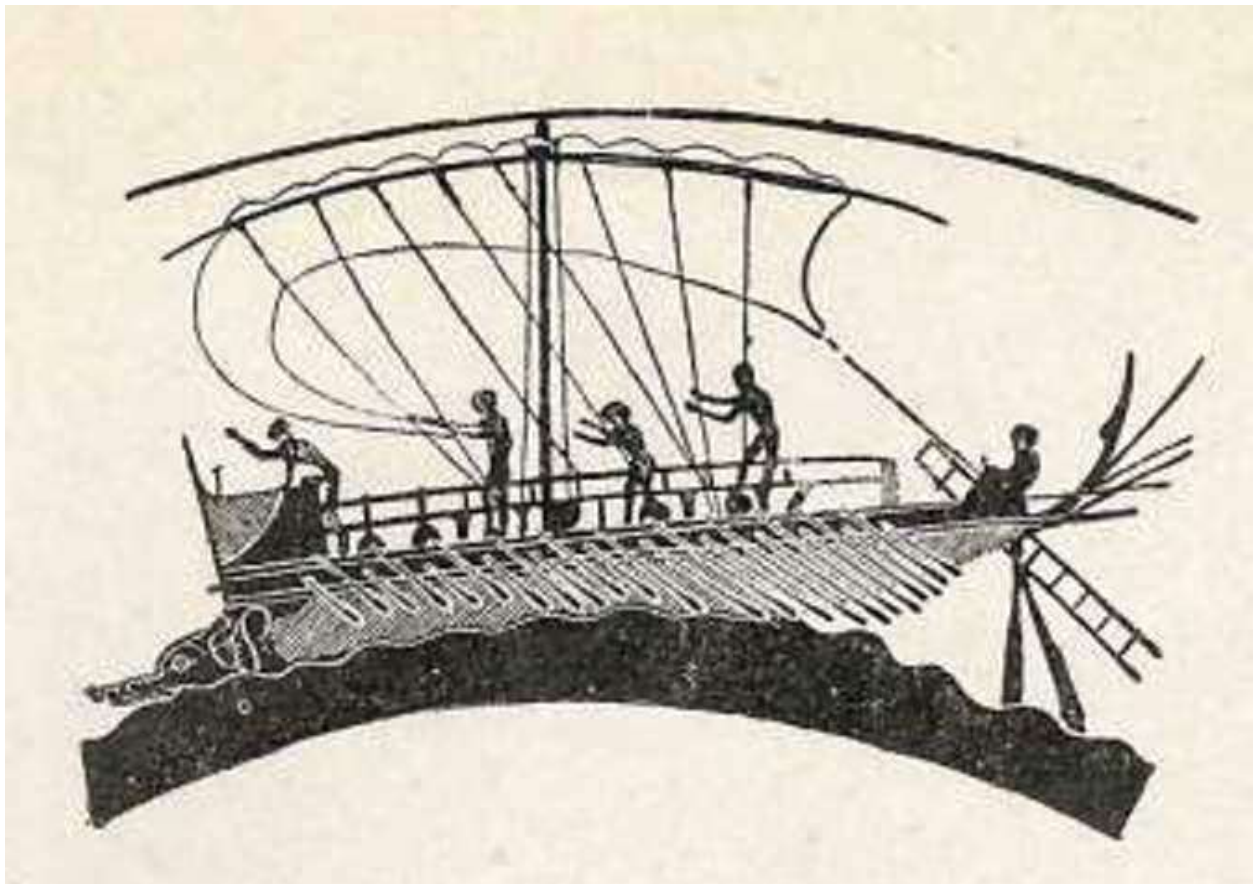


# *Destination: Ithaca*

## *Part 1*



*A Teacher's Guide to Taproot Theatre Company's Production of "The Odyssey"*

*by Homer, adapted and originally directed by Mary Zimmerman*

*adapted from the translation of "The Odyssey" by Robert Fitzgerald*

*Created by Dramaturg, Sonja Lowe*

*January 2011*



adapted and originally directed by Mary Zimmerman  
 By Homer, adapted from the translation of  
 "The Odyssey" by Robert Fitzgerald  
 Directed by Scott Nolte

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## ***The Odyssey: A Guide to the Show***

|                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Scott Nolte</b>        | Producing Artistic Director   |
| <b>Karen Lund</b>         | Associate Artistic Director   |
| <b>Mark Lund</b>          | Design Director               |
| <b>Anne Hitt</b>          | Production Stage Manager      |
| <b>Sarah Burch Gordon</b> | Costume Shop Manager          |
| <b>Pam Nolte</b>          | TTC Ambassador/Co-Founder     |
| <b>Rick Rodenbeck</b>     | Finance & Operations Director |
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| <b>Sonja Lowe</b>         | Marketing Assistant           |
| <b>Zach Brittle</b>       | Director of Development       |
| <b>Anne Kennedy</b>       | Development Associate         |
| <b>Jenny Cross</b>        | Patron Services Manager       |
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| <b>Marty Gordon</b>       | Custodian                     |
| <b>Sara K. Willy</b>      | Director of Education         |
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| <b>Suzanne Townsend</b>   | E & O Associate               |
| <b>Paul Adolphsen</b>     | Patron Representative         |
| <b>Laura Bannister</b>    | Patron Representative         |
| <b>Alysha Curry</b>       | Patron Representative         |
| <b>Asha Sticher</b>       | Patron Representative         |



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*We value faith. We respect people*

*We celebrate theatre.*

## Play Synopsis

*The Odyssey* opens in the council of the gods on Mt. Olympus. Athena seeks permission from Zeus to aide Odysseus who for eight years has been held captive on Calypso's island far away from his home in Ithaca because the sea god Poseidon holds a grudge against him. Athena is concerned because while Odysseus has been away his wife has been plagued with suitors for her hand in marriage. These rude young men have invaded her house, are eating up her livestock and her only son Telemachus is in danger of being killed by them as they plot to gain the throne.

