

Pelican Classics Selection Task

Compare the following translations of the opening lines of Homer's *Odyssey*. This is an epic poem, the result of an oral tradition, originally composed in Greece over 2,000 years ago:

Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned, aye, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades. Yet even so he saved not his comrades, though he desired it sore, for through their own blind folly they perished—fools, who devoured the kine of Helios Hyperion; but he took from them the day of their returning. Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where thou wilt, tell thou even unto us.

(translated by A. T. Murray)

Tell me about a complicated man.

Muse, tell me how he wandered and was lost

When he had wrecked the holy town of Troy,

and where he went, and who he met, the pain

he suffered on the sea, and how he worked

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to save his life and bring his men back home.

He failed, and for their own mistakes, they died.

They ate the Sun God's cattle, and the god

kept them from home. Now goddess, child of Zeus,

tell the old story for our modern times.

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Find the beginning.

(translated by Emily Wilson)

Write no more than 500 words. You may think about the following questions:

Are there any words or phrases that strike you as particularly interesting?

Which version do you prefer? Why?

Does the fact that this is a translation of an epic poem colour your judgement?