The Rebirth of Odysseus

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OF THE MANY supplication scenes in Greek literature which have received close examination, the Odysseus-Arete episode in *Odyssey* 7.133–206 has attracted considerable attention. Two reasons may be suggested. First, Homer himself lavishes a large share of attention on the scene, presenting a highly detailed account of the ritual of *hiketeia*: Odysseus crouches before the queen and grasps her knees, then sits at the hearth, and is finally raised by Alcinous, who escorts him to a seat.[1] Other supplication scenes contain some of these steps, but few other accounts—and no other Homeric account—include them all. When Thetis supplicates Zeus in *Iliad* 1.493–530, for example, she clings to the god's knees, but Zeus does not lift her by the hand. In *Iliad* 24.468–517, to cite another example, Priam kneels before Achilles, kissing the hands of the man who has murdered so many of his sons. Achilles responds by lifting the aged king from his knees. But there is no mention of Priam's occupying Achilles' hearth. The closest parallel to Odysseus' supplication is found in Thucydides 1.136: Themistocles places himself at the feet of the Molossian queen and takes his place at the hearth, holding the king's infant son.[2] When King Admetus returns from abroad and finds Themistocles, he raises the suppliant by the hand.[3] Homer's account in *Odyssey* 7 is noteworthy, then, for the fullness of its description. The second reason for the fame of the scene is that Odysseus' supplication lies at the crux of an apparent inconsistency in the poem. Odysseus ap-

[1] A full study of supplication and the significance of its gestures can be found in J. GOULD, "*Hiketeia*," *JHS* 93 (1973) 74–103 (hereafter cited as 'Gould'). For a refinement of Gould's observations with respect to Homer, see V. Pedrick, "Supplication in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *TAPA* 112 (1982) 125–40.

[2] In supplication scenes in drama and in historical supplications the suppliant may occupy an altar or sacred area instead of the hearth: *cf.* Gould 77–78, 89–90, 101–03. For Plutarch's suspicion that Themistocles' supplication may be based on a scene from tragedy, see A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* I (Oxford 1945) 438–39.

[3] It should be noted (*pace* Gould 98) that Themistocles' supplication of the Molossian queen does not provide a genuine parallel to Odysseus' supplication of Arete. Themistocles approaches the queen because the king is absent; only when Admetus returns is the suppliant properly received. Odysseus, on the other hand, approaches Arete even as Alcinous is seated next to her.

proaches Arete because Nausicaa and Athena have instructed him to do so. Both the goddess and the princess tell him to bypass the seated king and approach Arete first, for her favor must be incurred if the hero is to receive passage home. After the supplication, however, Arete does not respond. On the contrary, it is the ignored Alcinous who welcomes the guest and arranges almost at once to send him on his way. It is the purpose of this paper to examine this scene with the following questions in mind: first, does it present a 'model' supplication or one that is at all unusual? Second, if unusual features do exist, can they be applied to a solution to the problem of the queen's alleged importance?[4]

The most unusual element in this supplication is the invisibility of the suppliant. As Odysseus walks through Scheria he is invisible to all, protected by Athena's magic cloud. When he enters the palace and approaches Arete he is still enveloped, as the poet reminds us at 7.140: *πολλὴν ἠέρ' ἔχων, ἣν οἱ περίχευεν Ἀθήνη*. Only when (*καὶ τότε*, 143) Odysseus has placed himself at her feet does the cloud vanish. This sudden appearance astonishes the Phaeacians, who are "rendered speechless" (*ἄνεῳ ἐγένοντο*, 144) and "watch in wonder" (*θαύμαζον δ' ὁρόωντες*, 145) as Odysseus makes his request. They sustain their surprised silence even after he speaks: *οἱ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῇ* (154). Alcinous reacts to the miraculous epiphany by suspecting that this stranger may be a god in disguise.[5]

Matching the suddenness of Odysseus' appearance is the rapidity with which he releases Arete to sit at the hearth: *ὣς εἰπὼν κατ' ἄρ' ἕζετ' ἐπ' ἐσχάρῃ ἐν κονίῃσι* (153). It is unusual that he does not cling fast to his hostess and wait for a reply. Contrast the tenacity of Thetis in *Il.* 1.512–13: when Zeus does not answer her plea, she "implants" herself and pleads again (*ἀλλ' ἀκέων δὴν ἧστο· Θέτις δ' ὡς ἥψατο γούνων, ὡς ἔχετ' ἐμπεφυυῖα, καὶ εἴρετο δεύτερον αὖτις*).

