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## **THE HAUNTED TEXT**

## **MUSIC, ALLUSION, AND STAGECRAFT IN HOMER'S ODYSSEY**

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## Abstract

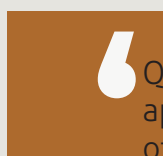
A new observation into Homer's music and musicality demands a reassessment of norms and trends and pedagogy, not just in Homeric Studies but in the modern approaches to classical texts. One cannot any longer ignore accentuation in ancient Greek and Latin verse under the spurious concept of 'quantitative metre'. In particular, the perennial problem of allusion in Homer takes on new dimensions when the phenomenon of musical resonance is brought to bear, together with a focus on the audience's point of contact in performance: the rhapsode wielding a staff, a soloist without a musical instrument or dancers, who appears to be prompted by his script to a distinctive form of stagecraft.

**Palavras-chave:** Homer, Music, Allusion, Stagecraft

## Resumo

Um exame novo sobre a música e a musicalidade de Homero exige uma reavaliação das normas, tendências e pedagogia, não apenas nos Estudos Homéricos, mas também nas abordagens modernas aos textos clássicos. Não se pode mais ignorar a acentuação na poesia grega e latina antiga sob o conceito espúrio de "métrica quantitativa". Em particular, o problema perene da alusão em Homero assume novas dimensões quando se considera o fenômeno da ressonância musical, juntamente com o foco no ponto de contato do público na performance: o rapsodo empunhando uma pauta, um solista sem instrumento musical ou dançarinos, que parece ser induzido pelo seu texto a uma forma peculiar de encenação.

**Keywords:** Homero, Música, Alusão, Encenação..



'Quantitative metre' is a concept which is thought usefully and distinctively to apply to ancient Greek and Latin poetry, but it in fact describes the substrate of all the familiar modern forms of music from baroque to classical, atonal, jazz, blues, rock, or pop. Whole-number ratios define the durations of notes in these forms which, more often than not, derive their patterns from the up- and downbeats of dance steps, rather than from ordering into rhythm the stressed and unstressed syllables of natural language, as happens in the English pentameter. In the ancient poetry, a partly natural distinction between syllable lengths is pressed into service so as to carry these whole number ratios between long and short steps, most often (but not always) 2:1, as between the long and two shorts of a dactylic foot. I say 'pressed into service' as there was no doubt something artificial about the sound of such whole-number ratios when compared to the syllables of plain speech, which makes the utterance sound like 'singing' rather than 'speaking'. In 'Twin-kle twin-kle lit-tle star, how I won-der what you are', each syllable is pronounced unnaturally equal in duration, but the effect sounds perfectly natural for singing. Similarly in  $\mu\eta\tilde{\nu}\iota\nu \acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\iota\delta\epsilon \theta\epsilon\acute{\alpha}$ , *mēnin aweide theā*, the opening phrase of the *Iliad*, the long underlined syllables are performed exactly double the duration of the short ones to achieve the dactylic effect, like a folk dance step, but there is no reason to suppose that Homer or his mates always talked in that sing-song way. In other words, in spoken Greek, rather than metrical or poetic Greek, not all long syllables would have taken the same length of time to say, nor were they all double the length of shorter syllables, while some short syllables would have been shorter than others. Hence the language of all ancient Greek poetry was stylised.

It is not just the timed ratios between syllable lengths that turn speech into song, however; there are also the changes of pitch and emphases on certain quanta, which give the bare metrical pattern both melody and rhythm. Greek and Latin, both, are self-described as pitch-accented languages. The pitch accent of Greek is a known thing; but Latinists (and linguists) generally disregard Quintilian's use of terms derived from Greek to describe a pitch-accent system for Latin. They assert, in error, that classical Latin had a stress accent. Quintilian for his part describes certain Latin syllables as 'acute', 'grave', or 'flex', where the term 'grave' does not mean 'unaccented', but as its name suggests, describes the heavy down-glide in pitch which immediately follows the sharp rise on the acute syllable.<sup>1</sup> So Greek and Latin do both supply in-built melodic contours when they are arranged by poets to accompany metrical steps (or 'feet').

But one more phenomenon is required of the ancient poetic languages to make their accompaniment musical: dynamic emphasis which either reinforces the metrical downbeat (*thesis*) or syncopates the rhythm by reinforcing within the upbeat (*arsis*). 'Twinkle twinkle' notwithstanding, the robotic reinforcement of the downbeat (in modern notation, immediately after the bar line) produces fatigue rather than the sense of music. This dynamic emphasis in ancient poetry has been discovered in the combination of pitch change with metrical quantity, in particular, the tendency to place the down-glide in pitch, which occurs in both 'grave' and 'flex' syllables, on long metrical downbeats. The latter tendency is documented for Greek by W. S. Allen.<sup>2</sup> I developed a new theory of the Greek accent which entails a 'law of tonal prominence', drawing on W. S. Allen's descriptive work on metrical environments, which determines when each of the often unmarked down-glides in pitch and the marked acute rises in pitch, is dynamically prominent. The positions within words and enclitic groupings predicted for dynamic prominence by the new law correspond to the consensus among historical linguists for stress positions in Greek words, involving both a rising-pitch stress and a separate falling-pitch stress. This finding among linguists goes practically unheeded by professional Hellenists, despite its implications for how to perform Greek poetry.<sup>3</sup> The law turns out to apply also to Latin, in a similar way, predicting dynamic prominence for the very same syllables deemed to be stressed by the conventional rule.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. P. David, 'Vindicating Quintilian: Latin had a pitch accent!', *Dramaturgias* no. 20:7 (2022), 731-43.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Allen, *Accent and Rhythm*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, 262-4.

<sup>3</sup> Although see Alan H. Sommerstein, *The Sound Pattern of Ancient Greek*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973, 123-7, discussed in A. P. David, *The Dance of the Muses: Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 80-1. Subsequently, see Chris Golston, 'Floating H (and L\*) Tones in Ancient Greek', in J. Myers and P. E. Pérez (eds.), *Arizona Phonology Conference*, iii (1990), Tucson: University of Arizona Linguistics Department, 1990, 72. See also P. Sauzet, 'L'accent du grec ancien et les relations entre structure métrique et représentation autosegmentale', *Langages*, 95 (1989), 81-113; for a conspectus and summaries of these, see R. Noyer, 'Attic Greek Accentuation and Intermediate Derivational Representations', in I. Roca (ed.), *Derivations and Constraints in Phonology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 501-27. More recently: Lev Blumenthal, 'Tone-to-Stress and Stress-to-Tone: Ancient Greek Accent Revisited' in *General Session and Parasession on Conceptual Structure and Cognition in Grammatical Theory*, Linguistic Society of America, BLS 30:5.

<sup>4</sup> Stress the penult when the penult is long, the antepenult when the penult is short. David, *The Dance of the Muses*, 52-93. See also *Singing Homer's Spell: The End of Oralist Poetics*, Chandler, AZ: Mother Pacha, 2025, 33-43 (paperback), and 'Debunking the Parry-Lord Hypothesis on the Composition of Homer or Ἑμμελῆς Τέχνη, The Art of Intrinsic Melody', *Dramaturgias*, no. 28 (2025), 332-61.

There is a moment in the *Iliad* when Odysseus has finally had enough of servility to the unworthiness of Agamemnon. For the latest time, the warlord counsels escape, an ignominious pushing off of the ships by night forever abandoning the expedition to Troy. Odysseus addresses him as οὐλόμεν' ('accursed', probably best translated as a swear word), and bursts out:

σίγα, μή τις τ' ἄλλος Ἀχαιῶν τοῦτον ἀκούσῃ  
μῦθον, ὃν οὐ κεν ἀνὴρ γε διὰ στόμα πάμπαν ἄγοιτο,  
ὅς τις ἐπίσταίτο ἤισι φρεσὶν ἄρτια βάζειν  
σκηπτοῦχος τ' εἶη, καὶ φοί πειθοίατο λαφοί  
τοσσοῖδ' ὅσσοισιν σὺ μετ' Ἀργείοισι φανάσσεις.

Shut up! Lest any other of the Achaeans hear this  
Disclosure, which no man would let out his mouth at all—  
Anyone who'd know in his mind's vessels to speak what suits,  
And be the sceptre-bearer, and the one whom armies obey—  
So many as are the Argives among whom you're the Lord. (Il.XIV.90-4)

The accentuation of the first line of the speech is highly unusual. There are actually five long beats in a row to begin the line; four of the five are dynamically prominent, or stressed, according to the new law; all of them have changing pitch, four rising and one falling. Such a sequence bluntly suspends the tripping dactylic rhythm, long-short-short, with long-long-long-long-long. Note in particular the sequence of three straight, long, acutely accented syllables, three long syllables of sharply rising pitch (μή τις τ' ἄλλος). Perhaps there is a staircase effect to a high pitch peak. The line is musically as well as emotionally an emphatic outburst.

This moment of defiance against authority, counter to Odysseus' character elsewhere, evidently made a big impression on the composer of the *Odyssey* and its hero Odysseus. The striking accentual pattern, from beginning to mid-line, recurs several times in key speeches of Odysseus which are reported by Odysseus himself. Two of these are in the episode with Polyphemus, first in Odysseus' indignant expression at being taken for a fool by the brute:

οὐτῶ γάρ πού μ' ἤλπετέ 'νι φρεσὶ νήπιον εἶναι.

For I suppose he expected me, in his mind's vessel, to be *such* a simpleton.  
(*Od.*9.419)

Then the identical accentual sequence occurs at the beginning of the fateful speech where he announces his true name to the Cyclops:

Κύκλωψ, αἶ κέν τις σε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων  
ὄφθαλμοῦ εἶρηται ἀφεικελίην ἀλατύν,  
φάσθαι Ὀδυσσοῆφα πτολιπόρθιον ἐξαλαῶσαι ...

Cyclops! If there's any death-bound human being  
Should ask after the ugly blinding of your eye,  
Announce it was Odysseus the City-Sacker who blinded you ... (9.502-4)

A visual inspection reveals that in the rest of the line and the following lines, accented syllables are generally spaced between unaccented ones, in the normal give-and-take of poetic rhythm. The concentrated outburst occurs also at the moment Odysseus'

identity is almost revealed when the nurse Eurycleia discovers his scar and drops his leg into the wash basin. By this point, however, his identity is already revealed in his accents:

σίγα, μή τις τ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισι πύθηται.

Silence! Lest anyone else in the big rooms hear. (19.486)

In the latter case, the half-line from the *Iliad* as well as the distinctive accentual pattern are re-sounded. Most strikingly, the pattern appears when Odysseus is earlier disguised as an old beggar, in the swineherd's hut, and tells a lying story about how he once bivouacked with Odysseus; he quotes Odysseus as uttering almost exactly the same hushed outburst he had used against Agamemnon:

σίγα νῦν, μή τις σε' Ἀχαιῶν ἄλλος ἀκούσῃ.

Hush now, in case some other Achaean hears you ... (14.493)

Odysseus in disguise wants to be convincing that his character has met the real Odysseus, among people who know the real Odysseus. The pitch patterns by themselves, even when the words bearing them are different, are identifying. Hence Homer's craft is pointedly at work in creating a distinct musical identity for Odysseus, in conversation with perhaps his most redeeming moment in the *Iliad*. I wrote:

What is marvellous here is that this is Odysseus trying to sound like Odysseus; may we not surmise that this character was coming to be known for the emphatic, long-syllabled, oxytonal crescendo at the beginning of his hexameters—and his stage whisper? Known for his hoarsely whispered 'Shut up!?' Known, in the strictly metatextual sense, for that very line from *Iliad* XIV? It is a bit like Don Quixote appearing in his sequel, where he is already a literary sensation, a character whose words and actions people have read about in the first book. In the previous line, Odysseus playing the Cretan even advises that Odysseus speaks the line in a 'little voice', φθεγγάμενος δ' ὀλίγηι ὀπί με, cueing the performer's stage whisper for the outburst. We have been set up by Homer, long in advance, through Odysseus himself in his lying tale, for the scene of the recognition by the scar in Book 19, when nurse Eurycleia famously drops his leg in the wash basin. Odysseus' tonal outburst gives himself away, as surely as his scar.<sup>5</sup>

Homer's text appears to contain intentional music, separable from the meaning or intent of its words. Philology is therefore no longer adequate to interpret such a text, unless it loses its habit of disregarding accentual prosody. Penelope in the *Odyssey* has an even more striking leitmotif, which recurs uniquely often in her speech, with its culminating instance in the recognition scene of Book 23, when she performs the 'bed trick' upon Odysseus:

οὔτε λῆην ἄγαμαι, μάλα δ' εὔφοιδ' οἶος ἔησθα

'Nor am I even so amazed—but dammit, I know you, what you were ...' (23.175)

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<sup>5</sup> David, *Singing Homer's Spell*, 263-4 (paperback).

I wrote:

There is in this period a remarkable sequence, against all notions of epic rhythm and harmony, of three successive circumflected syllables: εὔ οἶδ' οἴος ἔησθα. If there is an absolute in metrical theory, it is that rhythm depends on alternation—on the alternation of emphases in time. Hence there is also something absolute about the harmonic innovation registered here; three consecutive complete Hellenic contonations should be unsingable within a dactylic line. Even someone who hears formulæ in Homer must admit that there is something more than an instance of non-formulaic language going on here: there is something antithetical to the very notion of a metrical formula. Indeed, it is by 'innovation' that the concept 'tradition' is analytically determined, and hence by which it comes properly to light—not by the 'formula'. At a moment of ultimate tension, the histrionic minstrel has dared his music to overreach its native forms, to find and to embody an expression inside the rhythm and harmony of the epic line which captures the sure mind, the knowing heart, the very living breath of Penelope. 'I know you, what you were,' she seems to say to the stranger before her, with all the force, and risk, of her own identity. This is a moment to be savoured, a moment of musical disclosure and self-revelation ... a moment scarcely to be matched in the apparitions of later literature.<sup>6</sup>

All of the presumptions and implicit premises which drive the idea that Homer's text is a product of an oral tradition, all of its 'noble savage' mentality, together with many of the conclusions and constructs which follow, must be put to one side until the idea can be grounded in the intentional, musical reality of Homer's extant text. Sequences of pitch changes only become melodies when they recur, as it were, verbatim; the recurrence and repetition which are the stock-in-trade of oral theory lose all need for explanation in a musical text. Philological prompts toward 'diction' and 'theme' may move mountains in analysing the Gospel of St. Matthew, but they yield to other motive forces when it comes to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. 'Theme' in particular must take on its musical colour, which brings an intrinsic desideratum, rather than an editor's scrutiny, to the concept of variation, whose display in modern music, from classical to jazz, is sophisticated enough to illuminate the text of Homer. The modus of theme and variation, or variations on a theme, should be seen to motivate composition, rather than reflect exigencies of either transmission or performance.

