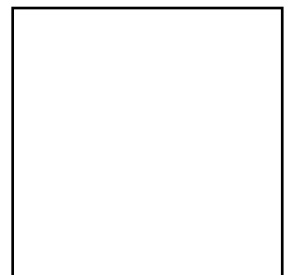
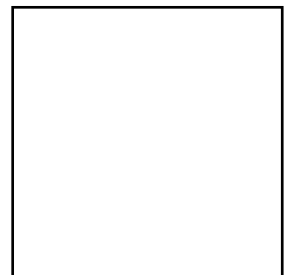
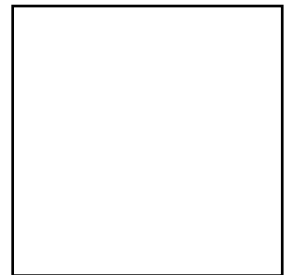


**Nelson Thornes
Distance Learning**

AS Classical Civilisation

Giles Dawson

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Nelson Thornes

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Key to icons used throughout this pack:



Writing



Hand-in activity (either by post or e-mail)

Introduction



Hello and welcome to AS Classical Civilisation

Over the next two years – if you follow the whole course, not just AS – we shall be studying aspects of the life and culture of the ancient Greeks, with in-depth consideration of: Homer’s *Odyssey* and Athenian comedy (this year); Greek tragedy and Socrates and Athens (next year).

Each week, during the 60-minute video conference, we shall review the unit you have worked on. It is essential that you **complete all the activities** in preparation for the video conference.

Assignments must be completed on time and given to your Link Teacher to post; or you can e-mail them directly, as Word attachments, to your tutor.

Distance learning

Studying a subject via distance learning of any sort is not a soft option. It is a full-time course, just like those for which you are probably provided with four hours per week tuition at school. We recommend that you allocate at least 4-5 hours of study time per week (in addition to the actual tutorial) and you must work on the Student File during your study periods and at home, if you are to benefit from the course.

In a sense, the Student File *is* the course. It will provide your main guide to the history, culture and the specific texts that you study. It also contains plenty of information about other sources of study material: websites, DVDs, specialist books and so on. The File has been written by experts in the field of Classical Civilisation who are also tutors on this course – one of the writers will probably be tutoring you.

The weekly, 60-minute tutorial is the focal point of the week. You will have spent much of your private study time preparing for the discussion which takes place in the tutorial. Above everything else, your tutor wants to hear what you have thought and what you have to say about the topic under discussion. The tutor is not there to ‘teach’ as such, but to bring out what you have discovered, and, where desirable, to set you thinking about the topic in different ways. The tutor will also sometimes give hints as to how to tackle the next Assignment, or major piece of written work.

This Classical Civilisation course is assessed entirely by examination. That means there is no coursework element. But naturally, in order to be able to tackle the exams confidently, you will need regular practice at the skills of analysis, comment and essay-writing which will be tested in the exams. This practice is what the Assignments, usually set every two weeks during the course, are intended to provide.

You are welcome to e-mail your Assignments to the tutor (preferably as a Word attachment). But do bear in mind that in the actual final exam you will be handwriting your work. There is a tendency nowadays for many 16–18-year-olds to lose touch with the skill of handwriting, so that when it comes to the exam they fail to do themselves justice. Your tutor will be reminding you of the importance of this during the January term, encouraging you to resume handwriting for at least some of your Assignments just in order to practise the skill again.

Try not to do all your work in isolation. You have fellow-students in your group, some of whom may already be friends. Find some time, in a private study period perhaps, to discuss one or two of the more taxing Activities in the topic you are

preparing. You might not agree, but just articulating your thoughts and practising your arguments will mean that you make even better use of the upcoming video-conference tutorial.

Finally – you will have your tutor’s e-mail address right from the start of the course. All NTDL tutors encourage their students to get in touch by this method if there is a problem with the work, or an issue that needs dealing with. Do always feel that you can use your tutor’s help in this way. You are guaranteed a reply within 24 hours, certainly during the working/school week.

The course

During the first year we shall study Homer’s *Odyssey* – the fountain-head of European literature, no less! – and Athenian comedy, with special reference to a very funny playwright, Aristophanes, and the history of his time.

At the end of this year you will sit two examinations, passing which will give you an AS in Classical Civilisation.

