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Nausikaa and the Word that Must Not Be Spoken: A Reading of Homer's *Odyssey*, Book Six

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THE *Odyssey* is a mystery drama from start to finish. When the poem begins, Odysseus is lost, and in every conceivable way. He is lost to his family and friends, lost to the comrades with whom he fought side by side at Troy, lost to himself, lost even to the gods; or, if not lost, then forgotten. He is sequestered somewhere at the extremity of the world, far beyond human traffic, beyond even the pathways of the gods. He has disappeared, concealed by the nymph whose very name means "I shall conceal." Odysseus is invisible, even to himself.

The mystery begins with the first word of the poem: ἄνδρα (man). "Man, sing in me, Muse." What a banquet of semi-otic delights is spread before us with this one word. Man! We might expect a name to follow this announcement of the poem's theme, but once we have missed our opportunity to name this man, Homeric diction makes it difficult to insert the desired name into the sentence. The word "man" has its own set of formulas, and the name "Odysseus" has its own cluster of formulas, and the two clusters do not interact; each must be deployed in its own separate context.

The significant point here is *absence*. Just as Odysseus is absent, so also is his name. Reading forward in the poem, we recall that this man gave away his name; or rather, he threw it away, when he had escaped from the Cyclops' cave in book 9. Who can forget that the hero of this epic is the man who claimed that he was a man without a name. The absent

name is established at the beginning of the poem as one of the poem's great mysteries; indeed, as the mystery that encloses all the other mysteries that guide us toward a definition of this man. Here is a capital opportunity for our grammatologists to beat every bush to flush out the name that loves to play hide and seek.¹

The poem's invocation, having misplaced the name of its hero, must make do with a descriptive epithet, πολύτροπος (*polytropos*), "much turning," or "turning this way and that," and then adds a sentence to explicate this unusual epithet, "Sing, Muse, Man, much-turned (or much turning), who saw human cities and came to know mind" (*noos* in Homeric Greek, *nous* in later Attic Greek). This epic thus announces its theme in a sentence that begins with "Man" and ends with "mind." Those of us who learned Greek will recall that these positions in a sentence, the first and the last, receive the greatest emphasis. The syntax of this opening sentence makes Man and mind virtually interchangeable. Here at the very fountainhead of our Western consciousness, the external is a metaphor for the internal. The poem announces at the outset and in the boldest font, that this is the epic of mind.

We might expect that this poem, having evaded the name of its hero in the opening sentence, would surely proceed to give us the name in the second sentence. But no, the proemium, as we call the introduction, *meanders*, as if imitating its hero, one hexameter after another in search of his name. How different is the opening of this epic from the opening of the *Iliad*. That poem hurls us with furious energy into the fray with its first verse. Its hero stands before us without equivocation, ambiguity, or hesitation: "Wrath, O Muse, sing, of the son of Peleus, Achilles." It is as if we had walked into a gallery, and there, confronting us in the middle of the room, is the man himself, larger than life, as formidable as a statue by Pheidias. The proemium of the *Iliad* identifies Achilles in the first verse, and then also ends (v. 7) with his name. In between these two names the proem dwells

on his wrath (his *menis*) and its effects. If Odysseus is Absence, Achilles is Presence. The Achilles of the *Iliad* has that *terribilità* that Michelangelo's contemporaries attributed to statues like his David or Moses. Achilles is a force, a force of destruction, a disaster both to himself and to his society. The whole poem is the record of this destructive force. Achilles is demonic. He is a Lucifer, indeed the first Lucifer of our Western tradition. The hero of the *Odyssey* is, by contrast, sociable. He is destructive too, of course; how could he be a hero of the Bronze Age and be merely domestic? But passion is subordinated to the virtues of thought and the values of community. Longinus distinguished between the two Homeric epics, defining the *Iliad* as the poem of *pathos* (passion), and the *Odyssey*, composed by the same poet, but when the poet's own passion had waned, as the poem of *ethos* (character).² But *ethos* hardly does justice to the full intention of the *Odyssey*. It aims for a theme that transcends *ethos*, which is mind itself.

The *Odyssey*, *polytropos* like its Hero, wanders for twenty-one hexameters before it finds the name we have been waiting for, and when it is found, it is embedded in an epithet-formula, *antitheos Odysseus*, "godlike Odysseus." With the variety of epithets available for Odysseus, we might expect his name to enter the narrative with some more definitive formula than *antitheos Odysseus*. *Antitheos* is used of various heroes in the *Iliad*; it is almost generic, a simple marker of heroic stature. But, appearing as it does here, after twenty hexameters given to the search for the hero's name, it gains considerable force, and calls for us to dwell on its various connotations: Odysseus, "who stands face to face with the gods," Odysseus, "the equal of the gods."

With that name found at last, the poem then continues to wander in its dilatory fashion for another four books in search of the character to whom that name belongs. So thoroughly is wandering embedded in the very structure of the poem that, instead of being presented with the man, once we have reached the name, Athena instead makes her own con-

tribution to the theme when she darts down from Olympus to Ithaca to lay on the man's daydreaming son the burden of the search of this man, lost and all but nameless. The proemium gives a preliminary shape to the poem's content: the poem's theme is thinking, and thinking is in turn graphed as absence, evasion, and wandering.

After we have meandered through the four books of the poem in search of the man, Odysseus at last makes his own appearance in book 5, where we discover him hidden on an island far removed from other humans, and even from the gods. With Odysseus found at last, we must now begin to explore the mystery of his hiding. The name of his hiding place, Ogygia, tells us it is a primordial place, beyond geography. It is the *omphalos* of the world. It is, if we like, the very point where geography begins or, if we prefer our categories to be Hegelian, we might say it is where being, human being, emerges from the non-being of eternity—or is that vice versa?

Once we have located Odysseus, we are led to the very heart of his mystery, when, in answer to Calypso's question, Odysseus states his desire to be neither deathless nor ageless, but to be an ordinary, fallible, ephemeral human being. In response, Calypso provides him with the means, that is, both the equipment and the directions, that will bring him back from being into the world of ordinary pedestrian becoming. Odysseus builds a ship and sets sail on a solitary voyage, charting his course across the sea by the constellations inscribed on his celestial ceiling. Those forms that Odysseus projects from the night sky onto the formless void of the sea, mapping his journey in both time and space, proclaim the mystery in the most conspicuous way. This is the hermetic night journey. This is his journey into being or, if we are Hegelians, into the world of mere seeming that is the lot of hapless human beings.

This night journey ends as mysteriously as it had begun, with Poseidon, the great adversary in this poem, doing his utmost to prevent Odysseus from entering the light, rousing

a storm that shatters Odysseus' ship. Now Odysseus must swim for three days and nights, saved, fortunately, by the magic of the veil that the White Goddess gives him, keeping him buoyant in that dark and turbulent abyss until he reaches *terra firma* and the outstretched arms of the river reaching into the sea from the land of the Phaeacians, land now instead of sea, order instead of chaos, the benevolence of sweet water after days immersed in an abyss more terrible than the fiercest enemy on the battlefield. Blessed solidity.