In point of fact, metrical formulas are inadequate as building materials for *any* musical text, from Homer to Bach to the Sex Pistols. *All* of them are not only quantitative, but rhythmic and harmonic. The leitmotifs of Odysseus and Penelope, respectively three straight rising long acutes and three straight long circumflexes, are pointed insults to the sense of dactylic rhythm. Word-level accents are usually separated from each other by the unaccented syllables; it takes compositional engineering, by means of enclitics and elisions, to achieve the sequences which characterise Penelope and Odysseus at moments of heightened drama, moments which elicit an outburst from their carefully considered facades into the breath of living music. *I know you, what you were.*

It may excite ambitious students of Greek that Homer's music is largely an unknown, but that there are now new tools, such as the law of tonal prominence, with which

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<sup>6</sup> David, *The Dance of the Muses*, 136-7; *Singing Homer's Spell*, 240-3 (paperback).

to recreate and explore his score, perhaps to discover new depths of resonance and allusion. There is no longer a need to limit yourself to the imagined epic cycle of the neo-analysts when you sound out Homer's score for its internal echoes and musical evocations. To be sure, external allusions in Homer remain a labyrinthine critical problem. But it should be clear that the number of people presently familiar enough with Homer's music and how it works, to be able to compare it to something or anything else, must be vanishingly small. For now. But it seems to me the ability to restore the music to Homer's text, through attention to melodic contours and applying the law of tonal prominence, makes most of this poet's extant material newly virgin territory. The leitmotifs mentioned above should be considered blunt instruments, for all that philology so far has let them go unnoticed, compared to the subtleties of theme and variation we should expect in a musical narrative. In what follows, I cannot pretend to have heard all there is to hear in the passages I shall discuss; but I hope I shall advance the possibility that Homer's Greek and the art of Homer's line will become interests of renewed intensity for prospective (and prospecting) students.

There will no longer be a need to couch one's observations in the language of oral theory, and to use the word 'tradition' in every second paragraph. The only direct internal indication of traditional inheritance in Homer comes through the catalogue form. The *Iliad's* Catalogue of Ships may well be a quotation of sorts. I have suggested that some peculiarities of narrative form in Homer and Hesiod, especially ring composition, can be traced to expansions, via digression and retrogression, within the listed segments of a catalogue.<sup>7</sup> An original motivation for an extemporiser of closing each digression with a retrogression, turning the inserted story into an aural ring, would have been to keep his place in the sequence, like someone interrupted from counting pennies, trying to remember what number he had been on. In Homer and Hesiod one should assume that the mnemonic technique had instead become an aesthetic style. A catalogue we encounter in Homer's composition need not be a traditional one, as we shall see, but a composer tapping into a familiar style, like Mozart writing a march in *Figaro*.

Crucially, nothing about Homer's noun-and-epithet laden language points to inherited use of any kind, only to the natural reflex in music to create context in the only way it knows how, through repetition; and to the instantiation in performance of singing an object or person with its full name—that is, not bare, but replete with its evocative epithets.<sup>8</sup> Modern editors sometimes edit him; but Odysseus never misses an opportunity, in his long tale to the Phaeacians, to have someone address him with his full ἔπος, so that through the superior to whom he is giving voice, whether Circe or Teiresias, he in effect keeps invoking and instantiating himself:

διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ  
'Zeus-Born son of Laertes, Contriver Odysseus'

Why should we not also see Homer as a self-promoter? There is every reason to suppose that he was an innovator and an iconoclast. To judge by his reception among later

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<sup>7</sup> see my chapter 'The Genesis of Homeric Poetry (a Brief Synthesis): The "Intemporizing" Cataloguer', in David, *Dance of the Muses*, 208-14.

<sup>8</sup> for his timeless discussion, see Paolo Vivante, *The Epithets in Homer: A Study in Poetic Values*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982; discussed in David, *Dance of the Muses*, 145-50.

authors, from Stesichorus to Sappho to Plato, he was at best a competitor or foil, at worst a corrupter of morals who needed to be refuted or purged. In relation to Greek religion and ritual, the explicit evidence is that Homer was, if anything, a source of tradition and of practices, like the text of the Gospels, and not at all the product of a tradition of which anyone was in any way aware. The ancients knew their poetry by the proper names of its composers, in exactly the way that we know our music. And in our own case, the names of Bach and Wagner and the Rolling Stones speak to the inimitable quality of their musical signature. Only proper names can identify this quality, in relation to generic styles and metres. The same must have been true for ancient poets. Hesiod does not swing like Homer. This is why the Homeric Question has always been a red herring. Ancient Greeks, and perhaps non-Greeks like the Romans, needed to know nothing about Homer's biography, as we need know nothing about Bach's, to recognise instantly the unique and identifying qualities of his music, so that we must call it by his name. The more we become familiar with it, the more one should expect that we will recognise what the ancients did implicitly and explicitly, that Homer's word-music, by itself, like Bach's and Shakespeare's, forges an identity; and every word doth almost say his name.

While all of Homer can be danced in the round, or sung to the accompaniment of a lyre without the pounding dactylic beat of the dancers, we know that large Athenian audiences met Homer's music in the lyre-less declamation of a rhapsode, wrapped in a cloak and holding, or wielding, a staff. Let us meet him there on his stage. I see him as a haunted figure, equally haunted by the invisible dance which animates the rhythm of his words, as by the long dead people who continually possess him, and speak through him like a medium. His is still a text made of words, each of which needs to be parsed before a thought or a story can emerge. But this story comes to us in rhythmic segments and melodic lines which are separable from its phrases and sentences, while engaged with them in a constant dovetailing at cadences both musical and narrative. This performer of the tale regularly makes his presence intrude when he announces that he is changing places (ἀμειβόμενος) from one speaker to another. (This middle-voiced insertion of the narrator is always translated as applied to the new speaker, who 'replies' as though he or she is in a novel. I suggest that it is in fact the rhapsode telling you that he is changing parts. His is a one-man show.<sup>9</sup>) The propulsion of music and stagecraft must now combine with language to deliver the epic moment in solo theatre, and so inform its critical reception.

*Odyssey* 5 opens with Eos the dawn getting out of bed. The famous line which invokes the dawn with her fingertips of rose, now gets instead a two-line vignette, which sounds themes that redound as the episode develops:

Ἥφως δ' ἐκ λεχέων παρ' ἀγαυοῦ Τιθωνοῖο  
ὤρνυθ', ἴν' ἀθανάτοισι φῶως φέροι ἠδὲ βροτοῖσιν ·

Eos the dawn from her bed alongside handsome Tithonus  
Arose, to bring light to deathless ones as well as mortals ... (5.1-2)

Homer describes what is in the literal sense an everyday event. The dawn happens every day, and it is described in everyday terms, a woman waking up next her partner,

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<sup>9</sup> for the keenest study yet on Homeric stagecraft, see Katherine Kretler, *One Man Show: Poetics and Presence in the Iliad and Odyssey*, Washington DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2020.

who's perhaps still sleeping. Everything is settled and routine, a wife getting up before her husband to greet the dawn. As this routine so aptly evokes the sunrise humanly, it becomes not so odd that the woman in question *is* the sunrise. She opens a window and shines upon the world, not just on everyday folks but on the immortals as well, who evidently do not see so well by their own radiance.

The two lines are sung and they're done; we move straight on to the redux of Athena's plea to Zeus in the gods' council, in preparation for our first meeting with Odysseus on Calypso's isle. It would be typical of professional Homerism to say that the waking dawn's lines have 'accomplished their purpose,' in supplying the 'oral poet' two lines of the traditional, flowery stuff, to say what a modern novelist gets done more efficiently, economically, and rationally with 'When the sun rose ...'

It has been observed (famously by Eric Auerbach) that Homer's narrative designs no depths: it is all the manipulation, often dazzling, of surface and foreground. But those who make and promote this observation have perhaps not understood it properly. A surface and a foreground have, after all, only an analytic reality in relation to a background and a depth. To say that Homer is all surface is really equivalent to saying that he is all depth—unless one says that Homer is himself somehow unaware of the distinction. To a human mind, a text or other artwork that designedly presents a foreground must represent a more or less irresistible invitation to enter and to penetrate. Like the surface of Achilles' shield, Homer's text is engrossing and captivating on the literal level, a mirror of polished metal held up to the cosmos; but like the shield, it cannot point to itself. It is for the reader to recognise that the mirror is in fact a shield, and so to ask with reference to the world pictured there: whom or what is it protecting, and from what or whom?

This idea of the Homeric foreground complexifies when one considers the situation of a rhapsode's performance. This fellow's prospect is pretty obvious in the daylight of a Greek theatre: he is just a guy in a cloak or robe, holding a stick. There is no hiding the fact that between himself and his audience's imagination is a foreground that he takes great care to construct, and for which his author scripts him broad detail of embedded instruction. Recall that the rhapsode's art did not become obsolete when it had to compete with dramatists, who had scenery, machinery, masks, props, and costumes to aid their immersive illusion. His was a one-man show without any soundtrack but what his voice and words could generate. Hence the presentation of a foreground with the limited means at his disposal, and how it might stimulate imaginative interpretation in the people watching him, is very much front and centre in the pragmatic consciousness of both composer and performer, rather than some sort of primitive necessity of legendary narrative (as Auerbach would seem to hint). In Homer's script there is generally an intuitive use for the performer's magic staff, for the drape of his clothing, and also for the posture of his spine beneath. There is nothing easy about doing his craft well and effectively; he is to become girls, goddesses and monsters, talking ghosts and old men and Zeus himself. The dramatic magic of his becoming these people and speaking in their voices, like a medium in a seance, can be even more effective in the solo performer's sudden transformation, than in the actor taking the stage already masked and in persona.

But the true miracle in the representation occurs in and through the choice arrangement of the poet's language. It is purely the power of words which can just as soon place us before Calypso's garden as Hades' abyss. But in the case of Homer's words, it is more than their semantic potency which captivates a captive audience. The proper

translation of ποιητής and ποίημα from Greek is never 'poet' and 'poem', given the literary connotations that have accrued to these terms. We tend to distinguish poetry from music. This distinction makes no sense in the world of ancient Greek, whose syllables, as we have observed, lend themselves to quantitative arrangement (like the syllables and notes of most all songs and melodies), and are inherently pitch accented, which is to say, rhythmic and melodic. In contexts of ancient performance and entertainment the poet in Greek is therefore a 'composer' and his work a 'composition'; in lyric pieces he is also a 'choreographer' and his composition a 'dance' (χορός, chorus). Every Homeric hexameter line, or ἔπος, is suffused subliminally with its mesmerising percussive dance rhythm, punctuated with invocative naming phrases for people and objects, and graced with signature lines of prosodic melody to awaken the musical consciousness and the musical memory.

It is the discovery of these rather obvious leitmotifs, identifying each of Penelope and Odysseus, which puts paid once and for all to an oral theory of Homeric composition based on solely metrical formulas. Such a theory tries to account for a musical composition purely by its time signature, while ignoring all the notes. In particular, Homer's musical phrases (which must be repeated to become fully musical) are horrifically, and also ludicrously, denuded when treated as 'metrical building blocks'. Music cannot be made by metre alone. Metre gives us only the bar lines, the repeating downbeats. As I say, we need pitch patterns and accentual emphases, which do not always have to fall on the downbeat at the bar line, to fill the frame with music. In ancient Greek these pitches and syncopating emphases are supplied by the words themselves: they fill the empty staff with notes.

Some might now find themselves diverted by a theory of 'musical formulas' in Homer, but even these can never account for prosodic patterns, evidently composed as signature lines, which are not tied exclusively to the particular words which carry them. It is both false and demeaning to think of Homer as motivated to fill up his line with prepackaged goods, the purported metrical formulas, when he has evidently composed a lilting, pointed, and resonant recitative. Homer's phrases recur and re-echo because music is music, and so is μουσική. Hence the mimetic work of creating a convincing foreground in a minimalist theatre is immediately deepened and layered by the largely non-mimetic musical dimensions embedded in the verbal voicing of the story. Of course these dimensions are lost on critics trained in literature, like Auerbach, and still more on scholars trained in grammar, like the professors in classical languages. They provide an immediate ground for significant resonance and significant internal and external allusion in Homeric composition, no matter the literary or non-literary means of his composing, or the near total loss of neighbouring compositions from Homer's musical world which he may either have been hinting at, borrowing, or directly quoting, like Coltrane riffing on 'My Favourite Things' from *The Sound of Music*. Music abhors a vacuum, it transmits itself like a hum. We have given concrete evidence that one line from the *Iliad* emoted by Odysseus, which likely does not make most top ten lists, made a rather huge impression on the composer of the *Odyssey*.

Resonance seems to be the key to so many facts of lived experience, from physics to music to emotion and sympathy. Something internal to the individual (or the atom) reverberates in response to external stimuli, to result in sympathetic resonance or even the emission of energy. Memory itself, including musical memory, seems to work this way, when the oddest external twitterings can produce responsive reverberations and generate internal images like waking dreams. One species of resonance is the pheno-

menon we call allusion. We don't always know what it is in a work of art which makes us think of something else, including other works of art. But resonance is ubiquitous and is not usefully distinguishable from feeling or memory. When words or brush strokes are involved, the puzzle can become forensic; in academic circles there are those who think that allusions need to be proven. But before addressing the problem of allusion in Homer, I think it important to recognise the breadth of the field of phenomena in which such bookish pursuits actually lie.

The Homeric medium is intrinsically musical, and hence intrinsically reverberative and allusive; the philologists who preside over the poems, however, are not required to be musical at all. Grammar, rather, and linguistics generally, have their own quasi-logical and inductive attractions whose needs are sated by solutions in static, tabulated paradigms. We murder to dissect. The art which is taught consists of applying the paradigms and classifications induced from the extant nouns and verbs in writing, back onto the texts themselves, as aids to decoding their semantic sum. It does not strike its practitioners as absurd that there be a purely metrical music or poetry, without stresses or pitches, yet made from human language which cannot function without such marking emphases. In point of fact, the absurdity here is intrinsic and self-evident. The embarrassment to philology seems due entirely to the lack of attention to pronunciation and performance in the study of ancient texts which were almost exclusively designed as notations for performance.

But even if we can now, to some small extent, restore the music to the texts with the law of tonal prominence, all we can hear or otherwise discern are internal reverberations, such as Odysseus' accentual leitmotif and its origin in the *Iliad*. Let's not diminish that discovery. But there are clear allusions in Homer to people and events beyond and outside the poems, which seem intentional and yet enigmatic. We must have recourse to sources we know to be later than Homer, in order to get any illumination upon these people and events mentioned in Homer; and we do not know if Homer agrees with these sources' implicit schemas, or if indeed they were formulated, on occasion, as direct refutations of Homer or his implications. And in some cases, though we cannot responsibly take them, these allusions remain achingly critical to our reasonable understanding of Homer's composition.

