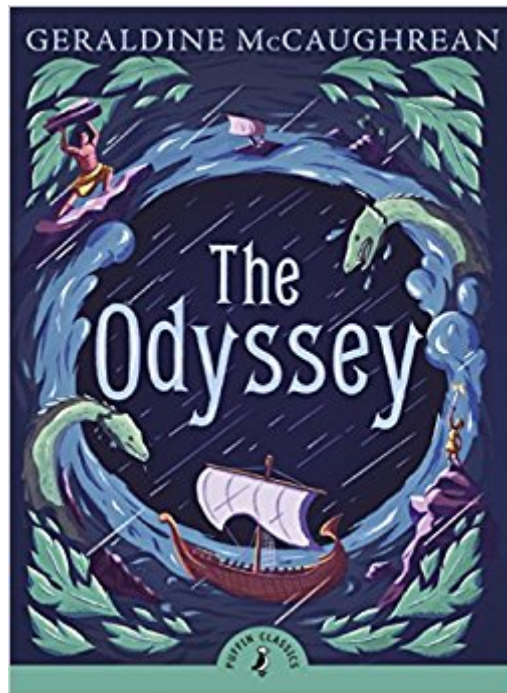




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# The Odyssey (Puffin Classics)



## Synopsis

The epic journey of Odysseus, the hero of Ancient Greece... After ten years of war, Odysseus turns his back on Troy and sets sail for home. But his voyage takes another ten years and he must face many dangers - Polyphemus the greedy one-eyed giant, Scylla the six-headed sea monster and even the wrath of the gods themselves - before he is reunited with his wife and son. Brilliantly retold by award-winning author, Geraldine McCaughrean.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• “[Robert Fitzgerald’s translation is] a masterpiece . . . An Odyssey worthy of the original.” •  
• “The Nation” • “[Fitzgerald’s Odyssey and Iliad] open up once more the unique greatness of Homer’s art at the level above the formula; yet at the same time they do not neglect the brilliant texture of Homeric verse at the level of the line and the phrase.” • “The Yale Review” • “[In] Robert Fitzgerald’s translation . . . there is no anxious straining after mighty effects, but rather a constant readiness for what the occasion demands, a kind of Odyssean adequacy to the task in hand, and this line-by-line vigilance builds up into a completely credible imagined world.” • “from the Introduction by Seamus Heaney

Geraldine McCaughrean has written over 160 other books, including *A Little Lower Than Angels*, which won the Whitbread Book of the Year Children’s Novel Award in 1987, *A Pack of Lies*, which

won the Guardian Prize and Carnegie Medal in 1989 and Gold Dust, which won the Beefeater Children's Novel Award in 1994. She has written retellings of notoriously tricky classics including El Cid, the Epic of Gilgamesh, Moby Dick and The Pilgrim's Progress. In 2004, she won a competition to write the sequel to J M Barrie's Peter Pan. And in 2006, Peter Pan in Scarlet was published to great acclaim.

Before I begin, a disclaimer. This review is not written to help you decide whether to read the Iliad. It is to help you decide which translation of the Iliad to choose. In short: In 2015, this is the best translation to get. Get it in paper, not Kindle. Peter Green states in the introduction that he is following in the footsteps of Lattimore, to preserve as much of the poem in Greek--wording, sentence structure, meter, and so on--in English, but to also make it declaimable. It is a translation to be read aloud. Thus, it is also a challenge to Fagles's translation, among whose virtues is how well it works as an audiobook. To review, there are several major verse modern translations of the Iliad. Lattimore's is closest to the original Greek, and for undergraduate work can substitute for the original well enough. There is the Fagles translation, in modern free verse, is wonderful to read aloud. The Fagles Odyssey was on Selected Shorts once, and for a long time after I insisted that there was no other worthwhile contemporary translation of Homer. I swore by it. Lombardo's translation is pretty common in colleges because of the price and the slangy presentation. Then there is Fitzgerald, which some swear by, but Fitzgerald's translation is loose with the Greek and mannered and fey in its English. It even translates Odysseus as "Ulysses," a sure sign that fidelity to the Greek is not worth the translator's trouble. I am missing some others, I'm sure. So let us begin at the beginning. In the Greek, the Iliad has Ἄλκιμα κούρησσι Πηλεΐδῃ ἄνακτι θυμὸν ἐρέω· ὅς μιν ἀνὰ κρατερὴν κατὰ φρεσὶν ἔειπεν ἰδέμεναι ἄλλοι τεύχεα καὶ ἄρματα μάχης, ἵππους δ' αὖτε κτήνη τεύχεα τε.