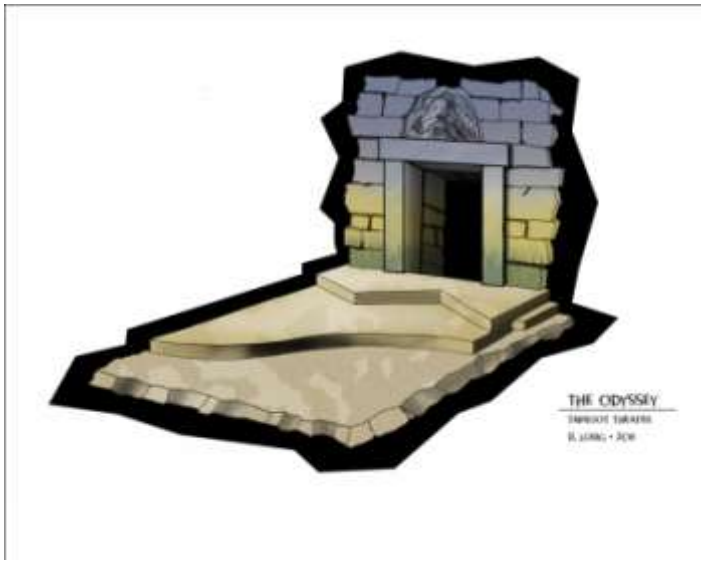
Zeus agrees to help Odysseus. Athena travels in disguise to Ithaca and encourages Telemachus to defy the suitors and set sail for Sparta to seek news of his father. She travels with Telemachus disguised as his friend, Lord Mentor.

Meanwhile, Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso to tell her to let Odysseus go. Odysseus sails away on a raft, but Poseidon stirs up a storm causing Odysseus to ship wreck on the coast of Phaacia. The Phaeacians receive Odysseus royally and promise to help him sail home to Ithaca. They invite Odysseus to share his past adventures and he begins to tell his story.

Odysseus relates how he and his companions set sail from Troy and the adventures they have on the way home. How they are captured and escaped from a giant Cyclops; about their adventures on various islands with the Lotus Eaters, with Aeolus and the goddess Circe; the sea monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis. How they were becalmed on the island of sun and finally how a great storm sank the ship and all of Odysseus' companions. Only Odysseus was rescued from the sea by the goddess Calypso. Calypso fell in love with Odysseus and kept him captive on her island for eight years.

The Phaeacians keep their promise and send Odysseus safely home. He arrives on the island at the same time that his son Telemachus returns home from Sparta. Together father, son and Athena plot to get Odysseus into the house in disguise so that they can defeat suitors and reunite Penelope with her husband.

# The Set



## The Setting

A play like *The Odyssey* calls for so many different locations that it is impossible to build sets for them all. Instead, designer Richard Lorig has created a simple stone platform with architecture inspired by the famous Lions Gate at Mycenae. A platform stage such as this can be Calypso's island, a Cyclops' cave, or even (when the sail drops down) a ship at sea. Lighting changes, sound cues, and actor narration will all combine to indicate a change of scene. After that the audience's imagination does the rest!

## What to Watch For

Richard Lorig's set has three different levels. If you look at the sketches above (or walk up to our balcony and look at the stage down at the stage) you will see that the first step up is curved like a wave and the second step up is jagged like a lightning bolt. These design elements symbolize the two most powerful gods in *The Odyssey*, Poseidon and Zeus. Based on your knowledge of Greek mythology – which symbol corresponds to which god?

| Production Team   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Director          | Scott Nolte        |
| Scenic Designer   | Richard Lorig      |
| Sound Designer    | Mark Lund          |
| Costume Designer  | Sarah Burch Gordon |
| Stage Manager     | Anne L. Hitt       |
| Lighting Designer | Brian Engel        |
| Dramaturg         | Sonja Lowe         |
| Music Director    | Sam Vance          |
| Choreographer     | Karin Stevens      |

# The Costumes



*Hermes*



*Nausicaa*

## Very Quick Changes

Taproot Theatre's production of *The Odyssey* has a cast of 13 actors playing a total of 84 characters! This means that Sarah Burch Gordon has taken on her biggest costuming challenge yet! In order to allow for rapid costume changes (some of which take place right on stage) Sarah has given each actor a "base costume" of dark pants and a plain dark shirt. As the actor changes from different characters they can pull on each costume over their "base costumes. For example a loose robe and a crown over the base costume will complete the costume for the princess Nausicaa, while a messenger bag and winged hat/sneakers are all that's needed to turn an actor into the god Hermes.

## What to Watch For

Notice that Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus are all dressed in the same colors. Similarities like this are one way that a costume designer can tie characters together as a family. With so many different characters in one story it's important to have visual clues like this to help the audience keep track of the story.