Consider Tithonus. Yes him, the one we left behind in Eos' bed. His name sits at the cadence of line one, invoked with an epithet of general commendation or status, ἀγαυός, unknown in its precise meaning, which I have perhaps provocatively rendered 'handsome'. The only other musical moment of note is the enjambment of the verb ὤρνυθ' into line two, 'she rose,' its displaced rhythm helping to bring the dawn to life. So what do we know of Tithonus from the forbidden later sources, and what of these resonates when Homer drops his name? One thing we know for sure is that Homer counts on his audience knowing who this is; he could not simply drop Tithonus' name for no reason. He is not introduced with a backstory; in this he is like Athena or Circe. They appear on Homer's stage as known beings. An exception among the divinities may be Calypso; Athena in Book 1 does tell us whose daughter she is and where she lives. That may be an example of what we would call necessary exposition, for an unfamiliar character, or one Homer has invented.

Perhaps then we can go further and assert that Homer is purposely being elliptical, without any stipulation as to what exactly he might be leaving out; only that he is knowingly sounding the name and epithet, ἀγαυός Τιθωνός, without saying all (or anything) he knows. In other words, he is after the effect of dropping his name into the mix precisely for the effect of its reverberant entrance into consciousness, whatever that effect may be.

We are also on safe ground, one feels, in adding that Tithonus is a mortal. All the stories assume this, and the idea of a goddess having sex with a mortal male, and all its attendant perils, seems to be thematic for the introduction of Odysseus' situation on Calypso's isle of Ogygia. Calypso later rallies with her indignant response to Zeus' order, which had been delivered by Hermes, that she must give up Odysseus and help him make his return home. She complains about the gods' jealousy of people with tastes like hers; I think she means the Olympian gods:

σχέτλιοί ἐστε, θεοί, ζηλήμονες ἔξοχον ἄλλων,  
οἳ τε θεαῖς ἀγάασθε παρ' ἀνδράσιν εὐνάζεσθαι  
ἀμφαδίην, ἦν τίς τε φίλον ποιήσεται ἀκοίτην ·

Bastards you are, you gods: jealous, on top of the rest of your rubbish:  
So to begrudge the goddesses who sleep with human men,  
Out in the open, if one of us makes him our special bunkmate. (5.118-20)

Calypso gives two examples of their vindictive moralising: the first, again, involves Eos the Dawn, who evidently has a thing for human men. Eos (Latin Aurora) is known for a number of abductions. She seized (ἔλετο; that is, raped) Orion, and seemingly continued to enjoy him until Artemis struck the hunter down with her gentle arrows. Things do not end well for the men in these situations. Such a lesson is not lost on our audience, but it is not clear how much these stories play a part in Odysseus' thinking when he rejects Calypso for Penelope; he is not present for this private exchange between gods, but is away off on a lonely headland. The second example is Demeter herself, who is known through no less an authority than the 'Homeric' *Hymn to Demeter* to be the mother of Persephone. This lineage does not signify in Calypso's story, however, or indeed elsewhere in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, either with respect to Persephone or Demeter. Here Demeter is a 'pretty braids' (ἐϋπλόκαμος) who falls in love with the mortal lad Iasion:

ὥς δ' ὀπότε Ἰασίῳ ἐϋπλόκαμος Δημήτηρ,  
ὣν θυμῷ φείξασα, μίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνήϊ  
νειῶνι ἔνι τριπόλῳι ·

And as when with Iasion, Pretty-Braids Demeter,  
Yielding to her very life's breath, had consensual sex and love-making  
In the thrice-ploughed fallow ... (5.125-7)

The sense of φιλότης, 'amity', suggests the consensual yielding to passion for this couple, which contrasts with the Dawn's 'taking' of Orion. Iasion is killed by Zeus's thunderbolt for his time with Demeter in the 'thrice-ploughed fallow.' (Perhaps it was three times on that occasion.) Calypso goes on:

ὥς αὖ νῦν μοι ἄγασθε, θεοί, βροτὸν ἄνδρα παρεῖναι.  
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν ἐσάωσα περὶ τρόπιος βεβαῶτα  
οἶον, ἐπεὶ φοῖ νῆφα θοῖν ἀργῆτι κεραυνῶι  
Ζεὺς ἐλάσας ἐκέασσε μέσῳ ἐνὶ φοῖνοπι πόντῳι.

And now my turn for your grudge, ye Gods! for living with a human man.  
This is one I personally rescued, bestriding a ship's keel  
All alone, since his swift ship with the flashing thunderbolt  
Zeus convulsed and split in two in the middle of the drunken deep. (5.129-32)

How wonderful is her turn of phrase 'bestriding a ship's keel' (περὶ τρίπιος βεβαῶτα) in describing her encounter with her version of the man of many turns (πολύτροπος), whom she rescued from being all alone on the sea, an icon of our condition, on the 'turner' (περὶ τρίπιος) of a now wrecked ship. She appears to have drawn a lesson from the awkward and inconvenient mortality of the men in her lovers' tales, to declare that she would make Odysseus deathless and ageless 'all his days.' It's not clear how she might do this, however, and prevent his dying at another god's hands. Perhaps all she need do is feed him the ambrosia and nectar she reserves for her guest Hermes, who must listen to her indignant harangue. But she has not yet done this; her promise remains a dangled enticement for her lover to remain with her, without fear of the fate of his mortal predecessors who had the misfortune of being chosen to please a goddess. It would seem that permission would be required for such a move, from powers greater than she, the same powers perhaps who have secluded her on a deserted isle. It is hard to imagine that Athena could consent to losing her special one. Calypso is perhaps a lover who will swear to anything at certain moments.

'Deathless and ageless' hints at something that may slip the attention, however. If the external stories may be relied upon, it would seem that Eos the Dawn had learnt a lesson of her experience with Orion, and asked, when her radiant gaze fell upon young Tithonus, that he be made immortal. Zeus granted her wish. But, the story goes, the poor thing did not think to ask that he also not age. Tithonus became a proper Struldbrugg. (The Struldbruggs were Jonathan Swift's immortals who kept getting older and older, and correspondingly more repulsive and ill-tempered.) When his grey hairs and beard started sprouting, of course she had to shun Tithonus' bed; the very idea ... but Eos was kind enough to have him fed and clothed in her house. But at last—

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ πάμπαν στυγερὸν κατὰ γῆρας ἔπειγεν,  
οὐδέ τι κινῆσαι μελέων δύνατ' οὐδ' ἀναεῖραι,  
ἦδε δέ οἱ κατὰ θυμὸν ἀρίστη φαίνετο βουλή·  
ἐν θαλάμῳ κατέθηκε, θύρας δ' ἐπέθηκε φαιινάς.  
τοῦ δ' ἦτοι φωνὴ ῥέει ἄσπετος, οὐδέ τι κῖκυς  
ἔσθ' οἷα πάρος ἔσκεν ἐνὶ γναμπτῶσι μέλεσσιν.

... when repulsive old age pressed fully upon him, and he could not move or lift any of his limbs, this is what she decided was the best course: she laid him away in a chamber, and shut its shining doors. His voice still runs on unceasing, but there is none of the strength that there used to be in his bent limbs. (Hymn to Aphrodite 233-8, tr. M. L. West)

In effect Tithonus would have been a prisoner in his own bedroom, which was perhaps soundproofed, if he could have got out of bed or even moved at all. The hymn is perhaps accommodating the story it does not tell, that poor Tithonus was eventually turned into a cicada who could chatter and chitter forever, but who longed for the release of death.

Now, Homer's lines are unequivocal, that Eos still shared a bed with Tithonus. So who can tell what parts of the other stories (which, to be fair, must be described as later in extant written source but not necessarily later in origin) are called to mind by Homer's passing evocation. But it feels safe to say that the opening lines of Book 5 are sounding a note of caution and warning about the dangers of man and goddess comingling, which later comes to a head in Calypso's impassioned oration. What moves

her, of course, is not the peril to mortal men, who are constituted to wish to preserve their lives, but the unfair constraints on women's desires and choices.

But it must be said, Homer's touch in this allusion is light, almost unbearably light. It is not simply the case, you see, that we are missing out because we no longer have access to the world of referents and echoes that Homer's compositions enjoy. It seems to me that there is a designed feature here, not a bug in our reception of it. The origin of this poetry is in singing catalogues in the presence of a continuing round dance. The object there is not only the naming of people and events from the past, but the actual summoning of them into the circle. The dancers feel the presence of the past; their ancestors join them in the circle as the rhythmic chant of their names harmonises with the steps of their feet. Perhaps if one dances the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, as Walter Burkert put it, 'the experience of the dance merges with the experience of the deity.'<sup>10</sup> It seems to me that the lyre-less, solo rhapsode without dancers beating the ground around him, has not lost this intrinsic summoning quality of the medium; indeed his role is as a medium, not just a teller. Behold the people and events and the images he draws conjured in the space around him: Orion no longer a constellation but a hunter hunted by Artemis, Demeter in the furrow in sexual ecstasy, until suddenly everything collapses into his body and face as he utters, and becomes, the voice of Calypso. When he drops Tithonus' name, and only his name, all the stories you know about him are summoned at once, but not dwelt on; this is the unbearable lightness of touch; we do not pin down morals and meanings, but let all the implications reverberate and hang there, like ghosts in the air. This is an effect that, it seems to me, Homer is striving after and exploiting in his conjuring art, so that we get what might be called a haunted text. From the aesthetic standpoint, the allusion to Tithonus is not incomplete but perfect. It is exactly as sardonic as it needs to be. When Homer enjambes ὤρνυθ', 'she rose,' it already seems clear that Tithonus is not also rising but staying in bed at such an early hour. But is it because he cannot rise, can no longer move at all, in his inexorably advancing decrepitude? In choosing Penelope, it seems Odysseus is choosing not only death, but ageing.

We are like children who feel haunted by a ghost story, even though they don't get the half of it. That is my lot, at any rate, when reading Homer. Consider the beginning of the *Nekuia*, when Odysseus travels to Hades to consult the soul of Teiresias. Recall that Odysseus the character had received a sword from a Phaeacian lad in Book 8, in compensation for his rude challenge to the hero in the lists. I suspect that one purpose of this gift of a sword, which he straps over his shoulder and forgets, was plausibly to equip Odysseus the narrator, who was about to take the stage, with the rhapsode's prop, the magic staff, which of course Homer's performer had already in hand. There is a running joke in the *Odyssey*, where a line from the *Iliad*, 'he drew the sharp sword from by his thigh,'—invariably followed in that poem with a masculine martial exploit—is in this poem followed by some incongruous action which tends to make the armed man look awkward or silly. Circe had instructed Odysseus to 'draw the sharp sword from by your thigh/And sit ...' (*Od.*10.535-6). Not 'attack' or 'spill the blood of your foe,' but sit ... to guard already spilt sacrificial blood from a thirsty queue of ghosts. Now, at or within Hades' door, he follows Circe's instructions to dig a trench for that sacrifice, but innovates in the means, which she had not thought to mention.

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 103.

ἐγὼ δ' ἄορ ὄξυ φέρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ  
βόθρον ὄρουζ' ὅσσον τε πυγούσιον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα ...

... but me, I drew my sharp sword from by my thigh  
And dug a trench as much as an arm's length over here and over here ...  
(11.24-5)

The lines seem designed for an actor's gesture with his prop, blocking and animating a stage. But to dig a trench with a sword? Recall the demand on King Arthur from the Knights who say 'Ni!', that he must cut down the mightiest tree in the forest with a herring. I suppose in life as well as in performance art, one has to make do with what is to hand.

... αἱ δ' ἀγέροντο  
ψυχὰι ὕπεξ Ἑρέβους νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων,  
νύμφαι τ' ἠΐθεοὶ τε πολὺπλητοὶ τε γέροντες  
παρθενικαὶ τ' ἀταλαὶ νεοπενθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαι,  
πολλοὶ δ' οὐτάμενοι χαλκῆρεσιν ἐγχέηισιν  
ἄνδρες ἀρηΐφατοι, βεβρωτῶμένα τεύχε' ἔχοντες. 40  
οἱ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος  
θεσπεσίηι φίφαχῆι · ἐμέ δέ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει.

... and they gathered,  
Souls out from Erebus below, of the corpses of the dead and gone.  
There's brides and lusty boys, much-endured old men,  
Tender virgins whose life's breath is new to sorrow,  
Many wounded by copper-tipped spears,  
Men slain by Ares wearing equipment covered in human gore:  
These began coming in numbers, from one side and the other,  
In a supernatural uproar: the yellow-green fear got hold of me. (36-44)

I think it bears repeating, and then contemplating and diagnosing, this vision of the dead streaming forth from some hidden location behind the screen of reality, where they are thought to remain in some sort of half-aware relation to our history and consciousness. I suppose there is nothing unusual about this idea by now, nothing that offends our sense of realism or plausibility, at least when we are telling stories or saying prayers. One accommodates this parallel reality, at least at certain times, when it comes to grandparents and parents and children and dead presidents and saints, and of course beloved pets. But I find myself wondering, would there ever have been such things as ghosts without ghost stories? Our susceptibility to stories and storytellers, to their ability to conjure the absent and make it act and speak before our eyes, may well be of a piece with our susceptibility to the belief, or even the perception, of ghosts. The dead, after all, are merely one species of the absent and missed. Of course this passes onward to the fear of their noxiousness or malevolence as independent agents, who might attend you even if they don't know you; the success of horror films and stories bespeaks this extension of the realm of the dead beyond a space of sanctuary for the beloved and the missed. Odysseus describes a terrifying sensurround experience (θεσπεσίηι φίφαχῆι); his response describes the one in the movie theatre at a horror show: 'the yellow-green fear got hold of me.' It is not finally clear how the souls make the sound that terrifies him. Perhaps with their feet? Perhaps they moan and clank in

their armour, like Marley's ghost? We learn later on—from Teiresias—that they cannot speak articulately or thoughtfully until they drink of Odysseus' blood sacrifice.

