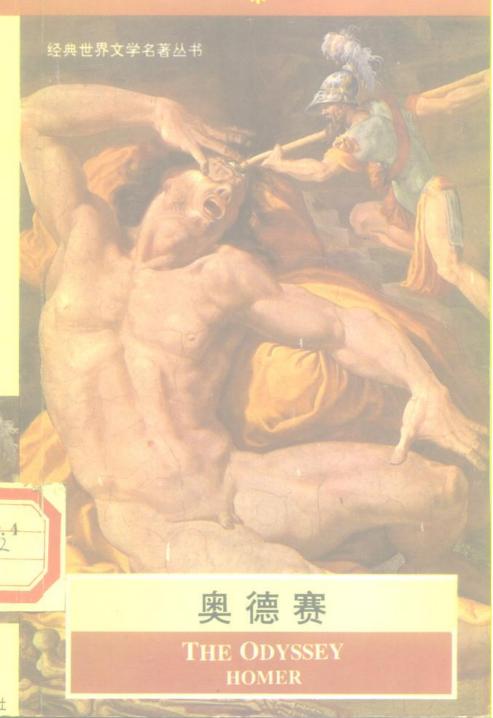
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THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

HOMER The Odyssey

Translated by
WALTER SHEWRING
with an epilogue on translation

Introduced by G. S. KIRK

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荷马(约前9-前8世纪),古希腊诗人,专事 行吟的育歌手。生于小亚细亚。但是,关于荷马 的身世和生平,曾经有过种种神话般的传说。按 古希腊历史学家希罗多德的说法,荷马约生于公 元前 850 年左右。正是希腊氏族社会解体、奴隶 制开始形成的时代,即所谓的"英雄时代"。诗人 的出生地不可考,后来希腊的七个大城市都曾经 自认为是荷马的家乡。荷马日常挟七弦琴流浪 于热闹的市镇,以歌吟维持生计。相传他把发生 在大约公元前20世纪时的特洛伊战争的传说, 初步编定、成型、就是著名的史诗〈伊利亚特〉和 (奥德赛)。这两部史诗被誉为"希腊人由野蛮时 代讲入文明时代的主要遗产"。苏格拉底、亚里 斯多德、柏拉图都认为荷马确有其人。18世纪末 时,德国学者魏尔夫对荷马是否确有其人提出了 疑问。由此可见,关于荷马是否确有其人,他的 生存年代、出生地点以及两部史诗的形成,争论 甚多,这便是欧洲文学史上的所谓"荷马问题"。

1

(奧德賽)与(伊利亚特)并称为古希腊两大 史诗,相传为荷马所作。描写希腊英雄奥德赛战 后还乡的故事。

特洛伊战争后, 奥德赛在海上漂流了 10 年。 这期间, 有许多青年贵族觊觎他的财产, 住在他 家喧宾夺主, 尽情消耗他的资财, 向他的妻子求婚。第 10 年, 奥德赛漂流到斯刻里亚岛上, 受到 国王的款待, 他向国王追述他离开特洛伊以后经 历的种种艰险, 国王听完了他的故事放他还家。

奥德赛终于回到祖国,夺回自己的财产,杀 死向其妻求婚的人,夫妻得以团圆。

《奥德赛》串联许多传说和神话,反映了古希腊氏族社会向奴隶社会过渡时期的家庭关系、社会生活和维护私有财产的斗争。

THE ODYSSEY

By its evocation of a real or imagined heroic age, its contrasts of character and its variety of adventure, above all by its sheer narrative power, the Odyssey has won and preserved its place among the greatest tales in the world. It tells of Odysseus' adventurous wanderings as he returns from the long war at Troy to his home in the Greek island of Ithaca, where his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus have been waiting for him for twenty years. He meets a one-eyed giant, Polyphemus the Cyclops; he visits the underworld; he faces the terrible monsters Scylla and Charybdis; he extricates himself from the charms of Circe and Calypso. After these and numerous other legendary encounters he finally reaches home, where, disguised as a beggar, he begins to plan revenge on the suitors who have for years been besieging Penelope and feasting on his own meat and wine with insolent impunity.

