
The Odyssey's Slow Movement

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UNTIL CONFINED BY the pandemic, I had not read my father's Postscript to his translation of the *Odyssey*, written almost sixty years ago: it is dated Perugia, June 1962. We had moved to the house below the hamlet of San Fortunato della Collina near Perugia just before Christmas 1961, and soon after the Epiphany, the four of us who were attending local schools enjoyed the measles that quarantined us well into the beginning of spring. The two older siblings, already at boarding schools, escaped. While my father was composing the postscript up in the attic studio, at the pinewood architect's desk facing the window, the Tiber valley lay before him, all the way to the Subasio hill with Assisi nestled at its foot. It lay before us all as the weather got milder, when we stepped out of the house onto the terrace, letting the screen door slam. The air of that last childhood spring is always clear and cool, the sky blue with tones of pink, the distant ancient mountains, eroded by time, still miraculously blue green. In memory, rain belongs to an earlier period, where it slides forever down latticed panes in windows that look out to the stormy sea from the house overlooking the Mediterranean where we lived for a number of years before moving to Umbria.

In the Postscript, my father theorized a division of the epic into six blocks, based on his own particular way of deducing the length of performances in ancient times, informed by Milman Parry, the Harvard scholar who transformed the study of Homer, and who was a mentor and long-lasting influence:

If you will make the effort to imagine this Greek as still virgin of any visual signs at all, associated with no letters, no Greek characters, no script, no print—as purely and simply expressive sound, you will be

able to perceive it in the air, its true medium, and to hear how it shapes
and tempers the air by the virtue of stops and tones. (493)

My father calculated how many lines could be performed in an hour and based the division on the assumption that each part would have lasted around five hours. The division blocks together Books I to IV, V to VIII, IX to XII, XIII to XVI, XVII to XX, XXI to XXIV.

When I read it, I was struck at how my father seemed almost ambivalent, and a little defensive in naming one of the blocks, Books XIII to XVI, *The Slow Movement*: it was the only block he named, almost as if he could not stop himself from thinking of those four books somehow as fillers, dragging on the poem in a mechanistic effort to reach the final stage, to move the protagonists and get them to the same place at the same time. This is understandable if the assumption is that ancient audiences, just like today's audience, are uninterested in nuance. Did he see the need for the slowness of the movement, and yet wished it were not so, and was eager for the action to pick up?

During the lockdown, I also finally read my father's translation of the epic. Trained by a professional career teaching Creative Writing that had fostered a technical interest in the writing of fiction, I noticed how almost all the action in the poem is in the remembered past, and how little action there is in the narrative present, until the righteous slaughter of the suitors; and I noticed that all the books of the slow movement are in the narrative present, with no epic flashbacks.

BOOK XIII

DURING THE PREPARATIONS for the overnight *clear sailing* between Skheria and Ithaka, the tenderness of the encounter between Odysseus and Nausikaa is replicated in this first book of the slow movement on a different note from Odysseus' first encounter with her in Book VI: now the crew of the ship . . .

. . . *spread a rug*
and linen cover on the after deck,

*where lord Odysseus might sleep in peace.
 Now he himself embarked, lay down, lay still,
 while oarsmen took their place at the rowlocks...
 Slumber, soft and deep
 like the still sleep of death, weighed on his eyes. (xiii.88–91, 98–99)*

God, the man is tired: it is specifically recorded that after Odysseus left Kalypso on the fragile raft, *seventeen nights and days in the open water he sailed*, before getting within reach of the coast of Skheria—more than two weeks carefully husbanding water and food, aware of the hourly possibility of a change in the weather, cat napping but never sleeping. And then grumpy Poseidon had thrown a fit, engendered hurricanes and tidal waves, described in wonderful and exhausting detail. Five minutes in this would be enough to drown anyone, but our hero fought for hours with every breath and stroke of arms until he was beached on the shore, and soon heard the gracious teen Princess playing shuttle cock on the beach with her girlfriends. Yes, he had then spent some days, perhaps even weeks in Skheria, enjoying banquets and telling his great tales for six wonderful epic books, but still, how long does it take to recover from that kind of experience, living through hurricanes and tidal waves, especially after having enjoyed years of languid indulgence, without much physical exertion except lovemaking with Kalypso?

