**Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Greece**

**Pomona College — Spring 2021**

**Workshop Six : Sex, Gender, and Power in the *Odyssey***

**General Instructions:**

This workshop spans two class meetings and you will be invited to work with the same group members for both.

Please begin by taking 10 minutes to check in, read the instructions, and get settled in for the workshop. Please note your start time \_\_\_\_\_\_ and end time \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Here are the group and room assignments:**

For Part Two, please focus on Passage A

Breakout Room One : Lauren Adi, Jayda, and Miranda

For Part Two, please focus on Passage B

Breakout Room Two : Connie, Camille, Val, and Sarah

For Part Two, please focus on Passage C

Breakout Room Three : Kate, Rinny, Cyn, Peeper

Breakout Room Four : Angie, Juliana, Kate F., and Philip

Please complete the first half of this workshop on 3/16. Please select a timekeeper and facilitator whose job it will be to watch the clock and keep the group on-time. Everyone should make notes for your own records. The group also needs to assign a *scribe* who will be prepared to report your findings to the reconvened class. Please rotate both position each week. Please bring this workshop with you next week. Please complete the second half of this workshop on 3/23. Please select a timekeeper.

For this workshop, you’ll be assigned a group and Breakout Room number and be asked to make your own way into the open rooms on both the 16th and 23rd.

**PART ONE: GENDERED CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION (30 MIN.)**

1. Working together as a group, please review the characters depicted in books 1 - 11 of the *Odyssey*. Begin by making a list of the key figures in the first 10 books of this epic poem.

2. Next, go through your list and describe the characters you listed. Discuss WHAT the characters DO, HOW they behave, and THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER.

3. Third, based on your descriptions, create and fill in a chart with the headings: **Gender Roles in the Odyssey: Female Traits / Male Traits**. (You might try Ziteboard a Google Doc., or the like if you’d like to collaborate in real time on this.)

4. Finally, note if any characters seem to cross gender boundaries or display what you think might be non-conforming sex or gender roles.

**Please take a ten-minute break now.**

**PART TWO: CLOSE READINGS (35 MIN.)**

Passage A. BOOK FIVE “From the Goddess to the Storm,” lines 1 - 227.

Passage B. BOOK SIX “A Princess and Her Laundry,” lines 1 – 315.

Passage C. BOOK TEN “The Winds and the Witch,” lines 188 – *ca*. 490.

1. Begin by carefully re-reading your group’s assigned passage. You may choose to read the passage out-loud together or silently to yourselves. As you read, note important and interesting moments in the text.

2. Work individually for a few minutes to collect your thoughts on this passage. Which lines strike you as particularly significant and why? Develop ONE QUESTION about this passage that YOU DO NOT HAVE AN IMMEDIATE ANSWER TO.

3. Reconvene with your small group. Discuss the passage, focusing on the lines that you each selected as significant. Discuss the questions that you developed.

4. Select ONE QUESTION from those suggested by group members, or develop one new question, that you will ask the reconvened class in order to facilitate discussion.

5. Carefully re-read the other passages assigned for this workshop so that you are prepared to participate in discussion when we reconvene.

**3/23: WORKSHOP SIX, DAY TWO.**

Please begin by taking 10 minutes to check in, read the instructions, and get settled in for the workshop. Please note your start time \_\_\_\_\_\_ and end time \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Group & Room assignments are the same as 3/16. You won’t need a scribe for today. Everyone should make notes for your own records.

**PART ONE: GENDERED CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION (20 MIN.)**

Today, please supplement your work on female and male characters and characterization in the Odyssey that we began last week. Begin today by adding characters who make their first appearance in books 11 - 24 of the poem to your list. Next, follow the instructions above: describe the new characters you encountered and add to your description of characters who reappear and continue to play an important role in the latter half of the poem, further elaborating your list of female and male traits. When you have finished making your lists, please continue with Part Two below. Now that we have laid out the female and male characters and characteristics presented in the *Odyssey*, we can begin to make some overall analyses of sex and gender in the poem.

**PART TWO. RING COMPOSITION, IDEALS, AND PROBLEMS (45 MIN.)**

Please discuss the following question with your group. Do your best to develop answers that you can present to the reconvened class. Your conclusions need not be set in stone, but they should be supported by specific moments in the text(s) and strong enough that you can build on them for our work next week and your next Pressbook post. (Approx. 7-8 min./question)

1. The worlds of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are collective constructs, revised over several generation, and indicative of the social values of their world. Yet, there seem to be expressions of cultural ideal and dystopian social norms throughout the poems. For instance, one can glean lessons about the code of *xenia*, or hospitality, from how *Odysseus* interacts with his hosts, and how he repays his “guests,” Penelope’s suitors, for their treatment of his home. There are also representations of gender that seem to reinforce certain social norms. Positive and negative constructs of both men and women are evident throughout the poems. Please select at least two excerpts from the *Odyssey* that seem to you to present socially accepted or ‘good’ male and two of socially accepted or ‘good’ female behavior as well as two excerpts from your lists that provide counterexamples of unacceptable or ‘bad’ male behavior and two of unacceptable or ‘bad’ female behavior.

2. If you were a group of young people who identify as male coming of age in ancient fifth-century Athens and you had heard this poem (and the *Iliad*) over and over, memorized excerpts in school, and recited verses for years, how might you imagine that you, as a man, should behave? And how might you understand your status in relation to women? How might you imagine women ought to behave?

3. Now imagine that you are a group of young people who identify as female coming of age in fifth-century Athens. While you wouldn’t attend school, you would still have heard the *Odyssey* (and the *Iliad*) recited numerous times. You would know them well. How might you imagine that you, as a woman, should behave? What would be the behaviors that you should avoid? How might you expect the men in your life to behave? And what would you think your status is in relation to men?

4. Do the gender roles in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reflect ONLY the ‘world of the poem’ or can we extrapolate from them to ancient “Greek” society? What kinds of intellectual work do we need to do in order to move from analyzing gender roles in the poems to understanding the social context within which the poems were sung and the texts circulated?

5. As you recall from your work on the *Iliad*, one of the characteristics of the Homeric epic poems is a circularity known as “ring composition.” Looking back to the beginning of the poem and forward to the end, what would you say is the central theme of the *Odyssey*?

6. Please conclude by developing questions for further discussion. You may work to develop you questions individually or together as a group. Plan to participate in a student-led seminar when you reconvene to the main room.