In the second year, we shall study Greek tragedy, focussing on four great plays by Sophocles and Euripides, and Socrates and Athens, an excellent complementary study to Athenian comedy the year before. The philosopher Socrates lived at the same time as Aristophanes – who even portrayed him, satirically, in one of his plays.

At the end of that year, you will sit a further two examinations, completing the full A-level qualification.

The classical world

There has been a great upsurge of interest in the world of the Greeks and Romans in recent years. The most visible and popular signs of this are feature films like *Troy*, *Alexander* and *300*, plus the two recent TV series entitled *Rome*. You must remember, when watching and no doubt enjoying such productions, that they are conceived mainly as entertainment – historical authenticity is, often, another matter.

Museum exhibitions, too, often feature the classical world: look out for what is showing at the British Museum in London, or regional museums which may be nearer where you live. A visit to the British Museum is in fact desirable at any time, just to see the great Greek sculptures and ceramics they have on permanent display.

Several popular historical novelists locate their plots and characters in Greece or Rome. Though her ‘Alexander’ books are now nearly 40 years old, Mary Renault is arguably still the best historical novelist in this field, and well worth investigating.

Greek plays – both tragic and comic – continue to be produced in English (or American) translations even today. As recently as autumn 2008 there was a production in English of Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* (one of the ‘A2’ tragedies) at the National Theatre in London; and Euripides’ *Medea* is often revived in translation.

Look out for the DVD of Pasolini’s *Edipo Re* (Oedipus the King) – not precisely the Sophocles play, but a brilliantly realised interpretation of this awesome Greek myth.

If you can actually manage to visit Greece during your A-level years, be sure to spend some time in Athens itself, visiting the site of the Theatre of Dionysus, the Parthenon on the Acropolis, and a couple of the major museums. The brand new Acropolis Museum is now open – a great piece of modern architecture, apart from the ancient treasures it contains.

On you go!

You might have had a taster lesson with your tutor towards the end of last summer term; or you might be coming entirely fresh to the course. Whichever: go to your work ‘with a will’, realising that – even more than for your ‘normal’ school subjects – your success will be very much down to your personal effort and organisation. Enjoy!

Topic 1: Homer's *Odyssey*

Unit 1: Book 1

On completion of this unit, you should:

- be familiar with the storyline and content of Book 1
- have an awareness of the **role of the gods** in the *Odyssey*
- be getting to grips with themes of **guest-friendship**
- have learnt something about **oral composition**

Introduction

Most of the literature that we study and enjoy today was written down at an early stage of its creation. We take that for granted. A poet, playwright or novelist might have ideas and possible characters in his/her mind for some time – then comes the moment at which some of the work is written down and so begins to take 'literary' form.

Homer's *Odyssey* is different. We have evidence – not least from features of the poem itself – that this is a collection of stories that was passed down by word of mouth and retained by memory from generation to generation, possibly for centuries, before it was written down and became a work of literature. We call this 'oral transmission'.

Oral poetry, in the days before Greek writing, was chanted to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument called a 'kitharis' or lyre. One of the first characters we meet in the *Odyssey*, called Phemius, is just such a poet-musician or bard. He is sitting in the palace at Ithaca, entertaining his audience with a song about how difficult it was for some of the Greeks trying to get back home after the great war against Troy. Almost certainly he has no manuscript, either of music or poetry, to help him remember the song: he is remembering it, and perhaps to some extent improvising it, as he goes along.

Activity

1

- 1 What would you expect to be the qualities of a good poet-musician of this kind?



2 What difficulties might such a bard have to overcome?

Being a bard

Your responses to Activity 1 may well have included ideas about memorising, repetition and vivid powers of description. Many scholars and others who have talked and written about Homer think it is quite possible that a bard of pre-Homeric times (say around 850 BC) would have been capable of reciting a poem the length of the *Odyssey*, over a period of several days, entirely from memory, with a little improvisation here and there.

Indeed, 70 years ago, an American scholar called Milman Parry tracked down an illiterate Serbian bard who did something very like that, for four hours per day over a period of two weeks.

So it is reasonable to suppose that, in the time of the 'germination' of the *Odyssey*, there was a profession of bard, whose members – no doubt serving a long apprenticeship in their youth – sang the stories about Odysseus as a favourite item of their repertoire. They must also have sung the story of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in order to produce the other great poem which became the *Iliad*.