Once grounded on the soil of Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians, Odysseus, fearing the winter's frost, finds two trees growing other, one of them wild and the other a cultivated tree, the olive. The olive! Nature and culture intertwined. One of the most significant characteristics of the mystery drama is the interconnectedness of everything with everything else. And nowhere in our ancient literary tradition is this principle made more conspicuous than in the *Odyssey*. Athena, the goddess who guides Odysseus through this whole poem is herself nature and culture so blended that we cannot say where the one merges into the other. Likewise, Odysseus shelters himself under a dense cover of the leaves fortuitously provided by the two trees working here in close collaboration.

We are now given a remarkable simile to accentuate the mystery. Odysseus buries himself under the leaves as a farmer buries a coal at far edge of his property, so that he will have the wherewithal to start a new fire the following day: the *sperm* of fire, as our Greek text puts it. Homeric scholars used to look for that *tertium quid*, that third element that makes the simile a link between two disparate elements. What, for example, have bees and soldiers on the battlefield in common? Swarming. In this instance, *sperm* is the *tertium quid*, but a *tertium quid* made so inclusive that it draws everything into its orbit. We might begin with the most literal: the edge. Odysseus is here at the edge, the edge where land emerges from the sea, the edge of the farmer's property, the edge between life and death, the edge between time and its evil twin, eternity. We are led to consider the

idea of burial within the earth, and sperm itself as a hidden microcosm, with the farmer concealing the merest seed of fire so that it will lie dormant, yet ready to burst into flames the following day. Our thoughts turn to the cycle of nature, life sheltered from the winter's frost, nature concealed, resting as if in hibernation, the mind gone inward, nature recuperating. In the language of the hermeticists, this is the spermatic fire.

Sperm leads us to the next phase in this mystery. With Odysseus stowed away as hidden seed, Athena forwards his drama on another front. It is a useless quest to search for absolute consistency in the behaviors of the Homeric gods. They are far too individualistic in their powers and privileges to allow us to group them together into one pantheon of Platonic Forms. The Homeric cosmos is more diverse and complicated than Plato ever imagined. Every god is a creature invented by the dynamism of the human imagination for a momentary necessity. The moment passes and the god is gone, and another god stands ready to inflame or illuminate the next moment with a fresh passion. Werber, in writing of the language of the clouds, describes them as in perpetual motion in search of the perfect form.³ This is an apt description of the Homeric gods. They are forms in perpetual motion, each in search of its perfect Form.

But the Athena of the *Odyssey* presents us with a different paradigm. In the *Iliad* she is as infatuated as any of the other gods with securing some momentary advantage. But her infatuation is of a completely different species in the *Odyssey*. Here she is infatuated with one human, Odysseus. She manufactures one episode after another to forward his prospects for life and survival, and in this poem her ulterior motive, on which all her interventions depend, is his *nostos*, his homecoming. She orchestrates his life and the lives of those dear to him, yet we never feel that she has cheated Odysseus of his will, his powers, or his intelligence. The favor of the gods in the *Iliad*, promoting one hero's advantage over another for a brief moment or two, is a continent

away from Athena's solicitude for her beloved Odysseus. She adores Odysseus, as she explains to Odysseus himself, for his intelligence. Once we understand this poem as a hermetic mystery, we perceive that Athena is spirit, the spirit who guides the soul to the light. She is the *daimon* of whom Parmenides writes, who steers everything, who governs all birth and all begetting.⁴ She is becoming Sophia. *Nostos*, "homecoming," is the story of the man whom his *daimon* steers back to his own home, to his wife, to his son, to his goddess, to his beloved nymphs, and to his own mind.

While Odysseus sleeps, Athena introduces a young princess, Nausikaa by name, into the mystery. Devising Odysseus' homecoming (his *nostos*), she slips into Nausikaa's bedchamber like a breath of wind (the Spirit!); she stands at Nausikaa's head, taking form in the likeness of Nausikaa's dearest friend. Speaking through this impersonation, Athena chides the girl for being careless in her housework. The "lovely garments" are lying about untended. What garments? We soon find out: those needed for her wedding. They must be washed because her marriage (*gamos*) is close, when she herself should be well dressed and also those (men) who will lead her in marriage: "you will not much longer be a virgin (*parthenos*).

With this preamble Athena then proceeds to her instructions. Nausikaa is to request a wagon from her father, King Alkinoos ("Sharp Mind"), to load the wagon with the laundry and take it to the river to be washed. With her instructions completed, Athena, as evanescent as the wind, speeds to Olympus, and we are now given a passage of extraordinary beauty describing this abode of the gods, untouched by wind or rain or snow, where the sky is clear, and a white light is spread across the whole region.

Nausikaa, entrusted with these instructions from the angel of light, awakes, amazed. One of the great gifts of the Homeric imagination is how inner and outer or, if we prefer, objective and subjective, are fused together. In our modern age, under the influence of logic, with its adamant principle

of non-contradiction, we have learned to distinguish the one from the other. When we read the *Odyssey*, we must place Athena to one side—call it superstition—and anything we might classify as subjective we must deduce solely from the human characters' own words. But Homeric consciousness does not distinguish between the two. The eminent student of mythology, Vernant, has observed that myth, in contrast to the logic of non-contradiction, is "a logic of the ambiguous, of the equivocal, of polarity."⁵ Mythologists, he writes, must turn to linguists, logicians, mathematicians for a paradigm to give us "a logic other than the logic of the logos." The *Odyssey* gives us Athena's arrival in Nausikaa's bedroom as an apparition from outside, but we do ourselves a disservice if we apply to this episode our modern lines of demarcation. Nausikaa, awakes from her nocturnal epiphany to discover her own mind. She has been introduced, by whatever forces operate on her hormones, to her own selfhood.

No god, so secular humanists must insist, would descend from the realm of light to infiltrate, indeed to seduce, the mind of a mere mortal. We have become Epicureans and cannot grant validity to any tale of gods leaving their blissful state to transmit light to mere mortals. But the cleavage in our modern thinking between the subjective and the objective leaves us no space for the uncanny. All the great poets have been mystified by the uncanny. Where would Wordsworth be as a poet without his attention fixated on the uncanny, or Tennyson, Coleridge, or Blake, or artists like Van Gogh and the Impressionists? The simplest definition of the uncanny is that it is an experience, before it is a thought or an idea; and it is that experience we have when earth and sky, the above and the below, the inner and the outer, and the self and the other, seem to be in complete synchronicity.

The uncanny defines the whole Nausikaa episode. Nausikaa, sound asleep in her own bedroom, and awaking mystified by her own best friend talking to her of marriage, has just discovered the Uncanny. Our post-Freudian reason-

ing suggests that Nausikaa has just received a message from her own Unconscious, and the message says: marriage. We might take our analysis one step farther: Nausikaa has discovered the inner life of her own hormones.