He sleeps so deeply that the swift moving ship, with wind in its sails, seems to rock him into unconsciousness, from which he does not wake when the same gentle crew hoists him off the ship and lays him on the sands of Ithaka. He does not wake even with all the noise the sailors cannot help but make as they unload the gifts the Phaiakian ruler gave him and settle them around the olive tree that *throws wide its boughs over the bay*.

He does not wake when the Phaiakian sailors unfurl the furled-up sails and the ship backs out of the cove to make its return trip. He still sleeps while Poseidon and his dad Zeus yet again wreak petty revenge on the ship and strike it, turning it into a ship-sized boulder just as it is making its way into the Skherian harbor at sunset. The poem does not say, but I shall ask: what happened to the gracious crew? With a

wave of the magic wand of my imagination, I shall turn them into glorious, multicolored stones, reduced in the millennia to the pebbles I've seen at the bottom of transparent Mediterranean waters, still rocking in currents among bite sized anchovy and stinging jellyfish.

When Odysseus wakes up—he must have slept deeply for at least twenty-four hours—he does not recognize the place. Truth be told, it would be very difficult for anyone to recognize an unknown beach even in a familiar landscape after twenty years, and Athena makes it even harder by creating a grey mist to hide her protégé, a particularly unnecessary but enchanting bit of magic in a landscape that seems *unearthly strange* and bare of human life, *paths by hill and shore, glimpses of harbors, cliffs and summer trees*.

Odysseus stood up, rubbed his eyes, gazed at his homeland...he swore, *slapping his thighs with both his palms*, where am I? Those great Phaiakians, they went and dumped me somewhere that is certainly not Ithaka, not this empty misty landscape. Ithaka never has fog! Where am I? What alien gods and monsters am I doomed to meet? And look, there's the whole treasure they so generously gave me, dumped like me. But at least it is under the olive tree, not lying around on the sand. Better check that everything is there, I would not put it past those sailors who appeared so concerned, to have headed back to Skheria with a whole lot of it to use in their own houses. Why, o why did I fall asleep? And for how long?

*. . . And then he wept,
despairing for his own land, trudging down
beside the endless wash of the wide, wide sea,
weary and desolate as the sea.*

(XIII.275–278)

We may all want to pause here, contemplate the middle-aged Odysseus before he undertakes his final heroic act, ravaged by years of useless war and wandering, acknowledge his PTSD, and join him in weeping. Time itself, plundered and savaged is *weary and desolate as the sea*.

Figuratively wiping the tears from his eyes, the incomparable Athena came to him from the nearby air. This time she makes herself man-

ifest as a princely young shepherd, but from the very beginning of the story, as told in the poem, her goddess power has been expressed through a mutable omni-presence that seems so much more pleasant and productive than her father's Zeus' dictatorial and monolithic omnipotence: she is Mentor for Telemakhos at Menelaos' court, a teenage best friend for Nausikaa, a child carrying a water jug for Odysseus in Skheria, a Phaiakian crier for Alkinoos before the poem becomes epic with Odysseus' telling of tales and adventures.

Athena is never mentioned in the six books of epic flashbacks with which Odysseus has entertained the Phaiakian court. But in the narrative present, she is always there. Here, in Book XIII of the slow movement, the narrative is slowed down further by the game the goddess and the hero play, telling each other fictions about who they are, until. . .