(Picture Left to Right: Odysseus, Penelope, & Telemachus)

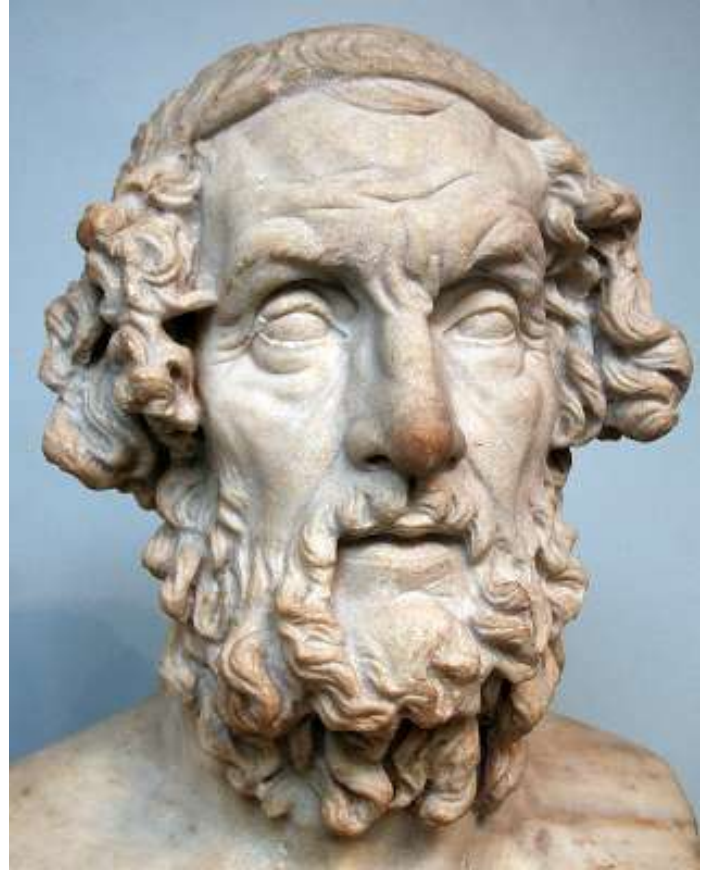


# *Beginning with Homer*

Centuries of scholars have devoted their efforts to studying his writing, his culture, and his time period. Yet the most common expression one hears regarding Homer is “we don’t know”.

It’s ironic that a man who influenced so much of Western art and culture should be so completely *absent* from history. This is partly due to the fact that the Greeks had almost no written records until after Homer’s time. Everything we “know” about him, therefore, is based on archeological evidence, oral tradition, and things that were written about him long after his death.

This means that theories about Homer abound. Some think that there were two Homers; reasoning that since the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are such vastly different poems, they must be attributed to two separate poets. Some argue that at least one of these “Homers” was a woman. Some scholars think that there was no Homer at all; that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are compilations of many different poems by many different bards. There’s always the possibility that some incredible archeological find will blow all current theories out of the water, but for now, here is what is *generally* agreed on by *many* scholars.



## *Pre-Homer*

The events of Homer’s poems are set in the Late Bronze Age. Historians agree that this period (aprox. 1600-1150 BCE) was a time when the ancestors of the Greeks (commonly referred as the Mycenaean) were prosperous and powerful. Then, somewhere around 1100 BCE a catastrophe overtook the Mycenaean. All the major cities of the time (Mycenae, Thebes, Pylos etc.) show archeological evidence of destruction followed by decline. No one is sure exactly what occurred (Natural disaster? Invasion by a foreign power? Civil war?) but whatever it was plunged the area into what is commonly known as the “Dark Ages” from aprox. 1150-850 BCE.

In his introduction to Robert Fitzgerald’s translation of the *Odyssey*, Seamus Heaney describes this pre-Homeric period, saying “All evidence suggests decline, an end to overseas trade, an impoverishment of material culture and a general loss of creative nerve—except in the vital area of oral poetry”.<sup>1</sup> Even though

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<sup>1</sup> Heaney, Seamus, “Introduction to The Odyssey, translated by Robert Fitzgerald”, Everyman’s Library Alfred A Knopf: New York, 1992. Pg xiii.

\*Top picture: Sculpture of Homer

everything else had disappeared the Mycenaeans' oral history (the stories, the heroes and the traditions of the Bronze Age) were passed from bard to bard and told and re-told for 200 years, gradually becoming part of a shared memory of the Greek people. And this is where Homer comes in.

## *Homer*

Many scholars today agree that there was one poet, living sometime between 750-650 BCE who composed both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is likely that he was a professional bard, and as such would have been taught the ancient stories, the "stock phrases" that had been handed down through generations of poets, and the craft of oral recitation in the traditional hexameter (see note)<sup>2</sup> rhythm of epic poetry. If he was a professional bard, it is also likely that he would have traveled to many Greek cities and would have seen first hand the landscapes that he describes in his work.

No one knows where he was born. Tradition has linked him with Smyrna (in modern day Turkey) and with Chios, a large prosperous island. The Chios tradition is particularly intriguing. In classical times there was a guild of performers there who called themselves the "sons of Homer". They claimed to have preserved their ancestor's work perfectly, right down to specific intonations in performance.<sup>3</sup>

Ancient tradition also reports that Homer was blind but this, again, is impossible to prove. Some scholars theorize that he might have gone blind later in life. Some think that the description of the blind bard Demodocus in *The Odyssey* might be auto-biographical.



"The crier soon came, leading that man of song whom the Muse cherished; by her gift he knew The good of life, and evil – For she who lent him sweetness made him blind."<sup>4</sup>

It is generally agreed that Homer was not literate. The skill of writing was only beginning to be introduced in Greece in 700-650bc and the basic technology of it was too unwieldy to be widespread. Wherever they were performed and for whatever reason, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed and recited orally, perhaps changed and crafted by Homer over the course of many performances until they reached the final form that we know.

<sup>2</sup> Hexameter: each line of the poem must contain six feet. The first five feet can either be "dactyls" (one long syllable followed by two short syllables) or "spondees" (two long syllables). The sixth foot is always a spondee.

<sup>3</sup> Rubens, Beaty & Oliver Taplin, "An Odyssey Round Odysseus: The Man & His Story Traced Through Time & Place", BBC Books: London, 1989. Pg 37.

<sup>4</sup> Homer, "The Odyssey, translated by Robert Fitzgerald", Everyman's Library Alfred A Knopf: New York, 1992. Pg 127

\* Picture: Engraving of Demodocus playing in the Phaeacian court. Odysseus sits next to the king weeping.