Nausikaa awakes to discover herself at the center of the mystery or rather, several mysteries embedded one with another—the mystery of the dream, the mystery of her own hormones, the mystery of womanhood, and of course the mystery of being articulated in the language of becoming. She goes to her father and, following Athena's instructions, requests a wagon be prepared so that she can take to the river the clothes that need to be washed. This might seem an unusual task for the princess of the realm, but here two archetypal narratives have been subsumed into one. The domestic economy of the palace has been borrowed and transposed as the apparatus for a higher level. Once, when I was teaching the *Odyssey* in a graduate course, and we came to this passage, a woman in the class, who identified herself as a Pontic Greek, exclaimed with a happy surprise: "We always wash all the clothes before a wedding." This information from modern Greek practice was the clue that helped us see the sacred function of this episode. Clothes must be washed before the wedding because the wedding is a sacrament. It is also an initiation, and raiment, to use a loftier word, is always significant in an initiation. Nausikaa is about to be initiated into the mystery.

Nausikaa, in making her unusual request, resorts to prevarication, and we enjoy watching her protect the secrecy of the mystery. The clothes must be washed, she claims, first, because her father himself should have clean clothes when he goes to hold counsel with the chieftains of the people; and then, because his three bachelor sons always want clean clothes when they go to the dance (vv. 60–65). These domestic concerns, she says, are always on her mind. But what, we may ask, of the bride? Surely she too will need fresh raiment for the initiation. Here we smile at the dexterity with which the narrator infiltrates the mind of a character within the

story itself. The narrative that Nausikaa has just entered needs male clothes. This necessity is nicely couched in a pleasing falsity. We know the man waiting for his clothes down at the river; the *bridegroom*, of course. And in such a narrative, other men are waiting for their clothes: first, the father, who will give away the bride; and the groomsmen, who would be, at least in this case, the girl's brothers.

When Nausikaa pretends to be concerned about her brothers, her concern is not for them but for herself. The poem gives us an addendum to explain why she needs to protect the deeper secret of her dream: "she was ashamed to say the word 'marriage' (*gamos*)."

This is the only occasion in the whole poem when we are told that a word cannot be spoken. There is only one other word that must be shrouded in secrecy, and that is the name *Odysseus*. Here is a crux that invites our finest semiotic needles. Secrecy is at the heart of the *Odyssey*, and secrecy is always at the heart of every mystery religion. In book 1 Telemachus engages in a secret conversation with Athena while he is seated in the very midst of his mother's rowdy suitors, and when Athena disappears, he is the only person in that hall who knows she was a goddess. Later, in Sparta, we learn that Helen was the only person in Troy who could penetrate Odysseus' disguise. Then, from Menelaus we learn that Odysseus in turn was the only man inside the wooden horse who could decipher the mystery outside the horse, where Helen was palpating the horse impersonating every man's wife. And no one can forget how Odysseus kept his name a secret from the Cyclops. Later, when he has been received as a guest at the Phaeacian court, we must meander through three books of various kinds of entertainments and inducements before Odysseus can be persuaded to give himself a name. Secrecy continues to dominate the story after Odysseus reaches his own island. He is delivered to Ithaca in secret by the Phaeacians with their magical ship. He hides his identity at first from Athena, then conspires with her, first to hide his treasures in the Cave of the Nymphs; and then to plot revenge on his wife's unwell-

come suitors. He maintains his secret identity all through his time in his own palace, even inventing another name for himself when he invents his Cretan fiction. Only his trusted old slave, Eurykleia, discovering his scar, penetrates the secret of his name, which she deciphers written on his own body. Penelope, his own wife, is kept out of the secret, but she has secrets of her own, including the secret that leads her husband to collapse his own fictive identity, which he had been carefully cultivating through this long and spacious epic.

How would Nausikaa claim a major role in this drama if she were not a woman of secrets? Nausikaa is lured, as it were, into the orbit of secrecy that surrounds Odysseus, the perpetual stranger. But her secrecy is made plausible, as consonant with the character given to her in the narrative. She withholds from her father the one word that cannot, indeed must not, be spoken. It would be indecent for a princess, and equally important, a virgin to announce to her father that she was now marriageable. To borrow from George Sanders in the 1947 movie, *A Scandal in Paris*, "This is a thought, Mademoiselle, that is best not put into words."

The word *gamos* (marriage) is a confluence of many impulses, social and physiological, that must not be named. Nausikaa is preparing herself for an initiation, and taboo is an essential element in any initiation. The larger mystery is broached in the words *θαλέθοντες* and *θαλερός*. She was ashamed to name to her father her *θαλερὸν γάμον* (6.66). The epithet *θαλερός* is easy enough to understand, but defies translation. It signifies "blooming," or "fresh," but none of the meanings that we might extract from this word can be attached to "marriage" in our language without seeming awkward or even silly.

The Lexicon, doing its best by us, gives us for this instance, "the marriage of a youthful pair." But "youthful" is a long way from the essential significance of *thaleros*. We are being introduced here to the idea of the bud, "the budding marriage" about to flower. The connotations are reinforced

when Nausikaa, speaking to her father of his five sons, says that two are married; but three are still bachelors, and these she describes as θαλέθοντες (6.63). They are in the very bloom of their manhood. Both these words refer us to a certain point in the development of organic life, when a plant comes into flower; hence our translations “blooming,” “blossoming,” “flowering.” Such translations are satisfactory when plants and flowers are our theme, but scarcely adequate when our theme is boys on the verge of manhood, or a girl discovering herself on the verge of womanhood.

The word *gamos* take us to the heart of the mystery that has now struck Nausikaa as if with a lightning bolt. Transformation is in the essence of the word. We may, to observe decorum, translate the word simply as “marriage,” but we do well to remember that it also signifies behaviors that are not named in polite society; it is the act of sexual intercourse. To lapse into our vernacular, Nausikaa has just discovered sex. She went to bed one night as a girl, and she woke the next morning to discover she was no longer a girl but a woman. That was the message from the goddess, who told her, “Nausikaa you are no longer a girl.” We can each spell out for ourselves the endocrinology, which transformed girl into woman.

Gamos is the only word in the whole poem that a character is ashamed to speak. Of course, Nausikaa’s nocturnal experience must be camouflaged. The clothes are *soiled*. *A whole wagonload of clothes must be taken to the river and thoroughly washed*. The girl’s father, we are told, true to his name, “Perceptive Mind,” “understood everything.” He saw through his daughter’s girlish subterfuge. The laundry was not needed to make the boys look good at the dance, but to ensure that they would look their best at their sister’s wedding. He understood that his daughter was no longer a girl. In the larger structure of the poem, we understand also that *gamos* can only be alluded to here because this episode is but a rehearsal for the true *gamos* that will come only at the end of the poem.

The wagon is prepared. The princess herself, moving into her new function as mistress of the house, brings out the nec-

essary male attire and loads it onto the wagon. Her mother (on whose approval Odysseus' survival will depend) treats her daughter's outing as a very special picnic. She loads the wagon with a wonderful variety of edibles, pours wine into a wineskin, and provides olive oil (yes, of course, the olive again) for the girls to moisturize their skin after they have washed the clothes and themselves. With all the preparations made, the princess plies the whip, and off they go, the mules, the wagon, the princess and her playmates. The mules, we are told, moved forward with great vigor as if they too were actively engaged in this sacred rite and were responding with their own urgency to carry the girl forward to her initiation.