"Quite literally, "Rage! sing goddess of the son of Peleus Achilles." Ἄλκιμα κούρησσι Πηλεΐδῃ ἄνακτι means, more or less, the anger that engenders revenge, rage, wrath, anger are all ok to some degree. (It's complicated, an entire scholarly treatise is written on the meaning of the word.) Green gives, "Wrath, goddess, sing of Achilles Peleus's son's [/wrath]." Fagles gives "Rage--Goddess sing the rage of Peleus's son Achilles." Lattimore gives "Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus." Green and Fagles are right to put the first word first. This is poetry, after all, the order of the words matter, the first especially. The first word is the theme of the poem, the way it is directed first against Agamemnon, then toward the Trojans, and then tempered for a common moment of humanity, is the internal trajectory of the whole epic. Wrath might be best of all, since it conveys that it is anger in a sense that is unfamiliar to modern

readers. Once, in my second year of taking Greek, I was told that there was no use of literal translations. Take it far enough, and you wind up with a textbook on how to read the book in the original Greek. Make it into readable English, and you wind up with a host of compromises where thousands of close translations might do. Go far enough you wind up with Girardoux's "The Trojan War Will Not Take Place," worthwhile on its own, but not really a "translation." That professor preferred Fitzgerald, but easy for her to do, she could read anything in Greek without any help. For us mortals with mostly forgotten Greek, or no Greek at all, closeness to the original in a translation should be treasured. In the end, translating Homer is a game of compromises, How much of the strangeness of 2500 year old lines and 3200 year old motivations do you keep? Dactylic hexameter calls for lines much longer than any form of English verse, so shorter lines or not? And so on. For me, Fagles is as far to compromise with how English verse should go as I am willing to accept. For what it's worth, Lattimore's English verse is better than his critics complain of. Starting from no knowledge of Greek, I'd choose Green. Over Lattimore because it's friendlier for the beginner and not worse as far as I can tell for a serious third reading. Over Fagles because the true-to-the-Greek line lengths convey the way the poem drives itself forward better in Green's line by line than in Fagles's free verse. Also. The introduction includes a plot summary of the whole Trojan War, of which the Iliad only covers a small portion. I have never seen such a succinct and complete synopsis before. There is also a synopsis of the poem keyed to the poem in the back matter to help find your place, an enlightening glossary of names and concepts to help you through your first read, and footnotes to inform the reader of context that has since been lost. Word to the wise re: Kindles. These are long verse lines. To get complete lines on a Kindle screen, you need a Kindle that allows text to display in landscape mode. Even then, complete lines only work in a very small font size. Get this in hardback for now. The hardback is stitched and bound to keep, so it is worth your money.

This is not a book review, but a warning: there is a technical problem with this page. I received a different translation than the one shown here, and apparently the page changes randomly (since someone else says this is the page for buying a copy of the Iliad!). I've reported the problem and it is being looked into. Because you can't leave a review without a star rating, I've using one star for this warning. That's no reflection on the book described here, which I hope to purchase once corrects this problem. I know this is an unusual use of book reviews, but I think it's important for people to know that if they purchase from this page there is no telling what they might receive. I will delete this once the problem is solved,

This review is concerned with the translation of Homer's Iliad by Anthony Verity: it is about the intellectual product, not some essentially irrelevant technical issue regarding the vending of the work. Anthony Verity set out to faithfully translate the original text (as best we know it) of Homer's great poem. He clearly states that "It does not claim to be poetry: my aim has been to use a straightforward English register and to keep closely to the Greek, allowing Homer to speak for himself -- for example, in the use of repeated epithets and descriptions of recurrent scenes." Verity has carefully preserved the line numeration of the original, yielding a translation which matches the original line by line. The first-time reader of the Iliad might prefer a more classically poetic rendition, such as those by Lattimore, Fitzgerald, or Ewald, or perhaps a faster moving translation such as those by Lombardo, Reck, and, now, Mitchell. But with the Verity translation, the reader can be assured that he/she is getting something that hews quite closely to the original in structure and language, with style and word choices not artificially forced by some particular metrical scheme or in pursuit of rapidity as an end in itself. And the reader may be assured that the translation is by no means dull and plodding. Verity's choice to present his translation in what physically looks like poetic verse (in separate lines rather than a solid mass of prose) serves both to remind us of the Iliad's origin as a great poem as well as enhance its value as a classroom tool and reference, with lines of the original text readily located in Verity's rendition. And his retention of the characteristic epithets as vital to the poem's meaning (rather than dismissing them as merely technical expedients used to achieve a set meter, as some translators are prone to do) does much to preserve an authentic Homeric flavor. This translation may not have been intentionally written as free verse, but de facto it functions as a free verse poem. This is not the finest English poetic rendition of Homer's great poem, but it may well be the best way for an English language reader to best approach the real heart of the Iliad.

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