The Odyssey

Seminar Leader: Dr. David Hayes
Course Times: Wed. 9:00-10:30, Fri. 13:30-15:00
Email: d.hayes@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: TBA

Course Description
A close reading of Homer’s epic poem. We will pay attention throughout to the multifaceted and ambiguous character of the poem’s main hero, and to his own and the poet’s efforts to mark meaningful differences when it is not always easy to do so, such as: the difference between maturation and rebellion; between eating and devouring; between love and sex; between heroes and ordinary people; men and women; human beings and monsters; human beings and gods; between reconciliation, justice, and revenge; responsibility and luck; luck and fate; poetry as lies and poetry as truth; intelligence and self-identity; compassion and weakness; hospitality and betrayal; pride, modesty, and debasement; and between travelling for its own sake and trying to go home again.

Requirements

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. The drawback of the translation is that it is prose while the Odyssey is verse. However, Murray’s scrupulous word-by-word fidelity makes this a superior choice for close academic work. Murray’s English prose also reflects Homer’s Greek in that it has a consistent literary style.

The Odyssey is obviously intertextual with the Iliad. (The reverse is probably also true, but is less obvious.) While the Iliad is not an assignment for this class, students are highly encouraged to read it if they have not already done so.

Attendance
College policy is that more than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will affect the grade for the course.

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 wait for the seminar to begin your thinking.

I will evaluate class participation according to the following criteria:
1) Does the student show that he or she is ready to discuss the reading from the beginning of the class?
2) Is the student is manifestly prepared for each and every class; or does she or he take classes off?
3) Does the student show a capacity to connect the discussion in the current class with the discussion in previous classes?
4) Does the student show a capacity to converse with other students about their concerns, and to contribute to lines of discussion that other students have initiated?
5) What is the quality of the student’s contributions? An interesting or important thought matters much more than quantity. Dominating the discussion is a negative. If you have a lot to say, for the sake of the general discussion you may need to exercise some restraint by picking your spots.
6) What is the quality of the student’s questions? A good question is also an excellent contribution to a discussion—often even better than a good point.

**Writing Assignments**

Frequent short assignments will best serve the interests of developing your thought about the poem over time, and of enriching the class discussion. Therefore, 6 short papers (limit of 500 words) are required, plus a longer final paper (approximately 2500 words).

Short papers can be turned in **at any point** during the week they are assigned, up to the class on Friday. The paper should be a concise effort to assess the meaning of a specific “detail” in the paper. The detail might be a single word, an object, a gesture, a line of speech—something concrete that can be directly pointed to in the text. The short papers on the Telemachy and the Apologoi should have the character of a more general thoughtful response to these respective sections of the poem. I will drop the lowest grade of these 6 short papers.

Final paper topics will be provided. You are also free to devise your own topic, but this should happen in consultation with me.

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

The Student Handbook specifies the following policy: *Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

**Classroom policy**

Research has shown that the presence of screens in the classroom is detrimental to learning—not only for those who use the screens, but also for others sitting near them. Therefore, laptops and cellphones are not permitted in this class.
Grade Breakdown

Seminar (Participation) grade: 25%
Short papers: 6 (500 words) x 10% each (I will drop the lowest grade) = 50%
Final essay (2500 words): 25%

Schedule

(The schedule is subject to change on the basis of the pace of the discussion)

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<tr>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 2: Proems of Iliad and Odyssey (and to line 1.95)</td>
<td>Sept. 4: Book 1</td>
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<td>Sept. 9: Book 2</td>
<td>Sept. 11: Book 3 (Short paper: On a detail)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 16: Book 4</td>
<td>Sept. 18: Discussion of the Telemachy (Short paper due: On the Telemachy)</td>
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<td>Sept. 23: Book 5</td>
<td>Sept. 25: Book 6</td>
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<td>Sept. 30: Book 7</td>
<td>Oct. 2: Book 8 (Short paper: On a detail)</td>
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<td>Oct. 7: Book 9</td>
<td>Oct. 9: Book 10</td>
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Fall Break: No classes

Oct. 28: Discussion of the Apologoi | Oct. 30: Book 13 |
Nov. 4: Book 14 | Nov. 6: Book 15 |
Nov. 11: Book 16 | Nov. 13: Book 17 (Short paper: On a detail) |
Nov. 18: Book 18 | Nov. 20: Book 19 |
Nov. 25: Book 20 | Nov. 27: Book 21 (Short paper: On a detail) |
Dec. 2: Book 22 | Dec. 4: Book 23 |
Dec. 9: Book 24 | Dec. 11: Final Discussion |

Final Paper deadline in consultation with the class.
Completion Week: No classes