The girls reach the river; they let the animals loose; they unload the clothes, including their own, so we must infer, and set about doing the laundry in vigorous contest. They then bathe and anoint themselves with oil; they have their lunch by the river. They then played a ball game while the clothes are drying in the sun. So much of the *Odyssey* takes place in darkness, but here the sun is a glorious participant in the day's events. This is our only reference in book 6 to the sun's direct action, but its presence radiates through the whole of the book. Helios, who had years earlier destroyed many of Odysseus' comrades for their sacrilege, is now exerting a power that will help bring Odysseus back into the world of light.

The girls play ball, but we are also told that Nausikaa "led the song" (*molpê*). This is no ordinary game. It is a moment in a sacred ritual. It is the prenuptial Game, the last game that Nausikaa, unmarried, will play with her unmarried girlfriends. The girls throw aside their veils, at liberty for the moment to expose themselves to the elements and careless of their virginal vulnerability.

Nausikaa, leading the "song," is treated to an extraordinary encomium on her beauty. She is likened to the goddess Artemis as she ranges on her mountains, Taygetus and Eurymanthus. Thus we are transported to Arcadia, and the Arcadian resonance is heightened when we are told of Artemis

and her nymphs delighting in the goats and the deer, sporting in the open grazing lands (far from city inhibitions). Leto rejoices to see her daughter in this landscape, where all the nymphs are beautiful and her daughter the most beautiful of them all, and standing a full head taller than any of them. This moment of Arcadian joy is a significant element in the unfolding events of the day. The girls, with their domestic responsibilities completed, and their city modes temporarily cast aside, can enjoy, if only for the moment, the wild state of nature. Becoming nymphs, they delight in the rites of spring. Their play is the music of nature.

Now the time has come for the girls to put their veils back in place and make themselves once again circumspect for society. But wait. Athena must intervene again. After all, in this scene of Arcadian innocence lurks an old goat, veritably a Pan himself. Odysseus must be awakened from his coma and allowed to gaze upon the lovely maiden who will reintroduce him into the city.

Here we are invited to enjoy the mystery of coincidence. What a coincidence that a beautiful princess, just newly awakened to her sexuality, should happen to be at the very spot outside the city where our weary traveler awaits to be discovered. The coincidence is now circled and highlighted to engage both our humor and our deeper insight. How pedestrian would be our reading of the *Odyssey* if we were not attuned to the mystery of coincidence.

And how gracefully Coincidence shades into the coincidence of opposites. As the poem begins, we learn that, in the circling of the seasons, Athena has now set the clock for Odysseus' *nostos*. It is time now for him to emerge from hiding and return to his native hearth. In the crescendo building to the poem's denouement in the final books of the poem, we gain a progressively deeper understanding of the synchronicity that is the kernel of this narrative, the synchronicity of man and wife, reflecting the synchronicity of sun and moon as they come into alignment after their twenty years of wandering on their separate paths.

Here, in the laundry episode, coincidence is given a lighter touch. Nausikaa throws the ball to one of her girlfriends, the girl misses the ball, the fumbled ball falls into the water, all the girls shout in playful surprise, and their girlish dismay awakens the satyr lurking on the perimeter of their playground.

Every game, whether the manly sport of baseball or the girls' domestic game of dolls and dollhouses, demarcates a sacred space. The girls' game in this episode signifies symmetry, balance, reciprocity, and freedom from outside interference. The audience for this game, if there were an audience (apart from us, the readers of the poem), would be Leto, who watches Artemis and the other nymphs at play—singing and dancing—in the wilds of nature. We have many illustrations of this dance in the galleries of our Western art: in ancient art, the three Graces; and in subsequent European art, from Botticelli to Matisse. It is a constant and recurrent theme in our tradition.

But a game, to be a game, requires an obstruction, an interference, or we would soon tire of arabesques performed in endless perfection with no narrative for them to punctuate. The game in this episode signifies virginity, and its pristine delight. But virginity would be an empty game indeed, but for the presence of that which cannot be named lurking on the perimeter of the charmed circle. And there, lying on the rocks, being bleached in the hot Mediterranean sun, is that very presence, but camouflaged as absence, an absence that declares itself a ghostly presence—the absent or hidden male. The girls play ball with this numinous absence, tossing the ball to each other over it and around it, encircling it as if they were the very nymphs of coincidence.

Odysseus, awakened, sits up in his bed of leaves and ponders. Where is he? Who are these girls? Are they humans, or are they nymphs? How should he approach them? He can impersonate the male animal on the prowl. In this paradigm, the male pursues, the female flees; he continues to pursue and she continues to flee, until she gives up her resistance

and surrenders. We can watch this ferocious courtship often enough even among the pigeons at play on our streets and in our backyards. The other option for a male in such circumstances is to give up any thought of the chase and be himself the one who surrenders.

Hard necessity gives Odysseus, in fact, no real option but to throw himself at the girl's feet and present himself as both helpless and harmless, a stranger finding himself by accident in a strange land. He emerges from his ground cover, stark naked, but discretion bids him break off a branch with which to hide (in Homer, "to protect") his genitals. The poet, not hampered by the taboo that affects the girl's conversation, can say the word—and, by the sheer coincidence of language, the word for "penis" appears identical to the word for intelligence, though they are in fact two distinctly different words. The Greek pun here is untranslatable: Odysseus held the olive branch in front of his *penis* to hide his *intelligence* (*mêdea*).

Here is the word that must not be spoken, certainly not by a girl of good breeding. Of course it cannot appear naked. The supergo's censorship of the dream requires that it be *dressed* in genteel subterfuge. We are at the heart of the uncanny, the very substance of the nocturnal dream made manifest in the broad light of day. But much must still be disguised.

Odysseus, making a brusque entry into this happy scene, with only a branch to hide his private parts, causes extreme consternation. The girls panic and flee in every direction. We are reminded of the myth of the hunter Actaeon inadvertently coming upon Artemis while she is naked and at her bath, where feminine vulnerability is transformed into deadly reprisal. We think also of the myth of Hades and Persephone, or stories of the god Pan advancing on some woodland nymph. Odysseus emerges from his hiding place with his eyes aglitter. He is a lion on the hunt. He is a savage. This is how the Male appears in his natural state before he has been dressed and initiated into the decorum of society. Society is language, and language is culture and camou-

flage. To Nausikaa is assigned the task of introducing this savage into society.

