

Odysseus' Urge to Cry and the Psychology of Weeping

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LECTURE SERIES

**Tuesday,
22nd March
2022**

12:15 - 13:15

The Greek hero Odysseus bursts into tears first at lunch and then again at dinner while listening to songs about the Trojan War on the island of the Phaeacians. Scholars no longer take issue with the repetitive structure of these two scenes in the *Odyssey* (8.83–95 and 521–24), nor do they reject their psychological verisimilitude; and yet, there appears to be no consensus on how to characterize the emotion that the poet implicitly attributes to the protagonist in this scene. I identify and examine seven conflicting answers to this question that have been put forward by scholars over the last two millennia and offer a new explanation. In the process I reflect on the overall interpretative challenge posed by tears in culturally distant verbal narratives in which co-occurring response components can only partially be surmised, and argue that the task requires us to examine our presuppositions about the appraisals that drive the urge to cry.

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