. . . the grey-eyed goddess
 Athena smiled, and gave him a caress,
 her looks being changed now, so she seemed a woman
 tall and beautiful and no doubt skilled
 at weaving splendid things. (XIII.365–369)

Trans-gendering herself to show she is a goddess, she tells him who she is, what the situation is with the suitors and that they have to have a plan. But first of all, they have to resolve the problem of the treasure trove of gifts the Phaiakians left under the olive tree:

. . . The goddess turned and entered the dim cave,
 exploring it for crannies, while Odysseus
 carried up all the gold...
 Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus the storm king,
 placed them, and shut the cave mouth with a stone. (XIII.459–464)

Who else among the capricious family of gods on Olympus would take the trouble and help a protégé in such a humble way, tidying up the treasure? Here Athena is both practical organizer and all-powerful god, placing objects in the best places for them, gold here at the back, cloth there to cover the gold and all those cauldrons and tripods. She

moves a boulder by the flick of the wrist and the witchy wand she carries, to block the entrance. Then, *under the old grey olive tree those two / Sat down to work the suitors' death and woe*. Under what better canopy to plot the death of suitors, direct the hero to the swineherd Eumaios, insist that she will engineer Telemakhos' joining them, without the boy even knowing that he will be re-united with his father? What better place to transform the brawny hero into an old beggar?

*. . . She touched him with her wand
shriveled the clear skin of his arms and legs,
made all his hair fall out* (XIII.537–541)

The ancient blind poet knew about shriveled skin and the humiliation of baldness, so often hidden with caps and hats. The mid-twentieth century translator knew as well. By the time my father came to translate this book, around the year 1956–57, he was carefully brushing wisps of greying hair from one side of his head to the other. He was about the same age as Odysseus, the inescapable middle age, and it was ever harder for him to know himself a young man, with six children rampaging around the house, playing hide-and-seek and cow-boys-and-Indians along the terraced olive groves on the steep rocky hill overlooking the limpid Mediterranean.

BOOK XIV

IN THE ODYSSEY'S slow movement, this is undoubtedly the slowest book: when Odysseus, old beggarman, reaches Eumaios, the swineherd is making sandals for himself, and thinking of the four apprentices he employs: three of the young have taken hogs to different and more distant pastures, and the fourth has been ordered to take a fat boar into town as tribute to the suitors. He welcomes the beggar and complete stranger with faultless hospitality and the endearing garrulity of a certain kind of man, salt of the earth, come in, come in, make yourself at home, and let me tell you, life's a bitch, here I am protecting what I can of the wealth of this kingdom, the great son of Laertes gone and in all probability dead in the useless distant war fought—

over adultery of all things, lust for one woman's useless beauty. All that destruction, all those bodies fertilizing a foreign land, my lord's precious blood added to the blood of all those heroes. Heroes my foot. Cannon fodder, the lot of them:

*. . . This being told
he tucked his long shirt up inside his belt
and strode into the pens for two young porkers.
He slaughtered them and singed them at the fire,
flayed and quartered them, and skewered the meat
to broil it all; then gave it to Odysseus
hot on the spit. He shook out barley meal,
took a wine bowl of ivy wood and filled it
and sat down facing him, with a gesture, saying:
"There is your dinner, friend, the pork of slaves.
our fat shoats are all eaten by the suitors. . .* (xiv.89–99)

Eleven unparalleled lines to describe an activity that cannot have taken less than two hours, and much more likely half a day. What did Odysseus do during the real time it takes to actually pick out two young pigs, butcher, bleed out, cut and separate the loins, butts, jowls and tenderloin, to skewer the spareribs and lay them on the fire to broil? Did the swineherd stop talking during that time? No. Eumaios continued to chatter. And though the poem mentions the wine after the description of the food, I am pretty sure the first thing Eumaios handed out to his guest was the ivy wood bowl. By the time the meat was ready, how many times had the wine bowl been refilled?