## *Post-Homer*

With Homer, it seems, the Greek tradition of oral poetry reached its peak. As a poet he blends the ancient phrases with his own talent for description and simile to create two superbly crafted epics. Homer's poems are the only remnants of this ancient period that survive in tact. Tradition holds that the first official written copies of the poems were created in Athens around 530bc. These became the cannon for the emerging Greek culture. Ancient and classical Greeks honored Homer's writing almost to the point of making them sacred texts.

Heaney notes that Homer used the ancient heroes to shape a concept of Greek identity, "at a moment when Greek society and culture were resuscitating themselves after centuries of torpor...as Greek life swung back into a mood of recovery and a quickening began that would eventually come to fruition in the classical age of Athens three centuries later, it was Homer, the great bard of survival, the memory keeper and the vision speaker, who shaped the trace elements of a lost world into the foundation art of a new one."<sup>5</sup>



The fact that Homer's writing formed the bedrock for the literature and philosophy of ancient Greece means that directly and indirectly his art has influenced all of Western culture. In 1869, John Ruskin declared that it didn't matter whether one actually read Homer or not since, "All Greek gentlemen were educated under Homer. All Roman gentlemen, by Greek literature. All Italian, and French, and English gentlemen, by Roman literature, and by its principles."<sup>6</sup>

Edith Hall quotes Ruskin in her study of the *Odyssey's* influence on literature and film. She goes on to add her own comment that, "In the case of the *Odyssey*, no later author could ever again make a fresh start when shaping a narrative or a visual representation of a voyage, a metamorphosis, a run-in with savages, an encounter with anyone dead, a father-son relationship, a recognition token, or a reunion between husband and wife."<sup>7</sup>

In other words, we know Homer even if we don't know hexameters and we've heard the *Odyssey* even if we've never heard of Odysseus. The themes and the scenes from the *Odyssey* that are picked up and replayed so often in our stories, novels and films can all be traced back to Homer, merely because Homer was there at the beginning.

<sup>5</sup> Heaney, Seamus, "Introduction to The Odyssey, translated by Robert Fitzgerald", Everyman's Library Alfred A Knopf: New York, 1992. Pg xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, Edith, "The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey", Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2008. Pg 7.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, Edith, "The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey", Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2008. Pg 8.

\*Picture: Text of Homer's *Iliad* in Latin and Greek, illustrated by an Italian artist, 1477

# Poetic Devices in Homer's Epics

## 1) Audio/Visual

Seamus Heaney, in his introduction to Robert Fitzgerald's translation, *The Odyssey*, emphasizes the fact that Homer was an oral poet. His poems may have been written down shortly after his death or even later in his own life time, but the epics themselves were created to be spoken--not read. **This means that from the very beginning the *Odyssey* was meant to be performed.** We don't know much about how the epics were recited (they might have been broken up into short chapters, they might have been recited all at once in a marathon telling at a religious festival) but archaeological evidence indicates that they would have been spoken by one performer accompanying himself with chords on the lyre.

Heaney speculates on a moment in the *Odyssey* where Homer creates both a visual and audible picture for his audience. At the climax of the poem when Odysseus picks up the bow to shoot an arrow through the axe heads, Homer describes the scene:

“But the man skilled in all ways of contending,  
Satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,  
like a musician, like a harper, when  
with a quiet hand upon his instrument  
he draws between his thumb and forefinger  
a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly  
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.  
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,  
so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang  
a swallow's note.”<sup>8</sup>

Thousands of years ago, Heaney imagines that, “The mixture of absolute joy in the imagined twang of the harpstring and absolute dread in the thrum of the bowstring would have been clinched in performance by the minstrel's plucking of a string in punctuation at the very moment...”<sup>9</sup>

Think of the hush falling over the ancient Greek crowd as the poet pauses to pluck a string and let its one note sing in the silence. Now that's a fantastic bit of theatre!

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<sup>8</sup> Homer. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Everyman Library, Alfred Knopf: New York. c1992. pg 404.

<sup>9</sup> Heaney, Seamus. “Introduction”. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Everyman Library, Alfred Knopf: New York. c1992. pg.xxiv

## 2) *The Ghost of Agamemnon*

The Homeric Epics were re-working myths that were already very familiar to Homer's audience. Everybody knew the heroes of the Trojan War and the stories of the gods and their relationships with each other. This meant that Homer could begin his narratives right in the middle of the action because his audience was well aware of the back story. It also means that just the single mention of a name could call up a whole separate story. Similar to the way that a modern day sportswriter can refer to unmatched teams as "David and Goliath" and his readers will know what he means.

Homer uses this common awareness in the first scene of the *Odyssey*. The action opens with Zeus complaining about Aigesthes. Right at the beginning of the story the audience is reminded of a Trojan hero whose homecoming was not happy. King Agamemnon returned from Troy to find that his wife Clytemnestra had taken a lover, Aigesthes. Agamemnon is murdered in his bath by his unfaithful wife; having survived a ten year blood bath on foreign shores, he comes home to be murdered by treachery.

Homer continually calls up the "ghost of Agamemnon" throughout the *Odyssey*. Menelaus and Helen re-tell the story to Telemachus. Agamemnon is one of the heroes that Odysseus meets in the underworld, where the embittered spirit warns Odysseus not to trust women. And when Athena informs Odysseus of the suitors that have invaded his house he comments that but for her warning he might have "bled to death in my own hall like Agamemnon".<sup>10</sup>

In this way, Homer increases the tension for his audience. We are reminded over and over again that a happy ending is not guaranteed.