Nothing is known for certain about Homer – not even whether that was the name used by the poet responsible for the Giyssey and the Iliad in their final form, if indeed a single poet is in question. But if there was a Homer, he probably lived in the eighth century a.c. in Asia Minor or the Aegean islands. By tradition he was blind, and so most of the portraits of him that survive from antiquity represent him.

WALTER SHEWRING, for fifty years a master at Ampleforth College, has written on classical and Italian themes, has translated Latin hymns, and like his friend Eric Gill has constantly defended a traditional view of art. In his epilogue to this book he discusses the special difficulties of translating Homer.

G. S. KIRK was Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and has worked on Greek myths and philosophy as well as on Homer. His books include The Songs of Homer (1962) and Homer and the Oral Tradition (1976).

INTRODUCTION

G. S. KIRK

'GODDESS of song, teach me the story of a hero. This was the man of wide-ranging spirit who had sacked the sacred town of Troy and who wandered afterwards long and far.' The hero is Odysseus, one of the greatest (and certainly the most resourceful) of the Greek heroes who had fought for ten years before Troy. The Trojan War itself had been bad enough, but Odysseus' real sufferings came in the ten years that followed, which he spent in wandering and hardship before finally regaining his island home of Ithaca in the far west of Greece. Others of the Greeks, too, had had terrible homecomings. Agamemnon himself, leader of the Greek contingent and brother of Menelaus, whose wife Helen's abduction by the Trojan Paris had caused the whole war, had been brutally murdered by his adulterous wife Clytemnestra - Helen's elder sister, incidentally. Odysseus at least is still alive, but he, too, faces mortal danger when at long last he sets foot again in Ithaca. His wife Penelope is a paragon of loyalty, the very opposite of Clytemnestra. and he has nothing to fear from her. But she has had for years to hold out against the arrogant and violent importunity of a whole crowd of unwanted suitors, princelings from Ithaca and the surrounding regions who have crowded into the palace and are trying to force her to give up her husband for dead and marry one of themselves. Her only defence is stratagem (like the web that she weaves by day and undoes secretly each night); the ordinary people are helpless, and her son Telemachus is young and immature. Such is the background to the Odyssey, and it is the tale of Odysseus' wanderings, homecoming and triumph over the evil suitors that is the epic's main narrative theme.

It is a commonplace that this masterpiece of world literature, at least, can be read without having to try too hard and without special preparation. Yet there are certain considerations that the reader might, none the less, like to keep in mind, since they may increase his enjoyment still further. For the conventions of the Odyssey are obviously different from those of a modern narrative. That is illustrated, for example, by its unexpected variations of pace and detail, caused often enough by an ancient taste for repetition, for formality, for major digression, for long scenes of

gradual recognition. The fundamental difference, however, is this (and it makes questions about the poem's mode of composition less than pedantic ones)! that the Odyssey like the Iliad was designed to be heard in public performance, not to be read in private. That has all sorts of effects. It explains, to begin with, why the poem is so dramatic in essence - why characters display themselves in speeches or through actions and not primarily through discursive analysis by the author. We have grown used to this last method of approach, which has had special success in the novel, sometimes on planes to which no ancient author would aspire. Yet the dramatic approach, which often exacts more from the reader or audience, has its counterbalancing merits, and in the Odyssey we can observe the art of formalised but purposeful conversation, now devious, now urgent, now flattering or charming or deprecating, carried to heights occupied by Jane Austen or the Milton of Paradise Lost rather than by most writers for the modern stage.

In Homer's hands the dramatic epic is far from simple. Once again its complexities can do with preliminary identification, since their form and motives are different from those of modern literature - or, for that matter, of ancient Greek tragedy. The Odyssey is less severe in its structure and focus than the Iliad, which takes place mainly on the battlefield and by the Achaean ships, occasionally in beleaguered Troy itself, and only fleetingly, by simile or reminiscence, elsewhere. For the Odyssey's action moves over three separate landscapes: Ithaca mainly (and almost wholly in its second half), the Peloponnese in the striking third and fourth books with a brief recall in the fifteenth, and mythical lands -Calypso's island in V and the coasts and islands of Odysseus' adventures, including the underworld itself, in VI to XII. Even Ithaca is sharply divided into town and country, with the palace and Eumaeus' hut as their centres; two wholly different ambiences with different rules, conventions and moralities. Odysseus' movements between the two lend tension and diversity to the second half of the poem, which again, as a whole, stands in counterpoint with the first. Geography is paralleled by grades of reality; for 'real life', itself divided between palace and countryside, suitors and honest men, is parodied or re-enacted at a different level by the gods and goddesses on Olympus, and more mysteriously by the inhabitants of lands of fantasy, the Laestrygonians, the Lotuseaters, the Cyclops, the Phaeacians. Finally there are strong social