[4] It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the numerous arguments of Analysts and Unitarians over the alleged importance of Arete and the authenticity of the pertinent passages. For the most recent discussions and full bibliography see B. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey* (Wiesbaden 1974) 105–30, and H. Kilb, *Strukturen epischen Gestaltens im 7. und 23. Gesang der Odyssee* (Munich 1973) 29–107. It is hoped that the hitherto unobserved evidence presented in this study will place Arete in a new perspective and demonstrate that Homer's text does not pose a problem of inconsistency.

[5] 199–206. The surprise of the Phaeacians at Odysseus' miraculous appearance is stronger than that of Achilles and his attendants at the appearance of Priam (*Il.* 24. 483–84): there Priam is not rendered invisible; he is simply not seen by the sleeping Achaean guards nor by the busy Automedon and Alcimus. Achilles and his attendants are surprised, but not speechless, upon seeing the Trojan king, who now appeals to Achilles as an exiled murderer would appeal for asylum. On Homer's inversion of the simile see Gould 96.

After this second request Zeus finally responds. In Thuc. 1.136.3 Themistocles sits by the hearth, but only after being instructed to do so: ὁ δὲ τῆς γυναικὸς ἱκέτης γενόμενος διδάσκεται ὑπ' αὐτῆς τὸν παῖδα σφῶν λαβὼν καθέζεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν ἑστίαν. Like a normal suppliant, Themistocles does not release the supplicated until he receives a reply.[6] Odysseus, on the other hand, appears to be in a hurry and releases Arete before she has time to utter a response.

Another feature of this supplication deserves mention. Odysseus' occupation of the hearth is appropriate, to be sure. But Homer emphasizes the fact that, from the moment of Odysseus' appearance, his actions take place along the ground. Upon occupying the hearth he sits "in the ashes beside the fire" (ἐν κονίῃσι πὰρ πυρί, 7.153–54). After a long interval of awkward silence (ὀψὲ δέ, 155) Echeneus the elder criticizes the king for allowing a "stranger to sit on the ground at the hearth among the ashes" (ξεῖνον μὲν χαμαὶ ἧσθαι ἐπ' ἐσχάρῃ ἐν κονίῃσι, 160). "Come now," continues Echeneus, "and lift the stranger up and seat him (εἶσον ἀναστήσας, 163) on a silver-studded chair." Alcinous then takes Odysseus by the hand and raises him "from the ashes" (ὦρσεν ἀπ' ἐσχαρόφιν, 169). Although the occupation of the hearth necessarily entails sitting on the ground, Homer stresses the fact that Odysseus spends an unusually long time on the floor.[7]

These departures from the traditional features of a supplication make it clear that Homer is not presenting a 'model' scene. It is interesting in this context to note that the poet varies details in other supplication accounts. Thetis' appeal to Zeus, for example, includes a variation: Zeus does not acknowledge her until she makes two requests. The god's refusal to speak at a moment of ritual expectation thereby receives dramatic emphasis: in this scene which initiates the all-important 'will of Zeus', the poet's strategic placement of the god's reticence emphasizes how reluctant Zeus is to begin the series of deaths mandated by his own will. Homer modifies the ritual also at *Il.* 24.507–12. After Priam beseeches Achilles to remember his own father Peleus, Achilles gently pushes Priam away, and both men succumb to a flood of tears. Once their grief is spent Achilles raises Priam from his knees. At the very moment that we expect Achilles

[6] *Cf.* Medea's tenacious supplication of Creon in Eur. *Med.* (339, κοὐκ ἀπαλλάσσῃ χερός) and the Nurse's clinging to Phaedra in *Hipp.* (326, κοὐ μεθήσομαί ποτε).

[7] As part of Homer's emphasis on Odysseus' ground-level movements, it may be significant that there is no mention of Odysseus' reaching for Arete's chin: contrast the upward movement necessitated by Thetis' reaching for Zeus' chin (*Il.* 1.501) and Priam's kissing of Achilles' hands (*Il.* 24.478).

to lift the suppliant, Homer interrupts the ritual with an unexpected and, therefore, poetically effective variation in which the Greek hero and the Trojan king forget their differences and mourn their common losses together as father and son. It is possible, therefore, that the variations in *Od.* 7 are likewise intended for special effect.[8]