## 3) *Women's Work*

In the ancient world the mistress of the house, her daughters and her maids were responsible for the production of fabric to clothe the entire household. Skill in spinning and weaving were highly praised feminine qualities. Author Edith Hall describes the processes involved:

"...it is certain that fabric production was central to women's lives. Domestic task-forces spent long days turning wool into fabric for soft furnishings and clothes. At the houses' thresholds they received from their menfolk the fleece culled from the flocks in the outdoor world, removed the grease and scoured it clean. They dried it, dyed, combed and teased it into roves, spun yarn from them with distaff and spindle, and then loaded the warp yarn, weighted onto looms. It was only at this point that weaving could begin. Because both male and female labour is required to produce textiles, weaving became a symbol of male and female collaboration and *The Odyssey* stresses that marriage is a cooperative enterprise."<sup>11</sup>

Within this cultural context the story of Penelope, alone, weaving day after day is a poignant image. She is faithfully holding up her side of a marriage, but her partner, her collaborator, is conspicuously absent.

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<sup>10</sup> Zimmerman, Mary. "The Odyssey-adapted by Kerry Catlin (with Mary Zimmerman's permission) for the Lookingglass Young Ensemble's 2006-2007 Season". Lookingglass Theatre: Chicago, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, Edith. *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey*. The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore. c2008. pg 116.

#### *4) The Birds*

A key feature of Homer's poetry is his use of similes and word pictures to create a scene in his audience's imagination. At times the same imagery comes up repeatedly, reinforcing the pictures for maximum impact.

For example, the coming of Odysseus is foreshadowed repeatedly by images of birds of prey. When Telemachus calls a council on Ithaca Zeus sends the sign of two eagles to warn the suitors of Odysseus' impending return. When Telemachus is speaking with Menelaus and Helen all three of them see an eagle descend and attack some geese just outside the palace. Helen interprets this as a sign from the gods that Odysseus is coming home to revenge himself on the suitors. Penelope also dreams that a bird of prey attacked some geese gathered in her courtyard.

So when Homer once again calls up the familiar imagery to describe Odysseus and Telemachus attacking the suitors, the audience has no trouble picturing father and son:

“After them the attackers wheeled, as terrible as falcons  
From eyries in the mountains veering over and diving down  
With talons wide unsheathed on flights of birds...  
So these now fell upon the suitors in that hall,  
Turning, turning to strike and strike again...”<sup>12</sup>

#### *5) Mood Music*

When the suitors have all been slain the clean-up/cover-up begins. Odysseus, his son and his two faithful servants (with Athena's help) have won against extraordinary odds, but there is still the danger that word of the slaughter will get out and the families of the suitors will come seeking vengeance. True to his nature, Odysseus has a plan to buy some time.

He tells Telemachus to have the servants prepare a feast with music and dancing, as though a wedding were being celebrated. The townspeople will think that Penelope has consented to marry one of the suitors and that all the rest of the young men are staying to celebrate the wedding. This ingenious plan keeps the family safe for at least one night, but it also provides an appropriate soundtrack for the reunion scene.

Odysseus has arranged it so that when he and his wife go to their bed-chamber for the first time in 20 years--there are wedding songs playing outside.

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<sup>12</sup> Homer. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Everyman Library, Alfred Knopf: New York. c1992.

# Mary Zimmerman and "The Odyssey"



"MARY ZIMMERMAN has worked with Lookingglass Theatre Company for more than twenty years. She adapted and directed *The Odyssey*, *The Secret in the Wings*, *Arabian Nights*, *S/M*, *Metamorphoses*, the Lookingglass/About Face collaboration of *Eleven Rooms of Proust* and *Argonautika*. Zimmerman is also part of the Goodman Theatre artistic team where she adapted and directed *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (with several members of the Lookingglass ensemble), *Silk*, *Journey to the West*, *Mirror of the Invisible World* and a re-creation of *The Odyssey*. She has twice directed for the New York Shakespeare Festival in the Park. Her work has won awards in Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Berkeley and New York including the 2002 Tony Award for her direction of *Metamorphoses* on Broadway. In 1998, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She lives in Evanston and is a professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University"<sup>13</sup>

## *On Adapting for the Theatre*

"I used to think of the process of making a play like this in grandiose, architectural terms. I'd say, proudly, "Look, we took a flat line, and tugged it up into the outline of a city. We built this thing. We started from nothing, and now look!" But over time, the metaphor has changed. I think of this way of working as an act of archeology. There is something buried in the sand, and it is our job to uncover it. If we panic and work too fast, not paying attention to the true shape of the buried artifact, if we are impatient, then we will damage it. We have to let the emerging shape guide us. On the other hand, if we are lazy, and don't do our work, the thing will arrive in front of the audience on opening night with dust still clinging to it, unclear, its true shape obscured. The treasure in the sand is comprised of the text as it wants to live on stage and some fugitive part of ourselves, buried and forgotten; but if we work carefully, its eventual shape is inevitable – made up of who we are and the text itself and our efforts in the search." – **Mary Zimmerman**<sup>14</sup>



<sup>13</sup> "Mary Zimmerman". Bio from Lookingglass Theatre Website. <http://www.lookingglasstheatre.org/content/mary-zimmerman>. October 30, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Galland, Nicole. "Interview with Mary Zimmerman, compiled by Berkley Repertory Theatre Dramaturg Nicole Galland".

<http://www.mccarter.org/education/secretinthewings/page10.htm> 10/27/10.

\*Top Picture: Mary Zimmerman/Bottom Picture: From Left: Christopher Donahue, director Mary Zimmerman and Ryan Artzberger in rehearsal for *Silk*, photo by Michael Brasilo.

# *The Journey of "The Odyssey"*

*The Odyssey* began its life as a theatre project at Northwestern University. Graduate student Mary Zimmerman produced the show as part of NU's Summer Fiction Series and cast the roles using her current students. The show was presented in two parts over two evenings and totaled 4.5 hours in running time. The production budget was \$300.