contrasts (we expect them, perhaps, but the heroic taste generally did not): aristocratic and proletarian (Odysseus and Philoetius or Eurycleia), male and female, human and divine – or monstrous; genuinely and falsely heroic.

These grades and locales are brought into dramatic contact, are made to overlap, by the central characters: Odysseus above all, but also Telemachus, Nausicaa, Eumaeus, Athene. Transitions from place to place and from human to divine are managed with extreme simplicity, amounting at times to abruptness. The audience is simply switched, sometimes in mid-verse, from one environment to the other. There is no need for ponderous temporal explanation, because the epic singers treated all events as successive; the chronology is strictly linear, broken only by explicit reminiscences or generalised statements like similes. It is a convention that grew, presumably, out of the necessary economies and simplifications of oral singers and narrators, but has been exploited for special ends by the master composer of the Odyssey. Finally there are stylistic complexities. Oral poetry had developed. by Homer's time, an impressive variety of styles within the limits of hexameter verse: from bald and strongly conventionalised narrative, in which each verse tends to contain a separate statement (as in the simple oral poetry of Yugoslavia in recent times), to elaborate and recherché passages with long, subordinated sentences and strong enjambment; from formal, rhetorical speeches (commoner in Iliad than in Odyssev) to relaxed conversations; from brief, serviceable descriptions of scene and setting to luxuriant set-pieces on particular places (Calypso's cave, Laertes' orchard, the island off the Cyclops' shore) that range in tone from the geometrical to the numinous; from the cryptic style of prophecy, as by Theoclymenus, to the tantalising omissions of condensed reminiscence and anecdote, especially in Nestor's tales and the reported songs of Demodocus and Phemius. There is an enormous wealth of such stylistic varieties and resources, despite which the Odyssey can sometimes seem monotonous to the modern reader - especially, perhaps, in the long conversations and the repeated journeys to and from town that occupy books XIV to XVII or XVIII. But the more closely one notices the nuances of these books the more intriguing they become, and the more valid as a necessary preparation for action and dénouement later; and the more one becomes conscious of inconspicuous changes of pace,

style, theme and character which must have appealed to the listening audience and kept it enthralled.

Beneath these integuments the narrative skeleton of the poem stands out strongly. After a conventional but thought-provoking invocation to the Muse and a brief mention of Odysseus' present sojourn in Calypso's island, the singer takes his listeners straight to Olympus, where the gods debate Odysseus' fate and decide that he should be allowed to return home, as all other survivors of the Trojan expedition had long since done. Hermes is to instruct Calypso: Athene descends in disguise to prepare Telemachus, Odysseus' and Penelope's young son, in Ithaca. She makes him grow in maturity and experience by urging him to stand up to the suitors who have camped in Odysseus' palace and are devouring his substance and ogling his wife, then to slip off to Pylos and Lacedaemon, down south, for news of his father. Little in the way of hard information will result and the suitors are half-alerted to danger, but the excursion (in books III and IV) is fascinating in itself, it fills in much of the background of the aftermath of Troy and it builds the young prince into a credible ally for Odysseus.

The divine decision is briefly repeated in the fifth book, after the Peloponnesian interlude, to remind us (or the listening audience more particularly) that Hermes must still instruct Calypso - this is how the oral poet deals with events that are more obviously seen as simultaneous. The goddess is slightly disgruntled, and Odysseus leaves on his home-made raft with a certain apprehension but no regrets; he is longing to return home to his possessions, his household and his wife, and no minor deity, no promises of equivocal immortality, can divert him. Poseidon rages at him because he had blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus: that tale is to be told by reminiscence in the ninth book. So the god makes a fierce storm blow up and smash the raft; Odysseus eventually struggles ashore, not in Ithaca but in Phaeacia, half-way between fantasy and real life, where Nausicaa discovers him (book VI), that delightful creature who elicits Odysseus' most unexpected kind of resourcefulness in the form of gallantry and tact. In the palace of her father King Alcinous he recounts all his adventures - Lotus-eaters, Cyclops, descent to the underworld and the rest (books VIII-XII): and after this almost sacred interval of re-creation, of incipient aggregation into the world of men, he is carried in a death-like sleep back to Ithaca on