Activity 2

Read the section on Oral Poetry in the introduction to the Penguin translation of the *Odyssey*, pp xxvii–xxxii.



Any good storyteller has to grab and then hold the attention of his listeners/ readers. It's time to see how this mystery-man, Homer, manages to do so – right at the start of his 12,000-line epic *Odyssey*.

Read the whole of Book 1, preferably at one sitting. Then re-read it in short sections, as guided by the Activities below.

Re-read Book 1, lines 1–21

Activity
3

1 What knowledge does the poet assume in his listeners/readers?



2 From these first few lines, how much of a role do you expect the gods to play in the story?

3 What impression are we given of the hero Odysseus?

Keeping the hero in reserve

One of the intriguing features of this work is that, once the poet has told us that the main focus of his story will be Odysseus and his troubles, we don't actually get to meet the hero in person until the start of Book 5! So it is there, in our Unit 3, that we shall begin to explore Odysseus' character and examine his situation.

You will surely form your own views about why Homer delays his hero's 'entrance' for one-sixth of the poem; so be thinking about that as you work through Books 1-4 / Units 1 and 2.

Meanwhile – enter the gods! No sooner has the poet outlined the story and the main characters, than we meet some of the divine participants.

Re-read Book 1, lines 22-96

Activity 4



1 What were the responsibilities of Zeus, Athene and Poseidon?

2 Is there anything in this passage that specially marks them out as divine?

3 How does Zeus show his superiority to the others?

Gods in the *Odyssey*

To the ancient Greeks, the gods were real. Storms and good weather alike were caused by them; the outcome of battles was decided by them; whether a warrior came safely home after a campaign was down to them. If they are to play a part in an epic story, we might think it obvious that they should show 'human' characteristics. But the scholar Moses Finley cleverly reminds us: "The humanisation of the gods was a step of astonishing boldness. To picture supernatural beings not as vague, formless spirits, or as monstrous shapes... but as men and women with human passions, demanded the greatest audacity and pride in one's own humanity." Nonetheless, though human-like in their passion, Homer's gods are definitely a breed apart! We'll encourage you to appreciate how much this is so, as we meet various gods at different stages of the story.

Re-read Book 1, lines 97–157

Activity

5



- 1 Why do you think Athene needs to appear in human guise here?

- 2 What is the first impression we get of Telemachus?

3 Despite this, what does he remember to do in respect of his guest?



Hospitality in Homer

In keeping with his early introduction of several major themes in the *Odyssey* – we’ll list them at the end of the Unit – Homer provides the first example of what the Greeks called ‘*xenia*’. This is a kind of code of hospitality: ‘How to Treat a Guest/Friend’. From the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* and other sources, we have the strong impression that there was an accepted way of behaving when someone – either previously known to you or not – turned up at your door:

- Welcome your new guest into your home
- Sit him down, give him refreshment
- Ask him politely who he is and what has brought him here
- Give him a comfortable bed and invite him to stay for as long as he likes
- Send him on his way with a lavish ‘guest-gift’.

Notice that this code only operates between men. Women do, of course, play a part in Homer’s world, not least in offering hospitality; indeed, two of the most important human female characters, Penelope and Eurycleia, appear as early as Book 1. But it is men who have all the power, and to whom relationships such as ‘*xenia*’ exclusively apply.

We shall soon find Telemachus in turn benefiting from the code of ‘*xenia*’ when he goes on his travels; then Odysseus himself (most notably in Books 7 and 8 at the court of King Alcinous) enjoys lavish hospitality; after which he is prepared to tell his hosts (and us!) the long and exciting story of his adventures before he landed for a seven-year stay with Calypso.

Re-read Book 1, lines 158–269



Activity 6

1 What do you think Athene is seeking to achieve by her appearance as Mentès?



2 How is she doing, so far?



We learnt very early on (p4 onwards) that Athene wants to help Odysseus return home at last. It would have been simple and easy for the poet then to take us straight to the island where Odysseus is languishing, and proceed with the story from there. Your first written Assignment (see Assignment Guide) will be about what you think Homer gains by focussing firstly on Telemachus rather than his father.