In a sense it was this project that started it all for Zimmerman. Her student production caught the eye of the young emerging theatre company Lookingglass in Chicago. In the spring of 1990 Zimmerman and Lookingglass staged the show on a flat platform set up in the large screening room of the film co-op Chicago Filmmakers. "We did it for \$11,000 top to bottom," Zimmerman recalls, "which includes space rental and advertising and no one was paid."<sup>15</sup>

This production was also presented in two parts over two evenings. The performances were well-reviewed, but the audiences were tiny. Overall the show was not a great success, but it was the beginning of a creative partnership between Zimmerman and the Lookingglass Theatre Company that continues to this day.

In 1999, with several successful productions under their belt, the no-longer emerging Lookingglass Theatre Company decided to revive *The Odyssey*. This time the script was pared down to one evening. When asked how the show had changed Zimmerman commented:

"I did have to entirely rewrite the script...But the funny thing is after years and years of waiting to do the show again...the current production is very much inspired by the poverty of the first production. The first time around, we used chairs and bamboo poles to represent everything. Here again we are using a lot of chairs and bamboo poles."<sup>16</sup>

Produced originally in The Goodman Theatre of Chicago, this new and improved *Odyssey* was very successful. It toured to The McCarter Theatre, New Jersey and the Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2000 and received rave reviews in both venues.



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<sup>15</sup> Helbig, Jack. "Reviving 'The Odyssey' Mary Zimmerman brings the revamped, rewritten classic back to the Goodman". *Daily Herald*. Arlington Heights, Ill.:Sep 17, 1999. p. 22

<sup>16</sup> Helbig, Jack. "Reviving 'The Odyssey' Mary Zimmerman brings the revamped, rewritten classic back to the Goodman". *Daily Herald*. Arlington Heights, Ill.:Sep 17, 1999. p. 22

\*Picture: Mariann Mayberry as Athena and Mark Alhadeff as Telemachus in McCarter Theatre's production of *The Odyssey*. Photographer: T. Charles Erickson

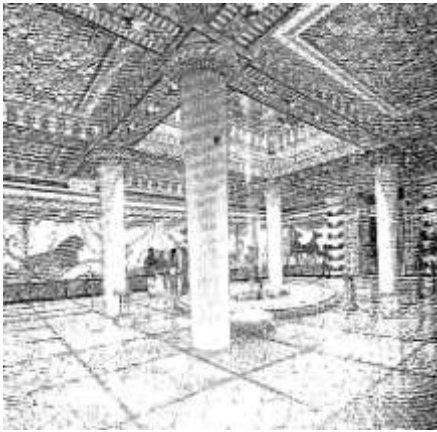
# *Mycenaean Kings and Queens*

The following descriptions, based on Bronze Age archaeological evidence, are of a fictional Agamemnon, Helen, and Menelaus but the depiction of royal life would have been the same for Odysseus & Penelope, Alcinous & Arête and other Mycenaean nobles.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Agamemnon’s kingdom was typical of its times; it was less a state than an estate, that is, it was essentially a big household. The royal palace had grand storerooms, but most of its space was devoted to workshops, storerooms, and armories. It was a manor that produced luxury goods for the *wanax* [king] to trade or give as gifts. Raw materials for the workshops were siphoned off the king’s subjects as taxation.”<sup>17</sup>

“The rooms where a girl like Helen spent most of her time would have been emblazoned with colour. The walls, covered with lime plaster, were decorated with vivid patterns in blue, yellow ochre and deep salmon pink – still visible on the fresco-fragments that have survived. Pattern and form were created using both the *buon fresco* and *fresco secco* techniques – the paint being applied in different sections when the plaster was wet and again when it was dry. Even some of the floors were technicolor – decorated with paint or vivid cut stones; at Pylos there are geometric patterns, and an octopus glides close to the central hearth of the palace. Columns as high as three men, also coated in a rich pink wash, would have supported the roof and provided a colonnade through which a young princess could wander...”<sup>18</sup>



“[In Menelaus’ palace] barefoot servants hurry to and fro with oil lamps and silver-and-gold pitchers and bowls for the ritual washing of hands. Then comes the meal. There would be honey, figs, and bread, and a selection of the finest meat from the royal stock: lamb, kid, pork, hare, venison, or wild boar. For a special guest from a royal house, there would be fish. In Greece meat was available even to ordinary people, but fish was food for a king. Fishing was labor-intensive, transport overland was expensive, and fish was not as easy to preserve as meat.

The food would be washed down with plenty of alcohol. The preferred beverage was a cocktail, mixed in a large bowl, of wine, beer, and honey mead, possibly with a taste of pine resin; resonated wine was already popular in Bronze Age Greece. The partygoers drank out of two handled cups with a wide, shallow bowl above a stem, and made of either the finest painted pottery or of silver or gold. A bard playing the lyre would have entertained the banqueters with heroic song.”<sup>19</sup>



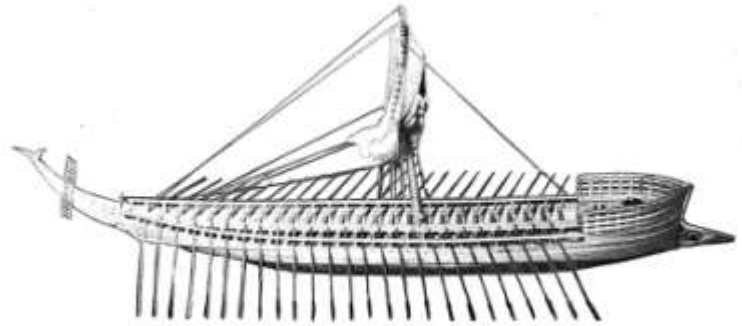
<sup>17</sup> Strauss, Barry. *The Trojan War: A New History*. Simon & Schuster: New York, 2006. Pg 32.