a magical Phaeacian ship – to the remote harbour of Phorcys, where Athene, at first disguised, meets him, warns him of the crisis with the suitors (who are laying siege to Penelope, a handsome prize, claiming that Odysseus must be dead), and sends him across country to the hut of Eumaeus. We are in the real world again, and will remain there; there is even an exact point of transition, at XIII 86–95, which contains a sort of formal coda to the whole of the first half of the poem.

After a protracted conversation between the still unrecognised Odysseus (whom Athene had made like an old man) and Eumaeus the faithful swineherd, the scene shifts rapidly back to Lacedaemon; for Telemachus has to be brought home with all speed now that his father is there. Farewells are said to Helen and Menelaus and then, in Pylos, to the aged Nestor - these Iliadic characters come through more blandly and less powerfully than in the earlier poem. A mysterious stranger called Theoclymenus, a seer, takes refuge with Telemachus for the passage back to Ithaca. The action reverts for a time to Odysseus and the swineherd, who still continue their talk, including now the long tale of Eumaeus' noble birth and abduction; then Telemachus, evading an ambush set offshore by the perturbed suitors, lands in his native island. He too makes for Eumaeus' hut, where his father eventually reveals himself to him. In book XVII the young man proceeds to the palace to tell his mother he is safe; Odysseus and Eumaeus follow, and there is the famous scene with the old dog Argos, who alone recognises his master and then dies. Playing the role of a beggar, Odysseus undergoes a long series of degradations; three of the chief suitors throw things at him, he has to fight the beggar Irus (but in so doing gives a sinister demonstration of his real strength), and the disloyal herdsman Melanthius, Eumaeus' polar opposite, insults him. All this underlines his almost unnatural patience and strengthens the case for total revenge. Penelope displays herself to the suitors - to arouse their passion, it seems, although Odysseus rejoices secretly that her real intentions are quite different (XVIII 283); was there a different version, hinted at here by the monumental composer, in which husband and wife were already in collusion? However that may be, in our version Odysseus keeps up his false identity, for, after he and Telemachus have secretly removed the armour and weapons that were normally kept in the great hall, he meets Penelope as night falls and

ries, to persuade her that the 'real' Odysseus is close at hand. She persists in her scepticism but treats the beggar kindly and tells Eurycleia to wash his feet; the old woman recognises her master by a scar on his leg (and a long digression tells how he had got it as a young man), but he still prevents her from telling the good news to her mistress.

Still disguised and still insulted, Odysseus is seated by the door into the great hall: the suitors become crazed, burst into hysterical laughter, and Theoclymenus prophesies their doom Telemachus is there too, waiting for his father's signal to attack (book XX); but it is Athene who shows, as always, the way ahead by putting it into Penelope's mind to set up the trial of the axes; ostensibly whoever succeeds in it is to win her hand. There are two stages to the trial, first the difficult stringing of Odvsseus' powerful old bow, then shooting through a line of axes set up along the floor of the hall. The chief suitors fail to string the bow, even; it is dramatic and humiliating for them, especially when Telemachus passes it to the despised beggar and encourages him to try. Still seated, and as easily as fitting a fresh string to a lyre, Odysseus draws the bow and shoots right through the axes, and at the end of book XXI Telemachus springs up and stands at his side. All this is intensely exciting after the long preparations, and so is the systematic destruction of the suitors in the book that follows.