(*Eumaios* -- *Oh, my swineherd!* the poem calls out four times in this slow-moving book, in my father's faithful but never slavish translation. I am post-modernist enough to want this to be the poet's call. It makes the only kind of sense. It is certainly nonsense for Odysseus to be calling out in the narrative moment. Let me make some fiction: around two thousand eight hundred years ago, before he was blinded, the young aspiring poet Homer had known and loved such an Eumaios—just look at how he remembered the way the swineherd

tucked his long shirt inside his belt. Homer boy-poet may have been one of the apprentice swineherds. Why not? It's all being imagined, why not imagine this? I can make up a whole story, how Homer the apprentice eventually acknowledged to his master, the swineherd Eumaios, that he really could not stop himself from thinking in hexameters and songs...and when he ended up blind from the black fly parasite in the river water, his employer, who loved him as a father loves a son, kept him on as his employee, and sent him to Odysseus' court to learn and make something out of those royal adventures... Odysseus was a great hero, but he did not know how to tell tales, the poet had had to drag the facts out of him, and then, what fun to make the language sing...who cared if some detail is not precisely the factual one. . . the heart of the story is almost too true. . .)

While they are drinking and eating, master and servant talk up a storm. Eumaios encourages the new beggar-friend: *I suppose you, too, can work your story up at a moment's notice, given a shirt or cloak.* Our hero obliges, making up a different fictional self from the one he had made up to Athena, young princely shepherd, just a few hours, maybe a day before. Not all that different than my working up an origin story for Homer poet, just for fun, just to make the point that stories can be inserted here and there, wherever. Whenever.

The tale-telling between the two old geezers takes up 450 lines. Really, it would be likely to go on for days. Odysseus makes up a fictional self who has lived the life of a hero unlike the heroic life he has actually lived, although it contains elements that have been re-arranged. In his own autobiography, Eumaios remains closer, perhaps, to the true story of his life—well, actually we don't know, perhaps we trust him more because he is a simple forester, not heroic protagonist. Can we really believe today that anyone is a reliable narrator? I can't.

And in any case, I like invention. It is one of the things that I found most revealing about Odysseus: I did not see the adventurer fighting monsters and gods with canny and indefatigable wiliness; not the hero so admired through time. I saw a middle-aged man disguised as an old man, finally relaxing completely in the company of the only real friend he has, Eumaios—*oh my swineherd*— Let others make him

hero. I think the talk between them went on for days. Athena in her wise, omniscient way, oversaw it—at once absent, headed to Menelaos' court to stage the return of Telemakhos, and present as she always is for Odysseus.

In fact, she organized it, didn't she? She'd planned it from the very beginning, sitting up on Olympus, before she turned her goddess gaze to her stern and rather simple-minded father-god in Book I, the book my father titled *A goddess intervenes*. I want to call that first book: *A goddess plots*. Before she ever intervened, Athena planned the whole thing, plotted the story, organized the set pieces, wrote it in her head in the language of the gods. The intervention was mere enactment in time, up there where time is subsumed in the eternal moment, a blink of an eye. The intervention was the slow writing, in the earthly hours and days of which humans are made, "just what the guy needs in preparation for the last act, a real vacation from being hero," she told herself in my contemporary language, in my contemporary mode of thinking. "He needs a friend," she said, psychologist before psychology was even a notion and a word, "and not a heroic one either." A real friend, who understands when he does not speak, or when he speaks too much; even when he lies, which Odysseus does routinely.

Her wise omniscience is by my side, encouraging me, yes, go on, do not be afraid to deviate from what has been emphasized for so long, the hero. Look at the man, drinking his nth bowl of wine, on the nth day of this slow movement, quite drunk now. Look, Athena tells me, look at how your own father made the poem new so that you have not been able to avoid seeing the real story, the true story behind the heroics.

IN A PAUSE in the talking, Eumaios tells our beggarman-hero:

... It is time for supper. My young herdsmen
should be arriving soon to set about it.
We'll make a quiet feast here at our hearth. (xiv.479–481)

Oh, so the two piglets slaughtered a little while earlier were a mere snack? Lunch to the forthcoming dinner?

*. . . At this point in their talk the swine had come
up to the clearing, and the drovers followed
to pen them for the night—the porkers squealing
to high heaven, milling around the yard.* (xiv.482–486)

At this point, I feel the only thing I should do is to just copy out the clear narration of the preparation for this feast, told in exquisite detail for 70 lines or more. Reader, do pause, pick up the copy you have neglected for so long; the poem I, daughter of the translator, neglected for so long. Read. Re-read.