<sup>18</sup> Hughes, Bettany. *Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Whore*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2005. Pg42-43.

<sup>19</sup> Strauss, Barry. *The Trojan War: A New History*. Simon & Schuster: New York, 2006. Pg 14.

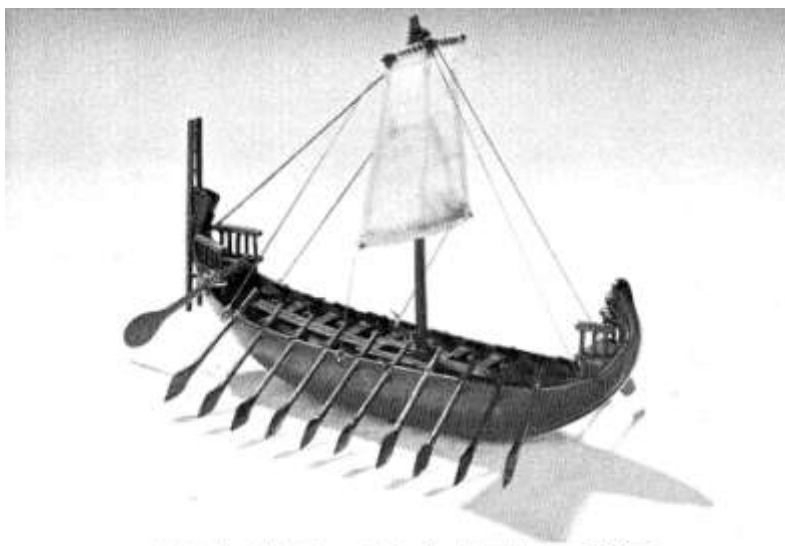
# *Ships and Sailors*

There are two different kinds of ships used in Homer's epics. One is the "penteconter;" an early Greek warship. These galleys had fifty oars (25 on each side), a single sail on a mast and were steered by means of a single rudder attached to the stern. When the ship was moving under oar power (rather than wind) the whole mast was lowered and rested on a prop attached to the stern of the hull (see model). When the wind was favorable the whole mast was raised by ropes (fore-stays). Taut ropes running from the mast to the front and rear of the ship (fore-stays & back-stays) held the mast upright. Then the single sail could be unfurled. The bottom corners of the sail appear to be secured by means of rope attached to the sides of the hull.



Model of a penteconter. Naval Museum of Greece.

The second type of ship was also propelled by oar and/or sail using the exact same methods. These ships, however, were smaller with only 20 oars (10 on each side) and seem to have been used for everyday travel rather than warfare.



Model of a Hittite ship, 13th century B.C. From the collection of the Commercial Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

PLATE W

It is likely that Odysseus and his men would have been returning from Troy in penteconter. Homer records that twelve ships from Ithaca were part of the Greek fleet. Telemachus' journey, Antinous' ambush, and the Phaeacians' ships, however, were all the more standard 20 oared kind. The phrase "Come, give me a swift ship and 20 comrades" seems to have been a common expression, and is used twice by Homer's characters with the same casualness that we might say, "Hey, lend me your car keys."

## *Definitions*

**Stern:** Rear of the ship

**Prow, bow, stem:** Front of the ship

**Hull:** frame or body of the ship

**Rowlocks:** a brace that attaches the oar to the ship

**Keel:** the main beam in the center of the hull that runs under the ship from prow to stern and serves as the structural "spine" of the ship.

**Aft:** at, in, near or towards the rear of the ship

**Fore:** at, in, near or towards the front of the ship

**Afterdeck:** part of the center deck close to the stern

# The Trojan War

The Trojan War sits like a shadow over the characters of *The Odyssey*. Whether they sailed away to fight or remained at home to wait and wonder, whether they are kings or queens or maids or swineherds, the siege of Troy has shaped their life. It is the great event that defines their age.

## The War

The war starts with a quarrel between the goddesses Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite when Eris (the goddess of strife) gives them a golden apple marked "for the fairest".

Zeus sends the goddesses to be judged by Paris, a prince of Troy. Paris awards Aphrodite the golden apple. In exchange, Aphrodite promises him Helen, Queen of Sparta, the most beautiful of all women. Paris sails to Sparta and is received as a guest by Helen and her husband, Menelaus. Helen falls in love with Paris and they leave Sparta together taking quite a bit of Spartan treasure with them. Menelaus is enraged and appeals to the other Greek kings to help him retrieve his wife and avenge his honor.



Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and the brother of Menelaus leads an expedition of Greek troops to Troy and



besieges the city for ten years. The war causes the deaths of many heroes, including Achilles and Ajax (Greek) and Hector and Paris (Trojan). At last, at Odysseus' suggestion, the Greeks abandon the beach of Troy making it look like they've sailed away for good. They leave behind a large wooden structure shaped like a horse. The Trojans believe that the horse is a peace offering and drag it inside their city, but there are Greek warriors hidden inside the hollow structure. When night comes the Greeks slip out of the horse, open the gates for the rest of their army and proceed to sack and burn the city of Troy.

The Greek army is rewarded with plunder and Menelaus recovers his wife. Some traditions say that he had intended to kill her, but was overcome by her beauty. Some more cynical make note of the fact that Menelaus was only king in Sparta through his marriage to Helen. The Greek army is separated on the return home. Of the main heroes, Agamemnon arrives home first, only to be murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover, Aigisthes. His son Orestes then kills Aigisthes and Clytemnestra to avenge his father. Menelaus and Helen are blown off course and end up in Egypt for awhile. Eventually they return with much treasure to live prosperously in Sparta. And Odysseus...well Odysseus' homecoming is a different story...