T. S. Eliot says, quoting Dante—'I had not thought death had undone so many.' The sentiment morphs into David Bowie's 'I never thought I'd need so many people ...' A vision of the dead becomes at once a vision of the almost burdensome immensity of human population. Bowie's doomed cityscape (*Five Years*) and Eliot's vision of a busy London Bridge (*The Waste Land*) are of a piece with the earlier infernal visions in that the realisation that these people had stopped living is at once a taking in of their sheer number. Odysseus' vision here, which inspired so many different kinds of poet across the ages, may in fact be the origin of them all. My only hesitation when it comes to Homer's originality, is the hint at parody and sendup which runs through the veins of the *Odyssey*, including in this episode of Odysseus in Hades, whose undercurrents are felt despite our lack of objects for their direction (outside the *Iliad*). Perhaps, for example, there were stories and perhaps also rites due to Orpheus, or about him, to which Homer was responding in a somewhat parodic way, but there is no evidence for an Orphic priority. There seems to be only genuine sentiment running through Homer's lines. We do not know how the brides and grooms came to their presumed sudden end—must have been horrible—nor the virgins new to sorrow. But they all died untimely, like men killed in battle, and evidently keep the semblance with which they died; the soldiers' ghosts' equipment is still covered, rather gratuitously, with real gore.

The odd ones out are the old men who have endured much (πολύτλητοι); they must be wearing their endurance in their posture and gait. Perhaps they also died at a wedding, like the people killed by drones in Afghanistan? It does not seem that we are shown people who died of old age, or disease. There are no old women mentioned, for example, nor cripples, nor others who might not elicit the sought-for poignance in the sense of lost opportunity and bloom. These are sad songs in a comedy, not tragic eruptions into the score. The ghosts are Homeric psyches who lust for the blood from which they have been forever separated. We are supposed to think that they would fear Odysseus' sword, which stands brandished in their way. 'Wot are you gonna do, kill me?'

Odysseus draws his sword anyway, and repeats, in his own assertive voice, Circe's command that he will not let the 'corpses' powerless heads—which sound like 'skulls', but must be recognisable, like zombies' faces—approach the sheep's blood before he can question Teiresias. The rule is immediately broken, however, when the ghost of Elpenor shows up first. He does not take a drink, but starts right up talking in response to Odysseus' question. No explanation is given for his ability or privilege in line, unless it can be found in the fact that he's not yet been acknowledged in death, but lies there 'unwept and without a funeral' in Circe's house. But this seems, rather, to be an explanation of why he is dead at all. Elpenor tells the story of his drunken misadventure. Odysseus' question of him had served as a chance to repeat a joke which doesn't, perhaps, improve with age: how'd you get here so fast, the quickest way to Hades? 'You beat me here on foot, though I came with my black ship.' (11.58)

Elpenor's presence in the story, at first blush anyway, seems in every way a contrivance. Unkind people would call him an insertion. My own sense is that the poet of the *Odyssey*, who is scripting a one-man show on a bare stage, is someone who embraces both the imaginative challenges placed upon him by the conditions of his art, and a performer who must be more a medium than an actor, a necessarily multilayered vehicle who will not be shy to indulge things 'meta'. This layering will include breaking what we call the 'fourth wall';

we see this already in his use of the figure of Mentor, who is at times the performer's alter ego rather than an assumed character. I have suggested that in Elpenor's case, the manner of his death, which he now recounts in his own voice, stands as a sort of parable for an 'epic movement'.<sup>11</sup> Instead of retracing his steps down the long staircase, he falls straight through the roof, which results in his neck being severed from its spine.

Circling with a retrogression midway is the movement of a dactylic round dance which supplies the poet with an hexameter beat. The timely retrogression becomes a fulcrum which makes the six-measure movement a unity—that is, a 'line' or ἔπος. In the twist in his neck the dancer also feels the unity between his head and spine. The movement of such a round dance is, not coincidentally, an image of the motion of an outer planet, like the gods Jupiter/Zeus or the present Mars/Ares, as we see them from earth: these beings seem to stop and retrogress westward at the approach of each solar opposition, before resuming their eastward motion among the fixed stars. From the dancer's point of view, every four dactyls there comes a retrogression, a pausing step for almost two feet. From the accompanist's or composer's point of view, the retrogression is not the beginning or end but the fulcrum, a balancing point just past the middle, of an Homeric line. (This line's beginning, its first foot, is always marked by a new word; the later resumption of rightward motion after the retrogression is also often marked by a new word, in a phenomenon called the 'bucolic diaeresis' between the fourth and fifth feet of the six.)

Elpenor himself becomes the vehicle for Odysseus and his men to accomplish a retrogression in their journey, as though this was the right way to travel: in the round, like the planetary gods when they are on good behaviour, rather than in straight lines. Rather than head home immediately upon hearing Teiresias' prophecy, they must now first return to Aeaea, Circe's Isle, to do the last rites for their comrade. Elpenor does not depend on them to do this out of love, for all that Odysseus is in tears at the sight of him; no, he threatens them in a rather striking way:

μή μ' ἄκλαυτον ἄθαπτον ἰὼν ὄπιθεν καταλείπειν  
νοσησθεῖς, μή τοί τι θεῶν μῆνιμα γένωμαι ...

'Do not abandon me unwept, without a funeral, left behind  
With your back turned, lest I become a concretion of the gods' wrath against  
you ...' (11.72-3)

The θεῶν μῆνιμα is an 'object of the gods' *mēnis*, where μῆνις is a kind of wrath usually distinguished as emanating from divine agents, rather than human beings who tend instead to harbour χόλος (*kholos*, 'anger'), a liquid humour within the chest. I say 'usually' because μῆνις is the first word of the *Iliad*, and that particular anger notably stems from and belongs to Achilles, who is mortal. One does not know what teeth or influence this now bloodless ghost still has; but Elpenor plays all his cards in making his threat. You will be the victim of a divine smiting if you do not cremate me on a proper pyre, and give me the burial I prescribe. The implication is that neglecting or otherwise violating what is due to the dead remnants of an human being would elicit not only societal or cultural opprobrium, like our ubiquitous mass graves, but offend

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<sup>11</sup> David, *Dance of the Muses*, 204-5.

also the divine consciousness, chthonic or cosmic, so as to bring on a supernatural and superhuman threat of punishment. It is a conceit which is in no small part strengthened by the very existence of Elpenor's conscious soul after death.

But Elpenor's vehicle does more than take us back to Circe's Isle. This is only a local, topographical retrogression; many adventures lie beyond Aeaea, including Ogygia, Calypso's island at the sea's navel—surely the centre of some different circle from Aeaea—not to mention Scheria itself, where Odysseus is now among the Phaeacians. It is to this audience that Elpenor is also a storyteller's vehicle, for in making his plea to Odysseus, he calls on those who are absent, both in the sense of 'not in Hades yet', but also absent to the storyteller in the present, and as yet unknown to those listening to him:

νῦν δέ σε τῶν ὀπιθεν γουνάζομαι, οὐ παρεόντων,  
πρὸς τ' ἀλόχου καὶ πατρός, ὃ σ' ἔτρεφε τυτθὸν ἔόντα,  
Τηλεμάχου θ', ὃν μοῦνον ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἔλειπες ·

'But now I beseech you by those left behind, who are not present:  
By your wife and father, who fed you when you were little,  
And Telemachus, whom you abandoned an only child in your rooms.' (11.66-8)

The notion of those 'behind', like ghosts behind your back you cannot see, is striking in this context. The forced absence of the beloved seems very much to be a feature of modern life (not a bug!), not only the lot of the prisoner or the deportee; it seems usefully comparable in feeling to the felt absence of the dead. I, at least, find Elpenor's invocation estrangingly powerful. What can get lost in the reverie is that this is the first time, through Elpenor, that Odysseus has revealed the existence of these people to the Phaeacians. (At the beginning of the tale, he did announce himself as 'son of Laertes.') What Elpenor confirms, somehow, is something that Odysseus cannot honestly know: that these people are still alive. Note in particular the mention of 'the wife' (ἀλόχος, 'bedmate'). She has no name, no epithet, but she has suddenly become a presence hidden behind the speaker. Odysseus has a wife. The once prospective husband for Nausicaa has been outed by his own narrative vehicle, Elpenor.

The dead lad's work is not yet done. The signpost that is Elpenor demands the construction of a sign, one might say a symbol:

ἀλλὰ με κακῆραι σὺν τεύχεσιν, ἄσσά μοι ἐστίν,  
σῆμά τέ μοι χεῦναι πολιῆς ἐπὶ θινὶ θαλάσσης  
ἀνδρὸς δυστήνοιο καὶ ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.  
ταῦτά τέ μοι τελέσαι πῆξαι τ' ἐπὶ τύμβωι ἔρετμόν,  
τῶι καὶ ζωὸς ἔρεσσον ἐὼν μετ' ἔμοις ἐτάροισιν.

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'... Put me to the pyre with my equipment, the sum that is mine,  
And pile me a tomb on the shore of the grey sea,  
The sign of an unfortunate man—to learn by, even for those yet to come.  
Finish this for me, and affix on my barrow the oar,  
With which I used to row when I was also alive and with my comrades.' (11.74-8)

'Tomb' and 'sign' both translate the single word σῆμα (*sēma*), not because Elpenor equivocates, but because a *sēma* is a mark or point, which points, just as a tomb points to its resident. Hence we derive 'semantic'. Homer may not have a word for 'word', but he is of course as fixated as any artist on both the investiture of signs and their possible interpretation. Why should one pay attention to an unfortunate man? It is a curious case;

Elpenor is too 'random' a person, as the kids say, to contain a lesson such as 'there but for the grace of God go I.' This whole Elpenor project, shall we call it, seems to come to Homer's purpose in the affixing of an oar on top of a barrow, as the creation of some sort of incontrovertible and unambiguous sign. Of course there is no such thing. But Elpenor seems to stand for this idea, this aspiration, toward a monovalent sign like a pictogram. I am my oar, I am my work, I am a comrade amongst a rowing team who made me feel alive and of whom I'm proud. Elpenor's oar wants to be a non-arbitrary sign.

But the oar must be transformed to become a sign for his tomb, a *sēma* for his *sēma*. In life the oar was an horizontal extension of his arms, which turned them into a paddle by which to manipulate the alien liquid and traverse the gulfs of the sea. Now it must be planted upright on his barrow, like a loom or a mast. There are so many uses for a stick! But will people still know that it is an oar, an oar meant to represent an oar, when it is stuck upright into the ground? Will Elpenor's oar still mean anything at all, when the art crowd arrives and disagrees on how to interpret the installation?

'This, my sad one (δύστηνε, *dystēne*), I shall fulfil for you, and I'll do it too,' says Odysseus (11.80). In addressing him this way Odysseus confirms that Elpenor's tomb will be, as he wishes, a monument to the unfortunate man (ἀνήρ δύστηνος, *anēr dystēnos*, 11.76), like a tomb for the unknown soldier. Why is he wretched? Is it because Elpenor died in such a pratfallish way, untimely and by absent-mindedness? Or is it because he is, at the end of the day, just an oarsman? Odysseus called himself Ὀὔτις to the Cyclops, which sounds a lot like the Greek for 'no-one', what the grammarians call an indefinite pronoun. The name he later reveals to the Cyclops, Odysseus, we call a 'proper' name. It *belongs* to its referent. There are whole poems and other artworks which memorialise that name and its referent. But even this most proper of proper names has become, in part through the import of its associated stories, an abstract noun; an adventurous, god-inspired journey has become an 'odyssey', a word more like 'oar' than 'Odysseus'. Hence Odysseus' name, in his own telling of the journey, verges from witting anonymity to the full disclosure of a peculiarly talented individual and family, and beyond that to the realm of the archetypes that some would call 'heroic'. "That guy is a proper Ulysses!" For Elpenor, by contrast, the arc is toward the anonymous tomb of the unfortunate man, topped by a sometime oar now planted like a tree. Like the oar put to another use, Elpenor's life has been inserted into Odysseus' story to serve as a useful vehicle. Its insertion into the epic lends his life its true immortality, so it seems; his usefulness to the telling of Odysseus' odyssey is his true memorial.

Teiresias comes on the stage announced as a Theban. In the next breath, he embodies as a man holding a golden sceptre (*Od.* 11.90-1). What can one make of these two sparse features of the mimetic creature now approaching us, on the one hand a Theban, on the other a man with a gold sceptre?

Let us note that Teiresias makes his first ever appearance in Greek letters here in Homer. He must already be well-known, however; he gets, and therefore we infer that he needs, no introduction. Hence our position is awkward. We ourselves do not know him from Adam, except via later sources. (It bears repeating, stories that are later written, or otherwise documented, are not necessarily later in origin.) All my instinct is to focus on the man with the sceptre: here again is the doughty rhapsode, stepping forward with his stick in this, his latest guise. One ought not to have to read the book to experience the drama unfolding before one's eyes. Here comes a seer or prophet; that stick is actually a golden sceptre (so my mind has been prompted by the performer to think) which says that he is authorised to speak with authority. What more do I need

to know? And yet, the narrator (an epic voiceover) has announced him as 'Theban'. So, annoyingly, we are presented an unknown. What is Thebes to Homer, or she to Thebes?

I say 'annoyingly' because efforts at intertextuality, or virtual intertextuality (like the movement called 'neoanalysis') invariably lead us down a rabbit hole, quite away from the dramatic moment at hand. It can sometimes seem that such studies, even if they are themselves absorbing and ingenious, nevertheless lead us away, rather than towards, the text at the heart of the comparison or the allusion. This can be frustrating when the Homeric composition itself cannot simply be taken as read, in that it continues to yield new puzzles and new insights to new readers without any resort to esoterica. Classicists may not accept the comparison, but the modern approaches seem to be saying little more than 'this' is 'that', in the fashion of the oldest critical tack known in the reception of Homer, the modus of allegory. Those early allegorists, however, may well have been responding genuinely to their predicament, that they could no longer make sense of who or what Homer's gods were, for example, in relation either to their customary worshipful practices or their atheism, or how to make sense of these gods' actions in a story. The moderns, by contrast, seem no longer interested in such glaring questions, which perennially confront a youthful initiate; they instead seem to find freedom as well as a sense of context in alternate or parallel stories, akin to the modern penchant, inspired by spurious 'science', for possible universes and alternative time-lines. In the spell of the eye-widening moment where one says, 'hey, this is really that in a new skin,' Homer's poem (or Odysseus' tale) becomes just a version of something.

It seems likely that the biases which accompany oral theory in its genes, help make plausible the idea that one can usefully find comparisons, or even claim sources for a poem, in material where no poem has been remembered at all except for the barest templates for a story. We are dealing only with 'traditional', 'orally transmitted' material, after all, where the Homeric poems are supposed to represent a moment's instantiation of something non-literate, and presumed to be fluid. In literary contexts, one does best to demonstrate the fact of an allusion, often aided by theories of dating, but most persuasively in the way that an allusion, if taken, enriches the interpretation of the text in hand. In oral theory, on the other hand, allusion to tradition is thought to be endemic, including in the idea that alternate routes for the storyteller, paths not actually taken, are all nevertheless ambient in the moment of telling, contributing to its unique *gestalt*. The modern Homerist seems suspended ecstatic in the moment between the this and all the possible thats. Under the circumstances, the significance of the particular form and meaning of Homer's poem, especially the sense that it takes pains to establish by internal context, cannot help but be diminished. One almost seems liberated from the actual poems of Homer.