Some moments are gruesome to our contemporary sensibility: *Then he stood up and brained the boar with split oak from the woodpile.* The sensibility is dictated by an awareness that porkers no longer ever spend any time *milling around the yard*, they are instead constrained and penned by the thousands, with no possibility of ever coming across an acorn or two to enjoy, or a healthy bit of mud to rustle around in.

By the mid-nineteen eighties, when my father died, the stink of the industrial hogs' slum-living rose from a hangar filled with them, built below our home outside Perugia, by owners who ignored the valley, the Subasio hill and Saint Francis' home of Assisi, in the rush to profit from the expectations of immediate and endless consumption. But in memory I also retain the sound from an earlier time, 1960 or so, of the squealing when the pig that had lived snorting its gleeful life on the neighboring farm below the same hamlet, with the valley spread out before it, was killed and made into the festive *porchetta*: a whole pig, including the head, roasted in the outdoor oven. Once the squealing was silenced in the afternoon of the first day, the pig was hung to bleed overnight. The tang of burning wood drifted from morning to evening the next day, enriched by the fragrance of garlic, rosemary and sage and by the developing scent of cracklings. The feast began on the third or even the fourth day, and went on deep into the following nights:

*. . . Now all hands reached for that array of supper,
until, when hunger and thirst were turned away
Mesaulios removed the bread and, heavy
with food and drink, they settled back to rest.* (xiv.535–538)

BOOK XV

AT THE BEGINNING of the penultimate book of the slow movement, busy Athena goes to Lakedaimon, the lush and wealthy kingdom of the famous husband of the infamous wife, Helen, and finds Odysseus' son, Telemakhos, and his friend Peisistratos, Nestor's son, *at rest under the portico of Menelaos*.

When she had first intervened, at the beginning of the poem, the wise goddess had come to Telemakhos in the physical form of Mentor, encouraging him to take his life in his hand and get moving, do something. But here, in Book XV, she comes to the young man undisguised, for the first time in the poem:

*. . . at his bedside grey-eyed Athena
towered and said:
"The brave thing now, Telemakhos
would be to end this journey far from home. . .* (xv.14–17)

Telemakhos had been wondering what to do, and *towering* Athena instructs him exactly: return to Ithaka, but not to court where the suitors are planning to kill you, go find Eumaios *your old friend, loyal keeper of the swine*. Her job done for the time being, Athena hurries back to Olympus. She does not need to keep an eye on her protégé Odysseus, sleeping off the *porchetta* feast in Eumaios' home across the channel in the high Ithakan hills. He could not be in a safer place, with a safer friend.

Still under the portico, Telemakhos:

*. . . swung his foot across and gave a kick
and said to the son of Nestor:*

"Open your eyes,
*Peisistratos. Get you team into harness,
 we have a long day's journey.*"

Nestor's son
turned over and answered him:

"It is still night,
 and no moon. Can we drive now? We cannot,
 itch as we may for the road home."

(xv.61–70)

My three brothers shared a room through the years, and if they happened to all be in the room at the same time, there were provocations and rumbunctious tussles that sometimes escalated into outright physical fights. I remember walking past, drawn to the noise, and fearful of the noise. I remember as I was walking by, the kick one sibling gave in my full view to the sleeping younger brother, and how furious the younger was at being woken. Peisistratos, son of Nestor, is much more mellow than any of my brothers were, but the movement of the two bodies is no different, the kick across from one bed to the other, the turning over, "What d'you mean we have to go?"