Re-read Book 1, lines 270–325

Activity
7



1 How far has Telemachus' attitude changed?



2 What does he continue to remember?



Activity
8

1 What kind of person is Penelope, to judge by her first appearance?



2 How does Telemachus surprise her?

3 What more do we learn about the Suitors – from their own lips?

Much of the best, most compelling writing in the *Odyssey* comes in the speeches put into the mouths of characters like Penelope, Eurycleia and the Suitors. No doubt it would have been possible to tell the whole story in the third person, with

entirely 'reported' speech; but how dull that would have been. From the earliest exchanges of the gods in Book 1 to the final reunion of Odysseus and Penelope in Book 23, Homer again and again shows his mastery of the 'dramatic' element of epic storytelling.

Your discussion of Book 1, via these Unit 1 Activities, will probably include mention of the two references to the revenge taken by Agamemnon's son Orestes on his father's murderer Aegisthus: lines 35–44 and lines 298–303. In fact these are just the first two of many references in the *Odyssey* to this contemporary story; look out for later references, especially Book 4 lines 522–550, where the story is told to Agamemnon's brother Menelaus in some detail; and Book 11 lines 404–461 where Agamemnon himself – in ghostly form – gets to tell his own story.

Activity 9



- Why do you think this story of a young man's revenge is meant to serve as an example to Telemachus?

Summary

In the course of studying Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, you should have learnt something about

- Oral composition
- The role of the gods
- Hospitality and guest-friendship

Looking ahead

The next Unit will cover your study of Books 2–4. None of these features specifically in the AS exam, but it is important for you to have an appreciation of them as the 'prologue' to Odysseus' story.

Topic 1: Homer's *Odyssey*

Unit 2: Books 2–4

On completion of this unit, you should

- be familiar with the storyline and content of Books 2–4
- have an awareness of the **social values** displayed in the *Odyssey*
- be getting to grips with concepts of **honour and revenge**

Your tutor will be setting Assignment 1.2 at the end of this unit.

Introduction

In Book 1 you met several of the main characters and were introduced to a number of the major themes of the *Odyssey*. This week we have to cover three books. This is the rest of that part of the poem which is sometimes called the 'Telemachy' because of its focus on Odysseus' son rather than the hero himself.

Read the whole of Book 2, then re-read it as guided by the Activities below.

Re-read Book 2, lines 1–259

Activity

1

- 1 What do we learn is so remarkable about the event taking place in this passage?



- 2 Why, do you think, does Telemachus want to keep his whereabouts secret from his mother?



Read the whole of Book 3, then respond to the Activities below.

Activity
3



- 1 How does Nestor's hospitality compare with that of Telemachus in Book 1?



- 2 Make notes on Nestor's version of the Agamemnon story, and be ready to compare it with the version coming up in Book 4.



Read the whole of Book 4, then re-read it as guided by the Activities below.

Re-read Book 4, lines 1–305

Activity 4

1 How does the hospitality at the start of this book differ from previous examples?



2 How does Helen come across on this, her first appearance?

3 How does her husband Menelaus seem with her?

4 In what ways is the absent Odysseus commemorated?

5 How do these stories enhance our knowledge of the hero?



By line 305 of Book 4, Telemachus and his new friend Peisistratus are well established in the royal palace at Sparta. We have met the intriguing Helen, 'cause' of the Trojan War, now comfortably re-established in her original place as Menelaus' queen, apparently forgiven.

Memories of, and associations with, the war still linger on – and, for the fourth time in the poem so far, reference has been made to the fate of Agamemnon on his return home to Mycenae, and to what happened to his murderer Aegisthus years later. There will be yet another – and more detailed – reference to this story later in Book 4. Look out for it when you reach lines 522–538. Look out also for the benefit which Menelaus is told he can expect, just by virtue of being Helen's husband (lines 568–569). Maybe this is why he took her back so generously...!

Re-read Book 4, lines 306–624

Activity
5



1 Can you explain Menelaus' strong reaction to Telemachus' plight (lines 332–346)?



2 How does Menelaus exemplify the art of the storyteller in the shaping of his reminiscences?

3 Hospitality: what do you note about the proposed guest-gift (lines 615-619)?



Re-read Book 4, lines 625–847

Activity
6



1 How does this passage throw more light on the relationship between Penelope and Euryycleia?



2 How does Homer cause the reader to sympathise with Penelope here?

3 How does Athene show her support for Penelope as well as Telemachus?



Social values in the *Odyssey*

One of the many fascinating aspects of the *Odyssey* – especially once the reader gets to know the poem *really* well – is how much the content reflects life in the society lived in by ‘Homer’ (whoever he was!) in around 750 BC, and how much it reflects life as lived hundreds of years before the writing down of the poem. After all, the storyline follows the return home of a Greek king following the war between the Greeks and Troy – which we might take to be based to some extent on historical events of around 1250 BC. According to the *Odyssey* itself, stories about the heroes of the Trojan War began to be composed and sung almost immediately after the war – if we are to take the scene with the bard Phemius in Book 1, and later scenes in Book 4 (at Menelaus’ court) and Book 8 (among the Phaeacians) as in any way authentic.

