Lecture 1: The Odyssey

**The afterlife of Odysseus**

* *Il ritorno D’Ulisse in patria* (Monteverdi) 🡪 One of the first opera’s performed (1639); Odysseus as inspiration for this opera
* Reverberation/Echo of Odysseus in Painting (Examples)
  + *Odysseus and Calypso in the Caves of Ogygia* (Jan Brueghel the Elder, 1616)
  + *Odysseus on the Island of the Phaeacians* (P.P. Rubens, 1630-35)
  + *Telemachus and Mentor* (Charles Joseph Natoire, 1730)
  + *The Sorrow of Telemachus* (Angelica Kauffman, 1783)
  + *Teiresias and Odysseus* (Henry Fuseli, 1800)
    - Side note: Fuseli as inspiration for William Blake
    - Fuseli dealing with supernatural a lot throughout painting career
  + *Scylla and Charybdis* (Henry Fuseli, 1829)
  + *Odysseus and Penelope* (Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, 1802)
  + *Odysseus Overcome by Demodocus’ Song* (Francesco Hayez, 1813-1815)
  + *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* (J.M.W Turner, 1829)
  + *Odysseus and Calypso* (Arnold Böcklin, 1883)
* Reverberation/Echo of Odysseus in Literature (Examples)
  + James Joyce, *Ulysses*
  + Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad*
* Reverberation/Echo of Odysseus in Film (Examples)
  + *Ulysses’ Gaze*
    - *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

**The Odyssey as Origin of European Literature**

* Is Odyssey a “Big Bang” for European Literature?
  + *Iliad* (700 BC) and *Odyssey* (675 BC) oldest preserved literary works of Western Literature
  + Oldest Examples of Fiction, Narration, and Epic
  + Oldest Record of Formal Poetry (Meter)
  + Sets basic Themes for European Literary Tradition
    - Memory, Cultural/Subjective Identity, Love, Heroism, etc.
* BUT
  + Relative Origin 🡪 Reaches back to older literatures of the Near East
  + Elusive Origin 🡪 We do not have clear material point of Origin
    - (Oral/Written, Author, Manuscripts, Etc.)
  + The Homeric Question 🡪 What do we know about Homer?
* Traditions that predate Homer
  + Mesopotamian Civilizations:
    - Sumerians (3000 BC Sumerian Cuneiform)
    - Akkadians (2500 BC Akkadian Cuneiform)
    - Phoenicians (1500 BC Phoenician Consonantal Alphabet)
  + The Epic of Gilgamesh
    - Written in Sumerian-Akkadian
    - Cuneiform
    - Discovered in 1853
    - Epic Poem about the King of Uruk
    - Oldest version 1800 BC
    - Extensive literary production that shares elements with Homeric Epic
      * Narrative in long verse, no stanzas or refrains
      * Fixed Epithets (“The Father of gods and men”)
      * Gods on mountain, holding council
* How is Odyssey founded?
  + 1488-1489 Florence 🡪 Works of Homer edited by Demetrius Chalkokondyles
    - A Rare copy produced in 15th century, since Printing Greek was rare (Latin more dominant going into 16th century)
  + 100s of medieval manuscripts in Homeric Greek, mainly produced in Constantinople (Byzantine Empire) between 1100-1453
    - Essential Scholarship (“Scholia”) in Byzantine Empire vs. Catholic emphasis on Latin language in the West (Homer as pre-Christian pagan)
  + Early Fragments
    - From 3rd Century BC 🡪 Fragments on papyrus, all preserved in Egypt (Arid climate vs. Wet winters in Greece)
    - 332 BC: Conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great
    - No written remnants of Homer before that time
  + Library of Alexandria
    - Scholarship, birth of philology
    - 3rd Century BC – 30 BC
    - From 150 BC onwards: Standardization of textual variations, basis for medieval versions
    - This period also saw the division of Odyssey in 24 books
    - Burned down
  + Panathenaea
    - 6th Century BC
    - Festival with athletic contests and recitations of Homeric Epics, under tyrant, Peisitratos
    - (More Speculative) Scattered evidence of standardized editions of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: “Peisistratid recension”
    - What evidence is there for this?
      * Remnants of Athenian Dialect in Odyssey of today
      * Reference in later texts (Cicero)
      * But no scholarly consensus
  + The Homeric Question: Who is Homer?
  + Don’t have any concrete information on who Homer actually was and how it was written
  + Sources we have:
    - Earliest reference to Homer: Callinus (7th Century BC), but only as indirect via a reference by Pausanias (2nd Century AD)
    - Xenophanes (570-475 BC) and Heraclitus (535- 475 BC) criticism of Homeric Epics
  + Scholarly Debate:
    - The historicity of “Homer” 🡪 Did he actually exist?
    - If he did exist, did he write these texts alone?
    - Debate goes back to Antiquity by become real scholarly questions in 19th century
  + The Homeric Poets and the Greeks
    - Homer as legendary poet
    - 10 “Lives of Homer” 🡪 Fragments on Homer’s life in other texts, from Alexandrian Period onwards (300 BC)
    - Very contradictory accounts
    - “Hymn to Apollo” 🡪 “The blind man that dwells in rocky Chios; his songs deserve the prize for all time to come”
  + Homer and Alexander Pope
    - “Homer is universally allow’d to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever.”
  + Debate in Late 18th Century
    - F.A. Wolf 🡪 Founder of modern philology
    - Homer as pre-literate oral bard
    - Poetic fragments transmitted orally until written down in 6th century “Peisistratid recension”
    - *Iliad* and *Odyssey* not the works of one writer, but result of long oral transmission (through several bards)
    - Analysts vs Unitarians
      * Analysts 🡪 those scholars who believe Homeric texts written by many different bards and poets
      * Unitarians 🡪 Homeric Texts by one person (Homer)
  + Milman Parry
    - Dissertations on Homer (1928)
    - Begins looking at Homeric Texts and Oral traditions
    - Textual evidence that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the results of oral-formulaic composition: Repetition of words, phrases and entire verses
    - “Framework” for bards who had to retell the stores
    - Each bard improvises and creates a new poem aided by ready-made phrases and words
  + Debates Today
    - Stylometric Method: suggests integral unity of Homer’s works
    - Sheer length appears to indicate written composition
    - 3 Hypotheses:
      * *Transcription Hypothesis:* Homer as an illiterate bard who dictated the *Odyssey* to a literate scribe
      * *Ballad Hypothesis:* Homer as a folk-poet of short ballads; ballads were later combined
      * *Oral/Written Hypothesis:* Homer as a poet trained in oral tradition and versed in new art of writing