I have to wonder whether my father, solitary son to an ailing father, observed my brothers at play while engaged in the translation of this book, around the year 1957, when they were all still children, and the younger not yet in school. Did he pause at the door, and think, yes, that's the way to render the lines from the original Greek: boys will *kick* (*lax podi kinesas* is the transliteration from the Greek, courtesy of a friend who reads ancient Greek), not nudge or touch. Or perhaps he remembered the days at Harvard, when he was about the same age as Telemakhos and Peisistratos, in a room he shared—did he share a room?—with a messy, disheveled James (Agee? Laughlin?). Or the year at Choate, in the room he shared with Bob Cochran, whose father wrote proudly to my grandfather about the two youngsters sharing the room and enjoying each other's company, who became a doctor and died of a heart attack in the year my father married my mother, 1947.

like a son to me. Poet and translator are unable to contain Eumaios's delight, *light of my days* he says, *let me feast my eyes*, he says. You never come and visit, he says, as parents have always said to their young adult children, *always in town* he says, I am afraid you are enjoying the company of the suitors, he says, provoking Telemakhos who has to reply, no, no, I am here with you, I came here before even going to court, because I wanted to know how things stand, has my mother married one of them looting suitors in my absence? No, no, *gently the forester replied*, she is still holding out, but she is grieving, she does not know what to do, none of us knows what to do, he says, taking the *bronze-shod lance* from the boy as today he might relieve the boy of a bulging backpack, the water-bottle rattling from the clip that keeps it attached to one of the straps, ushering him in.

They have been standing in the doorway all this time, and when they are over the threshold:

...Odysseus moved aside, yielding his couch,
but from across the room Telemakhos checked him:
"Friend, sit down; we'll find another chair
in our own hut.

(xvi.52–55)

This is a moment of immense complexity, of immense delicacy, exquisitely rendered by my father: Odysseus, the beggarman, the father, half rises from his seat to give it to the youth, no, no, stranger, friend, Telemakhos says with the ancient courtesy that should be perennial courtesy towards strangers and towards elders, no, please don't move, I can find another seat... Odysseus, the father, *the quiet man*, *sank down*, weak with wonder and astonishment at the sight of this strapping young man, this son; unable to speak.

Eumaios—*o my swineherd*—busies himself, of course, with handing *trenchers of good meat*, *left over from the roast pork of yesterday* and Telemakhos quizzes him about *your friend*, who is he, where does he come from? What ship brought him to shore on this island? Surely, he cannot have walked on water, he teases Eumaios with the impertinence of youth, never asking the question directly to the man in the corner, who cannot take his eyes off him, though he surely tries.

The swineherd who has just hugged and kissed the boy with no restraint as if he were his own *dear and only son, born to him in exile, reared with labor*, minds his role in the hierarchy of rulers and ruled: my friend, he says, *wishes your protection*, basically acknowledging, I know I live here and work here only because you have allowed me to do so. Since Odysseus-master is absent, you are my master. And young Telemakhos graciously grants both old geezers his protection, never mind that he is lost in this world and has no idea what to do about the wretched suitors, or anything else, really. What he can and will is *undertake...to clothe your friend for winter...Tunic and cloak of wool, a good broadsword, and sandals—these are his*.

And still Odysseus, the great teller of tales, cannot speak, silenced by the sight of his grown son, sitting on a *pile of evergreens and fleeces* made into another couch, just there, across the modest room from his own couch, tucking with his bare hands into the *porchetta* that is better, always, on the third and fourth day; reaching for the ivy wood bowl to take a drink.

All these details contained in the lines of verse, rendered from *the air* of ancient Greek to contemporary written English: the position of the three men, the beggar-Odysseus in the shadowy interior of the hut, the boy standing in the lighted doorway in the glorious tallness of youth, the faithful servant remaining his incomparable self, the full generosity spilling in every movement and word. O Eumaios, indeed.

After saying to Eumaios that he can hear footsteps in line 14 of Book XVI, it takes until line 108 before Odysseus speaks again. Almost 100 lines of awe and pride on the part of the father; and not for anything that Telemakhos has done—he has not done anything except wish his father back—but for his sheer existence, his young adult presence transfiguring the world.

I go back to the arrangement of lines 15 to 20:

“I can hear footsteps” —

But before he finished

his tall son stood at the door.