Antinous, their leader and easily the most horrible of them, is pierced through the throat by an arrow as he raises a wine-cup to his lips; the rest think it is an accident - but only for a moment, for Odysseus reveals his identity and tells them what he intends. Eurymachus rallies them, tells them to draw swords and use the tables as shields, but then he is struck down by Odysseus' second shot. Telemachus spears Amphinomus, then runs to a store-room to bring armour and spears for the four of them (for the loval cowherd Philoetius, as well as Eumaeus, is fighting at their side). But he leaves the door unlocked and Melanthius brings arms for the suitors; Odysseus' heart sinks but Athene rallies him, and Telemachus catches Melanthius and ties him up, and so the slaughter proceeds on its way; only Phemius the singer and Medon the herald, who had been forced to work for the suitors, are spared. Eurycleia is summoned, and Odysseus forbids her to utter the ritual shriek of triumph as he stands, covered in blood and gore among the corpses of his enemies; for, he says, Vaunting over men

slain is a monstrous thing. These men have perished because the gods willed it so and because their own deeds were evil. They had no regard for any man, good or bad' (XXII 412-14): a remarkably un-Iliadic sentiment, and one that stresses the underlying moral force of Odysseus' revenge. The disloyal maidservants are hanged (a little hard, this; they were silly girls who had slept with the suitors): Melanthius suffers a crueller death after torture and mutilation: then the violence is over. The remainder of the poem is spent in describing how Odysseus is at last recognised by those closest to him: by Penelope above all, who is sceptical to the last but is then reunited in a wonderful scene of sympathy and mature understanding. In the final book (which was almost certainly subjected to a degree of later elaboration), after a view of the dead suitors in the underworld and then of Odysseus' reunion with his pathetic old father Laertes, he prepares with his helpers to meet the inevitable threat from the relatives of the dead men. Athene sees to that, too, and brings the poem to a surprisingly abrupt end.

It stands out that there has been a marked change of tempo between the first half of the poem and most of the second. Once in Ithaca the concentration on detail - of preparation and planning, of insult, of slaughter, of recognition - is far more intense. It is my own opinion (and needless to say I may be wrong) that, compared with the Iliad, there is some falling off in power and concentration in those long preparatory scenes in Ithaca, roughly between books XIV and XXI. To see why that might be so, or indeed to rebut the suggestion, requires a closer consideration of Homer's compositional technique and general aims - one of which, at least, must have been to produce a poem of comparable length to the Iliad. It requires us, even, to tangle peripherally with the old 'Homeric Question'. Down to the time of the First World War scholars tried to explain anomalies and inconsistencies in both epics by the assumption of multiple authorship, along the lines of two or three separate and successive authors, the last of them carrying out some sort of conflation or redaction of the products of his predecessors. Growing interest in the repetitive and conventionalised phraseology of both poems, and its probable reasons, culminated in the work of Milman Parry, who in 1928 claimed that such phenomena showed them to be essentially oral in their mode of composition. That is, they were not written compositions but were composed by ear by unlettered singers,

xiv G. S. KIRK

who needed those formular phrases and repeated motifs to be able to construct complex heroic poetry at all.

That view of the Homeric epics has been found essentially correct (although scholars disagree over the tightness of the formular 'system' and over whether writing might have played some ancillary part); and it suggests an altogether different and more convincing explanation of anomalies, real or apparent, in their composition. There is no question of constructing a special 'oral poetics', a set of rules broadly distinct from those that might govern literate composition; but at the same time certain probable differences present themselves. Minor inconsistencies are more to be expected, and are less noticed by the recipient, in this kind of poetry. Repetitions of various kinds are not only tolerated but also welcomed, for they help both the poet and his audience. Another important consideration is this: it is a natural characteristic of a narrative poem designed to be heard that its basic unit of length is the 'session'. That may vary a little according to the circumstances in which the poem is given. Several kinds of circumstance have been suggested for the Greek heroic song, with nobleman's banquet and religious festival as the most common. The first has some support from the Odyssey itself, where Phemius in Ithaca and Demodocus in Scheria are, to an extent, court poets although the latter at least is not exclusively so. The second coniecture is based on what we known about festivals like the Delia in later times, or the Panathenaea, at which contests for rhapsodes reciting Homer were certainly held in the sixth century B.C. But other, less formal and more popular, occasions may have been just as important; Demodocus is classed with seers, doctors and carpenters as a demicergos, a 'worker for the community', at XXII 383-5, and village gatherings, weddings, horse fairs and the like must be considered as well. But in none of these contexts is the poet likely to have dealt as normal practice with a narrative unit that would outlast the capacity of most members of an audience to sit or stand around and take it in. One might guess at between half an hour and a couple of hours as the usual range; a range into which a Homeric 'book' would fit (although the division into twenty-four books as we have them certainly owes something to Alexandrian or Pergamene editors in the Hellenistic age), but which the whole Odyssey would vastly exceed.

