

The Odyssey begins.

O Muse

The Odyssey of this reader's reading is not Odysseus' journey. It is not one man's ten-year travels travesties travails home. It is not the return of a husband to his wife. There is no fidelity faithfulness waiting patience here. This is no homecoming. It is a departure. It is a journey, yes, from one world to another. Not Ithaca nor Troy, nor even Tripani. These worlds are primordial archaic chthonic Minoan Mycenaean sparked into Sparta stopped in their tracks. Thera is there. Men (the moon) supersedes Selene (the moon). Day over night. Light over Dark. Speculative non-fiction. The world turned upside down. Cuckoo.

It is a story of a journey, yes, but one Western Civilization was forced to take as it transformed from a female whorl world to a male word world. One world dearly departed, the next never the same again. Circles, wheels, spinning, turns.

It is a story of and about text and textiles, communing and communication, metallurgy and media, material culture and early technologies. Song to ear. Ear to alphabet. Lore to epic. Textile to text. Thesaurization, hidden treasure. Who can commune and who cannot. A story concerned with transmission transformation technologies transvestitism: transgendered Goddesses transcending mortal might human plight vestiges of delight.

While Penelope's key, she's only one part of this art. A paradigm a parable a paramour—paramount-- a praxis perhaps. The odyssey begins. And from the beginning Penelope resists is resistant resisting hearing the *nostos*, the song of return, recalcitrant to her husband's return, resisting the return of the king, poor thing, perhaps because she knows what his return will bring, poor thing. Rather meets the *mêtis*. Poor pure thing, pshaw! When he re-enters the scene, she will have been usurped, upturned, her velvet tipped past the tipping point. Blink, delta, blink. Iragaray, I say. Outlier on fire. Out of control. Out of sight. Drugged unconscious. Deep in sleep. Dreaming of clucks like the duck that she is. Put away, carefully hidden. Forbidden.

And she has become very controlling. Controlling 108 suitors, controlling her son as he docily consoles her, controlling her captivity in her own high-roofed house. Carefully espousing the faithful spouse. Is she or isn't she? What is she doing? What on Earth has she done? Is it done? Is it over? Are we there yet? Turn

around, veiled circecalypsopenelope. Take your talons and fly, bird, fly. At least try. Mycenaenminoancretanasiaminor myOmy. Miracles prophecies Cassandra complexities. Soothsaying roleplaying nix-saying always straying. Woof warp weave, wanderers wonderers whisperers witches, maids made mad, maenads, matriarchates amok. Neologisms nomenclature mother nature appropriations. Bombastic audacity pity and pride. Elastic pluralities. Single Greek females inside. She spied she shied she lied and she tried. Time to hide, abide or obey. Or, pick up the damned lyre, as she'd say.

The odyssey begins...

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns¹

It starts with a request. A transmittal, over the "tele," let's say, a high frequency hi-fidelity frequently high pirate transistor station: over the waves, a song is requested. Of a Muse. But which one? Calliope, Clio, Euterpe, Erato, Inspiration, Melpomene, Mnemosyne, Polymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia, Urania? Or was it that one Plato called "the tenth muse," that Sappho was her name. A song about string theory, the caller requests. Orphically quantum superstring revolutions. Do the twist. Make the turn. Sound the dance. 'Round the pants. Prance, little goddess, last chance.

Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy²

It begins by someone asking their girl friend to tell a story about a war hero who's taken his time coming home. Ten years, after a ten-year battle. Twenty years away. There's a ditty for ya'. Gladwell, well, well, well.

"The hero with a thousand faces"³"The face that launched a thousand ships. *Faustus*: Was this the face that launched a thousand ships/And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? / Sweet Helen, make me immortal with

¹ Homer, *Odyssey*, Fagles, Robert, trans. (New York: Viking, 1996), 77.

² Homer. *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Samuel Butler, ed. Louise Ropes Loomis. (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1944), 3.

³ Campbell, Joseph. *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. (Princeton: Bollingen, 1972).

a kiss.⁴ What a trip!

Not heroin[e]? Hermione's mother, the Homeric pharmakon pusher, hold the hellman's; pass the olives. Grow the pomegranates, Olive Oyl for Popeye the sailor man. Persephone pre-Ptolemy astronomy Penelope? Please! "Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss." Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?

Penelope and Helen are kissin' cousins of Clytemnestra, who knew! Spartan sisterhood of travelling wives desperate houselives living in honeycomb hives.

