, quick, engaging, spare, alive (typical words used by professional/academic reviewers for this translation...) An interesting touch by Lombardo is whenever Homer goes into one of his celebrated similes or metaphors Lombardo puts them into italics and sets them apart in the text. There are more of these in the Iliad than the Odyssey, but it is interesting to read them separate this way. He uses very much 'man on the street' expressions, and his verse reads very quickly, or, 'lightly' like a clear stream flowing easily over stones. I don't want to give the impression these are simplified versions of Homer's epics. They are real, unabridged translations. Serious translations, and though they are relatively new they seem to occupy a unique position in the gallery of English translations of Homer. They are worth acquiring for their uniqueness alone if you have the usual abiding interest and curiosity in new translations of Homer that most people develop who are drawn to these two epic poems.

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