

When Odysseus goes to the underworld, he meets with a number of people, but most interesting are his encounter with his own mother (who died after he had set sail, years before, with the Greek armies heading to Troy) and the great Greek hero Achilles, the greatest of the mighty warriors in the war. The encounters are interesting because they show us how the realm of the dead was being imagined. There is real pathos in both episodes. In this post I'll talk about the first.

After Odysseus has arrived in Hades and has made the prescribed sacrifices (see the former post), the "shade" of his mother comes to him beside the pit filled with the blood of the sacrificial animals. Several immediate points to make.

For one thing, it may seem weird that of all the people who are dead (today, of course, we think of many billions of people!), his mother just happens to come up. How did she know he was there? We aren't told.

We are told, though, that he recognizes her. But as will be evident in a second, she doesn't have a body. She is a "shade" that has no substance, no materiality about her. If she doesn't have a body, how does she look like herself? Again, Homer doesn't say, but just assumes that bodiless beings in the underworld look like they did on earth (at what age?).

This, of course, is a problem that many people have today as well, without realizing it: they think they'll recognize ...

THE REST OF THIS POST IS FOR MEMBERS ONLY. If you don't belong yet, join! It'll be too late once you're with Odysseus's mother. Grab for the gusto while you can! And remember, all proceeds go to those in need.

You need to be logged in to see this part of the content. Please [Login](#) to access.



[Life in Hades](#)

[The First Recorded Visit to the Realm of the Dead \(in Western literature\)](#)