**The Odyssey as Oral-Formulaic Poetry**

* Four Elements:
  + Bards in the *Odyssey*
  + Dactylic Hexameter (Heroic/Homeric Hexameter)
  + Epithets
  + Scenes
* Bards in the Odyssey
  + Phemius – Book I (1.164-167, 1.343 ff.); Book XXII (1.554 ff.)
  + Demodocus
    - Blind Bard at the court of Alcinous, King of the Phaeacians (Book VIII)
    - Sings of the Battle of Troy, Odysseus starts weeping, Alcinous asks him to reveal his identity, triggers Odysseus’ story of his travels (Book IX-XII)
* Dactylic Hexameter (Heroic/Homeric Hexameter)
  + Features
    - 6 feet
    - Either Dactyl ( – U U) or Spondee ( – –)
    - 5th foot mostly Dactyl (95 percent in Homer)
    - 6th foot never a dactyl (often spondee)
    - Masculine Caesura: After 1st syllable in 3rd foot
    - Feminine Caesura: After 2nd syllable in 3rd foot
    - Enjambments
* Epithets
  + ‘dios Odusseus’ (Approx. 70 times)
  + ‘polymetis Odusseus’ (Approx. 70 times)
* Scenes
  + Arrival of the stranger and hospitality of the host (EX: Athene-Telemachus, Odysseus-Alcinous) + reversal: Lack of hospitality (Suitors in Books 1, XVII and XVIII)
  + Preparing of the meal (Book 1, 1.145-154) + Reversal (Cyclops, Laestrygonians)

Lecture Notes

* Discussion Topics
  + Translation
  + Masculinity, Roles of Women, and Gender
  + Oral Tradition
  + Themes of Temptation, Obstacles, Etc. Hospitality (Zenia) and its Reversal
  + Man vs. Fate
    - Free will vs Fate
    - Tragedy, Schelling
  + Death and Mortality
* Timeline
  + Note that there are hints that Homer is talking about an age he is not apart of (“Bronze Weapons” were previously used and are mentioned throughout the poem while Homer writing in Iron Age.)
* Themes in opening lines
  + Recklessness (Anastalia) vs Cunning (Polytropos)
  + Nostros / Suffering Exile
  + Cultural Memory (Mnemosyne)
  + Odysseus as character with Agency
  + Proleptic Structure, directly linked to the oral tradition (Repetition, Formulas, etc.)
* Telemachus, Athena (Disguised as Mentes), and discussion with suitors
  + Hospitality 🡪 Eat and Wash before discussing
  + Athena telling Telemachus *also* has to travel. First four books on Telemachus travels
  + Gender and Masculinity 🡪 “You have to be aggressive, strong”
  + Phemius telling a tale to create cultural memory (Which is what the *Odyssey* is doing generally)
  + Collective (Public) vs Personal (Private)
* Odysseus and Calypso
  + Calypso offers him literal immortality; but immortality is essentially oblivion for Odysseus, he would just vanish. He needs to become to the hero (A heroic/metaphorical death in leaving Calypso) to find immortality in cultural memory.
  + Ino gives divine help via the cape, but Odysseus must give it back