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Richard Whitaker

The Odyssey of Homer: A Southern African Translation

Republic of South Africa (2017)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions Homer Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Penelope Telemachus



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General information	
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Creators



Richard Whitaker , b. 1949
(Author)

Richard Whitaker (July 15, 1949), emeritus professor, writer, translator and freelance travel writer, was born and educated in South Africa. He studied at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. After that, he received degrees in Classics from the universities of Oxford and St. Andrews, respectively. It is after then that he started a career in writing. His literary interests are the Classics, Roman love poetry, oral poetry, and the influence of the Classics on his contemporary society. That accounts for his transitions of Classics to suit his South African milieu. He is noted for his two major publications: *Homer's The Iliad: A Southern African Translation* and *The Odyssey of Homer: A Southern African Translation*.

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Additional information

Summary

The epic begins with the growth of Telemakhos, the epic hero, Odysseus' son. Two issues occupy the hero's son: the readiness to welcome his father's return from adventurous journeys and his preparedness to fight intruding enemies. Assisted by the goddess Athene, the young hero's development into manhood is secured. Aware of the backup, Telemakhos defies his enemies at home and goes out for his own adventures in Sparta, with one goal: to look for his father. The epic shifts to a new setting, the town of Phaiakia and it helps to unravel Odysseus' heroic prowess. Here, the hero is no longer in captivity under Kalypso of the people of Ogygia but in the house of chief Alkinoos and his denizens. The physical and immortal processes of Kalypso and Phaiakians are projected and Odysseus's virtues are revealed in the physical qualities that he displays during the game sessions held by the Phaiakians. He captures the respect of the people from his display of heroic tactics and the people sing praise songs and offer him gifts for his might.

Odysseus spends the rest of his time in the house chief Alkinoos, giving long accounts of his wanderings. In a discussion with Alkinoos, he reminiscences about his bravery in the battle of Troy (they lost men and ships, were traumatic before getting to the island of the Lotus-Eaters). The longest of the adventures which he narrates is about their movement to the tribe of the Kyklops, where they feast and Odysseus refuses that his men steal livestock there. A man from the town, Poseidon's son, Polyphemus, dares Odysseus by eating his men and challenges his council that he should not offend Zeus, the god of hospitality. In response, Odysseus uses wine to get Polyphemus drunk and pours fire into his eyes. Receiving the news about his son's suffering under Odysseus, Poseidon attacks Odysseus' crew. Odysseus continues his narration about his adventures in the town of the wind god Aiolos, the land of the giant Laistrygonians, the home of the goddess Circe, and the city of the Men of Winter. After the narration, the king of Phaiakians asks him to stay longer and receive more gifts and treasures and Odysseus continues his narration about the meeting of Agamemnon, his discussion with shadows, including Achilles and Tantalos. Throughout the story, he talks about the help Zeus provides his men and him.

Odysseus, who has come to the end of his story, receives more gifts from Alkinoos and is ready to return to his hometown, Ithaka,

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accompanied by Alkinoos' men. Poseidon, on the contrary, appeals to Zeus because he is angry that Odysseus has had a placid return. Zeus grants him permission to turn the Phaeacian ship into stone as punishment. When Odysseus arrives in Ithaka, he is unaware, thinking that he is in a foreign town but Athene, disguised as a shepherd, informs him that he is in Ithaca. Odysseus, guided, through his rhetorics, makes up a story about his arrival. Unfortunately for him Athene changes into a goddess and tells him that he is lying, tells him to reunite with his son Telemakhos from Lakedaimon, warns him not to inform anyone of his return so that he can easily surprise his suitors and defeat them or safety, she turns him into a battered old man. Now disguised as a beggar, Odysseus talks about the death of his master, Odysseus to Eumaios, the man in whose hut he intends to spend the night, but promises to fight Odysseus' suitors. Eumaios now revels the suitors' plan to ambush Telemakhos after his return. As the epic unfolds, Athene meets Telemakhos, tells him to return home to prevent his mother from marrying Eurymakhos, a suitor, informs him about the planned ambush, and instructs him to meet Eumaios.

Telemakhos arrives in Eumaios' house and is very friendly with Eumaios. Again Athene appears to Odysseus, now as a tall girl, and tells him to reveal his identity. The hero and his son hug each other after the identity is revealed and plan to revenge together, although Telemakhos is pessimistic and feels that even with the divine figures Athene and Zeus, they will not be able to defeat the suitors but his father gives an outline of the revenge plot, while he Odysseus will still appear and act as a beggar, only known to the three of them.