The specific irregularities of Odysseus' supplication—his sudden appearance at Arete's feet, his rapid release of her, and his immediate and prolonged contact with the ground—are unparalleled in extant supplication scenes. But his actions do share similarities with another ritual. Diodorus Siculus (4.39) gives an account of the adoption of Heracles by Hera. In order to adopt the newly-apotheosized hero, "Hera climbed upon a bed and, drawing Heracles toward her body, released him through her clothing to the ground, in imitation of an actual birth" (*διὰ τῶν ἐνδυμάτων ἀφεῖναι πρὸς τὴν γῆν, μιμουμένην τὴν ἀληθινὴν γένεσιν*). In similar fashion Odysseus appears suddenly at Arete's knees, as if being released from under her clothing, and proceeds directly along the ground. These similarities suggest that, within this scene of supplication, the poet is inserting allusions to a ritual of rebirth.[9]

Plutarch (*Mor.* 264f) provides another account of the rebirth ritual, the context of which sheds light on Odysseus' situation. A certain Aristinus had been so long absent abroad that his family, assuming him dead, held his funeral and erected a cenotaph. Later, however, Aristinus returned, only to be treated as a polluted outcast: he was denied contact with the people and barred from approaching the temples.[10] Sending to Delphi for instructions how to remove the stigma, he received this reply:

> *ὅσσαπερ ἐν λεχέεσσι γυνὴ τίκτουσα τελεῖται,*
> *ταῦτα πάλιν τελέσαντα θύειν μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν.*

[8] Pedrick (*supra* n.1) 135–36 is doubtless correct in her observation that Homer expands or contracts supplication scenes in order to make them fit the context. At issue, however, is not only the number of details included in a scene but also the variation of the details themselves. The poet's adjustments are both quantitative and qualitative.

[9] It is interesting in this context to compare the silent surprise of the Phaeacians to the awed wonder of the Olympians who witness the birth of Athena from Zeus' forehead, in *Hymn.Hom.* 28.6–7: *σέβας δ' ἔχε πάντας ὁρῶντας ἀθανάτους.*

[10] It is probable that the rebirth ceremony serves the purpose of removing the pollution associated with death: *cf.* J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1922) 244–45; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* I[3] (London 1920) 74; and E. Rohde, *Psyche*[8] (tr. W. B. Hillis, London 1925) 601–03. Although the ritual itself may have originated out of a concern for pollution and purification, it is clear that Homer does not view Odysseus as polluted: *cf.* E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1951) 35–37. The poet alludes to the ritual in order to enrich his account of Odysseus' entrance into the poem and to enhance the symbolism of the *νόστος*.

Aristinus followed the instructions closely and, "as if he were being born for the first time, he offered himself to women to wash him off (*ἀπολοῦσαι*), wrap him in swaddling clothes (*σπαργανῶσαι*), and nurse him." Such a ceremony, Plutarch reports, was performed by all "men of later fate" (*ὑστερόποτμοι*). Although Aristinus' is the first case of the ritual known to Plutarch, he adds, "Some claim that these things were done over the *ὑστερόποτμοι* even before Aristinus and that the ritual is ancient."

It is probable that Heracles' adoption ceremony and Aristinus' rebirth are versions of a ritual in which the candidate severs ties with the past and presents himself for acceptance into the social group. The kinship of the two ceremonies is attested to by Hesychius' definition of the term δευτερόποτμος ('man of second fate'):

> Some use the word *ὑστερόποτμος*. This is what they called a person for whom funeral rites had been observed on the assumption that he was dead and who later appeared living. Polemon says that such people were barred from entering the shrine of the Dread Goddesses. Or [a δευτερόποτμος is] one who has been reported to have died abroad but then returns. Or one who, for a second time, tumbles through a woman's lap, as was the custom of the second birth among the Athenians.[11]

If Homer is presenting Odysseus as a δευτερόποτμος, the problem of Arete's alleged importance begins to find an answer. For it would be improper for Odysseus to present himself for rebirth at the feet of a man. The notion that Odysseus is being reborn as he meets the Phaeacians is well-placed in the poem. For this is the hero's first appearance in the world of human beings and physical reality after some ten years in the imaginary realm of giants, nymphs, and witches. If, in the scenes which lead to the supplication, Homer is concerned with the themes of Odysseus' death and rebirth, it is probable that we are correct in detecting allusions to the rebirth ritual in the scene with Arete.

It cannot be argued, of course, that before his appearance in Book 7 Odysseus is dead; nor have his relatives on Ithaca erected his cenotaph. But on several occasions in the early books Homer associates Odysseus' name with the suggestion of death. When Athena addresses Zeus in the opening assembly of the gods, she complains that Odysseus is so unhappy with Calypso that "he longs to die" (*θανέειν*

[11] δευτερόποτμος· ὁ ὑπό τινων ὑστερόποτμος. οὕτω δὲ ἔλεγον, ὁπόταν τινὶ ὡς τεθνεῶτι τὰ νομιζόμενα ἐγένετο, καὶ ὕστερον ἀνεφάνη ζῶν. ὁ δὲ Πολέμων καὶ ἀπειρῆσθαι τοῖς τοιούτοις εἰσιέναι εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν τῶν Σεμνῶν φησι Θεῶν. ἢ ὁ φημισθεὶς ἐπὶ ξένης τετελευτηκώς, ἔπειτα ἐπανελθών. ἢ ὁ δεύτερον διὰ γυναικείου κόλπου διαδύς, ὡς ἔθος ἦν παρὰ Ἀθηναίοις ἐκ δευτέρου γεννᾶσθαι.