\*Top picture: 'The Judgment of Paris' c 1825-26, by William Etty \ Bottom picture: The Trojan Horse

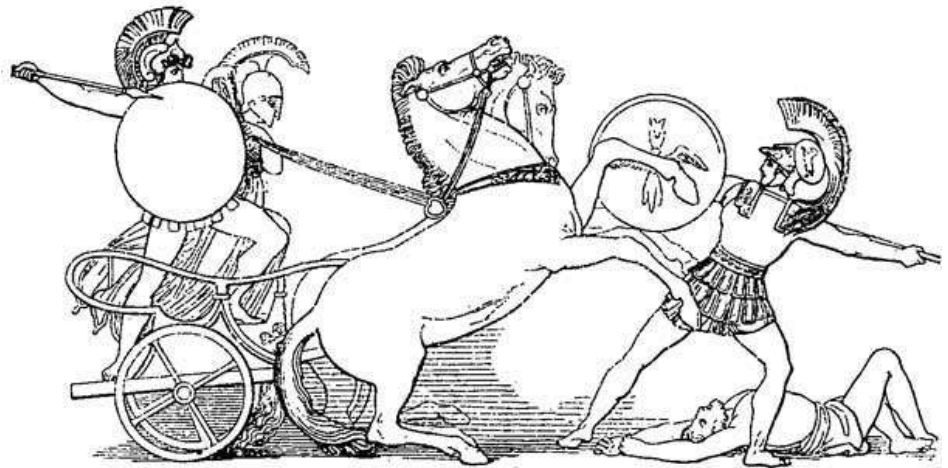
## *The Kings*

Historian Barry Strauss writes that Homer's depiction of the Greek heroes (Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus, Achilles,) is an accurate depiction of war-lords in the Bronze Age.

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"Maybe they are all fiction, but as a group they represent the Bronze Age art of war. Their hands were battle-wise with blood and calloused from stealing cattle. They could trample the enemy like a carpet under their feet or calm the heart of a nervous army under attack. They knew horses like a stable hand and ships like a boatswain, but most of all they knew men and how to lead them. They could be as smooth as the ghee-and-honey paste with which Assyrians cemented rows of mud brick or as rough as the gnarled limbs of an old olive tree. They knew which soldiers to reward with silver rings and which to punish with prison or mutilation. They could inspire the men to follow on foot while they rode in their chariots and to compete for the honor of fighting bravely in their presence.

They could break an enemy's lance or deceive him with words. They knew how much flour it took to feed an army and how much wood was needed to burn a corpse. They knew how to pitch camp or launch a fleet, how to debrief a spy or send out an informer. They could draw a bow and split a copper ingot like a reed or hurl a spear and pierce the seam in an enemy's armor. They shrugged off mud and snow, towering waves or buckets of rain... They relished ambushes after dark and noontime charges. They feared the gods and liked the smell of death.



Diomedes Pallas

Ares Periphas

They knew war in all its bloody ways, but they shared a single dream: to set sail from Troy in ships with timbers creaking from the weight of plunder... Each of Agamemnon's generals was the leader of a band of warriors... Whereas we, and later Greeks, tend to think of an army as an institution and war as a deployment of men and material, Homer and Bronze Age Greeks tended to think of both in personal terms... The army that gathered at Aulis therefore, was in a real sense, a collection of warrior bands and their chieftains."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Strauss, Barry. *The Trojan War: A New History*. Simon & Schuster: New York, 2006. Pgs 34-36

\*Picture: Greek hero Diomedes with Pallas Athena and the war-god Ares on the battlefields of Troy

## *The Soldiers*

Barry Strauss also gives a good description of what Odysseus' men (the common soldiers/sailors) in the Greek fleet would have experienced.

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**"They [the soldiers] were the ones who never got the best cuts of meat...the ones who lived mainly on a diet of beans and barley, which surely left the air thick with foul odor. They washed down the food with young, unseasoned wine...and drank from plain pottery cups. They were usually short and wiry, often round-shouldered with bad teeth... Most of their baths were in the salt sea, and they no doubt treasured the occasions when they got to take a dip in a river or a clear mountain spring. They had no perfume to offset the odors of sweat and sheepskin... They slept in tents or in the hollow ships or outside on the shore, making it through winter as best they could by huddling around communal fires. The kings had rugs for pillows, the soldiers had leather shields. Their chairs were piles of brush and twigs covered with a goatskin throw, which did double duty as a bed...**



**They had come to Troy with one tunic each, as well as a homespun cloak and a pair of rawhide sandals—a basic pair, without the laces that make sandals fit comfortably to the foot...And once the heroes had taken the pick of the booty, they had whatever was left along with whatever they could steal. Even so this was more than they could ever have hoped to put aside from a lifetime working the thin soil of Greece or herding another man's sheep or goats or cleaning out his pigsty.**

They were oarsmen, stewards, cooks, grooms, and perhaps even farmers. They were the men who pulled the wooden chock out from under the long ships at the moment of departure, the men who cast off the cables and hoisted the pinewood masts. They trooped into the hills to cut oak with axes made of dull bronze rather than sharp iron, gathered firewood, split kindling neatly, built and tended fires, stuffed goat intestines with blood and fat and then roasted them until they were sausage; carved meat; poured wine; gathered jugs of water from the river for drinking, for hand-washing before prayer or sacrifice and for heroes' bathing...They groomed the horses [and] dug defensive ditches...They picked up corpses, from which they had to shoo away swarms of flies, and hauled them onto the funeral pyres. They were indispensable to the expedition, but they counted for nothing in battle or council, as their betters were in the habit of telling them."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Strauss, Barry. *The Trojan War: A New History*. Simon & Schuster: New York, 2006 pg 111-112.

\*Picture: battle scene from *The Ambrosian Iliad*, a 5th century illuminated manuscript of the [Iliad](#)