However, Telemakhos' messenger informs Penelope, Telemakhos' mother, about his son's return and Eumaios also reveals the same information. News about it spreads like wildfire and the suitors are now more ready to fight and kill Telemakhos, although against Penelope's plea to allow him to live. Penelope is happy to see her son and Telemakhos tells her to offer sacrifices in order for the gods to guide them in their revenge. Theoklymenos tells Penelope about Odysseus' presence in town but she does not believe him. One of the suitors sees the "beggar" and kicks him, without knowing his true identity. In his disguise, he successfully lives with the suitors, fights and defeats another beggar and resits their insolence. Penelope also feels attracted to Odysseus (the beggar) and confides in him. She prays to the gods to guide her. Athene influences her to focus on the suitors and her son, Telemakhos. Penelope also reveals her plan to marry the suitor who will use Odysseus' bow and arrow and shoot

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through twelve axe heads. Surprisingly, Odysseus says her husband will be present at the event. Stressed that night she prays to Artemis to take away her life. As she cries, Odysseus laments to Zeus in his own room.

The following day, Telemakhos tells the suitors that they will not marry his unwilling mother and the suitors get angry, while their prophet sees the blood of the animals that they have been killing coming out their mouths. To him, it is an ill omen, signifying defeat. Penelope takes Odysseus' bow and bears axe heads to the main hall for the great contest, declaring that whoever succeeds in the contest will marry her. Telemakhos makes the first failed attempt and other suitors also fail. With failure from every suitor, Antinois proposes that they postpone the contest, offer sacrifices to Apollo, god of archers, before making another attempt. However, Odysseus begs to be allowed to make an attempt and is threatened by the suitors not to try. Penelope grants him the opportunity, on the condition that, if he succeeds, she will offer him gifts and praise songs will be sung for him. To everyone's surprise, Odysseus shoots and succeeds and the battle begins, with his first victim, Antinois, whom he kills immediately after shooting. As it has already been planned, the suitors' weapons have been taken away. Here, Odysseus reveals his identity and the fight begins. In a violent way, Odysseus cuts off their heads, chests, and limbs, with Athene's assistance. Penelope is surprised by Odysseus' return and victory but does not believe him to be real. She tricks him using their old secrets and Odysseus falls for the trick. Happy about his parents' reunion, Telemakhos fakes a wedding for them. Odysseus is now set to meet his father, Laertes. When he does, he recounts the story of his conquests and victories. He also plans to go out and appease the gods of their tribe and return to his house. The epic ends with the family that has triumphed over their enemies, through their own might, thanks to the help of the gods.

Analysis

Whitaker's *The Odyssey of Homer: A Southern African Translation*, is a translation, retelling and texturing of Homer's epic poem to capture the South-African readership. To achieve this goal, Whitaker uses isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu words. A number of distinct South African words (like *assegai*, a short or long spear; *bass*, a master, owner, or boss; *ikosi*, a chief or a ruler and *veld*, an open dry land) are used in the translation. Also, to facilitate the comprehension

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	of the text to a reader that is not familiar with the South African vocabulary, Whitaker includes a glossary at the end of the text. It is indeed an African texturing of the original text. Where Homer uses three names (Danaans, Argives, and Akhaians) to refer to one term (Greeks), Whitaker uses one, Akhaians, in order to ease reading for his South African audience. Further, Homer's version presents societal practices of the epic world, closer to those of small communities in Africa, than the West. Whitaker uses words that are not limited to the South African diction, but to Africa as a whole (instead of people/nation/city, used by Homer, Whitaker uses glory, king and palace tribe/town, praise, chief, house). The above demonstrate Whitaker's aim of drawing the Homeric world closer to Africa.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Storytelling African Traditions Homer Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Penelope Telemachus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Conflict Family Journeys
Further Reading	Field, Rogers, "The Classics, African Literature and the Critics", *English in Africa* 44.1 (2017): 73–95, available at journals.co.za (acessed: January 28, 2020). Hardwick, Lorna, "The Iliad of Homer: A Southern African Translation, Richard Whitaker", *Acta Classica: Proceedings of the Classical Association of South Africa* 56.1, Sabinet, 2013. Wilson, Emily, "The Odyssey of Homer: A Southern African Translation" (review), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2018.05.38 (accessed: October 27, 2021).

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