

H O M E R

THE ODYSSEY

PENGUIN CLASSICS



DELUXE EDITION

TRANSLATED BY
ROBERT FAGLES

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY BERNARD KNOX

One of the ten "Best Books of 1996"—TIME



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

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By now,

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

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. 60
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, 70
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? 80
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.



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