The swineherd

rose in surprise, letting a bowl and jug

tumble from his fingers.

The iambic line has been broken twice, once in line 15 and again in line 16: it is an intake of breath, a leap of the heart, a shock to the system, reflected in the swineherd's dropping of bowl and jug. If Eumaios reacts as he does, imagine the reaction of the disguised father: reader, the break in the line tells you, Odysseus' silence from line 15 to line 105, ninety-five lines, tells you. Poet and translator conspire through time, all the way from 800 BCE to 1960 CE and beyond, to break your heart.

IT SEEMS A mystery sometimes why certain moments are never completely lost and seem to carry a particular weight of meaning. We may even forget them until they are called to mind in their limpid brilliance, appearing like Athena in disguise. For me, such moments are always without a narrative context, with a vague chronology that I cannot pin-point with any precision. Sometimes the memory has a dream-like quality that makes me doubt the reality of it. Or at least the factuality of it.

The memory conjured up by reading the opening of Book XVI, the last book of *The Slow Movement of the Odyssey*, so named by the first translator of the poem in the twentieth century, is of a moment early in young adulthood, at some kind of social event our parents and all of us children attended: the six of us are particularly close in age to one another—there are only eight years between the oldest and the youngest of us—which meant that we all came to young adulthood at more or less the same time.

We were in a large crowd of social acquaintances, moving around in a space that I seem unable to define more closely: was it the terrace overlooking the Tiber Valley and the distant Apennines, or was it the garden shaded by trees and rhododendron in Cambridge, MA? Or were we all guests somewhere? Were my two sisters present? My mother? I don't know. I don't know what the occasion was. But the memory of looking across and seeing my father standing, talking with my brothers is clear, lit up despite the passage of time: the three of them appear taller than him, each of the brothers appear strong, with

the full careless strength of young manhood. I have a first, sudden awareness of my father's physical fragility: "He's old," I think, with a painful tug at the heart. I am far enough away that I cannot hear what they are saying. "He is so proud of them," I think, with annoyance and jealousy.

My relationship with my brothers was at a stage when their flaws often set me off into a kind of envious hilarity: they seemed so confident and self-assured, with absolutely no reason to be so. Who did they think they were? They really did think they could do anything, that the world was their oyster. The shock was to see, observing them with my father, that my father agreed with them, yes, indeed, *he* thought they could do anything, *he* thought that the world was theirs for the taking. He did not see them as faintly ridiculous as I did—with the cynical deprecation of sisterly awareness.

The perception certainly contained the sense that nothing had yet been cut to size, nothing had yet forced them to consider and reconsider their potential and their possibilities: I can pretend, now as I write at this late stage, that my father may even have been aware of the fact that they were about the age he himself had been when he moved to New York after graduating from Harvard, year four of the Great Depression, and got his first job as a journalist. Or perhaps I can make him conscious of his own father's pride in him, cut short when his father died a few months after he turned eighteen: Robert Emmett never glowed with the pride of Odysseus in the sheer wonder of the existence of his son Robert Stuart because he died when his son had not yet fully emerged from the awkwardness of adolescence. Its own glory, for sure, and my grandfather's pride is evident in every letter he writes, in every snapshot he takes, in every comment now stored in fragile paper in an archive. But nothing compares to the loss of a father's pride in the son who graduated from Harvard, who moved to New York to pursue his ambitions as a writer, who published his first book of poems before he turned twenty-five.

In the careful composition and arrangement of word and line in Book XVI, thirty years after his father died, my father foregrounded what had been contained but left unrecognized by translators rushing impatiently past the slowness of *The Slow Movement*. Perhaps his own

ambivalence, naming those books: isn't an epic adventure supposed to be epic and adventurous? What are we doing here in this modest hut, with a swineherd, a confused and lost boy and a beggar-hero unable, for once, to speak, filled with more awe at his son than he has had in Hades confronted by ghosts?

We are in the true heart of the story.