The 'this' that is the composed music of either of Homer's poems, however, is altogether more than a matter of narrative choice. I have demonstrated that Homer's *Odyssey* is a musical composition which designedly exploits the accentual features of Greek to produce memorably significant patterns of rhythm and melody.<sup>2</sup> Such things needs must be composed in advance of performance, as if scored or scripted. Moreover, the *Odyssey* quotes Homer's *Iliad* as another individual musical composition, not solely word for word but accentual pattern for accentual pattern, to pointed allusive (and perhaps parodic) effect. These are, for us, new discoveries which demand a renewed interest among students of Homer, who have been mining far afield, in the fine detail and broad movements of Homer's poems as musical scores intended for dramatic enactment and performance by a soloist. There is plenty of inspiration and diversion

to be had in Shakespeare's sources, but for God's sake, the play's the thing. An *Étude* by Chopin is not best thought of as a version of what might have been, but rather heard (and played), with skill and discernment, for exactly what it is.

And yet Thebes, along with other loci which resonate with their native stories, is made distinctly ambient in Homer's telling of the *Odyssey*. Hence refusing to speculate is not a possible path of prudence. Consider Ino, for example, whom we met in Book 5. She was the daughter of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes. She is supposed to be the sister of Semele, who, by one account, was impregnated in Zeus's deadly thunderbolt and bore the god Dionysus as her son. The mother's death left the baby in dire need of care; the nurses of Dionysus play a big role in his stories. Ino may well have been head nurse or the original Maenad. Now, Dionysus gets no explicit mention in the *Odyssey*, but the further we go down this rabbit hole, the more you might think that the *Odyssey* is actually about Dionysus, or that Odysseus himself functions at times as this god's avatar.

Ino appears to Odysseus as a sea bird. She offers the shipwrecked man, riding a keel's timber, her potent veil to tie beneath his sternum, which would then protect him from harm. He must strip off the clothes Calypso had given him and dive into the sea, naked except for the veil; so Ino instructs. It seems in doing so she is having Odysseus perform rites reminiscent of those from Eleusis, where an immersion in the sea precedes the rites of Demeter and Dionysus, and also rites from Samothrace, where the initiates tie a purple sash around them prior to diving in the sea. These latter rites were thought to save the initiate from storms at sea.<sup>12</sup> Now 'reminiscence' is a deceptive notion; we have no idea about the historical relation between Homer's poems and the sketchy knowledge we get, mostly from third parties tattling secrets, about the practices of ancient Greek mystery cults. Our ignorance of Homer's time and place is an absolute and non-negotiable fact of our predicament, in relation to the problem of Homeric allusion. We recall Herodotus' statement that all that the historical Hellenes knew about the gods came from Homer and Hesiod:

It is they who created for the Greeks their theogony; it is they who gave to the gods the special names for their descent from their ancestors and divided among them their honours, their arts, and their shapes. (Herodotus History 2.53, tr. Grene)

This could easily be read to apply to the rituals by which historical Greeks came to honour the gods: that in some instances the Homeric descriptions came first, in the way that acts and lines from the Gospels came to play a part in the mass. I do not at all dismiss this idea, or this quote from Herodotus, like most professionals; but my reservation has only to do with the nagging intuition from my own reading, that Homer seems to be parodying or otherwise having his way with these rituals, and many other things besides. There is a missing world of songs and chthonic rites and polar stars in which Homer plays, whose membranous connection to the ancient one—his future—has allowed only the passing of some small granules beside the giant pyramids of his poetry. Yet Homer's comedy does not preclude his most sincere investment in what

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<sup>12</sup> for a stimulating thesis and references to the literature, see Olga Levaniouk, 'The Waters of the Underworld and Ino in the *Odyssey*', in M. Christopoulos and M. Païzi-Apostolopolou, eds., *The Upper and the Under World in Homeric and Archaic Epic*, Ithaca: Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on the *Odyssey*, 2020, 279-314.

these rituals intend, as we shall see. I think of the various priests in Shakespeare's comedies. Even in *Midsummer Night's Dream* or the Roman plays or pagan *Lear*, the tenets and foils of Christianity and Christian ritual bear silent witness.

The detail in Ino's instruction that once Odysseus has made dry land, he must turn his back upon returning the veil to the sea, is the surest sign that Homer is tapping into some form of recognisable rite. We also see, in Hades, that Odysseus must turn his back on the ovine sacrifice and face the oncoming ghosts. The danger of turning around to see what's going on is a staple of stories from Lot to Orpheus. 'Mystery' is as much about what must not be seen, as what the initiate (*mystēs*) must be made aware of; the family of words seems to be related to μύω, 'shut the eyes'. Shutting the eyes can be a conscious act; it seems to be a helpful thing to do, in order to see things ordinarily hidden to the eye, perhaps with a third or inner eye. The mysteries, as these various rites were called, seem meant to have been conducted in darkness, or torchlit in dark places. The ritual pathway revealed truths hidden to the uninitiated, one of these no doubt being the immortality of the initiate's own soul. The successful initiate is thought to have received guarantees about his fate in an afterlife. A sacrificed animal, in Eleusis a pig, has died in his stead. He himself emerges reborn to new life.

In Homer's use μῦθος (*mūthos*), often translated 'speech' or 'command', is in my view better rendered as 'disclosure' or even 'revelation'. A speech or command only becomes actual and effective when it is spoken, or in Homer's metaphor, becomes winged. In Homer's own usage, however, it is possible for a *mūthos* to remain 'unwinged' (e.g., *Od.*21.386, where the would-be speaker is the nurse Eurycleia); this implies that it exists but remains hidden within the speaker. Hence it seems in Homer's usage a *mūthos* spoken is the revelation of a thing hidden, and is plausibly connected in etymology to μύω and the language of the mysteries. Hence only in the case of a speaker with relative authority in context, does the revelation of his thought (μῦθος) become at the same time a command.

Ino has been pursued to her death by drowning, as the extra-Homeric story goes, but has emerged into new life as Leucothea, the White Goddess. Homer simply gives Leucothea as her other name, albeit in the same line that he says she was formerly mortal. Hence she has undergone, painfully by drowning, the mystical transformation, and feels sympathy for the shipwrecked sailor. But her new charge must not look back and see the veil received into the bosom of the waters. Odysseus only sees her as a bird; he must not see the lady of the lake. The transformation through death to immortality must remain a mystery. Perhaps the new thing that the rites of Dionysus and Demeter (and Persephone) offered, was the possibility of safe human initiation into such life, rather than the painful calamity which befell a mortal like his aunt Ino, and which she underwent. Dionysus becomes the archetype of the dying god who is reborn to life, in whom Jesus and others participate.

Odysseus finally strips himself of Calypso the Titan's daughter's clothes and ties around him Ino's veil—after rationalising against such a leap of faith, and almost succumbing to Poseidon's aqueous blow—and leaps naked from his single plank, arms outstretched, to swim into the deep. Is this the stripping of one Titanic covenant and the embrace of a new chthonic one? Poseidon himself is a figure who may extend across such realms, as the one to which Atlas and the other deposed cosmic Titans belong, and the earth religion, if I may so style it, the religion of the great Goddess within which Dionysus has become her son. The place to which Poseidon doesn't seem to belong comfortably, is with Athena and the Olympians; these latter are the people who have

come in and taken over the place, conquering the Titans and subordinating the fertility of the earth and what lies beneath, the realm of the Great Goddess. Olympian Poseidon may also be a subdued and newly accommodated being.

Dionysus seems to have slipped into these divine upheavals sidelong, subverting establishments. Euripides in the *Bacchae* presents him as a visitor from Asia whose modus is to revolutionise the women; at the opening of the play he comes upon Thebes, though it is his birthplace, as just a stop on a whirlwind tour. Societies come to a standstill because their women reject the social order which subordinates them; he leads them in new ecstatic dances and initiates them into his mystic rites. The aim is to make his divinity manifest to mortals; quite unlike any god before him, he is out to prove that he is a god. In Thebes Semele's sisters (including Ino), the daughters of Cadmus, have denied that her son was Zeus's, but that he was a human bastard born of a tryst. So the god has it in for them, not by punishing them but by possessing them, upending their sense of status and showing them, in their ecstasy and loss of inhibition, that they are women like their neighbours, and that he himself is a god. Hence Dionysus is a profoundly democratic force, an equaliser; even Cadmus and Teiresias, the king's aged Apolline pontiff, dress up in fawn skins and head out to the woods.

The ecstasy and savagery of the women is temporary; they return to their accustomed roles when the madness passes. In a similar way, the Festival of Dionysus in classical Athens, during which tragic and comic dramas were performed, seems to have been a sort of Mardi Gras where all customary social roles were shown to be exactly that, merely customary and conventional, and were temporarily upended. Slaves became masters and masters slaves. The masque of the theatre seems to have been only the most stylised focus of the experience of this festival. One does not know how this could have worked, a sort of purgative but temporary revolution. It is as though Jeff Bezos becomes an Amazon warehouse worker, while the package packers fly into orbit. One cannot see everything going back to normal again come Monday morning, not today. But this was the ancient idea, anyway, which perhaps deserves revisiting, along with the Jubilee year for debts. Instead we live with class as caste, and children and their whole nations born into debt slavery.

In the academy one might seem a maniac to say so, but let's say it out loud: nothing about Dionysus, or, for that matter, whatever is made to go by the name 'Greek religion', is redolent of tradition and continuity. Dionysus in particular is the original upwardly-mobile interloper, the endemic iconoclast who disrupts attempts at systematising theology. He is either God's true-born son or an Asian immigrant queuing for a ticket to the Pantheon. He is Christ the Jew who establishes a covenant in wine. He is the god of drunkenness and the vine, he is the stranger in disguise, he is the god of Bacchic ecstasy, he is Zeus and Demeter's son, he is the dying son who is reborn to eternal life. If there is a through line to Dionysus' being, it is perhaps the line Euripides gives him when he confronts the rational skeptic who would suppress him:

οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅ τι ζῆς, οὐδ' ὅ δρᾶς, οὐδ' ὅστις εἶ.

You do not know what it is you are living, neither what you are doing, nor who you are. (Euripides' *Bacchae*, 506)

The god's challenge to self-knowledge and the knowledge of life, about the sources of action and the reality of identity, transcends the constraints of time and language to sound eternally to the human race. But it is Euripides, a poet of a time and a place,

who articulates the challenge in the course of his invented drama; the question one faces in the mirror on the wall, is therefore Euripides' epiphany.

There were at least two original gods Dionysus, only one of whom was the Theban son of Semele. Certainly his other names were legion, or else he became a syncretism of these distinct figures: Iacchus, Bacchus, Bromius, Zagreus, not to mention Eleutherus ('Freedom', Roman Liber). There is a Dionysus associated with wine in the pre-Homeric Linear B tablets. The Roman-era poet Nonnus (composing in Greek) was perhaps in late enough a position, long after Euripides who was himself an age after Homer, to offer an history of religions, and sort out some sort of theology based on the rites then practised by the Athenians:

ἀμφὶ δὲ κοῦρον Ἴακχον ἐκυκλώσαντο χορείη  
νύμφαι κισσοφόροι Μαραθωνίδες, ἀρτιτόκῳ δὲ  
δαίμονι νυκτιχόρευτον ἐκούφισαν Ἀτθίδα πεύκην·  
καὶ θεὸν ἰλάσκοντο μεθ' οὐρανὸν Περσεφονείης,  
καὶ Σεμέλης μετὰ παῖδα, Θηηπολίας δὲ Λυαίῳ  
ὄψιγόνῳ στήσαντο καὶ ἀρχηγόνῳ Διονύσῳ,  
καὶ τριτάτῳ νέον ὕμνον ἐπεσμαράγησαν Ἰάκχῳ.  
καὶ τελεταῖς τρισσῆσιν ἐβακχεύθησαν Ἀθηναί·  
καὶ χορὸν ὀψιτέλεστον ἀνεκρούσαντο πολῖται  
Ζαγρέα κυδαίνοντες ἄμα Βρομίῳ καὶ Ἰάκχῳ.

... the wives of Marathon wearing ivy tript around the boy Iacchos, and lifted the Attic torch in the nightly dances of the deity lately born. They honoured him as a god next after the son of Persephoneia, and after Semele's son; they established sacrifices for Dionysos late born and Dionysos first born, and third they chanted a new hymn for Iacchos. In these three celebrations Athens held high revel; in the dance lately made, the Athenians beat the step in honour of Zagreus and Bromios and Iacchos all together. (Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* XL-VIII.959-68, tr. Rouse)

'Zagreus' appears to refer to the son of Persephone. Persephone is often known elsewhere as Demeter's daughter—together they are the 'two goddesses' of the underworld—but sometimes they constitute a sort of Duality, like the Christian Trinity. Homer's Persephone seems, by contrast, to be the sole queen of Hades' realm. Demeter and infant Dionysus became the original 'Madonna and Child' icon in art, but as far as I know, Dionysus is not understood to be Persephone's brother, and in Nonnus, the 'first born' version of Dionysus is unambiguously the son of the underworld goddess, Persephoneia. There is no Bible and no big book of 'Mythology' where these personages and their histories are sorted out. The only stabilising authorities in the transmission of their stories appear to be specific poems by known poets, on the one hand, and local rituals on the other. None of these seem to fuss about agreeing with each other.

'Bromius' appears to be cast in Nonnus as the 'late born' Dionysus, Theban Semele's son; this Dionysus is famous for his *katabasis* or descent into Hades to free his mother. We do not honestly know if Odysseus' journey there was not in fact the original and the model. But there now appears also a third Dionysus, even more lately born, invoked by 'Iacchus'—which is not, however, a new form of invocation, but as old as any of them. Nonnus' syncretism, we note, is far in both Euripides' and Homer's future; it seems itself to reflect a syncretism in the Athenians' latest innovation: a dance which synthesises something new from the separate rhythms which had previously each been associated

with the names of Zagreus and Bromius, now fused with one for Iacchus. (The three names themselves have three different rhythms.) This mention of a late ritual synthesis in the Athenian celebration of Dionysus, which is at the same time a syncretism in dance rhythms, is endlessly intriguing. Athena herself has been seen as a reconciler of the Olympians to the great chthonic feminine forces. Her own femininity plays a key role as arbiter in the reconciliation between the Olympian heavies, represented in court by Apollo as Orestes' defence lawyer, and the powerful subterranean justicers the Erinyes, or 'Furies', in the vision envisioned in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Could Athena play a similar role for Homer?