A significant conclusion follows: that Homer, in making such

a huge, monumental structure as the Odyssey (not to speak of the somewhat longer Iliad), was doing something that completely transcended the ordinary rules and aims of oral composition, and obviously necessitated not only the heavy use and rearrangement of existing materials (from the standard repertoire, that is) but also much original composition, based always, although not exclusively so, on the traditional phraseology of dactylic poetry and on a rich store of standard major themes and minor motifs. Now these are conditions which would be apt to produce at least one kind of unevenness in the epic, at any rate from the modern reader's view point: the apparently unmotivated variations of pace or the clumsy passages here and there, often at points of episodic juncture. Another source of anomaly is more serious, but affects far fewer passages than used to be believed; for it is unlikely that the rhapsodes, professional reciters to whom the text of the epic was at one stage committed and on whom its transmission probably depended for much of the seventh century B.C., would have been content to leave it entirely unembellished. Here and there we can detect their usually unsuccessful attempts at improvement and expansion: in parts of the underworld scene in the eleventh book and early and late in the twenty-fourth book most especially. But generally speaking the Odyssey has come down to us much as Homer left it, and the occasional apparent anomalies, whether they be part of the process of monumental composition itself or arise out of subsequent stages of rhapsodic transmission, are unimportant. One can admit that without acceding to the fashionable modern view, based understandably on revulsion at the 'analytical' excesses of the past but less forgivably on a complacent preference for simplistic explanations, that every word in the modern vulgate text is exactly as Homer sang it - or, as this view almost requires, wrote it.

Many of the details of Homeric composition lie entirely beyond our grasp. It is a reasonable conjecture, based on the predominantly Ionic dialect of the poem as well as on a few allusions to Ionian sights and sounds, especially in the Iliad, that Homer did indeed come from Chios or Smyrna or one of the other cities of Ionia, the central region of the east-Aegean coast. That was what the ancients believed, and there was even a guild of rhapsodes in early sixth-century Chios that called itself the Homeridae, the 'descendants of Homer', and claimed to have special access to his

ipsissima verba. The west-Greek information in the Odyssey presents no impediment to this idea, since the vagueness about the exact position of Ithaca (for instance) is just what might be expected of an Ionian singer developing a theme about a remote part of Greece. As for the date of composition, it is a strong probability that both epics were composed during the latter part of the eighth century B.C., or at the widest limits between 800 and 680 B.C., with the Iliad preceding the Odyssey by not more than, and perhaps not as much as, the length of a generation. The evidence is partly linguistic (for the chronology of dialect-changes like the dropping of the w-sound represented by the 'lost' letter digamma, or the coalescing of adjacent short vowels in 'contraction', can be roughly charted) and partly archaeological - either by the description in the poems of objects or practices that can be approximately dated, like probable references to hoplite tactics in the Iliad or specific motifs like the gorgon's head, or by the outbreak early in the seventh century of multiple references in cult or on vases to themes (like the heroic stature of Agamemnon or the blinding of Polyphemus) most likely to have been publicised by the epics themselves. None of these kinds of evidence is absolutely watertight, especially for poems that were traditional and archaising in character - that contained references to people, events and practices going back to the time of the Trojan War itself, as well as to Homer's own time some five hundred years later and to many of the centuries in between. Moreover the growth of interest in cults of Agamemnon, Helen and Menelaus, for instance, could be due to other poems or other factors. Yet the creation of the monumental epics is its most probable source, and the different kinds of evidence do all point to the same general period; the period, indeed, during which illiteracy, and with it a creative oral tradition, was gradually coming to an end under the impact of alphabetic writing, which seems to have spread into Greece, perhaps from Cyprus, precisely during the course of the eighth century B.C.

Few can resist wondering whether those later Greeks were right who maintained that the Odyssey and the Iliad did not come from the same hand (or, as we might say, mouth). Was there one Homer – or were there two? The old jokes have some point, after all. even today; for the truth is that we cannot answer this question with certainty, neither can we say anything about