While the girls scatter in all directions, Nausikaa alone stands firm, with Athena's help. Is this her dream come true? But was the expected bridegroom to be a savage? Now is the moment when the savage must fine tune his instrument, and present himself as the most desirable suitor to the most beautiful princess in the realm. What can this brine-encrusted brute do to persuade her that he is no savage but in fact a courtier of infinite nuance? Odysseus composes a speech that is a masterpiece, delivered with finesse. Theorists of Lacanian persuasion must be especially delighted with this speech as a brilliant study of naked animal lust transmuted into human language, and human language transposed into poetry. Freudians too will delight to watch the id following its devious circuitry to its own sublimation. And Jungians will have their delight too, watching the Animus pay court to the Anima.

First the predator—and there is no question that this uncouth apparition is a predator—first, he must deploy an olive branch to camouflage his predatory tool. He must then decide on attitude and posture. Several motives crisscross each other like a net with which to snare this sweet and innocent virgin: hunger; the necessity of a man's survival outside the city limit; lust and, simply, a mature man's adoration of virginal female beauty. Should he grasp the girl around her knees, adopting the traditional posture of the suppliant? But his nudity would be too threatening to an adolescent girl so innocent and, if we may say so, pristine. Better to keep his distance and use space to ameliorate his wild appearance. If the first principle in his courtship is camouflage, the second is to find the exactly appropriate distance, far enough to offset the girl's alarm but not so far that he can be easily dismissed.

Odysseus debated this dilemma with himself and concluded that it would be more *profitable* to stand at a certain distance. *Profit* is our word here. This is no casual decision;

his very life is at stake. Culture is profit sublimated. To present himself as a suppliant while fully standing requires a certain suavity: the suppliant's aggressive posture must be translated into poetry. We are given to watch the agreeable contradiction of a man standing naked and fully erect to make his plea for mercy and benevolence from a beautiful adolescent girl who has just discovered her own sexuality. Various ideas hover as we read: on one side, the sperm; and on the other side, the not-to-be-mentioned *gamos* of an adolescent girl's nocturnal vision. And there, spread out on the rocks, are the very clothes that this brute so desperately needs to hide his brutishness. What words can he find to charm those clothes off the rocks and onto his own body?

Odysseus begins his courtship. Is this nymph who stands her ground in this most compromising situation a goddess or a human? If a goddess, he likens her to Artemis herself. If she is a human, her parents must indeed rejoice (we recall her father, who supplied the wagon earlier in the day), and her brothers (those same brothers whose glorious clothes are now in full view spread out on the rocks). They must feel great joy, this charmer continues, seeing such a *flower* (θάλον) going to the dance. We return again to the language of nature—Nausikaa as the bloom about to flower. Thus has the savage turned naked necessity into an overture. Here is that *gamos* of the girl's nocturnal vision being created before her very eyes.

Soaring on the wings of necessity, Odysseus parlays courtship to new heights, reaching for the sublime, as if he had not already sublimated his naked necessity. But no beautiful lady will weary of fine compliments. Changing his register, he now likens this young beauty to a palm tree. Young women today are not likely to melt into a man's embrace when they are compared to a palm tree. They are more likely to be amused at the incongruity, taking such a comparison to be a far distance from a winning compliment. But this was no ordinary tree. It is buttressed with several ramifications that signify its extraordinary nature.

First, it was a sight that Odysseus saw on the island of Delos. We do not know when Delos reached the full summit of its designation as a sacred island but the implication here is that the island already stood in a category of its own as a sacred place. It would hardly figure so conspicuously in Odysseus' speech if it were not already marked with that special character. This remarkable palm tree was planted close to the altar of Apollo. Thus we are given a set of signifiers of the palm's singular status: its growth on a sacred island and its presence beside a sacred shrine, as if it shared in the numen of that holy place. Odysseus talks of arriving at the island with a large body of men, as if to intimate, present appearances notwithstanding, that he was once a man of substance and that his visit to the island was accompanied with a certain majesty.

One other signifier adds a special character to this palm tree. Odysseus does not call it a tree, but a "young shoot" (τέον ἔρvoς). This "shoot" (ἔρvoς) is the fourth word in book 6 to bring our thoughts back to the human being as a living organism, to the human as nature, and nature as life in process. Odysseus, seeing this tree on Delos, gazed at it in awe for a long time. Never had he seen such a tree grow from the earth. This was a shoot like no other. He was granted a mystical experience then, and now he is given a second mystical experience as he gazes on another young shoot, Nausikaa herself.

So, he continues, his awe at seeing Nausikaa forbids him from grasping her around her knees. Odysseus translates his physical desperation into the poetry of courtship. It seems naïve to us today, indeed it is naïve as Schiller understood the term, for Odysseus to articulate as he does here the ontological problem of his courtship: where stands Nausikaa in the Great Chain of Being? The demarcation between one form of being and the next was more fluid in archaic thinking than now. Goddess, human, plant: Nausikaa as a living organism is all three because in the thinking of antiquity organic life is one continuum, each moment being but one point in the transition from one form to the next.

On Calypso's Ogygia Odysseus was coddled in nature as prolific and beautiful as nowhere else in our world. But it was a nature that had no meaning for him. He had no eyes for Calypso's nature. It has no *direction*. Meaning derives from direction. Odysseus, turning his back on that flamboyant fecundity, sat instead on the stony edge of the island, gazing out to sea, at those vast reaches of emptiness, searching for direction, weeping away his own precious nature drop by drop. Now, seeing Nausikaa, Odysseus has re-discovered nature as humans understand nature, nature as seed, bud, and flower, nature as direction.

Odysseus is courteous, with the courtesy of a troubadour. One theory for the origins of troubadour poetry suggested that it arose from the spring-time rituals, girls in ritual dancing around the Maypole.⁶ This theory has now been discredited but the troubadour tradition gives us an analogy for the present episode. Certainly, Odysseus is a troubadour at this moment. Like the Provencal troubadours, he, as a man of a low station (so he must seem), sings an ode to a lady of a very high station to win her affection, pouring out his very soul to her as if she were his goddess. And around this lady dance her maiden friends, as if around the Maypole in the Provencal rites of spring. As in a troubadour's song, Odysseus moves first from physical need to sensuous compliments; and from sensuality he moves to a yet higher register, the spiritual.

In the formal conventions of a prayer in ancient Greek, the suppliant first invokes the deity by name and attributes. In this case, since the person to be venerated is as yet unnamed, Odysseus must focus on her attributes, which are three-fold. First, if she is a god, then she must be Artemis. If so, Odysseus must highlight the beauties that make him take her for a goddess. But if she is a human, then she must be the finest of human girls, the most perfect daughter, a delight and a blessing to her parents. And last, she is as awesome as that shoot of a palm growing beside a sacred altar on a sacred island.

With the girl's attributes extolled, Odysseus moves to the second part of a conventional prayer, which is to present his request. We must hope that his encomium on the girl's beauty is successful, first in covering his shame, or at least transferring her attention from his genitals to his mind, and thereby finding an answer to his prayer. And what is his request? We are surprised to learn that his bravura performance is put at the service of a very modest proposal indeed. Odysseus asks for two items: he asks to be shown the way to the city and he needs something to cover his body; a mere rag will do.

