

## The *Odyssey*: From Cover to Classic

The author of the *Odyssey* makes it clear that an earlier Argonautic narrative was an operative intertext when Circe identifies the Argo and its passage of the Planctae as a story known to all. Scholars since Meuli 1921, Duffner 1988, and West 2005 discussed a pre-Odyssean Argonautic narrative that gave the Homeric epic many of its details. In this paper, I will argue that the *Odyssey* embeds more indications than previously observed that owe their existence to an earlier Argonautic tradition. Similar to Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, in which the playwright wrote a stand-alone tragicomedy about minor characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I will propose that Homer took a once minor character in the Trojan Cycle and gave him his own epic, a significant part of which was modeled on a pre-existing Argonautic saga, whether oral or literate. With this narrative in the background, many details in the *Odyssey* can be more fully explained within a post-Trojan War context (the presence of Circe, Aeolus, Argos, the discus contest, the rejuvenation of Laertes *inter alia*). More interestingly, I believe, the success of the *Odyssey* may have been responsible for the ultimate disappearance of its model, as can be predicted from modern parallels, in which the original was forgotten when overshadowed by its more prominent *epigonos* (e.g., Elvis Presley's rock-and-roll *Hound Dog* which overshadowed Big Mama Thornton's earlier blues version). As such, what was originally a cover of an earlier epic song became the classic.

Duffner, Christina. 1988. *The Odyssey in the Argonautica. Reminiscence, Revision, Reconstruction*. Diss. Princeton University

Meuli, Karl. 1921. *Odyssee und Argonautika; Untersuchungen zur griechischen Sagensgeschichte und zum Epos*. Berlin.

West, M.L. 2005. *Odyssey and Argonautica*. CQ 55.1:39-64.