Homer hails from a world unknown and unknowably remote to the Roman orchestral novelty in Athens which has lately impressed Nonnus. Nor is he privy to the extraordinary insights of the Athenian dramatists Aeschylus and Euripides. But Homer's imagination seems also, already, actively and creatively syncretic. It seems to draw from practices which in later times belonged to different local rituals (for example, from Eleusis and Samothrace). One may presume that the danger of exposing the mysteries' secrets may have been as real socially and politically as they were in the classical era. Euripides' *Bacchae* was composed in exile; its ending has apparently been censored at some point, most likely because it too closely and gruesomely recalled the Christian rite of communion. It is said that Aeschylus was almost lynched on the spot, for having shown too much in one of his plays. It is said that the old warrior and playwright took refuge at the altar in the orchestra of the famous Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. The presence of the altar in that venue, a dancing space becoming a stage, itself bespeaks living history and an evolving connection between poetry and religion among these people, and the connection of both to participatory theatre. The initiate must play his part—know his blocking and his lines—in a drama, as at mass. But the Christian mysteries are now televised!

In the *Odyssey*, the Dionysiac coloring is somewhat covert, as it usually is in Homer, and so is the evocation of the mysteries. Still, it is possible for the epic to refer to Dionysiac themes in general and to mysteries in particular in terms that are not specific yet are evocative of the religious experience and recognizable aesthetics of such rites. The mysteries of Demeter and Dionysos followed to some extent a common pattern: the mystes experiences terror which is then dispelled and as a result acquires secret knowledge and a promise of blessed life after death. Contemplating the possible origins of the mysteries, Burkert arrives at the following formulation: "Puberty initiation, agrarian magic, and sexuality may unite in the great experience of overcoming death."<sup>13</sup>

The crime of travestyng the mysteries, I would suggest, did not consist in open mockery or iconoclasm, although there may have been instances of this. Alcibiades would have been capable of being so motivated, I should have thought. But in general, the travesty need only consist in displaying the mystery drama in the daylight of the theatre. The acts and rites and clothing and sacrifices may have made their most potent impressions, and had their greatest effects on the participants, in the dark or by torchlight, like at a carnival haunted house; drink and drugs may have played a role; while at least some of the practices may have looked less than awesome and, well,

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<sup>13</sup> Levaniouk, 284; Burkert, 277.

pretty silly by the light of day. The experience of a blindfolded initiate could never be that of spectators aware of the machinery. That said, the costumed presence of the chorus of Furies on Aeschylus' day-lit stage is supposed to have been so formidable as to terrify women into labour.

Homer was never suspected of travesty the mysteries, as far as I know. The 'Dionysiac colouring' never involves an appearance by Dionysus in the *Odyssey*. Demeter only appears in Calypso's speech, as a lover of Amphion, not as the great Goddess of Fertility. Dread Persephone is said to be our host and emcee behind the scenes in Hades, but she never comes forward herself. All the same I cannot escape the sense of parody in Homer's presentation. Some of this is clearly directed at the *Iliad*; the line about 'drawing the sword from by his thigh', creating expectations about the action to follow, which then deflate and emasculate, seems to be deployed without mercy. Homer's art could not thrive, however, without drawing on the reality of the gods, or the power of the rituals known to him in their celebration and participation. An artist ought not to draw on the power of tradition, tapping into it to empower his own artwork, only to betray it. (This was my departed father's judgement on Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. A Roman Catholic himself, he felt that the power of Rushdie's subversion nevertheless originates in Islam and the Qur'an.) Never could I imagine Homer's parody extending to the gods themselves, or even to human religion or theology (although he is banished from Plato's best city for very much these reasons). But the use of Odysseus' drawn sword in the underworld, to dig a trench for a blood sacrifice, and then to be brandished to ward off the thirsty souls of the dead, rather calls attention to itself as a prop, or a malaprop. This effect is of course doubled when the *Odyssey's* performer is self-conscious of his staff as a magic wand, a loom, a mast, a sword, or anything he needs it to be. I am convinced, and will continue to try to be convincing, that the *Odyssey's* composer has scripted for beyond the fourth wall. What cannot be avoided in this move, is the little Catholic schoolboy who says—only to himself—those wafers taste like cardboard, here's the only place they'll allow me to glug some wine, and that there is just a man in a dress. *This is very much that.*

Dionysus the god who dies dismembered and is restored to life, and perhaps also the Persephone who returns to her mother releasing the fertility of spring, are there in Homer's poetry and intention, one need not doubt this at all. For God's sake, the very sea in Homer is famously wine-dark (φοῖνοψ, 'wine-faced', or as I render, 'drunken'). The danger for the interpreter, it seems to me, is the trap of allegory, which says, smugly, this is *really* that. I suspect the main reason that insightful scholars fall for this trap, and entrap others, is that by and large, they are not trained or equipped to focus on the musical and histrionic event that is going on in the moment of performance, not just in the accentual life of the words beyond their meanings and parsings, but in the physical apparition of the performer on Dionysus' stage. Refuge in esoteric meaning can seem to be redeeming when the text is thought mostly, or even partly, to be monotonous metrical formulas.

Consider again Ino-Leucothea: she appears like a bird called αἰθυίη, seemingly 'blazing' like a phoenix, a sea-bird we cannot identify, who emerges from a 'lake' (λίμνη):

αἰθυίη φερίκυϊα ποτὴν ἀνεδύσετο λίμνης

Looking like a petrel on the wing, she emerged from the lake ... (Od.5.337)

This is odd language for an encounter on the open sea, but not for a torch-lit ritual by a pool. Beyond this ambient evocation, however, Ino the talking bird is a wondrous

animation, putting Disney to shame; she leaps forth from the stage like all the creatures Homer brings to voice. She is a coquettish light in the chaos of storm and destruction, who begins by playing on Odysseus' name, as Athena did when soliciting Zeus:

κάμμορε, τίπτε τοι ὦδε Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων  
ὠδύσατ' ἐκπάγλως, ὅτι τοι κακὰ πολλὰ φυτεύει;  
οὐ μὲν δὴ σε καταφθείσει, μάλα περ μενεαίνων.

'Luckless man, why ever does he find you—Poseidon, Ground-Shaker—  
So violently Odious, that he plants so many evils for you?  
But it seems he will not destroy you, for all his eagerness. (5.339-41)

She means to charm a man to take off his clothes:

ἀλλὰ μάλ' ὦδ' ἔρξαι, δοκέεις δέ μοι οὐκ ἀπινύσσειν ·  
εἴματα ταῦτ' ἀποδύς σχεδίην ἀνέμοισι φέρεσθαι  
κάλλιπ', ἀτὰρ χεῖρεσσι νέων ἐπιμαίεο νόστου  
γαίης Φαιήκων, ὅθι τοι μοῖρ' ἐστὶν ἀλύξαι.

'No, you'd better do the following, and I don't think you're short of common sense:  
Take off these clothes, leave the raft to the winds to carry—  
Let it go! But swim with your arms and feel out a return home  
From the land of the Phaeacians, where it is your disbursement to escape. (5.342-5)

"You're not stupid!" 'Let it go!' Ah, don't we just; she enthral. Finally she gives instruction for the rite. An audience familiar with rituals would have expected some sort of rules, but surely would not have known exactly what to expect:

τῇ δέ, τόδε κρήδεμνον ὑπὸ στέρνοιο τανύσσαι  
ἄμβροτον · οὐδέ τί τοι παθέειν δέος οὐδ' ἀπολέσθαι.  
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν χεῖρεσσιν ἐφάψαι ἠπείροιο,  
ἄψ ἀπολυσάμενος βαλέειν εἰς φοῖνοπα πόντον  
πολλὸν ἀπ' ἠπείρου, αὐτὸς δ' ἀπὸ νόσφι τραπέσθαι.

'There now, this veil, stretch it under your sternum—  
It's immortal! No fear to suffer anything at all, or to die.  
But the moment you touch hands on the dry land,  
Loosen it off you and throw it back into the drunken deep  
Far away from the dry; but yourself, turn with your back to it.' (5.346-50)

In Homer, it is the dramatic realisation of this figure that counts. Yes Ino's backstory, however her painful transformation into the White Goddess is told, is there, it haunts the text, but it only serves to add watts to the electricity of her manifest presence. Homer is the table-setter, the bedmaker, and the pimp for these epiphanies: narrative, dramatic, musical, and finally poetic.

Yes Odysseus is like a dying god who comes back to life, yes he is to become the theoxenic god in beggar's clothes. 'Lord I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof.' But Odysseus is not Dionysus, for all that these two, the dying god and the theoxenic stranger-in-disguise, are Dionysian archetypes. This is not that. It does not often get remarked on, but consider that Odysseus is sober. He is the guy who hordes fortified wine so he can ply it on his enemies and get the better of them. That is not the spirit of Dionysus. He is the sort of duplicitous speaker whom Achilles, in the *Iliad*, hates worse

than the gates of hell. The sin Jesus seems uniquely to have highlighted is what we call 'hypocrisy'. But ὑποκριτής, 'responder', had become the regular word for 'actor'. When Jesus calls someone 'hypocrite!' he is calling them 'actor!' Jesus was not sober, he consecrates the wine, he can even be thought to have instituted a wine cult, but he also is not Dionysus. The Athenian stage remembers Odysseus precisely as a conniving sober liar, an arch villain. Except for being bearded, he anticipates the Machiavel of the Renaissance stage, the cunning pragmatist and adviser to the prince, the commander's henchman and trusty fixer. Perhaps the biggest joke of the whole *Odyssey* is this idea that Odysseus could be a hero of some sort. Perhaps this was Homer's original gag! To make Odysseus a hero. (You can imagine the writer's room banter: 'Focus on Penelope and the boy, let him long for shitty Ithaca, he'll be the murderous liar with a heart of gold!') If so, Homer's done too well, like Mel Brooks' 'Springtime for Hitler'; the joke was lost on Plato and the ancients, as well as all us moderns on our odysseys.

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Teiresias was already an old man when Dionysus visited Thebes and captivated its women. He and Cadmus himself trot themselves out in the latest Bacchic kit, shaking their arses. Pretty funny. But he is not otherwise a player in the Dionysiac saga or apotheosis. In other stories about Teiresias, we find out that he is the one person who has truly been both a man and a woman (but not at the same time). Could that be of interest to Homer? Possibly, I reckon. But Teiresias is someone who has lived through many ages, even before he became Cadmus' old and blind advisor. He is like Merlin. I think that's who he is, in point of fact, for Homer and for the *Odyssey*.

So does it matter that Teiresias is a Theban? After all the fuss, no, not really. I would focus on that golden sceptre, which recalls—reechoes—the sceptre of Chryses, Apollo's supplicating priest, from the beginning of the *Iliad*. Teiresias, also, is meant to speak his prophecy with the authority of Apollo. So what does Apollo's surrogate, this Merlin, have to say to Odysseus in hell?

διογενὲς Λαερτιάδη πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,  
τίπτ' αὐτ', ὃ δύστηνε, λιπῶν φάφος ἠφελίοιο  
ἦλυθες, ὄφρα εἶδης νέκυας καὶ ἀτερπέα χῶρον;

'Zeus-Born son of Laertes, Contriver Odysseus,  
Why ever, you wretched man, did you leave the light of the Sun  
And come to see the corpses and the cheerless place?' (11.92-4)

One of Teiresias' jobs is what the screenwriters call 'exposition', filling in the essential things in the background or foreground which the audience will need to know in order to make sense of the plot. A certain generation will always call this the Morgan Freeman role. But I find Teiresias' brief entrance to be a jolt of tactility and perspective. There is a fuss of stage business, where Teiresias asks Odysseus to put up his absurdly threatening sword so he can drink blood; there follows the enacted sheathing and the old man's imagined stooping and drinking of fresh animal blood from a trench, like a wildebeest at the watering hole. In a world already peopled with gods and monsters, this is nevertheless farcical and surreal. A stately man introduced wielding a golden sceptre is immediately on all fours lapping up gore like a jackal.

Note especially that phrase, 'cheerless place'; it might register these days as a bit of a cliché, when it comes to describing hell or the underworld or a haunted cemetery, but no one, that we know of, had really described these things before. Teiresias' 'cheerless place' (ἀτερπέα χῶρον), a land absent of sources of pleasure or delight, including the delights of dance and song, therefore deserves to strike the imagination with all the

sombre awe with which it evidently struck the likes of Virgil and Dante and then Milton. It is a place foreign, or immune, to poetry, and yet a wellspring. There is now, forever, such a place in the landscape. And it continues to live in the cultural imagination and to be perversely productive of poetry and art, first of all in the tale of the wanderings of Odysseus and eminently here in the speech of Teiresias. If the 'cheerless place' is an idea not original to Homer, he is nevertheless, in our literary history, the source of its apostolic touch. The elements of Teiresias' comparatively brief and pithy speech echo and resound, backwards and forwards in the *Odyssey*—literally re-sound—so that it becomes a true crux for both Odysseus' tale to the Phaeacians and the whole of Homer's poem.

It would seem that Teiresias needs to establish his authority with Homer's audience, rather than let it be assumed, as he later might amongst the likes of Oedipus and Antigone on the Athenian stage. He does this first by already knowing, without being told, who Odysseus is—'he knew me' (ἐμὲ δ' ἔγνω) says the teller—as well as the answer to his own opening question, why'd you leave the light of the sun for the cheerless place? He knows what Odysseus means to ask about:

νόστον διζῆσαι μελιγδέα, φαίδιμ' Ὀδυσσεῦ ·

'It's a return home you're after, sweet as honey, brilliant Odysseus ...' (100)

That shows he's at least a little mantic, if not quite divinely omniscient. Teiresias also knows that Odysseus is at risk of destruction by Poseidon, in anger for the blinding of his son the Cyclops. That is a past and done deed for Odysseus and ourselves in audience, hence a credential of the prophet's awareness.

But what comes next establishes Teiresias' authority within the poetic world of the *Odyssey*. He warns Odysseus that when they reach the Thrinacian Isle, he must restrain himself and his crew from harming the cattle and flocks of Helios the sun who graze there.

τὰς εἰ μὲν κ' ἀσινέας ἑάαις νόστου τε μέδῃαι,  
καὶ κεν ἔτ' εἰς Ἴθάκην κακὰ περ πάσχοντες ἴκοισθε ·  
εἰ δέ κε σίνηαι, τότε τοι τεκμαίρομ' ὄλεθρον  
νηφί τε καὶ ἐτάροις.