‘Values’ is a loaded term, and (as it happens) a very topical one these days. Prime ministers who wish to make their mark as moral guardians of the state often resort to talk about the values of the country they govern – what they are, what they ought to be, how they should be communicated and transmitted.

Such elements of spin and propaganda are very far from the world of the *Odyssey*. We must study what the characters in the story do, and especially how they behave towards each other, in order to build up a picture of social values at the time. We have already said something about guest-friendship (Book 1); you have just read part of the poem which includes more on this theme (Books 3 and 4) and you should look out for yet more in Books 6–8 (the Phaeacians) and Books 14 and 15 (in Eumaeus’ hut). This is all largely about the private area of behaviour, although it has a public dimension in that courtiers and other ‘spectators’ are sometimes able to view at first hand how their rulers treat guests and strangers.

What about the political and legal organisation of these societies? How much does Homer tell us, or at least imply, about this area of life? Most memorable perhaps, when we reach Book 9 (the Cyclops), is the picture of a society with no organisation and no laws, where each family lives and acts independently of everyone else. Every other country or city that Odysseus or Telemachus visits, shows a highly developed civilisation, with a social hierarchy having a royal family at the top. Just don't expect to find any democracy operating in the world of the *Odyssey* – you won't meet this until we study the mature Athenian society of the late fifth century BC later in this AS course.

Let's start with Ithaca, Odysseus' kingdom and the scene in which Books 1 and 2 are set. Look back quickly at any passages in those two books which give some indication of how the Ithacans were governed, and what this means for the health of the country in the prolonged absence of Odysseus.

Activity 7

Write a short account, based on what you have read in Books 1 and 2, of how Ithaca was organised.



Honour and revenge

'Was it not your idea that Odysseus should return and take revenge on these men?' (Zeus to Athene, Book 5, lines 21–22). Looked at in one way, the *Odyssey* is all about the build-up to an act of revenge. Odysseus, though diverted and delayed many times, must get home in order to reclaim his kingdom and punish the Suitors who have virtually taken over his home, and are on the point of seeing one of their number accepted as Penelope's second husband. Will our hero make it back to Ithaca in time...?

You have seen (partly via Activity 7 above) that in the king's absence, the political situation in Ithaca seems confused and ridden with strife. In this context, Michael Clarke suggests that Odysseus' vengeance can be seen as 'the heroic race asserting supremacy over later and lesser men' – i.e. none of the Suitors is worthy to succeed such a hero and take his place in Penelope's bed. In fact this is just how Menelaus, in Book 4 lines 335–340, looks forward to the situation of Odysseus' return:

It's just as if a deer had put her two little unweaned fawns to sleep in a mighty lion's den and gone to range the high ridges and the grassy dales for pasture. Back comes the lion to his lair, and the fawns meet a grisly fate – as will the Suitors at Odysseus' hand....a swift death and a sorry wedding there would be for all!

Indeed, Telemachus repeats these lines in Book 17, an excellent example of the kind of re-cycling or *repetition* that occurs at many points in the epic poem. But the main point is that the hero's eventual conduct is anticipated by others of his kind, and that the expectation is upon him to act as an avenger of wrong done to him and his nearest and dearest.

Clarke goes on to say that 'the punishment of the Suitors is more than an act of reciprocal vengeance – it is an enactment of absolute and timeless justice'. You may like to consider this view later in the course, in the light of how Odysseus' story develops.

Summary

In the course of studying Books 2–4 of the *Odyssey*, you should have learnt something about

- Social values
- Honour and revenge

Looking ahead

The next Unit will cover your study of Books 5 and 6, both of which are prescribed in the exam specification. Soon after the beginning of Book 5 – at last! – we meet Odysseus himself.



Assignment

See the Assignment Guide for details of this.

1.2

Your tutor will give you a deadline by which you should have sent Assignment 1.2 to the tutor by the agreed method.