"A whole field of mathematics called knot theory..."⁵ Poppies, please, to put me asleep! OmyOmy! A whole field of pomegranates, Persephone, please! Into the underworld descend, Demeter's daughter...Dante's *Inferno*...Dr. Faustus...and odd Odysseus in the nekuiea. Lady ghosts, lady ghosts, fly away home. Later in that radio play. Krapp! I'll fast forward, if I may. Replay. Rewind the spindle. Prepare the loom, you loon. It's off to doom we go, heigh-ho. Waddayaknow?

The odyssey begins:

Homeric hearse to Demeter, wherever that is, watch the meter. Go meet her there: where the crocus and irises loom. Seldom is heard hyacinth violence incense narcissistic incest misses insects and mushrooms. In the room the women come and go talking of a loom of their own. There is no chair there but a stool, my fool, with fleece on it, please. Three legged tease. Ned Ludd, don't please! I can see, I can sleep, I can dream. Something stinks. Poo poo on you, moo cow. In June. My dear Molly Bloom. Sail past that mast. Yes, I said, Yes—what a mess. Gaia bless, Telemachus, Gesundheit gesamtkunstwerk. Walpurgisnacht. Winkin and Blinkin and Nod. Mary Todd Lincoln she's not oh no Yoko oh no Yoko oh no sneeze not, you snot, sieze not the plot squeeze not!

Mad angry women in Attica. Rooftop gardens, their time in the sun has come. Be green, be obscene, Adonis is upon us. Let's go, it's just blow—tweak not, Dido, leap not. She is dead and gone. Rosemary, that's

⁴ Marlowe, Christopher. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, Act V, scene 1.

⁵ Smolin, Lee. *The Trouble With Physics: The Rise of String Theory*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 35.

for remembrance. Trace the chromosome, lipstick lace point mutations, deletion, duplication. A given eight. It's fate. Generations ago. One percent per population wherever you go. Memories we're not conscious of. Hello?

Put up or shut up. Put out and get up. Poo poo pee dew. Twitter and google and blog, oh my. Sound the sirens cast the net castanet to Gibraltar in a halter low slung girdle not a hurdle. Gerty and her little gang of girls. "*Pregunta la gallina*," so he says on his cellphone. *Pregunta la gallina* indeed.

The Odyssey begins--again and again and again.

The Odyssey begins: "Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns...,"⁶ or "Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man...,"⁷ or "The hero of the tale which I beg the Muse to help me tell is that resourceful man...,"⁸ or... A "man" and a "Muse"--no matter the translation-- are the central commonalities of the *Odyssey's* opening in English. The man is he who's to be spoken of--and the Muse? Frankly, I don't give a damn about the Man; but who is this Muse? She who knows the story?⁹ Does the story belong to her; is it her story to tell? It seems likely she's who without whom the story could not, will not, should not, cannot be told. She's certainly "of twists and turns" herself.

Of the man, Ulysses or Odysseus or any of his many disguises, my concern is only his absence from home, his absence from Ithaca; he is not there. I hardly care where his is, though whom he's with occasionally interests me here. Let's start there.

Yes.

In that other Homeric epic, the *Illiad*, this man has been recruited to the Trojan War by his peers. Some say he has gone reluctantly, feigning madness as an excuse; but off to war he goes. Heigh-ho, hey 'ho! Legend has it he's a hero who's conceived military strategies confounding others, most notably a "Trojan Horse" whose

⁶ Homer. *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles. (New York: Viking, 1996), 77.

⁷ Homer. *The Odyssey*, trans., Robert Fitzgerald. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963), 1.

⁸ Homer. *The Odyssey*, trans., E.V. Rieu (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1946), 25.

⁹ Of course she's female, all archaic Greek muses are female: Aoidē, Meletē and Mnēnē or Nētē, Mētē or Mēsē, and Hyapatē or Cēphisso, Apollonis and Borysthenis. Those others mentioned before, imposters.

Great-Mother-belly is filled with men ambushing Troy, ending the war. Fought over Helen, the man's wife's cousin. The man's wife's name is Penelope. She like other warrior's wives has remained at home, on an island called Ithaca, which may or may not be (it's unlikely)¹⁰ the island currently called Ithaca in the central western Aegean Sea. Ode to the opposite of Ozymandias. Ode to the insular Ithacan everydayness made epic.

