



The Odyssey: A Dramatic Retelling of Homer's Epic

Simon Armitage (Adaptation) , Homer

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In this new verse adaptation, Armitage has recast Homer's epic as a series of bristling dramatic dialogues: between gods and men; between no-nonsense Captain Odysseus and his unruly companions; and between subtle Odysseus and a range of shape-shifting adversaries.

The Odyssey: A Dramatic Retelling of Homer's Epic Details

Date : Published April 17th 2008 by W. W. Norton Company (first published January 1st 2004)

ISBN : 9780393330816

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Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Plays, Classics, Poetry, Fiction, Drama, Fantasy, Mythology, Book Club



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From Reader Review The Odyssey: A Dramatic Retelling of Homer's Epic for online ebook

Whit says

An interesting retelling of the Odyssey done in a script format, transcribed from a radio performance. It took me a bit to figure out why things were out of order in the story's plot, and I thought it was strange to start from the middle of the story and do the first half in a sort of flashback storytelling. I did, however, enjoy most of the characterizations that you don't normally enjoy in a traditional telling of this story. You are able to see more of the suitors and, while they are still hardly endearing men, you begin to see them as individual entities rather than just all the same. The scenes with the gods on Olympus felt...strange. They seemed strangely placed and I often found myself wishing they didn't exist; I'd have rather seen only their interactions with the mortals with a story focused more on the intelligence and machinations of the humans.

Maggie says

I loved Armitage's version of Gawain, so I'm giving this a try. I still need to read the original (or a translation of the original, since I can't understand Ancient Greek). Otherwise it feels like I know only Weird Al versions, know what I mean?

Added:

This was somehow less satisfying than Gawain, perhaps because I'm that further detached from the original tale (in Gawain the original text followed you from page to page). I love how effectively his poetry works from the standpoint of a radio play, but I'm not necessarily sure that his work moved me much.

Nikki says

It's funny to think I didn't enjoy Armitage's work the first time I came across it. I think it was his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that changed that. He brought something fresh and dynamic to the poem, which made it a very different reading experience to other translations and adaptations. He's done the same here with *The Odyssey*. This is *not* a translation, or even a completely faithful adaptation: I can think of several places where it departs from the original poem.

However, he brings that same dynamism to Homer's voice as he did to the Gawain-poet's. Some of the turns of phrase still ring perfectly true, mixed in with the modern vernacular he uses as well. I'm sure it drives purists crazy, but I set aside any professional qualms and just read it for enjoyment, and thought that he rendered some scenes beautifully -- more true to the spirit of the original than any stuffy translation, too, I think.

If you want to read *The Odyssey* without reading the phrase 'rosy-fingered dawn', and you don't want to worry about Greek customs (*xenia*, for example), this makes it very easy to follow the story and understand the basic motivations of all the characters. It has a robust beauty to it that wouldn't work in translating, say, Vergil, but I think in translating Homer it works very well.

Steve Tetreault says

What it's about: This is the tale of Odysseus, a hero of the Trojan War, as he and his crew attempt to return to their home of Ithaca. It takes 20 years, and not because they couldn't read the map. While Odysseus is trying to make his way home, his wife, Penelope, is besieged by suitors who want her hand in marriage (and her lands and riches), since her husband must be dead. And their son, Telemachus, is in danger of being killed by Penelope's suitors. Will the Greek gods upon Olympus help Odysseus and his family, or take their revenge against the humans who have at times thwarted them?

What I thought: This is an interesting adaptation of the original version of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Armitage was commissioned to create a radio play version of Homer's work, and he's done some interpreting and condensing along the way. Because this is essentially a script meant to be heard, rather than read, it sort of captures the spirit of the original, which was meant to be memorized and recited for audiences. But Armitage has removed the narrator and made almost the entire piece dialogue. He's pulled some clever tricks to make this work throughout the story, particularly in the way he's twisted up the timeline and created framing devices that allow him to tell the story partially in the present and partially in flashback.

