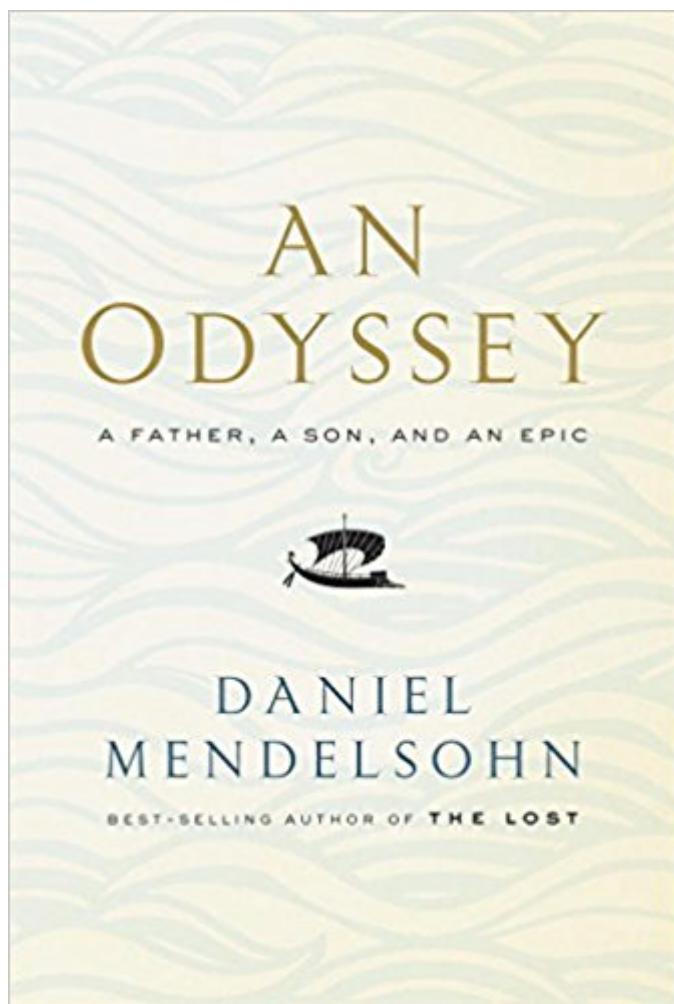


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An Odyssey: A Father, A Son, And An Epic



Synopsis

From award-winning memoirist and critic, and bestselling author of *The Lost*: a deeply moving tale of a father and son's transformative journey in reading--and reliving--Homer's epic masterpiece. When eighty-one-year-old Jay Mendelsohn decides to enroll in the undergraduate *Odyssey* seminar his son teaches at Bard College, the two find themselves on an adventure as profoundly emotional as it is intellectual. For Jay, a retired research scientist who sees the world through a mathematician's unforgiving eyes, this return to the classroom is his "one last chance" to learn the great literature he'd neglected in his youth--and, even more, a final opportunity to more fully understand his son, a writer and classicist. But through the sometimes uncomfortable months that the two men explore Homer's great work together--first in the classroom, where Jay persistently challenges his son's interpretations, and then during a surprise-filled Mediterranean journey retracing Odysseus's famous voyages--it becomes clear that Daniel has much to learn, too: Jay's responses to both the text and the travels gradually uncover long-buried secrets that allow the son to understand his difficult father at last. As this intricately woven memoir builds to its wrenching climax, Mendelsohn's narrative comes to echo the *Odyssey* itself, with its timeless themes of deception and recognition, marriage and children, the pleasures of travel and the meaning of home. Rich with literary and emotional insight, *An Odyssey* is a renowned author-scholar's most triumphant entwining yet of personal narrative and literary exploration.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“My favorite classicist once again combines meticulous literary investigation with warm and wrenching human emotion.” •books like these are why I love reading. “When Daniel Mendelsohn’s mathematician father lands in his son’s Homer seminar at Bard, the older man sets in motion an odyssey both hilarious and heartfelt. Father and son start in the pages of an epic, board a ship to follow the hero’s path through the Mediterranean, and finally end where all our stories do.” An *Odyssey* melds genius-level lit crit with gut-level moving memoir. Beautiful and wise. •Mary Karr “Sharply intelligent. . . A frequent contributor to the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times Book Review*, Mendelsohn is also a classics scholar. His father, a retired mathematician, had been interested in the classics during his school days and decided to continue his education by studying with his son . . . Ultimately, this book [is] about what they learn about each other—and what they can never know about each other. The author uses a close reading of the epic to illuminate the mysteries of the human condition; he skillfully, subtly interweaves textual analysis [with] the lessons of life outside it . . . A well-told story that underscores the power of storytelling.” •Kirkus, starred review “Beguiling. . . in this memoir, Mendelsohn recounts a freshman class on the *Odyssey* he taught at Bard College with his father, an 81-year-old computer scientist, sitting in. Mendelsohn gradually unwraps layers of timeless meaning in the ancient Greek poem; Homeric heroes offer resonant psychological parallels to a modern family. Mendelsohn weaves trenchant literary analysis and family history into a luminous whole. A gem.” •Publishers Weekly “Mendelsohn is an artful storyteller whose skills are equal to the task of weaving Homer’s poem into his own life. In this insightful, tender book, Mendelsohn gracefully marries literary criticism and memoir to describe an intellectual and personal journey that becomes one of profound discovery for both [father and son]. Most impressive are his transitions from scholarly consideration of *The Odyssey* to intimate stories of his family life, as when the class discussion flows effortlessly into a magical moment, witnessing [his father] Jay as he offers a heartbreakingly beautiful tribute to his wife.” [There are] many wise lessons to be gleaned from this lovely book. •Harvey Freedenberg, BookPage “A memorable mixture of literature and life. . . One of the students in Mendelsohn’s spring undergraduate seminar on Homer’s *Odyssey* was quite different from the others: Mendelsohn’s own father. Classroom discussions of Odysseus’s long, wandering journey home to Ithaca led father and son to undertake a real-life Mediterranean cruise retracing the Greek warrior’s travels. Mendelsohn begins to see his father in a new light even while the older man challenges the basic tenets of

Homer's epic. . . [It is] a journey of understanding they undertake together. Interesting and instructive. • Bridget Thoreson, Booklist

DANIEL MENDELSON is a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*. His books include the international best seller *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and many other honors; a memoir, *The Elusive Embrace*, a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book of the Year; a translation, with commentary, of the complete poems of C. P. Cavafy; and two collections of essays, *How Beautiful It Is* and *How Easily It Can Be Broken* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. He teaches literature at Bard College.

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