Date, please, for Book 23: April 16, 1178 B.C.E.¹¹ –anniversary of suitor slaughter, massacre of maids, and royal re-cognition, re-membering, re-connecting, back to bed again, omphalos phallus slumber under olive lumber, hooked up again after twenty years apart. What else do we know?

We know the man, according to the epic, stayed away from home for another ten years after his ten at war wandering whichever way the gods tossed him, often into the laps of females for extended stays on even more mythical masses of land emerging from elsewhere in the wine-dark Sea. Circe, Calypso, the Sirens; I am more interested in them than I am in him, but the one who interests me most is the wife, Penelope.

Frankly, there are many issues discussed by many scholars that don't concern me about this epic; even some things about the story with regard to Penelope just don't interest me. In fact, I am concerned here mostly with her name and how she spends her time: her dreams, her handmaids, her high-roofed home, her geese, her laugh, her chair, her pillar, her loom, her suitors (but only sort of), her tears, her veil. And, as you'll see, I am only interested in some very specific instances of these—moments maybe unnoticed by others, not spoken of by scholars, hidden, and so also absent.

Yes

¹⁰ Robert Bittlestone, *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹ "Plutarch and Heraclitus believed a certain passage in the 20th book of the Odyssey ("Theoclymenus's prophecy") to be a poetic description of a total solar eclipse. In the late 1920s, Schoch and Neugebauer computed that the solar eclipse of 16 April 1178 B.C.E. was total over the Ionian Islands and was the only suitable eclipse in more than a century to agree with classical estimates of the decade-earlier sack of Troy around 1192–1184 B.C.E. However, much skepticism remains about whether the verses refer to this, or any, eclipse. To contribute to the issue independently of the disputed eclipse reference, we analyze other astronomical references in the Epic, without assuming the existence of an eclipse, and search for dates matching the astronomical phenomena we believe they describe. We use three overt astronomical references in the epic: to Boötes and the Pleiades, Venus, and the New Moon; we supplement them with a conjectural identification of Hermes's trip to Ogygia as relating to the motion of planet Mercury. Performing an exhaustive search of all possible dates in the span 1250–1115 B.C., we looked to match these phenomena in the order and manner that the text describes. In that period, a single date closely matches our references: 16 April 1178 B.C.E. We speculate that these references, plus the disputed eclipse reference, may refer to that specific eclipse." Constantino Baikouzis and Marcelo O. Magnasco, "Is an Eclipse Described in the Odyssey?" *PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. Communicated by Mitchell J. Feigenbaum, The Rockefeller University, New York, NY, April 7, 2008 (received for review July 2, 2007). <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2008/06/23/0803317105.full.pdf+html>.

It's said—by Apollodorus, Didymus, Pausanias, and Tzetzes¹²--that the daughter of Icarius and the Naiad Periboea or Polycaste¹³, had originally been named Arnaea or Arnacia or Armirace. But there was a suitor's race down the Spartan street 'Apheta,' and Icarius' brother Tyndareus arranged for him to win; in return Nauplius flung the wee babe into the sea at Icarius' instruction. But ducks, purple-striped, caught and attended to the little thing, bouncing her back to the beach. Icarius and Periboea, surprised by her survival, honored her with renewed life with them and a new name: Penelope, which means 'duck.'¹⁴

¹² Graves, Robert *The Greek Myths: 2*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1988 [1955]). 279, 285, note "Apollodorus: iii, 10, 6 and 9; Pausanias: iii. 12. 2; Tzetzes: *On Lycophron* 792; Didymus, quoted by Eustathius on Homer p. 1422."; Kaarle Hirvonen, *Matriarchal Survivals and Certain Trends in Homer's Female Characters* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1968), 138-9.

¹³ "Of [Penelope's] own family we learn this from the *Odyssey* itself: her father Icarius is still alive somewhere on the mainland; and she has brothers, who are only mentioned once, casually; both father and brothers are outside of the story. She has also a sister Iphthime, married to Eumelus of Pherae in Thessaly, far away. There is no mention of her mother. This much is stated in the poem itself: but we may add to it another very important fact, from the general and unvarying main outlines of the heroic cycle, as they had already become fixed before the age of Homer: namely, that Icarius was the brother of Tyndareus, and hence that Penelope is the first cousin of Helen and Clytemnestra. This is in a sense the key to the whole structure of the poem." J.W. Mackail, *Classical Studies* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 60.

¹⁴ Graves, *Greek Myths: 2*, 279.