



Juvenile Fiction

### **The Adventures of Odysseus**

Daniel Morden

Hugh Lupton

Christina Balit, illustrator

Barefoot Books

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Odysseus's trireme (the galley propelled by oars and sails) races across the turbulent waves, while Poseidon, his long red hair trailing, looks on from the corner of the book jacket. This scene provides a glimpse of the excitement to come in this retelling of Homer's epic. The dynamic watercolor illustrations in jewel tones will hook readers of all ages, and the smooth text will keep them engrossed.

The authors, both storytellers, teamed up to bring these classic tales to a new generation of readers, preserving the long oral tradition of Homer's epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Lupton runs workshops for children and teachers, and currently works with the University of Cambridge School of Education TASTE (Teaching As Storytelling) project; he has written *Tales of Wisdom and Wonder*. Morden is the author of six previous children's books, including *Dark Tales from the Woods*. Their seamlessly retold version of these tales won the 2006 Classical Association prize for "the most significant contribution to the public understanding of the classics."

The illustrator, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, uses a flat perspective and decorative details like concentric circles in opaque paints (including gold) to recreate the look of ancient Greek vases. Yet while the vase painters often limited their palette to red and black, Balit uses a full range of colors and tones. Throughout, illustrations adorn the page borders, with text centered in double-page spreads. Whether portraying the dragon Scylla's six burnt-orange heads with mouths agape or Odysseus falling backward into a pool of blood in the underworld, the illustrations enhance the plot.

The collection begins with a prologue placing these adventures in the context of the Trojan War. Then, in first-person narrative, Odysseus tells of his voyage home to Ithaca. He and

his warriors encounter the Cyclops, Poseidon, and Circe. They visit the land of the dead, where “the smell of the dead clings to the nostrils,” Odysseus recalls. “Only when we had passed out of the mist, when there was wind and tide, day and night, did we shake off the chill.” Although they escape the lure of the Sirens, some of Odysseus’s men are gobbled up by Scylla and others killed for eating cursed meat. Finally in Ithaca, Odysseus’s adventures continue as he and his now grown son, Telemachus, deal with the suitors who have tried to force Penelope, Odysseus’s wife, to declare him dead and marry one of them.

This anthology will be particularly useful to teachers in middle school and early high school, whose curricula typically include the *Odyssey*. With this eye-catching introduction to the tales, readers will be encouraged to explore further. The only improvement would be a pronunciation key of proper names.