'Now, if you would leave them be, unharmed, and focus on returning home,  
You might even still make it to Ithaca, though suffering crappy things;  
But if you harm them, I read the signs of destruction at that time,  
For both your ship and crew.' (110-13)

This episode is in Odysseus' future; he first hears about it now. We, however, have known since the opening lines of the poem (1.8-9) that this encounter does not end well. Odysseus will fail to restrain his men and lose both ship and crew, although to be clear, Homer blames the men's failure squarely on their own (σφετέρησι) folly, not their leader's weakness. The effect here in the *Odyssey's* theatre is to certify, by internal validation, Teiresias' acumen as a prophet. He knows how to read the signs (τεκμαίρομαι—his name, Τειρεσίας, may well mean 'portent reader'); we are confident because, with respect to the sun's cattle at least, we already know how that story ends. By grounding Teiresias' credibility in this way, reaching back to the very framing of the poem, Homer primes us to take heed of the revelations about to come. We are on the edge of our seat for words from Teiresias which, it turns out, will haunt the rest of the

*Odyssey* like a recurring refrain, and as much as any other of its musical features, turns the story into a song.

Spoiler alert: Odysseus is going to kill Penelope's suitors, provided he manages to get home. Teiresias is in no doubt. But he leaves it open—not yet plotted by Homer, perhaps—whether he kills them 'by stratagem, or openly with the sharp blade ...' (120). There's still options, all suspense has not been lost. But that victory will not be the end of the story. For what follows from Teiresias' mouth, and is therefore to follow in Odysseus' life, nothing has yet prepared us. Note that Teiresias is no longer predicting, or entertaining choices and possibilities, but giving directions in the imperative voice; if he still has in mind Odysseus' return home, it would have to be in some extended sense, beyond Ithaca and wife and child. That presents a significant shift of horizon for the arc of the *Odyssey* as we generally experience it. All roads lead to the cheerless place, no doubt; but is there anything going to distinguish Odysseus' odyssey? What shall be written on his tombstone?

ἔρχεσθαι δὴπειτα λαβὼν εὐῆρες ἔρετμόν,  
εἰς ὃ κε τοὺς ἀφίκηται οἳ οὐ φῖσσασι θάλασσαν  
ἄνδρες, οὐδέ θ' ἄλεσσι μεμιγμένον ἔδφαρ ἔδουσιν ·  
οὐδ' ἄρα τοί γ' φῖσσασι νέφας φοινικοπαρήϊους  
οὐδ' εὐήρε' ἔρετμά, τὰ τε πτερὰ νηυσὶ πέλονται.

'Travel, then, afterward—grab an oar that fits you well—  
Until you reach those men who do not know the sea,  
Men who do not even eat food seasoned with salt:  
Nor do they actually know about ships with purple cheeks  
Nor well-fitted oars, which become the wings for ships.' (121-5)

Extraordinarily evocative are 'those men who do not know the sea'; one knows the very heart of such men and their pragmatic wives. They sing Thracian harvest songs.

'Grab an oar.' (It's what one feels like saying to those just starting the *Odyssey*.) Not for nothing has been Odysseus' interview, just concluded, with the ghost of Elpenor. His lost crewman had asked Odysseus to pile him a tomb, a monument to the Unfortunate Man (σῆμα ... ἀνδρὸς δυστήνοιο, 75-6), on top of which he is to affix Elpenor's oar 'with which I used to row when I also was alive and with my comrades.' (79) The oar planted on top of the mound (*sēma*) is itself a symbol (*sēma*) of the labour of the buried man's bones and, at the same time and intrinsically, of the necessary team, his crew of oarsmen, with both of which Elpenor's ghost identifies.

It is not clear whether Homer equivocates on the word *sēma*, as we would have to, between 'tomb' or 'burial mound' and 'sign' or 'symbol'. A 'tombstone' may well unite these ideas for us as well, although our sense, aside from crucifixes or other religious symbols, would depend on the epitaph, the legible and intelligible writing on the tomb. Homer does not knowingly refer to writing of this sort, the sort in which his own poem has come to be notated and transmitted. Such a notation, including the accent marks, is a particular deployment of an independent set of symbols used to represent the sound, including its emphases, of a spoken language. Such sounds would need to be decoded by someone familiar with the language, into groupings we have come to call 'words', 'phrases', 'clauses' and 'sentences', for example, before they could have any meaning, and therefore become signs for something more than their associated sounds.

What is clear is that *sēma* can mean 'symbol' in Homer without any reference to a tomb. When in the *Iliad* a champion among the foremost Achaeans must be chosen to

face Hector mano-a-mano, they each somehow put a mark or sign (σημαίνω, *Il.VII.175* ff.) on a lot, before dropping it in a helmet. When the helmet is shaken and one falls out, the lot is taken round the circle, one by one, until the man who recognises the sign (*sēma*) acknowledges he made it. (It was Ajax.) These must have been pictograms, what the corporations call 'logos', except that they are private; they have no meaning beyond 'I made this', while even that meaning is only apparent to the maker. Hence it is a non-communicative sign and, one might say, almost insignificant.

Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, when Bellerophon is sent to Lycia, after having secretly been accused, by his host's wife, of making unwelcome advances, he is to carry with him a folded tablet (πίναξ πτυκτός) inscribed with 'baleful signs' (σήματα λυγρά). These signs, which are said to be many and deadly (θυμόφθορα πολλά), evidently instruct the recipient to kill their bearer. (Bellerophon does not, after all, suffer the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; see *Iliad* VI.160 ff.) Now, these signs could well have been pictograms, like skulls and crossbones. But then how to make their intent unambiguous, and why were there so many of them on the tablet? The endlessly intriguing fact is that the manyness of the signs, and the fact that they are inscribed on a folded tablet, suggest that they were the writing of spoken language, and that Homer had actually seen written documents, but had not understood them for what they were. It would seem to have been quite beyond his ken that, in a sufficiently alphabetic form, the baleful signs could have been a brilliant means to record the sounds of his poetry, not just its meaning but its music. The inference is that Homer was not responsible for the written form in which his composition comes down to us; that inference is borne out by the absence of representation, in the dialect and alphabet in which we receive it, of certain forms and sounds which must have been in Homer's ear, most famously a <w> sound, with consonantal function, represented in some early Greek alphabets by a digamma (Ϝ). These <w> digammas have been restored where necessary, and sometimes where not, in my performance text of the *Odyssey*.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that Greek was recorded in different systems of writing (e.g. the syllabary of Linear B and various later alphabets) points to Saussure's idea, of great influence and suitability to modern taste, of the arbitrariness of the sign. There is, after all, no necessary connection between the signifier and the signified, but rather a sort of time-bound social agreement. As a student I learned that Hindi and Urdu were one language written in different scripts, and likewise Serbian and Croatian in, respectively, Cyrillic and Roman alphabets. But linguists could not say these things out loud for the political and social vitriol they would cause. Linguists, at the end of the day, are not the ultimate arbiters of identity. Apart from the significant differences in religion and culture between these groups, people identify with the signs they use, and identify the signs themselves with the things to which they refer. Educated people, even mathematicians, act as if the Arabic signs they use are not signs for numbers but the numbers themselves, particularly when they use them in operations like multiplying and dividing, where the factors put in and the products generated are mentally identified by permutations of these Arabic symbols. These facts and ideas may or may not prove useful, as grists and foils, when trying to take in what Teiresias next offers:

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<sup>14</sup> David, tr. & ed., *Homer Odysseia*, 6 vols., Chandler, AZ: Mother Pacha, 2024.

σῆμα δέ τοι φέρέω μάλ' ἀριφραδές, οὐδέ σε λήσει ·  
ὀππότε κεν δῆ τοι ξυμβλήμενος ἄλλος ὀδίτης  
φήη ἀθηρηλοιγὸν ἔχειν ἀνά φαιδίμωι ὦμωι,  
καὶ τότε δῆ γαίηι πῆξας εὐῆρες ἐρετμόν

'And I'll tell you a sign—oh so very clear—not even you will miss it:  
Whenever it is you fall in the way of another traveller on the road  
Who swears that you have a winnowing fan on your brilliant shoulder,  
Exactly then: fix it in the earth, your well-fitted oar.' (Od.11.126-9)

The only thing, it seems to me, that is clear about the sign Teiresias describes, is what to do when it is observed. That is, to plant the oar in the ground, upright one presumes, just like Elpenor's oar, but this time with no purpose of marking a tomb or any other evident purpose at all, and then and there, sacrificing three male animals to Lord Poseidon:

ἀρνειὸν ταῦρόν τε συῶν τ' ἐπιβήτορα κάπρον

'A ram and a bull, and the mounter of sows, a boar ...' (131)

To be honest, Teiresias need intend nothing more than this clarity, about what exactly to do when some stranger mistakes the oar on Odysseus' shoulder for a winnowing fan. But it should be equally clear that Homer intends something more by the mistaken oar. He has set us up, after all, with Elpenor's oar, which perhaps somewhat better than the crewman's name ('Hopeman'), embodies his function within Odysseus' journey. Elpenor is an oar. Does that mean Odysseus is also an oar, but with a double-meaning? Or is he a symbol whose meaning depends on his surroundings, and can be easily misunderstood? Despite the enduring hero and Bowman of Homer's treatment, Odysseus also lives on as a brutalist, cunning enforcer and henchman, the Machiavel of the Athenian stage. He has had a double life and a double estimation, perhaps in the Athenian consciousness, but certainly in our reception of Athenian consciousness.

What would an Homeric semiotics look like? We have no reason to suppose anything unusual about the way Homeric language works as language, apart from its peculiar abilities in bringing syncopating rhythm and melody to a fixed and repeating dance measure. These abilities could be said to be hard won; normal Greek syllables need to be lengthened and shortened to suit a metre which does not originate in speech patterns but dance ones, not in the voice but with the feet. This lengthening and shortening has direct consequences for accentuation according to the law of tonal prominence, so that as Aristotle notes, when we speak hexameters, we 'transgress ('step out from', ἐκβαίνοντες) the harmony of speech' (τῆς λεκτικῆς ἁρμονίας)—that is, the pitch accentuation of normal language (*Poetics* 1449a27-8). One even had to coin new verbal forms such as those in -ίζω, which are still productive today in our English -izes and -isms. We might as well note here Homer's extravagant, polysyllabic, long-syllabled coinage, accent-free in context, and not elsewhere used in extant Greek authors: ἀθηρηλοιγός, apparently 'chaff's bane'. It is taken to refer to a winnowing fan. Homer's words exult in their sonorities quite as much as in their meanings. But in the Homeric performance, attention is focused through voice, body, and prop. To begin with, the performer narrates in different registers, sometimes with definite moral judgement, as when he blames the crew for eating the sun's cattle, but sometimes with the distance of a stage direction. He is a voiceover. He invokes the sunrises and dusks with 'brief incantations,' but he

steps into the spotlight and centres his voice as he develops limpid-seeming similes which can also seem intentionally to entangle and dizzy their identifying elements.

Most dramatic, however, are the moments when Homer disappears as a narrator and vividly becomes someone else, whether god, human, or even animal, and speaks with their voice. Though there is no costume change, both voice and body become signs for other referents, so that in audience the assumed speaker stands before them. More protean still is the performer's staff, which is rarely meant to be a simple stick; we shall continue to point up its possible uses as a sort of new key to interpreting the Homeric 'script', in the sense of 'prescription for performance'. This is generally the function of ancient texts, whether they were originally composed with the use of letters, or the letters were the means of recording the music of a performance. I think it important that performance be scrutinised when broaching an Homeric semiotics; what the Alexandrian texts first separated for us as the 'words' of the poem, do not do all the work of this poet (or of any of the Greek lyric choreographers called 'poets'). I conceive the performer's rendering of old Teiresias as one not to exclude his becoming a mime in mid-speech, and swing his staff over his shoulder to demonstrate Odysseus and his oar. In his staff the rhapsode carries an implement whose meaning can change in an instant; it is therefore a sign of signs. (Of course Teiresias himself is being rendered by Odysseus, who is, in turn, Homer's own Trojan horse.) This Protean rhapsode and his sign of signs are the vehicles which frame each and every of Homer's words, and so the interpretation of his poetry. Indeed, the only winnowing fans I can find that could be thought to resemble oars are properly called winnowing shovels. I presume one scoops up the threshed harvest with these and tosses it into the wind. But their blades are too wide to be plausible as oars. Yet oars do have blades! And it seems to me crucial to the working of the joke that the performer can throw his blade-less staff, neither oar-like nor shovel-like, over his 'brilliant shoulder', and let imagination do the rest. This would include letting prejudices work about the unimaginative IQ of farm dwellers.

But there does seem to be serious business going on in the mission, or embassy, prescribed for Odysseus. The oar, unlike the performer's staff, stays an oar; Odysseus is to travel inland until it reaches the limit of its intelligibility as an oar, where such a thing would have no use. Its shape there becomes a sign within a different language, like the ancient and global emblem of a plasma configuration which became a Nazi swastika. Most obviously there is to be a personal reconciliation with Poseidon, or so it seems; Odysseus is to set up a sort of holy space around his now totemic oar, and sacrifice a ram and a bull and a boar. Then perhaps Poseidon will leave him alone? But this does not seem to be entirely the gist of it. The winnowing fan is a sacred implement in the rites of Eleusis, sacred variously to Demeter, Persephone, and Dionysus. Separating the wheat from the chaff takes on all manner of moral and otherwise supernatural meanings in the rites of these chthonic, harvest and vintage deities. Has Odysseus come as an initiate? Is he the winnowed—or the winnower? Or has he indeed come to atone on behalf of the pirates of the sea, including the glorified pirates of the Achaean army in Troyland, by making a surrogate sacrifice of their rampant masculinity within the precincts of Demeter? Instead of beating swords into ploughshares, is he swinging oars into winnowing fans?

I cannot resolve or order these questions, though they seem forced on us by the script. Homer layers nested levels of meaning for different recipients. Perhaps Teiresias is in fact a model for Homer's ideal auditor: we are to be interpreters of signs. I cannot help but think, for example, that the sacrifice to Poseidon, the lord of the salt-water

piratical domains, is a sacrifice of Poseidon, an emasculation, required by the plaintiffs, the goddesses of vintage and harvest, for the sea-goers' rapine plunder of the products and livestock of people who labour on the land. The Achaeans at Troy, and Odysseus and his crew afterwards, are not traders like the Mentees whom Athena portrays in Book 1, or the Phoenicians, who also ply the sea; they are men-in-arms, not traders but raiders. At the resolution of the tale of the love affair between Ares and Aphrodite, Poseidon implies that he will pay what a divine bystander calls the 'adulterer's wages' (μοιχάγρια, *Od.*8.332)), on behalf of the guilty Ares. It seems possible that this price was castration. At any rate, no further mention is made of this debt incurred by Poseidon, or its payment.

