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# The *Odyssey* of Homer

Course Guidebook

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## **Elizabeth Vandiver, Ph.D.**

Visiting Assistant Professor of Classics, Whitman College

Elizabeth Vandiver did her undergraduate work at Shimer College, Mt. Carroll, Illinois, where she matriculated in 1972 as a 16-year-old “early entrant.” After receiving her B.A. in 1975, she spent several years working as a librarian before deciding to pursue graduate work in Classics at the University of Texas at Austin. She received her M.A. in 1984 and her Ph.D. in 1990.

In addition to her current position at the University of Maryland (flagship campus at College Park), Professor Vandiver has held visiting professorships at Northwestern University, the University of Georgia, The Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies (Rome, Italy), Loyola University (New Orleans) and Utah State University.

In 1998 Dr. Vandiver received the American Philological Association’s Excellence in Teaching Award, the most prestigious teaching award available to American classicists. Other awards include the Northwestern University Department of Classics Excellence in Teaching award for 1998 and the University of Georgia’s Outstanding Honors Professor award in 1993 and 1994.

Dr. Vandiver has published a book, *Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History*, and several articles, as well as delivering numerous papers at national and international conferences. She is currently working on a second book, examining the influence of the classical tradition on the British poets of World War I.

Dr. Vandiver is married to Franklin J. Hildy, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Theatre, at the University of Maryland.

This course is dedicated to the memory of Gareth  
Morgan, teacher of Greek, lover of Homer.





# The *Odyssey* of Homer

## Scope:

Just as knowledge of the Trojan War legend is necessary for understanding the *Iliad*, so too the *Odyssey* assumes that its audience knows how the war ended and what happened next. Lecture One of this course sketches out the events that took place between the two epics, and then considers two primary types of epic, *kleos* and *nostos* (or “return”) epic. The lecture also looks at the opening lines of the *Odyssey* and discusses the effect of its complicated chronology and narrative structure. Lecture Two introduces another key cultural concept, *xenia* (the “guest-host relationship”) and explains its importance both for the *Odyssey* as a whole and for the first four books, which focus on Odysseus’ son Telemachos, in particular. In Lecture Three, we get our first view of Odysseus himself, and are introduced to key elements in his character, particularly his caution, his great rhetorical skill, and his longing for his own homecoming (*nostos*). Lecture Four analyzes Odysseus’ interactions with the Phaiakians, the people who will help him on his journey home. This lecture also covers the opening of Odysseus’ great first-person narrative of his travels since leaving Troy, a narrative which continues for four full books of the *Odyssey*.

Lectures Five and Six continue our examination of that narrative, identifying and analyzing Odysseus’ motivations in telling the story and its effect on his audiences both inside and outside the epic. In Lecture Seven, we look closely at Odysseus’ long-delayed return to Ithaka and his meeting there with the goddess Athena. His reunion with his son Telemachos and its implications are the main focus of Lecture Eight, which also covers Odysseus’ return to his palace in disguise as an old beggar. Lecture Nine provides a close analysis of Odysseus’ conversation with his wife Penelope, and considers the crucial critical question of whether Penelope recognizes this “beggar” as her husband. This lecture also explores the narrative significance of the scene in which Odysseus’ old nurse, Eurykleia, recognizes him from a scar on his thigh. In Lecture Ten we consider the scene of vengeance in which Odysseus kills the suitors who have been plaguing his wife Penelope, and in Lecture Eleven we discuss the final reunion of Odysseus and Penelope and the end of the *Odyssey*.

Lecture Twelve provides an epilogue to this course and its companion, *The Iliad*, by addressing the issue of the historicity of the Trojan War. This final

lecture surveys the recent archaeological evidence for an actual conflict, and discusses the possible relationship between that event in the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the legendary war as described in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. epics.