



Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey (Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches)

By Sheila Murnaghan

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Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey reveals the significance of the *Odyssey's* plot, in particular the many scenes of recognition that make up the hero's homecoming and dramatize the cardinal values of Homeric society, an aristocratic culture organized around recognition in the broader senses of honor, privilege, status, and fame. Odysseus' identity is seen to be rooted in his family relations, geographical origins, control of property, participation in the social institutions of hospitality and marriage, past actions, and ongoing reputation. At the same time, Odysseus' dependence on the acknowledgement of others ensures attention to multiple viewpoints, which makes the *Odyssey* more than a simple celebration of one man's preeminence and accounts in part for the poem's vigorous afterlife. The theme of disguise, which relies on plausible lies, highlights the nature of belief and the power of falsehood and creates the mixture of realism and fantasy that gives the *Odyssey* its distinctive texture. The book contains a pioneering analysis of the role of Penelope and the questions of female agency and human limitation raised by the critical debate about when exactly she recognizes that Odysseus has come home.

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Editorial Review

Review

All those who treasure Homer's great poem, from Classical scholars to the general reader, have reason to rejoice at the reappearance of this landmark study. Part of a rich flowering of scholarship on the *Odyssey* over the past thirty years, Murnaghan's book focuses on the riddles of identity that lie at the heart of the poem and take us to its central ideas about the human condition. The author's analysis of the relationship between form and meaning in the *Odyssey* is one of the most important contributions to Homeric scholarship in the past half-century. (Thomas Van Nortwick, Oberlin College)

Disguise and Recognition is a feminist classic as well as a superbly nuanced work of literary criticism. It broke entirely new ground within Classics and Feminist Studies by furnishing an answer to the conundrum of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, more than her husband's equal and yet tolerating a position subservient to him without complaint. Murnaghan's argument that Penelope is construed as a heroic type who achieves her goals by cunning intelligence, only to be knocked down as such by an ideological imperative inimical to male-female equality, has become the standard interpretation. No modern literary classicist can afford not to read this book. (Edith Hall, Royal Holloway University of London)

About the Author

Sheila Murnaghan is professor of Classical studies and Alfred Reginald Allen Memorial Professor of Greek at The University of Pennsylvania. She is author of *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*.

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