Why I rated it like I did: Armitage has done some clever work with his adaptation. He's made a very accessible version of what can be a daunting classic. I remember hating having to read passages of *The Odyssey* when I was in high school; I'm hoping this version is more palatable to my students.

Douglas Adamson says

Simon Armitage's interpretation of Homer's *Odyssey* brings this classic in reach of those unschooled in Greek literature. It is written with wit and style and introduces us to the ancient Gods and the many foes that Odysseus has to do battle on his return from Troy. Meet Calypso, Circe and Cyclops and be entranced by the Sirens. The epic story is packed with wisdom and sage-like advice on the human condition that is as applicable today as it was when written millennia ago. Armitage should be congratulated for making this wonderful tale of heroism and ever-lasting love so accessible to any reader.

Carlee says

I actually really liked this book even though it isn't something I would normally go for. It conveys the same messages as the original *Odyssey* but, is more interesting and modern. Definitely would recommend.

Leah says

So, I had to read this for class. But instead of doing what I did in high school and being all like, "The teacher assigned this book, it must be sooo boring," and not giving it a chance, I tried to pretend that I was reading it because I wanted to. I'm so glad I did that.

I have to say, this is now one of my favorite books. It's a very easy read, Simon Armitage did a great job with that. I had to read parts of the older, denser version of The Odyssey years ago and it was like pulling teeth and I didn't even remember what I'd read. But this one is great. It's also got some pretty funny parts here and there. I found myself reading some of the lines sarcastically and that made it even better. The plot moves fairly quickly too which kept me interested. In my opinion, up until the very end it teaches some pretty good morals if you think about it. I will let you figure those out and decide for yourself. There are beautiful metaphors throughout this book as well. I usually tend to prefer books loaded with details, but the vast majority of this one is dialogue/monologue and there are very few descriptions. However, this actually didn't bother me at all. It pretty much forces the reader to imagine things for themselves, and you can't get caught up in/distracted by the details (which can sometimes make reading pretty tedious for me).

To be perfectly honest, the only reason I didn't give this a five star rating is because I have been much more caught up in other books than this one. I did have a hard time putting this one down when I was reading it, and several times I chose to read it instead of another book that I'm reading (not for school), but I know I could have been even into it than that. I may even change my rating later on. We'll see... I'm sure I'll read this again too. It's definitely worth the time!

Beka says

This excellent adaptation of Homer's epic tale is incredibly readable; once I started I basically couldn't stop! Armitage adapts the epic poem with incredible skill, to make a highly enjoyable play. I usually don't enjoy reading scripts, as I find it hard to engage, but for anyone familiar with the ancient text, it is refreshing to read this new adaptation.

Of course, when adapting such a lengthy text, it is impossible to include everything, but I would have liked to see some scenes from books 4, and Telemachus' encounters with Menelaus and Nestor included in the text. To me, Telemachus' maturation into a man, enabling him to be ready for the return of his father, is an important theme of the Odyssey, and could have been developed more in Armitage's play.

Saying this, I particularly enjoyed Act II of the play, with Odysseus' retelling of his trials over the previous 10 years. I felt Armitage's use of both direct dialogue taking place 'in the past', and returns to the scene in the palace of the Phaeacians, was highly effective.

I would recommend this book to anyone looking for a fresh take on Homer's ancient text, although for those unfamiliar, I would always recommend reading a more traditional translation of the poem first, in particular Lattimore's.

Stuart says

A solid retelling of the ODYSSEY, though Armitage's lacks the linguistic brilliance and scope of Derek Walcott's stage version. This version is obviously more intended to be read aloud or done on the radio (as it was) than be staged, and it moves with a cinematic quality that allows for narrative progression that keeps Odysseus at the center, though somewhat at the loss of Telemachus as a hero in his own right. That said, a number of the lesser characters feel much more developed in this version, especially Amphinomus, Arete, Polites, Eurylochus, and Circe, giving those readers familiar with the Odyssey some refreshing perspectives to think about. Another interesting twist is treating Athena as a kind of secondary lead, and she and Zeus are given their own arc, with an unusually human view of their father/daughter relationship. The end of the story is particularly poignant, as most versions of the Odyssey tend to be, with Zeus having the final words,

Athena the final actions.

