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The Odyssey: Filibooks Classics (Illustrated)



Synopsis

The Odyssey is an ancient epic poem by Homer. The story revolves around the Greek hero Ulysses (alternatively Odysseus) and his journey home after the fall of Troy. The poem is fundamental to the modern Western canon. It is believed to have been composed near the end of the 8th century BC, somewhere in Ionia, the Greek coastal region of Anatolia. Samuel Butler's translation of the original Greek into English is one of the seminal achievements of Butler's authorship and a classic of English literature.

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Customer Reviews

Fagles's translation of THE ODYSSEY in the Penguin edition is an almost perfect act of publishing. The translation itself manages to be enormously readable, highly poetic, and extremely accurate, all at the same time. The Introduction by Bernard Knox should serve as a model for all scholars who are called upon to write critical introductions for classic works of literature. And the book design is extraordinary; this edition of Homer's classic is easily one of the most attractive paperback books in my library. I had read this once before in translation (in the old Rieu version), and then later translated much of it in a second year Greek class. But in neither instance did I enjoy it as much as

reading the Fagles's translation. Aristotle did not think that people should study philosophy too early in life, and perhaps that is also true of reading Homer. Part of me feels that we make a mistake in our education systems by making students read THE ODYSSEY before they are in a position to appreciate it. If one looks through the reviews here, a very large number of very negative reviews by a lot of high school students can be found. I find this unfortunate. In part I regret that we are forcing younger readers to read this book before they have fully matured as readers. Perhaps the book and the students themselves would be better served if we allowed them time to grow a bit more as readers before asking them to tackle Homer. THE ODYSSEY is so enormously enjoyable (at least for this adult reader) that it is easy to forget just how very old it is. What impresses me is how readable it is, despite its age. There are very, very few widely read works older than THE ILIAD and THE ODYSSEY. And the gap between how entertaining these works are and those that come before them is gigantic.

Most everybody knows about the Odyssey of Homer (the story and all that), so this review is about this particular translation by Stanley Lombardo. You have the classic English verse translations (Chapman, Pope, Cowper) and the classic prose translations (Butcher and Lang, Palmer), then you have the twentieth century crowd (Lattimore, Fitzgerald, Mandelbaum, Fagles, Rieu, Rouse, Shewring etc...) Some of these are verse and some prose, some literal and some poetic. Some are easy to read and some more difficult. Lombardo's translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey are somewhat unusual in that they are both verse and very clear and easy to read. Very much modern-day speech. Not that Fagles or Fitzgerald or Mandelbaum, for instance, (all verse translations) are difficult to read, but Lombardo's verse translation is really in a different category. His translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey sort of stand alone in their simple style and may be worth reading for that reason alone. I think also there is an unselfconsciousness in Lombardo's effort - and attitude - as well as a "very well then hang me, devils" confidence that comes through. Fresh, quick, engaging, spare, alive (typical words used by professional/academic reviewers for this translation...) An interesting touch by Lombardo is whenever Homer goes into one of his celebrated similes or metaphors Lombardo puts them into italics and sets them apart in the text. There are more of these in the Iliad than the Odyssey, but it is interesting to read them separate this way. He uses very much 'man on the street' expressions, and his verse reads very quickly, or, 'lightly' like a clear stream flowing easily over stones. I don't want to give the impression these are simplified versions of Homer's epics.

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