We relish the construction here, with three separate strands being fluently woven into a single fabric. We have, first, Nausikaa. Her attention has been wholly focused on marriage ever since Athena's scolding of the previous night. The clothes, the laundry, the picnic, the ball game—everything has been activated to one end. But marriage is not on Odysseus' mind. His needs are more rudimentary: something to eat, and something to wear. He is a lion on the hunt, but, being also the consummate courtier, he delivers a speech such as would win the heart of any virgin on the lookout for a husband, even a princess of royal blood. The incongruity, presented to us in the most visible way, adds to our delight. An ordinary castaway would blurt out his more immediate and primary needs. But this wayfarer, whose middle name is Evasion, tells Nausikaa almost nothing about himself except to mention, as if in a parenthesis, a past visit to Delos, wherever that is. Instead, he devotes his speech to Nausikaa, and marriage is interwoven suavely into everything he says—compliments on her beauty, the joy that she must give to her parents, and his wishes that she find a husband with whom she would share complete unanimity of soul. This is indeed courtship, incongruous as that must be in the present circumstances, but a courtship that is, alas, a masquerade, since marriage is not his intention.

And we, the readers, provide the third strand in this tapestry. We smile at the relations between the puppeteer and

his beloved Athena, knowing as we do more than is vouchsafed to either Nausikaa or Odysseus. We know that *gamos*, while anachronistic at this point in the story, awaits Odysseus at the end of this long epic. In fact, it is the climax that claims our attention through the whole poem, beginning with the conversation between Calypso and Odysseus in book 5, when Odysseus confesses that his own wife is certainly inferior to Calypso, yet she is where his heart is. We mark how that marriage, so distant from this episode in both time and space, and by comparison so very pedestrian, shapes and shades every line in this moment of pure magic.

We have not, perhaps, the full panoramic sweep that the bards enjoy, being observers while they are the masters in the art of illusion, but we have sufficient understanding of their creative intentions to smile at their manipulation of their beloved characters. Athena toys with Nausikaa; Odysseus too toys with Nausikaa, and the bards toy with us. Nausikaa thinks marriage while Odysseus thinks of his belly. And we, as best we can, peer through the poem's spyglass for those pinholes of coincidence that the poets allow to pierce our atmosphere and—for a moment at least—we almost believe in purpose and providence.

In the third element of a prayer, the suppliant promises, or in this case wishes, a special benefit for the person whom he is venerating in return for her benevolence. Odysseus, following the conventional form, wishes for Nausikaa a good husband, but then ventures beyond the social aspects to the spiritual. May she and her husband enjoy "same-mindedness" (*homophrosyne*). For nothing is better than when a man and woman enjoy this unanimity, a threat to their enemies but a blessing to their friends. Odysseus can hardly avoid the marriage theme, but he deftly deflects that possibility away from himself and projects it onto some hypothetical candidate who would be a more suitable spouse for this youngster who has just discovered sex. Thus he concludes his exercise in rhetoric, which moves like a musical composition among several registers, the sublime, the inti-

mate, and the pragmatic, with a gracious gesture to mind, which suggests to the lovely Nausikaa that his mind and hers can never be in total alignment, while reminding us, the readers, that mind is the principal theme of the poem itself.

Whether Nausikaa will find her perfect husband lies, alas, beyond the scope of this poem. But otherwise, the prayer achieves its purpose. This man, naked though he be, is certainly not uncouth. The other girls are summoned to come out of hiding. The princess orders them to give him what he so desperately needs—food and clothing, and olive oil for its extra cosmetic value. Odysseus, mindful of his shame, begs the girls to stand at a distance, to allow him to attend to his toilette in privacy, as best he can in these awkward circumstances.

A contradiction has been noticed between Odysseus' shame at being naked here and his lack of shame later, when Eurynome, one of his own slave women, bathes and dresses him after he has slaughtered his wife's suitors. We must factor in, to some degree at least, the nature of oral performance. When a text is composed by a single author, the author and various editors will rake through the text to catch any inconsistencies. But when the text is a composite made from dozens of oral performances, incongruities may pass unquestioned for generations, until they come to be accepted as organic elements in the authorized text.

But more important here is the context. Odysseus, being given his bath by one of his own slaves, reminds us that male nudity would be a commonplace in that culture. Female slaves were no doubt accustomed to bathing the men of the house from the time they were babies. We should note, however, that some care has been taken in the Nausikaa episode to distinguish, despite the possible incongruity, her handmaidens from the household slaves. There is no question that the women in Odysseus' household are all slaves, except for his wife Penelope. But that point is moot in the Nausikaa episode. True, these girls do the household laundry as if they were her slaves, but Nausikaa busies herself doing the laundry exactly as her companions do. She, in fact, loads the

laundry into the wagon, as if there were no distinction between the princess and her household slaves. This is Phaeacia, after all, not Ithaka.

Here various archetypes intervene, superimposed on what might seem an ordinary laundry scene. First, the princess and her handmaidens are playing a game in preparation for a wedding, a point made unequivocally when the girls undress to do the laundry, and then later toss aside their veils. These moments of undress remind us that they are both virginal and naked. Another archetype takes us into myths like the myth of Artemis and her nymphs bathing in some secluded pool far from human society. A man, a hunter like Actaeon, happens on them and spoils their innocence. Some modifications must be introduced in this interplay of archetypes, since Nausikaa is not a goddess, nor are her attendants. Their playing a ball game with their faces unveiled will suffice to allude to the archetype. The river, with its fresh running water, will have to substitute for the secluded pool.

The nakedness of Odysseus, while not a problem when he is given his bath in his own home, is presented as a problem here because the context is *virginity*, and virginity is marked by taboo. We may avail ourselves of *phallus* as it is used by modern sociological theorists. If the penis is the physical organ, *phallus* signifies social hegemony, when our discussion relates to the power structure. That is certainly the function of Odysseus' genitalia in this episode. Let us be blunt: his penis dominates this episode and it requires several strategies: first, the olive branch; next, his eloquence; and finally, clothes to make him a civilized social creature.

With Odysseus cleaned and dressed, Athena enters the scene as his hairdresser. The barber in present-day Greece is the *koureas*; his barber shop is the *koureio*, where the *kouros* has his hair and beard beautified, insofar as nature and his chronology will allow. This is Athena's function here. She fills out Odysseus' wasted frame, making him bigger and stronger, and then she dresses his hair, making it flow down onto his shoulders, a veritable garden. Hyacinths! The first

flowers of spring. Hyacinths in bloom, the poet says, as when a man, with his skills learned from Hephaistos and Athena, pours gold over silver and makes a thing of grace (grey hair returned to a golden blonde!). Athena makes this ancient mariner into a *kouros* again.

Odysseus sits washed, dressed, made sleeker thanks to the olive oil, with his silvered hair now miraculously blonde, and behold! Before Nausikaa sits the man of her dream, a *kouros* fit to be her bridegroom, a splendid sight indeed with his youthful looks and dressed now in the finest clothes; why, yes, such apparel as her bridegroom would wear. "He sat gleaming," says our poet, "with beauty and graces." Odysseus had taken Nausikaa for a goddess (perhaps), and now the favor is returned. He has become (in her eyes) a god. With her youth and beauty acting on her behalf, and aided by her prophetic dream, Nausikaa has transformed a wild brute into a man of beauty, courtesy, and charm.

