

GREEK EPIC: Past Essay Questions on the *Odyssey*.

- [00] 4. Show how Homer uses elaborate descriptions of landscapes and places to create atmosphere and tension in the *Odyssey*.
7. According to your reading of the *Odyssey*, how does social and moral order in heroic society break down, and how can it be restored?
- [99] 3. What makes the *Odyssey* an epic poem rather than a collection of folk-tales?
6. Why does Homer make such extensive use of 'recognition scenes' in the second half of the *Odyssey*?
- [98] 5. How does Homer explore concepts of what is normal or abnormal in civilised society in the *Odyssey*?
6. Show how Homer uses a wide range of female characters in the *Odyssey* in order to define the role and importance of women in heroic society.
- [97] 4. To what extent is it the female characters, mortal and immortal, who control events in the *Odyssey*?
8. **Either:** Are Odysseus and Telemachus the direct literary ancestors of Batman and Robin?
- Or:** 'The wise Penelope!' (*Odyssey* 11.446). Is Penelope a credible role-model for women of the twenty-first century?
- [96] 5. Show by reference to specific scenes how important the theme of hospitality (*xenia*) is to the *Odyssey*. Why do you think Homer gives this theme such importance?
6. [*Odyssey* 13. 291 – 295]: For what reasons does Odysseus tell 'lying tales' in the *Odyssey* and what do these stories tell us about his character?
- [95] 5. 'Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned, many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea, struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.' These lines occur on the first page of the *Odyssey*. Do you think they prepare us accurately for the book we are about to read?
8. Would the *Odyssey* make a good film/video? Which scenes would work best and which would present the worst problems?
- [94] 3. What different classes of person and what different occupations does Homer present in the *Odyssey*? How complete is the view of human society that this poem presents?
5. 'The *Odyssey* is perhaps a trivial poem, being concerned with issues that are either escapist fantasy or unheroic.' To what extent can the *Odyssey* be defended against such criticism?
8. What do you view as Homer's greatest strengths as a poet and narrator? Illustrate your answer by reference to particular passages and to a range of features.
- [93] 5. Describe the part played by Telemachus in the *Odyssey* and suggest what Homer was trying to achieve by paying so much attention to his character.
- [92] 7. Describe the support which Athene and other gods give to Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Why is he given this support and is he a feebler or a greater man as a result?
8. Show how separate stories and different versions of stories have been combined in the making of the *Odyssey*.
- [91] 3. Demonstrate the importance of the family in the *Odyssey*.
4. Which scenes show Homer at his most successful in telling the story of Odysseus between his return to Ithaca and his slaughter of the suitors?
- [90] 5. 'Realism is markedly more important than fantasy in the *Odyssey*.' Discuss.
7. For what reasons does Homer include the episode of Odysseus' visit to the Underworld?
- [89] 5. Show how frequently we meet the theme of *xenia* (hospitality) in the *Odyssey* and suggest why Homer considered it so important.
6. Do you consider that Homer's presentation of Odysseus' return after his arrival on Ithaca is slow and uneventful?

7. If the *Odyssey* were to be made into a T. V. serial, how many episodes would you divide it into, and what scenes would the episodes contain?

[88] 5. Discuss the structure of the plot of the *Odyssey*.

6. What qualities of character does Odysseus show in facing the dangers of Books 9 – 12 of the *Odyssey*?

7. Discuss the purpose and effectiveness of the successive recognition scenes of Odysseus after he arrives home.

8. In what period, if any, would you place the world of Odysseus?

[87] 6. Comment on the character and behaviour of Penelope.

7. Consider Odysseus' relationship with Athene. Why did she help him at Troy and after his return to Ithaca, but not during his sea adventures?

8. **Either:** Discuss Homer's portrayal of the Phaeacians. Do you think they are real people or inhabitants of fairyland?

Or: Are the events narrated in the last book of the *Odyssey* necessary to the rounding off of the story?

[86] 6. What qualities of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* contribute to his survival and success?

7. Why does the poet of the *Odyssey* send his hero down to the Underworld?

8. **Either:** Is the *Odyssey* anything more than an adventure story?

Or: What features of the *Odyssey* suggest a tradition of oral poetry lying behind it?

[85] 6. Discuss the effect of the long absence of Odysseus on his family (his father, mother, wife and son.)

8. How would you define 'Epic'? Does your definition fit the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* equally well?

[84] 3. Give examples of the way in which the *Odyssey* has been affected by a tradition of oral poetry.

[83] 6. How convincing is the characterization of Penelope in the *Odyssey*?

8. 'The *Odyssey* is more like a novel than an epic poem.' Discuss.

[82] 3. What are the distinguishing features of 'oral epic'? Illustrate your answer from **either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey***.

6. Consider Odysseus' relations with the various women and goddesses who appear in the *Odyssey*.

[81] 5. Discuss Odysseus' visit to the Underworld (Book 11), taking into consideration both the people that he sees there and the function of the book in the plot of the epic.

6. Discuss the social situation in Ithaca in the *Odyssey*. In the prevailing situation, how is the next king to be appointed?

[80] 4. What features in the composition of **either or both** the Homeric epics suggest a background of oral poetry?

5. How dependent is the *Odyssey*'s story on fairy-tale and folk-tale themes?

6. What does the poet aim to achieve by the successive stages in the recognition of Odysseus by other members of his household and by Penelope?

[79] 4. How well has the poet of the *Odyssey* succeeded in producing a unified poem out of the stories he uses?

5. Are Homer's gods too ridiculous to be convincing?

[78] 4. How effective do you find the characterization of women in the *Odyssey*?

5. Explain what is meant by the term 'oral poetry'. What 'oral' features can be recognised even in translations of Homer? What is their effect?

[77] 6. What are the essential qualities of an epic poem? To what extent do the epics you have read show these qualities?

[76] 4. What are the main subdivisions of the plot of the *Odyssey*? How successfully are they blended into a unified poem?

6. What impression of the style of Homer have you gained from your reading?