One of the two foundational epics of so-called Western Culture, the *Odyssey* features a wily hero whose journeys are extraordinary and whose longing for home is unbounded. The *Odyssey* offers a complex meditation on brotherhood, bestiality, sexuality, kinship, and power; it is the great epic of cross-cultural encounter, in all its seductive and violent aspects, as well as the great poem of marriage. An adventure in nostos (homecoming), the *Odyssey* shows us the pleasures and dangers of voyaging among strangers. Constantly exploring the boundaries between the civilized and the savage, the poem offers as well a political critique of many ancient institutions, not least the family, patriarchy, hospitality customs, and the band-of-brothers so central to epic ideology. And as a masterwork of narrative art, the *Odyssey* asks us to consider the relation of fiction to “truth.” We will explore these and other matters in the *Odyssey*, and may make some concluding forays into contemporary re-workings of Odyssean themes and characters.

**Week 1  Jan 25**   Introduction; problems and perspectives.


[http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/nagy/BofATL/toc.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/nagy/BofATL/toc.html);

**Week 2  Feb. 1**   Books 1-4

Background reading:


Week 3 Feb.8 Books 5-8

Background reading:

Week 4 Feb. 15 Books 9-12

Background reading:

Week 5 Feb 22 Books 13-17

Background reading:

In-class written exercise.
Week 6 March 1 **Books 18-21**

Background reading: Hoelscher, U. “Penelope and the Suitors” in Reading the Odyssey; Foley, H. "Penelope as Moral Agent," in The Distaff Side [Recommended: Schein, S. “Female Representations and Interpreting the Odyssey in The Distaff Side”]

Week 7 March 8 **Books 22-24**

Background reading: Calvino, I., “The Odysseys within the Odyssey”, in Why Read the Classics? tr. M. McLaughlin (1999); Zeitlin, F. "Figuring Fidelity in Homer's Odyssey" ch 9 in Playing the Other (1995)

In class viewing of “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” (Coen Brothers)

**Take-home exam due by email and posted on NYU Classes by Saturday March 18 at noon.**

The required book for this course is available at the NYU Bookstore: The Odyssey of Homer, tr. Richmond Lattimore (Harper Perennial: 1991)
Also available, but optional – not required – is Reading the Odyssey, ed. Schein, S. L. (Univ. of California Press 1996), which contains a number of the assigned essays.

Secondary readings will be posted on NYU Classes.

Course requirements: 1) class attendance and participation; any unexcused absence (except for emergencies) will automatically lower your grade 2) required reading; 3) *weekly response paragraphs on the assigned reading; 4) in-class written exercise; 5) final take-home exam.

Grading will be based on: class participation and response paragraphs 40%; in-class exercise 20%; final exam 50%.

All your written work must be your own; “borrowed” work will be severely sanctioned in accordance with school policies. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me.

**Class Paragraphs:** beginning next week (Jan. 31), please post on NYU Classes and bring to class a coherent 1-2 paragraph response to the week’s primary or secondary reading; students will volunteer or may be
called on to read their observations and comments. These paragraphs will not be graded individually, but do constitute an important element of your participation in the course.