Once our castaway, now gentrified, has partaken of some food (a luncheon such as would gratify the most fastidious royal palate), it is time for Nausikaa to guide him to her father's palace. He walks beside her wagon as she drives the mules back into town, but she leaves him outside the city while she proceeds to the palace. Just as it was unseemly for her to say the word *gamos* to her father, so now it would be equally unseemly for her to be ushering the leading candidate for this *gamos* into her father's palace as her bridegroom-to-be. Thus the wedding party proceeds, but they leave Odysseus at Athena's grove. If Nausikaa had a touch of the modern tart in her makeup, she might address Athena, when she has brought Odysseus to her Ladyship's grove: "Lady, I have followed your instructions. And here he is, the man of your dreams. I hand him now into your care." But not for her to interlace Athena's devious plots with her *sotto voce* commentary. That pleasure is reserved for us.

Just at sunset Odysseus enters Athena's grove, and there this sweet fantasy comes to an end. What a day this has been! But now both Nausikaa and Odysseus must return to

their own realities, hers to be a fairy-tale princess preserved in amber, forever intact; and his to be a man whose natural inheritance is decay.

Samuel Butler is remembered among Homerists for his theory that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman, and Robert Graves took the hypothesis one step farther, arguing that the poetess of this epic was none other than Nausikaa herself.⁷ That was the only explanation that these men could give to account for the powerful presence of the female, whether human or divine, in this poem. Such theories could emerge only in the period before the theory of oral performance brought about a seismic shift in our understanding of Homeric composition. In those pre-Parry days, it was still possible to assume that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written poems; hence we could talk of authors, perhaps one author for both poems, or two different authors, one writing the *Iliad*, and the other writing the *Odyssey*. But the conditions of oral performance in the archaic Age do not allow us to think of dozens, perhaps even scores, of women creating the *Odyssey* over several generations and giving public performances.

No, this is a man's poem. The hero is a male and all the adventures pertain to him. The females circulate around him as planets circle the sun. Penelope, a remarkable woman indeed, is not the hero of this epic, nor is Helen. Their heroic character is intended to reinforce and substantiate the male ethos of the poem. Penelope's mind, subtle as it is, sheds its special light on the mind of the hero, her husband Odysseus.

Yet, while we can never be in doubt that this was a man's poem, we must recognize the extraordinary influence of the goddess and the other female figures, whether nymphs like Circle and Calypso, or a long-suffering wife, who weaves and unweaves, then reweaves; or even a simple slave woman like Eurykleia, who is the first person to recognize Odysseus in his own palace, and from his body language alone. From their ubiquitous presence in the poem, we must conclude that in those centuries during which the poem took shape, the feminine (the Anima, in Jung's language) played a much

larger role in men's actions and consciousness than in subsequent periods. The Nicene Creed, formulated in 325 BCE, marks a significant moment in the undermining of the Anima. This Creed allows for only one God; or, more exactly, three Gods in one—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The female in this Creed is represented by two words (in our English translation): *Virgin Mary*, who provided the human womb for the incarnation of the male God, Jesus. The Virgin Mary is the last vestige of the Great Goddess of classical antiquity. She is Gaia Christianized. The Creed is the final chapter in that conflict between Gaia and Olympians first articulated for us in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

The *Odyssey*, patriarchal as it may be, puts us in touch with a time when the Goddess, the White Goddess, as Robert Graves names her, was one of the most influential powers, perhaps the most powerful, in the world. This is a poem about birth and rebirth, about generation and regeneration, about creation and re-creation. In that ancient paradigm, before begetting became a masculine monopoly, all creation, as Parmenides reminds us, begins with, and emanates from, the feminine.⁸

One scholar has written that Nausikaa “shapes up unused.” This is sadly true, though we might prefer to have this truth more elegantly expressed. In fact, Nausikaa is used; first by Athena, and then by Odysseus. But we understand this scholar's judgment here. Nausikaa is presented with such delicacy as if she were an exact facsimile of a human being. She is more fully realized than any other human character in the *Odyssey*, except Odysseus himself and Penelope. But when the puppeteer wheels her back into the cupboard, we purse our lips in dismay to be reminded that a creature so lifelike was merely a doll.

There are two kinds of characters in the Homeric world. There are, first, those we call real persons, people like ourselves, living the kind of lives we lead, having histories like ours, suffering all the exigencies that impinge on our human affairs. But another set of human-like persons exist, a much

larger aggregate than the human population, endowed, for the most part, with human appearances, at least when they enter our field of vision. These are the creatures of myth, and a partition separates their world from ours. That partition is impermeable from the human side (with some notable exceptions), but porous for those creatures of myth. We accept the logic of this narrative because we understand that the vast population of those other beings represents the almost infinite variety of powers that impinge on our daily lives—the air we breathe, the water we drink, the weather, the heat, the cold, the very ground we stand on. Such powers pass back and forth through that diaphanous curtain, since without their infinite mobility we would not even be alive. They bring us nutrition and feed us our ideas. They enter into us and pass through us, beings of every size and shape, like the atoms of Democritus. Some humans, Odysseus for example, or the modern adventurer, Harry Potter, find ways, by peculiar accidents, to pass through that partition. Whereupon, they find themselves in the world of magic.

Scholars have noted that the Phaeacians stand mid-way between myth and our reality. They have a grove dedicated to the goddess Athena as if they practiced the customary Greek religion. As Odysseus walks into the city he notices their harbor and the tall masts of ships, such as we would find on every Greek island today. In the palace, their king and queen entertain their guest as human monarchs would. They have a singer who entertains them at dinner as any human bard would, with tales of myth and morals artfully blended. Odysseus competes with the young bloods of the realm in such contests as we might expect to see on any Greek island. When the time comes for his departure, the Phaeacians stow him and his goods on board a ship and convey him back to his own island as if he had booked passage on some ordinary sea-faring ship sailing from one Greek island to another.

After all his adventures among strange beings who are only minimally like human beings, these Phaeacians seem remarkably Greek, people such as we might encounter on

any Greek island even today. Yet they are completely magical. Even the clothes that Odysseus wears when he arrives at the royal court are an element in the magic. They are imbued with sufficient magic to ensure his welcome at the royal palace. Once he arrives on his own island, Athena transforms him into a decrepit beggar, and that royal apparel is heard of no more. The ship that conveys Odysseus back to his own island seems real enough yet it too is endowed with magic. It navigates itself through the darkness of night by mind alone or, as we might say today, this ship's nautical chart is its own imagination.

