

People and Places of the *Odyssey*

You will find it helpful to become familiar with important people and places in the *Odyssey* before you begin reading. The map identifies real places mentioned in the poem, such as Troy, Sparta, and Ithaca. It also shows where later readers have thought that some of the imaginary lands visited by Odysseus could have been located, after applying Mediterranean geography to Homer's descriptions. Following is a list of important characters. All Greek names used in Robert Fitzgerald's translation have been changed from their original spelling to a more familiar, Latinized spelling.



IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN THE *ODYSSEY* (in order of mention)

BOOK 1

Helios (hē'lē-ōs')—the sun god, who raises his cattle on the island of Thrinacia (thrī-nā'shə)

Zeus (zōōs)—the ruler of the Greek gods and goddesses; father of Athena and Apollo

Telemachus (tə-lēm'ə-kəs)—Odysseus' son

Penelope (pə-nēl'ə-pē)—Odysseus' wife

BOOK 5

Hermes (hūr'mēz)—the god of invention, commerce, and cunning; messenger of the gods

Calypso (kə-līp'sō)—a sea goddess who lives on the island of Ogygia (ō-gī'yə)

Laertes (lā-ūr'tēz)—Odysseus' father

BOOK 9

Alcinous (āl-sīn'ō-əs)—the king of the Phaeacians (fē-ā'shənz)

Circe (sūr'sē)—a goddess and enchantress who lives on the island of Aeaea (ē-ē'ə)

Cicones (sī-kō'nēz)—allies of the Trojans, who live at Ismarus (īs-mār'əs)

Lotus Eaters—inhabitants of a land Odysseus visits

Cyclopes (sī-klō'pēz)—a race of one-eyed giants; an individual member of the race is a Cyclops (sī'klōps)

Apollo (ə-pōl'ō)—the god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine

Poseidon (pō-sīd'n)—the god of the seas, earthquakes, and horses; father of the Cyclopes who battles Odysseus

BOOK 10

Aeolus (ē'ə-ləs)—the guardian of the winds

Laestrygones (lēs'trī-gō'nēz)—cannibal inhabitants of a distant land

Eurylochus (yūr'īl'ə-kəs)—a trusted officer of Odysseus'

Persephone (pər-sēf'ə-nē)—the wife of Hades, ruler of the underworld

Tiresias (tī-rē'sē-əs) of Thebes (thēbz)—a blind prophet whose spirit Odysseus visits in the underworld

BOOK 11

Elpenor (ēl-pē'nōr)—one of Odysseus' crew, killed in an accident

BOOK 12

Sirens (sī'rənz)—creatures, part woman and part bird, whose songs lure sailors to their death

Scylla (sīl'ə)—a six-headed sea monster who devours sailors

Charybdis (kə-rīb'dīs)—a dangerous whirlpool personified as a female sea monster

BOOK 16

Athena (ə-thē'nə)—the goddess of war, wisdom, and cleverness; goddess of crafts

Eumaeus (yūr-mē'əs)—a servant in Odysseus' household

BOOK 17

Argos (ār'gōs)—Odysseus' dog

BOOKS 21–23

Antinous (ān-tīn'ō-əs)—a suitor of Penelope's

Eurymachus (yūr'īm'ə-kəs)—a suitor of Penelope's

Philoetius (fī-lē'shəs)—a servant in Odysseus' household

Amphinomus (ām-fīn'ə-məs)—a suitor of Penelope's

Eurynome (yūr'īn'ə-mē)—a female servant in Odysseus' household

Eurycleia (yūr'ī-klē'ə)—an old female servant, still loyal to Odysseus

The Epic

Extraordinary heroes and hideous monsters. Brutal battles and dangerous voyages. Spectacular triumphs and crushing defeats. The epic tradition, still very much alive in today's movies and novels, began thousands of years ago with the orally told epic poem. In ancient Greece, listeners crowded around poet-storytellers to hear about the daring exploits of a hero named Odysseus. With its storm-tossed seas, powerful evildoers, and narrow escapes, it's no wonder that Homer's *Odyssey* remains one of the most famous epics in Western literature. It captivates us because it is a compelling narrative and a window into a time and place different from our own.

Part 1: Characteristics of the Epic

In literature, an **epic** is a long narrative poem. It recounts the adventures of an **epic hero**, a larger-than-life figure who undertakes great journeys and performs deeds requiring remarkable strength and cunning. As you journey through many episodes from the *Odyssey*, expect to encounter the following elements.

THE EPIC AT A GLANCE

EPIC HERO

- Possesses superhuman strength, craftiness, and confidence
- Is helped and harmed by interfering gods
- Embodies ideals and values that a culture considers admirable
- Emerges victorious from perilous situations



EPIC PLOT

Involves a long journey, full of complications, such as

- strange creatures
- large-scale events
- divine intervention
- treacherous weather



EPIC SETTING

- Includes fantastic or exotic lands
- Involves more than one nation



ARCHETYPES

All epics include archetypes—characters, situations, and images that are recognizable in many times and cultures:

- sea monster
- buried treasure
- epic hero
- wicked temptress
- suitors' contest
- loyal servant



EPIC THEMES

Reflect such universal concerns as

- courage
- a homecoming
- loyalty
- the fate of a nation
- beauty
- life and death

