



The Odyssey of Homer: Translated by T.E. Lawrence

By Homer, T. E. Lawrence

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The Odyssey of Homer: Translated by T.E. Lawrence By Homer, T. E. Lawrence

Colonel T.E. Lawrence was one of the most flamboyant figures of his era, known throughout the Western world as Lawrence of Arabia. Glory-seeking yet self-effacing, this soldier, archaeologist, spy, and scholar was a war hero whom Winston Churchill called "one of the greatest men of our time." Less well known were his abilities as historian and author, which won him the admiration of such writers as Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden, and Robert Graves.

While stationed on a desolate R.A.F. outpost on the fringes of the Karachi desert in India, Lawrence began his acclaimed translation of *The Odyssey*. He devoted himself to the project for four years, and during that time he came to feel that he was uniquely suited to the task. "I have hunted wild boars and watched wild lions," he wrote. "Built boats and killed many men. So I have odd knowledges that qualify me to understand *The Odyssey*, and odd experiences that interpret it to me." Relying on an innate sense of language and truly gifted abilities at translation, Lawrence transformed Homer's *Odyssey* into mellifluous prose. The result was an overnight bestseller. *The New York Herald Tribune* hailed it "perhaps the most interesting translation of the world's most interesting book," and *The New York Times* called it "ruggedly and roughly masculine" and added that it "gives a vividness to the story beyond any other text familiar to us."

Lawrence breathes new life into the adventures of Odysseus, smoothing the reader's path through a fantastic array of monsters, temptresses, gods, and goddesses. For a generation of readers accustomed to verse translations of Homer, this bold and vivid prose version is well worth rediscovery.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The point of comparison between these two volumes is that neither will be well received by serious classicists. There have been at least ten previous editions of Lawrence's prose translation of the *Odyssey*. When it was first published in 1932, Lawrence's admittedly "free" translation was criticized by many as being too fast and loose with the original text. This and the colloquialisms that bothered critics then are all the more pronounced 60 years later. Nor does Bernard Knox give any discernible reason for the reissue of the work in his preface to the volume. Billed as a rediscovery, this is just new packaging of an old translation. Believing that the topography and the meteorology of the Mediterranean does not mesh with its descriptions in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, Wilkens presents a compelling argument that moves the Trojan War to Western Europe and Troy to East Anglia near Cambridge. The "Trojan War," he contends, was actually a Celtic battle that was fought hundreds of years before Homer's time and passed down to him by oral tradition. Wilkens redraws the map of the Trojan War, justifying each location with archaeological evidence or etymological analysis of place-names. The volume makes for interesting reading, albeit somewhat frustrating for one who is a Homerian by enthusiasm but not scholarship because most of the cited references are in languages other than English (this work has been translated from French). Libraries without Lawrence's translation can do without it, and only large libraries will want to consider adding Wilkens.

- Marjorie F. MacKenzie, *Washington State Univ. Libs., Pullman*

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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: Greek

About the Author

Bernard Knox is the retired Director of the Center for Hellenistic Studies and one of America's foremost classics scholars. His most recent volume is *Essays Ancient and Modern*.

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