Bry says

I really enjoyed the *Odyssey* when I read it in college and I loved this adaptation. Armitage did a brilliant job of adapting the story, condensing the action, and updating the language while staining the emotion and beauty of the epic poem. FYI this adaptation was done to make a radio dramatization of the story.

I was afraid it would be too dumbed down - too simple - when the original was so complex, detailed, and beautiful. Thankfully that was not the case. Obviously it is simplified just by converting it to today's English, but BBC was totally right in bringing on board a poet to do the adaptation and not just your normal author. Armitage has a way with pacing and words that does justice to the story, makes it easy for the reader, and still so beautiful.

Highly recommended!

Dergrossest says

The *Odyssey* was probably my favorite book as child, with all of its fantastic adventures, memorable monsters and beautiful women. And Odysseus - wily, tough, but so very human Odysseus - was always my favorite hero. While I have returned to this story many times, rereading various translations, watching the movie adaptions and listening to Cream sing of the Tales of Brave Ulysses a thousand times, this recent adaptation has breathed fresh life into the story.

Armitage is a poet by trade, as you can tell by his lyrical script for a theatrical version of the story, which was actually performed on the BBC in 2004. As was the case with his excellent translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, he is a beautiful writer who treads carefully between modernity and anachronism. More importantly, he still manages to stay true to the themes of the ancient Greeks. His Gods are mighty, terrible and meddling, but refreshingly non-omnipotent. His humans are deeply flawed, or harshly punished if they are not, but so much more interesting and ultimately important than the Gods can ever hope to be. The chapter in which Odysseus travels to the land of the dead and communes with fallen brothers-in-arms and family members is particularly illustrative of this exultation and fascination with man himself: Odysseus' sense of loss, and the tragic desolation of the dead, which the Gods can never experience, was absolutely devastating and an amazing piece of writing.

My only word of caution is that I believe that this book is best enjoyed by those who already know the story and, maybe, have already read one of the previous translations. However, even if you haven't, it is simply too good a story to pass up. I loved this book and highly recommend it to all.

Gabrielle says

This radio play, which was created in 2004 at the time of the Athens Olympics, is a masterful retelling of *The Odyssey*. The play fully uses the evocative power of the radio medium. The story gains weight when it is, in itself, a narrative, meaning that the second episode, where Odysseus entertains the court with the story

of his travels, is made more powerful through being told to us, the listener, rather than told.

I have only recently begun listening to audioplays such as this one, but I will make sure to try more of them.

Stella says

This is a brilliant and funny retelling of the Odyssey. It is enjoyable to read and characters come to life through the simple language.

Andrew says

Great resource for class! It has some really fun moments to read together as a group. Plus, the text served nicely to illuminate some of the more complex dynamics in the poem.

Leila Anani says

This is a cracking version of Homer's Odyssey, replacing densely translated, turgid prose with punchy poetic dialogue in a way that only Simon Armitage can.

Fast paced and exciting this reminded me of all the reasons I loved the Odyssey in the first place. Having the whole thing in dialogue gives it a real sense of immediacy and the ease of language makes it very accessible and a great way to introduce new readers to the wonder of Homer.

If I'm to be critical - sometimes it's a little too fast. Scene changes are abrupt and some scenes are glossed over - The Lotus Eaters and cannibals get a mere blink whilst other episodes get far more detail. Also gone is the repetition and wonderful Homeric epithets such as the wine dark sea and gleaming eyed goddess - this takes away some of the magic somehow and makes it more down to earth.

Saying that Armitage has done a stunning job with this and it stands up proudly to things like Heaney's Beowulf, Hughes' Tales from Ovid and of course Armitage's other works, particularly Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Last Days of Troy.

Recommended.
