



ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Joyce Carol Oates goes to battle for 'Odyssey,' takes aim at translator Emily Wilson's viral review



Joyce Carol Oates has entered the "Odyssey" debate after the translator who inspired Christopher Nolan snubbed the film. (Cindy Ord / Getty Images; Melinda Sue Gordon / Universal Pictures)



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July 29, 2026 5:26 PM PT



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Days after a classicist who translated Homer's "The Odyssey" in 2017 eviscerated the Christopher Nolan film based on the poem, Joyce Carol Oates has entered the debate.

She's Team Nolan.

The National Book Award-winning author is known for her (sometimes controversial) hot takes on social media, and on Wednesday, she stepped up to the plate in opposition of translator Emily Wilson's brutal takedown of Nolan's big-screen adaptation of "The Odyssey." Nolan had previously said Wilson's translation inspired him in making the film. But Wilson wrote that she would be ashamed to have written any part of the script.

"Her tone of dismissal & haughty superiority strike a sour note," Oates said of Wilson's review in a post on X. "Rather than disagreeing with interpretations of Homer in a collegial manner, this person, who has benefited enormously from Nolan's film, speaks in the crude language of MAGA folks attacking someone with ideas that differ from hers."

Wilson's biting missive, published in the London Review of Books this week, went so viral that it reportedly crashed the outlet's website for a few hours Monday. The British American classicist's take on the film was especially notable because, last fall, Nolan quoted Wilson's translation when telling Empire magazine why he was drawn to the story. "I think it's the Emily Wilson translation that begins, 'Tell me about a complicated man,'" he said.

Wilson's version of "The Odyssey" subsequently spiked in sales. A representative for Audible told The Times on Wednesday that, year over year, purchases of Wilson's "Odyssey" translation were up by more than 600% across Audible's U.S., U.K. and Canadian marketplaces. Daily global title sales rose nearly sixfold during the week the movie premiered. And in the nine days following wide release, daily global sales averaged around 20 times more than the rate before the premiere, showing sustained demand for Wilson's translation.

**'Odyssey' translator Emily Wilson rips apart film, says she'd be 'ashamed to have written' script**

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Oates, who penned the Pulitzer Prize-nominated "Blonde," said that, within the world of translators, Wilson's review "seems all the more surprising since all translations are, presumably, subjective & not equivalent to the original text."

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"One would expect a translator, of all people, beholden to a text, in service to a text, to be just a wee bit more thoughtful & respectful of others who are acting in good faith just as (she would claim) she is," Oates wrote.

In separate posts on the social platform, Oates said she highly recommended Nolan's adaption and that she wasn't a fan of Wilson's translation. "What I'd read of Emily Wilson's translation was not for me," she wrote, adding that she assumes it was "deliberately written to appeal to an audience comfortable with YA (young adult) directness & sparseness of vocabulary — that is, with the intention of being marketable, adopted by high school classes.

"With a more poetic, elevated speech, you are naturally limiting your audience," continued the author, who further noted that there was nothing wrong with a direct,

commercial approach. “Why not profit from a classic work not protected by copyright?”



MOVIES

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In the viral review by Wilson, who also translated Seneca and Euripides, as well as Homer's "Iliad," she likened Nolan's nearly three-hour epic to Peter Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and "Game of Thrones."

Her sharpest critiques were aimed at Nolan's rendering of Homer's female characters, of which she said there were more than in his other films "thanks to the source material" but that, in contrast to the poem, none of them "had much to say." Wilson said Nolan's race-neutral casting was essentially a wash as "[m]ost of the non-white actors — Zendaya, Lupita Nyong'o, Himesh Patel, Corey Antonio Hawkins, Travis Scott — play versions of the Black best friend, whose only role in the drama is to provide aid to the white protagonist."

And don't get her started on the whole point of the poem — the cost of war — of which Wilson quipped, "We are not shown that war or killing are bad, only that good men sometimes feel bad about it — a very different point."

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