September 23: *Odyssey*, Books 5-9

>One of the first things I noted as interesting was the similarity between Odysseus’s balancing act with Nausikaa and Penelope’s with the suitors. Odysseus has to essentially flirt enough so that Nausikaa will help him, but not so much that she believes he is available. Likewise, Penelope must protect her son and keep the peace by implying that she might still marry, but keep them at bay long enough for Odysseus or even Telemachos to take over. It seems that Penelope did it better than Odysseus, because he gets offered Nausikaa’s hand in marriage by her father, and she is obviously in love with him. (To answer another question about Nausikaa: Odysseus compares her to Artemis because Artemis is the goddess of fertility and virginity—he shows that he respects her purity.)

I was also generally amazed by Odysseus’s carefully planned trickery—sometimes he seemed to think he knew better than the gods! Overall, however, everything seems to work out. His deceit of the Cyclops is particularly funny, especially the “Nobody” tactic (reminds me of the ‘Knock Knock’ joke where the person says “Nobody Who?” and is left hanging). However, in his pride Odysseus forgets the importance of deceit and says his name, causing the wrath of Poseidon—not the last time his pride will overtake him, as seen in the games at Phaiakia.

I was indignant along with Kalypso that men are allowed to cheat but women should stay faithful. It might be the culture but I just hate it. (Although Helen has cheated and she isn’t punished.)

Lastly, I have no idea what Penelope has that the others don’t, except for her shared ability to manipulate others the way Odysseus does. Makes me wonder if they ever manipulated each other, or if it cancels out in some way—I’d imagine that Penelope is the only one who can see through Odysseus’s tricks and vice versa?

—I like that Odysseus cried when Demodocus sings because it takes away from the stereotypical nature that we discussed last class about the "trickster." I believe, first and foremost, Odysseus is the well known hero of this time. The fact that this strong man is able to cry and reminisce on his experience through war shows me that he is genuine and possesses other characteristics than just those that "get him out" of situations. He also does things "the hard way" with integrity and bravery.

The pain of slavery is felt in the hearts of all mankind no matter the region, race, or time period. On page 135 the woman is torn away from her family to "hard work". She loses her rights as a human and is treated a an animal, torn from her husband without sympathy where as a few days earlier she would have hospitably brought her attackers into her home and fed them as one human to another. How does the transition from human to slave take place so rapidly and certainly?
>Adultery is prevalent in this tale. Odysseus cheats on Penelope repeatedly until he "grows sick of Kalypso". Yet Penelope is being frowned upon for just manipulating men. Why is there such a double standard? I am turned off by Odysseus. Homer describes him as "resourceful" over and over again. I find this resourcefulness to be plain manipulation. Why did the Greeks praise him as a hero? What is Homer's definition of a hero and how does it compare to our standards today? I know the standards of a hero today are of some one who is selfless and Odysseus seems nothing but selfish. His journey back to his wife now seems to be pointless. So what then is his motive to returning home; he wants to be worshipped as a hero.

>While I was reading, I was surprised to find Odysseus to be a far more complex character than I had originally assumed he might be. From the beginning, instead of Homer portraying a brave, strong hero, Odysseus is introduced to the reader (or listener) pouting on the beach - a pathetic man lamenting his imprisonment by a beautiful goddess who is offering him eternal life. Later on in Book IX, Odysseus is again "shamed for tears running down his face" over a song sung by a bard that references his fight with Achilles. Once again, I am not one to generalize either sex, but for an Epic Hero, especially one who was written about when he was, he seems to embody some very different characteristics.

>I find it interesting to note Odysseus's relationship with his men and how it is portrayed in the story. Very little is given in the story directly by Odysseus to his men other than a basic summary of 'I said this and then they did it'. This is confusing in a way that one of the most vital parts to the Odyssey epic is the fact that the master here uses his cunning and guileful language to force his men to remain at sea or do what he wills while out. It is difficult in when looking at these interactions alone to see how Odysseus receives such a notorious label as a deceiver or trickster.

>I find immortality to be a rather interesting issue, specifically, in epics such as the Odyssey. However, what truly caught my eye was that, in this case, immortality is tangible in this particular story. I have found that often in similar literature immortality is not tangible. Often a motivating factor, it is used as a bribe in this particular epic, which surprised me in a way. Furthermore, Penelope's role in this novel has taken a turn in my mind. Why has Odysseus not fallen into the bribes and the open arms of all these exotic women? There seems to be another part of Penelope that has not been noticed as of yet.