The reconciliation may not after all be between Odysseus and the Olympian version of Poseidon, but between broader and deeper and older forces, for whom Odysseus is merely the pilgrim vehicle. Teiresias tells Odysseus to go back home before he even acknowledges the Olympian newcomers,

ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν,  
πᾶσι μάλ' ἐξείης.

'... the deathless gods who hold the wide heaven—  
All of them! Very much one at a time.' (133-4)

One must assume that Poseidon is also in the Olympian list. The sacrifices to the Olympians seem almost an afterthought in relation to the solemnity that has gone before, next an oar planted in the heartland. What does it all mean, the sacrifice of the male, the disjunction of meaning between oar and winnowing fan, sea and land? Perhaps there is a rift in the cosmos in need of healing, like that between Oberon and Titania, between Poseidon and Demeter? Has Poseidon incurred a debt that must be paid?

Teiresias ends his prophecy:

θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἄλός αὐτῷ  
ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος ἐλεύσεται, ὅς κέ σε πέφνηι  
γῆραι ὑπο λιπαρῷ ἀρημένον · ἀμφὶ δέ λαφοὶ  
ὄλβιοι ἔσσουνται. τὰ δέ τοι νημερτέα φεῖρω.

'... And death, out the salt sea,  
A very soft kind, will come for thee, which slays you  
Worn out by a plump old age: around you the people  
Will be prosperous. That's what I'm telling you, and no mistake.' (134-7)

These lines have a singular effect. I compare it to the codas of certain novels, when we hear what happens to everyone 'afterward'; we hear about Natasha in drab middle age, after *War and Peace*, and get hints about the married life of D'Arcy and Elizabeth. There is the line from the appendices to the *Lord Of the Rings*, where Legolas and Gimli depart together for the West upon the death of King Elessar, and there was at last an end to the fellowship of the ring in Middle Earth. There is a strong feeling, an ache, of mourning, I suppose in part because we sense the artwork itself passing away from us. We are detached from the lived experience shared, as it were, with these people, and see them now in a strangely televisual way. There are also those biographies we get at the end of films telling us what ends up happening our characters, sometimes comic and sometimes documentary, which put one in a similar state of detachment.

Teiresias' lines about Odysseus are ambiguous enough to inspire lively commentary and perhaps a good deal of what we would call fan fiction. What, for example, does

death from 'out the salt sea' (ἐξ ἁλός) mean? Or does it mean 'away from' the sea? There is no mention of the fate of either wife or son. The sea, of course, is the realm of the oar, not the winnowing fan; perhaps the idea is that some unfinished business from Odysseus' marauding days will come back to bite him at the end, where one of the enemies he has made along the way will learn his address and appear out the salt sea. There is supposed to have been a poem, *Telegony*, named after Odysseus' son by Circe, who arrives in Ithaca and kills his Dad, perhaps in self-defence. Some have him be the son of Calypso. Telegonus ends up marrying Penelope.

You can't make this stuff up, but I reckon somebody did. Classicists take an epic poem *Telegony* as canon, along with much else besides in lost and also non-memorable epic, but in reality I suspect such a poem is 'canon' in the way that word is used in present movie universes—as the lingo has it—such as *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* or the Marvel films. Even Middle Earth is spinning off tales. The idea that such a process took place in relation to the Homeric poems, including in relation to parts of the so-called epic cycle, needs to be taken seriously, before these hints and fragments are biblicalised into the monstrous modern concept of 'mythology', and its brain-eating cousin, 'tradition'. Stories about Thebes, its divinities and protagonists, are demonstrably part of Homer's world, although not, also demonstrably, in the forms with which we are familiar from the Attic stage. The *Telegony*, on the other hand, is not in Homer's universe, anymore than his boy Telegonus would have been a thought in Odysseus' mind until he appeared. It is possible that, where art gave licence or impetus, poets (who were the Hellenes' prophets and theologians) made things up, even within traditional catalogues; and to answer questions of acceptability to the canon, the audience voted with their feet.

That the Death which comes for Odysseus will be 'a very soft kind' (ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος) is immediately belied by the fact that it will slay him (πέφνηι); the sense of φένω is violent. (The composer(s) of the *Telegony* evidently had a nose for this detail.) Perhaps what is meant is explained in the next line, that Odysseus was 'worn out by a plump old age'. As Herodotus says, count no man happy until he is dead. A quick death without the wasting of disease, in well-oiled health and surrounded by a people enjoying prosperity—probably because of your transformation into a benevolent, chthonic king from an ocean marauder—would seem to be a good way to go. Perhaps the Ayatollah Khamenei had a death like that, from out the sea. As Herodotus might have it, such a death for Odysseus, however unlucky or violent, would not have been a ruination, but a right place at a right time.

Odysseus responds by addressing Teiresias by his name, without honorific or epithet. This strikes me as odd, but I cannot parse it. He asks plaintively after his mother. We remember Odysseus saw her first, before Teiresias approached. Now here is the vintage Odysseus whom any Athenian theatre-goer would recognise: he denied his own mother a draught of sheep's blood so Teiresias could be first in line. This is a man who would kill his mother—twice!—if she stood in the way of what he wanted. That's the man.

φείπέ, ἴναξ · πῶς κέν με ἀναγνοίη τὸν ἔοντα;

'Tell me, Lord, how might she recognise that it's me alive?' (144)

Now he calls Teiresias 'lord' (ἴναξ), also inexplicably, and emphatically. The one thing we can be pretty sure of, about Theban Teiresias, is that he was never a *wanax*

or 'lord' ('warlord', 'king'). He was a seer who served generations of kings, starting with Cadmus. Again I cannot parse this, except to say that Homer means to put his imprimatur on the authority of Teiresias' utterances.

A lesson for modern Homeric Studies from Homer's 'Theban Teiresias', the *wanax*, is that to try to cast Homer as an operator within a tradition is a mug's game. Everything about his ancient reception indicates that he was, as I say, an original, if anything a source, but not a product, of tradition. I must not tire of pointing out that the entire theory of metrical formulas, from which it is inferred that Homer's poems are a product of an oral tradition, is empirically and intellectually bankrupt. One cannot for any reason ignore the pitch accentuation of the Greek language. One should have thought that did not need saying in any context, let alone in the study of ancient Greek poetry. But in particular, I have shown that Homer has composed significant leitmotifs with intrinsic word- and phrase-level pitch contours, and selective dynamic reinforcements of the long and short elements of the underlying hexameter. The words are the music for the dance. To account for the origin of Homer's music by an oral tradition is like attempting to explain baroque or classical music by composition out of metrical formulas, which is to say, by the ubiquitous repeating metrical patterns which do in fact exist there, most of them based in dance steps. Such an explanation would travesty Beethoven's music, by ignoring all its melodies, harmonies, rhythms and syncopations. The application to Homer needs must have an identical result. It would be, and is, a travesty. If there is interest in Homer's relation to tradition, perhaps we are blessed with the data for the use of a field as yet unploughed by the academy: what is the effect of epochal musical works upon the musical culture that surrounds and succeeds them? Works like Bach's *Goldberg Variations* or *Well-Tempered Clavier*, or Mozart's operas, or Beethoven's symphonies, or Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*, or the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*? To what extent does previous music help to explain their eruptions? What is the process of their canonisation? At all levels of the phenomenon, from the physical to the auditory to the historical to the societal and cultural, how is music transmitted? This is the question for anyone interested in traditions, including intellectual ones. It is a question for a new university. There will likely be a Socrates there who asks us, 'what is this thing, music?' Let him wander the quadrangles and pester people into truth. Let us, for now, focus, like the modern sciences, on equations of transmission. The first lesson, for poet and mathematician, physicist and historian alike, is that Greek measures are dance steps.

The soul of Lord Teiresias leaves the stage with a farewell stint as Morgan Freeman. He explains to Odysseus that

ὄν τινα μὲν κεν ἑαῖς νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων  
αἵματος ἄσπον ἴμεν, ὃ δέ τοι νημερτὲς ἐνίψει ·  
ῶϊ δέ κ' ἐπιφθονέοις, ὃ δέ τοι πάλιν εἴσιν ὀπίσω.

'Whomsoever you allow among the corpses that are dead and gone  
To come near the blood, that's one will recite for you with no mistake ...  
But the one whom you begrudge, he'll go back again for you behind.' (147-9)

This implies that Odysseus will choose the order of the souls he would like to speak. In that sense his *Nekuia* will be no sort of traditional—in the sense 'received'—catalogue. The order, which is the essence of a catalogue, will be determined by Homer's Odysseus.

As I have shown, Homer takes pains to compose a musical, accentual identity for

Odysseus. He is therefore no everyman being initiated into the mysteries. Neither is he Dionysiac, or a Bacchus who, like Euripides, calls out human pretensions to self awareness and to constructions of identity. Rather, when he crawls under vegetation on the river bank on Scheria, escaped from the drunken sea, he begins precisely to establish an identity and earn his name; perhaps also to begin correcting long standing impressions of who he is. This is Homer's art forging an human identity through the music of hexameter rhythm, and placing its articulation in the mouth of the man himself. He even sings his own signature tune, and when in disguise, does impressions of himself. The achievement is such that the epic work itself can only be named by the man's proper name: Ὀδύσσεια. It can be seen as a watershed in the development of the western mind and psychology, on a par with the Cartesian meditation; the articulation of an human individual in the face of various enticements to oblivion, in religion, drink, and ecstasy, or promises to the initiate of immortality. The only immortality we actually know is the immortality of song, the very best examples of which are Homer's poems. The success of Homer's work upon Odysseus' name has been such, that whosoever now undergoes life's journey looks back on it as an odyssey, and participates in this way in the mystery of man, through the man of many turns.

Homer's art oversees its own mysteries, its own transformations, like the twin bushes on Scheria's shore,

ἔξ ὁμόθεν πεφυῶτας · ὃ μὲν φυλῆς, ὃ δ' ἐλαίης.  
 τοὺς μὲν ἄρ' οὐτ' ἀνέμων διάφη μένος ὑγρὸν ἀφέντων  
 οὔτε ποτ' ἠφέλιος φαέθων ἀκτῖσιν ἔβαλλεν  
 οὔτ' ὄμβρος περάσκει διαμπερές · ὥς ἄρα πυκνοὶ  
 ἀλλήλοισιν ἔφυν ἐπαμοιβαδῖς · οὓς ὑπ' Ὀδυσσεύς  
 δύσσετ'. ἄφαρ δ' εὐνήν ἐπαμήσατο χερσὶ φίλησιν  
 εὐρείαν · φύλλων γὰρ ἔην χύσις ἤλιθα πολλή,  
 ὄσσον τ' ἠφέ δύω ἠφέ τρεῖς ἄνδρας ἔρυσθαι  
 ὦρη χειμερῆι, εἰ καὶ μάλα περ χαλεπαῖνοι.  
 τὴν μὲν φιδῶν γήθησε πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,  
 ἐν δ' ἄρα μέσσηι λέκτο, χύσιν δ' ἐπεχεύατο φύλλων.

Planted from the same root: one of wild stock, one of olive.  
 These neither the strength of the winds got through, when they blew wet,  
 Nor did ever the blazing sun strike them with its rays,  
 Nor did the thunderstorm use to penetrate right the way through; for tight indeed  
 To one another did they grow, intertwined in a give-and-take: under these,  
 Odysseus  
 Entered. Right away he gathered himself a bed with his own hands,  
 Nice and broad; for there was a fall of leaves, pointlessly large,  
 Enough to protect two or maybe three grown men  
 In the wintry season, even if it was ever so bitter.  
 When he saw this, he rejoiced! The Endurer, radiant Odysseus,  
 And right in the middle he lay himself down and heaped on him the fall of leaves.  
 (5.477-87)

The sublimity of this poetry ushers in a new birth under the sun, or rather, one protected from its radiation. This hero is born in the dark. There is no speech, no storm, no histrionic drama this time, no god except the one always watching, or the one who reads out loud while you read silently. The Greek words intertwine into a nest for an

human egg. At the very same time, it is dry leaves to fire a corpse. For a critic, words fail. The poetic moment speaks itself. We can never know what it was like to participate in the mysteries, but we can know what it is to be initiated into the mysteries of Homer's poetry. It is not *like* anything. The *Odyssey's* similes never cut straight:

ὡς δ' ὅτε τις δαλὸν σποδιῇ ἐνέκρυψε μελαίνῃ  
ἀγροῦ ἐπ' ἔσχατιῆς, ὣι μὴ πάρα γείτονες ἄλλοι,  
σπέρμα πυρὸς σώζων, ἵνα μὴ ποθεν ἄλλοθεν αὔῃ,  
ὥς Ὀδυσσεὺς φύλλοισι καλύψατο · τῷ δ' ἄρ' Ἀθήνη  
ὔπνον ἐπ' ὄμμασι χεῦ', ἵνα μιν παύσειε τάχιστα  
δυσπονέος καμάτοιο, φίλα βλέφαρ' ἀμφικαλύψας.

As when a fellow hides a firebrand in the black ash,  
At the farthest farm, who has no other neighbours by,  
Saving the seed of fire, that he need not get a light from who knows where—  
So Odysseus hid himself in leaves: and on him did Athena  
Shed sleep upon the eyes, that he might the soonest rest  
From his hard labour and exhaustion, once she'd covered those dear eyelids  
round. (5.489-93)

Here again is another stick, this time a δαλός, a dying firebrand. The rhapsode's staff is a metaphysical thing; its existence is only metaphorical, it has no existence for the composer except as metaphor. For the audience, it is not a metaphor at all; it is a firebrand being laid, gently and carefully, into imaginary ash upon the ground. As such it can become a metaphor for something else—Odysseus' life?—and also the vehicle for a simile. The seed of fire (σπέρμα πυρὸς, *sperma pyros*), unlike the actually wielded staff, is the archetype of metaphors in our literary realm, the realm of words and language. It embodies antitheses. The sign or σῆμα of Odysseus' identity—or, without equivocation, its symbolic tomb—is to be something more complex than what Elpenor's oar intends. At certain moments like this, all the elements of Homer's presentation nest within, or mount upon, one another, like successive, long, acute accents. Odysseus is the seed of fire, burying himself in a pyre of flammable leaves. The whole vegetative cycle of growth, the 'nature' of the moly, the nexus of Demeter, Persephone, and Dionysus, is all immanent in the balance of this little phrase, *sperma pyros*: from seed to tree to leaf and intoxicate flower, to naked intertwined branches, fallen leaves and purging forest fire. 'So Odysseus hid himself in leaves ...' Athena, the final syncretism, comes in from nowhere, and everywhere, to cover the dead or dormant seed, along with its Odyssean eyes.

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