The treasures that the Phaeacians load on to the ship and then deposit on the shore at Ithaca, what can this wealth be but a generous cargo of magic, available for Odysseus to draw on in his later years, as and when such a necessity arises? Odysseus is the Harry Potter of the ancient world. Athena assists Odysseus to hide these goods in the Cave of the Nymphs, and they are heard of no more. Whatever they may be, we would be obtuse indeed if we were to take them for the mere swords and spears of human manufacture. The Cave of the Nymphs, as Porphyry eloquently explained long ago, is completely mystical.⁹ Its two entrances, one for the coming and going of the gods, the other for humans, signify that this is where myth and our reality intersect.

The function of the Phaeacians in this poem, standing as they do at the threshold of our reality, is to pass Odysseus back through that curtain separating their polymorphous world of magic from his own world governed by the hard, inflexible law of non-contradiction. Nausikaa, sharing in the bipolar nature common to all the Phaeacians, is a fusion of the real and the unreal. She is endowed with so much human grace that we are vexed, perhaps even peeved, that she must be returned to her native habitat. She is only temporarily on loan to Odysseus. The realism that has endeared Nausikaa to generations of human being, natural as it may seem, is in fact completely unnatural. Her role is to guide Odysseus back into the reality of time.

The ball that goes amiss at the sea shore is the first cue for the perspicacious reader that Odysseus is now entering a world where people drop the ball, where mistakes and miscalculations make up the stuff of ordinary life. Such fumbling would be unthinkable on Calypso's island. The girls' shout that awakens Odysseus is his cue that he is about to re-enter time after his violent expulsion from Eternity. Understandably, he is perplexed. Has he indeed arrived back in the world of time, or is he still in Calypso's world where time is only a romantic fantasy? Only literalists would mistake Odysseus' bath in the healing waters of the river as simply the physical cleansing of the salt brine from his waterlogged body. A different kind of cleansing is needed, which will wash away the lingering traces of such *numen* as may be too toxic for ordinary human existence, and thus make him fit to enter his own human society again. His *daimon*, always one step ahead of him, conjures up a lissome young virgin to assist him in this necessary ablution.

Nausikaa is needed to make time delicious. After untold eons (by our chronology) sequestered outside of time, Odysseus must re-experience time, as if time itself, the greatest of our adversaries, were itself magical. Nausikaa is made to seem as though she were Time incarnate, that moment when Time is most sweet, most precious, most playful, and full of promise. Beauty is the compensation nature gives us when we exchange the seamless serenity of being for the slings and arrows of misfortune, nature's lure as it were, to have us believe that any destiny, however humble, is nobler than to have no destiny at all, even when we learn, as we must, whether sooner or later, that every destiny, even the noblest, collapses in defeat, and its end is catastrophe.

In the fullness of time, in the circling of the seasons, the goddess rises from her bed, gathers up all the apparel that needs to be made new. She goes down to the free-flowing river to wash away the old. She and her nymphs dance the Rite of Spring and their song awakens the male power buried deep under last year's desiccated leaves. Aroused, the man

too rises from his bed, is dressed by the goddess in the apparel of Spring, and now they are ready, Kore and her Kouros, to renew the world, to make it fresh and beautiful again.

Nausikaa is not a person, as Penelope is. She is an allegory.

The fresh shoots of Spring make even an ancient mariner's heart leap for joy and turn to thoughts of poetry.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, 1995), trans. of Derrida, *Sauf le nom* (Editions Galilée, 1983). Bernard Fenik, "The Nameless Stranger," *Studies in the Odyssey* (Wiesbaden 1974), 5–60, has given us a careful analysis of the problem that arises (in book 6.237), when Arete asks Odysseus for his name, and he ignores her question, while not identifying himself until book 9. Fenik shows that the problem presented in this incident is consistent with the practice elsewhere in the poem, and writes of scenes "where name-giving is first subjected to considerable retardation and then carried out within a rich spectrum of motifs that lie at the heart of the return story. In all these scenes the laws of verisimilitude are, if not thrown utterly to the winds, at least subjected to considerable strain. The poet sacrifices flawless motivation and efficient scene mechanics in order to build key parts of his narrative around a core of central ideas . . . name-giving is a matter of importance and at least some ceremony almost everywhere in the epics" (20). But such retardation of the name, while it may seem to defy narrative plausibility, is in fact very much part of the narrative intention. The implausibility that Fenik finds in the narrative is a modern idea, dating from the time when names have lost their magic. The name of Odysseus is a significant element in the narrative itself. George Dimock, "The Magic of the Name," *Hudson Review* 9 (1956), 52–70, makes a useful contribution to this topic, in his analysis of the name "Odysseus," and the naming of Odysseus by his grandfather Autolykos. In my essay, "Name Magic in the *Odyssey*," *Calif. Studies in Classical Antiquity* 5 (1972) 1–19, I made a preliminary attempt to demonstrate that the narrative treatment of Odysseus' name should be understood as reflecting magical thinking. Yet the full degree of this magical thinking could scarcely be recognized before Derrida's studies of "word" and "name," and the exploration of secret names in Levi-Strauss.

2. Longinus, *On the Sublime* 9.15.

3. Bernard Werber. *Le Livre du Voyage* (Paris 1997), 37.

4. Parmenides, fr. DK12.

5. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1980), 239–40.

6. Maria Rosa Menocal, "Close Encounters in Medieval Provence:

Spain's Role in the Birth of Troubadour Poetry," *Hispanic Review* 49 (1981), 47. Menocal attributes this theory to A. Jeanroy, *Lancelot du Lac: Le Conte de la Charrete* (Paris 1883), 86–89.

7. Samuel Butler, *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, ed. D Grene (Chicago 1967, orig. published 1897); Robert Graves, *Homer's Daughter* (New York 1955; also reprinted as "The Authoress of the *Odyssey*" in Steiner and Fagles, edd. *Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood, N.J. 1962, 148–51), where Graves writes of the *Iliad* as a poem written for men and "the *Odyssey* will be devised by a woman for women" (148).

8. Cf. Parmenides, DK12: the *daimon* who steers all things, who rules over birth and all begetting, is feminine (that is to say, a goddess).

9. Porphyry, "The Cave of the Nymphs," *Arethusa Monographs*, no. 1 (Buffalo, NY 1969).

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Roberto Bolaño harasses Horace, by IAN FIELDING

Horace counts his blessings, translations by KARL JOHNSON

COLIN CROMWELL PANG on Catullus, Hip-hop, and masculinity

“Statue” and “Shapeshifter,” poems by MARGARET WACK

ALAN SUMLER discusses the ingredients
and ecstasies in the Magical Papyri

JOAN KIMBALL’s “Visitation” and “Perpetual Notion”

JOSEPH RUSSO and BENNETT SIMON on
winning, losing, and success in Herodotus

Two poems by LAWRENCE DUGAN

From KARL KIRCHWEY’s *Mutabor*: “Palmyra” and “Colosseum”

Comedy and Tragedy in Modern Politics:
LOUIS A. RUPRECHT JR. reviews Angus Fletcher’s
Comic Democracies: From Ancient Athens to the American Republic

On Black Ground: HELAINE L. SMITH
on the Berlin Painter at the Princeton University Art Museum