>After finishing the most recent reading, I was most struck by the way in which the gods handled themselves politically. I thought it was incredibly interesting that Zeus didn't just tell the other gods and goddesses to leave Odysseus alone while he traveled home. It seemed really counterproductive to have Athena and Poseidon trying to battle it out with Odysseus at the center while Zeus could make the final decision. Why must Zeus hold a council while Poseidon isn't there and why doesn't he just tell Calypso to quiet done from the get go? It just seems ridiculous that Zeus would take the time to free Odysseus from Calypso only to send him out onto the seas and have Poseidon go after him. The whole situation made it seem as if Zeus maybe didn't have as much control as he puts off. With Athena flying around and helping
Odysseus and Poseidon doing everything in his power to hurt Odysseus, Zeus seems horribly out of control. For the first time, I saw a glimpse of Zeus not as an all powerful and all domineering god, but instead as a sort of king, surrounded by those who could overthrow him. He seemed wary of meddling in the affairs of Poseidon too much and it seemed as if this was because he feared him in some way.

>Athena is really fond of Odysseus. Why?
- "...since the nymph was no longer pleasing to him." Was she ever pleasing to him?
- What is an adze?
- Isn’t Odysseus a bit too old for Nausikaa? He calls her a “young palm”
- Surprising that Nausikaa admits her love for Odysseus to him.
- Incest: Alkinoos and his wife are related.
- Odysseus speaks very, almost too, highly of himself to the Phaiakians.
- There is a lot of recounting in these books.
- Why did Odysseus not listen to Circe?
- How could Alkinoos want to offer his daughter up to someone he doesn’t even know? It’s a weird concept to think about.
- Does Odysseus know that Athena is the little girl? For a little girl, she talks in a very sophisticated manner

The series of questions you gave us on the Book 6 interest me. (Odysseus and Nausikaa)

While he is naked and therefore prone to be regarded as a "monster", he sets up the relationship between himself and Nausikaa as sexually neutral: "You are like Artemis" -- Why not "Aphrodite"? Aphrodite is the goddess of sexual beauty, while Artemis is the 'huntress' goddess; "a young palm" -- not immature; "Your future husband is a lucky man" -- Odysseus appreciates her beauty but avoids a possible danger of suggesting that he wants to possess her beauty by saying about "her future husband", the 'owner' of her beauty, therefore keeping Odysseus away from claiming his husbandhood to Aphrodite.

Before chapters 5-9, I had a set idea of what I thought Odysseus would be like; based on his reputation with others, he would be strong, brave, undefeated, and loving. Strangely enough, after meeting Odysseus, my expectations lowered a bit. Of course, he seems to be a decent man; he was very polite when coming across Nausikaa, being sure to respect her boundaries despite his urge to touch her knee, and he was also very brave at the party, showing up his competitors in nearly every sport (but only after his ego had been deflated). The thing that made me question his almost god-like status was that in every troublesome situation presented throughout these 5 chapters, he receives some sort of aid from a god/goddess to prevent him from dying...or he ends up surviving based on pure luck.

For example, when he retells his past, he mentions that the majority of his comrades met up with Lotus-Eaters. By a stroke of good luck, he did not, leaving him unable to forget his homeland as the rest of his friends did. Also, while Leukothea helped him out quite a bit during his oceanic conflict, Athena nearly assisted him his entire journey back. It just made me think; could Odysseus’s reputation possibly be based solely on other people making him look good?
On page 151, Polyphemos prays to Poseidon so that Odysseus's homecoming is delayed. Yet if he harbored ill feelings toward Odysseus why not pray that his homecoming never comes, that he is either forever stranded of killed at sea? What else is curious is how the Cyclops outlines specifically how Odysseus is to come back to Ithaka if he should have the opportunity to; this was a bit silly to me. Though all of the conditions that Polyphemos set forth were damaging to Odysseus's reputation, I cannot understand why that was in any way important to the one-eyed beast.

On page 126, Athene likens herself to a man and exchanges kind and encouraging words with Odysseus at the Phaiakians' contest. I've understood the necessity in all of the transformations thus far but do not understand this one. If the necessity in becoming this man had anything to do with restoring Odysseus's confidence or happiness, then why did she not just instill those feelings within Odysseus as she has the power to do?

This reading was about how Odysseus escapes. It describes how prolonged his 'homecoming' was. Athene has helped Odysseus a lot; she helped him at Troy and she is helping him return home. All of this was prophesized and Odysseus is just living it. I understand that Odysseus was angered by the Cyclops, but it was very childish and silly of him to shout out to him in vengeance. Odysseus had a clever scheme until that point, in which Odysseus angered the Cylops and he prayed that Odysseus endures great tragedies. I was also amazed by the firm stance Odysseus took in the home of Alkinoos when he refused to participate in any games. He did a good job turning the situation around to make his host feel honored again, but that was a risk he should not have taken. It also is understandable that he is longing to go home and lamenting his tragedies, but "much-enduring great Odysseus" needs to be more cautious.

Odysseus is frequently described as godlike, but what are his attributes that are of a god? He only appears to be godlike when he is bathed, richly clothed, and under Athene's mist or alteration.