ἰμείρεται, 1.59). Odysseus himself utters a death wish and envisions his funeral in his famous soliloquy as he faces Poseidon's storm in Book 5: "How I wish I would have died and met my doom (ὄφελον θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν, 5.308) on that day when the numerous Trojans hurled their bronze spears at me over Peleus' dead son! I would have received burial rites, and the Achaeans would have spread my fame. But as it is, I am doomed to die a wretched death!" Contributing to the association of Odysseus with death are the speculations of Telemachus, Penelope, Eurycleia, and the suitors. In Book 1 Telemachus tells the disguised Athena that his father's "white bones are rotting somewhere in the rain, lying on the mainland, or being rolled about by a wave in the sea . . . He has died a wretched death (ἀπόλωλε κακὸν μόρον, 1.166), and it is no comfort to us if someone tells us he will return. His homecoming day is lost."[12] In Book 2 we learn that Penelope reported Odysseus' death to the suitors when she announced her plans to complete Laertes' shroud: "Since noble Odysseus has died (ἐπεὶ θάνε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς, 2.96), refrain from pressing my wedding until I finish the mantle." The suitors apparently believe her, as their taunts of Telemachus indicate: "Who knows if he too, embarking on a hollow ship and wandering far from his dear ones, will die, just like Odysseus?" (ἀπόληται ἀλώμενος ὥς περ Ὀδυσσεύς, 2.333). Eurycleia also assumes that her master is dead, and for this reason she attempts to dissuade Telemachus from leaving home: "Why do you, our only darling, want to travel over the wide earth? And the noble Odysseus has perished far from his country (ὤλετο τηλόθι πάτρης, 2.365) in a foreign land." In Sparta, furthermore, Menelaus speculates that the Ithacans have by now taken Odysseus for dead: "We do not know whether he is alive or dead. But the aged Laertes and sensible Penelope and Telemachus, whom he left a newborn baby in the house, are mourning him, I suppose" (4.109–12). With such speculations punctuating the early books Homer introduces the suggestion that Odysseus' status is analogous to that of a δευτερόποτμος: his whereabouts have been unknown for ten years, and his relatives and acquaintances are entertaining the possibility of his death.

The suggestion of the first four books is elaborated upon in Book 5, where the poet presents an intricate network of the imagery of

[12] *Cf.* 3.79–101: Telemachus, without asking if his father is still alive, asks Nestor the details of his death. After Nestor prays for Odysseus' return, Telemachus declares that not even a god could make the wish come true (226–28). When Athena reprimands Telemachus, the youth persists: "There is no return in store for him. The immortals have already decreed his black death and demise" (241–42).

death. It is well established in the scholarship that Odysseus leads a death-like existence in the cave of Calypso, whose very name connotes concealment and burial.[13] Surrounding the entrance to her cave, itself suggestive of a tomb, is a collection of flora and fauna which can only be described as funereal. The "alder and poplar and fragrant cypress" (5.64) all have ominous associations: the cypress is traditionally planted around burial sites;[14] the poplar appears again in Circe's account of Persephone's grove at the entrance to Hades (10.510); and the alder, because it bears no fruit, is considered "unlucky and under a curse."[15] Also conjuring up notions of death are the "owls and hawks and long-tongued sea-crows" (5.66) which nest in these trees: the hawk, according to Aelian, "delights to feed on flesh and drinks blood, on which it raises its young";[16] the crows are "concerned with the sea" (5.67) because they feed on carrion that is washed ashore;[17] and the owl is the traditional harbinger of death.[18] In this veritable cemetery of symbolism Odysseus' "sweet life ebbs away" (*κατείβετο δὲ γλυκὺς αἰών*, 5.152) as he sits on the shore and pines for Ithaca. Although Calypso has promised him immortality and eternal youth if he will stay, the poet makes it clear that such an existence would be an eternal death: Odysseus would spend his days in sensual gratification and indolence, far removed from the world of human activity.[19]

[13] For Calypso's origin as a death-goddess and Ogygia as a 'Toteninsel', see H. Güntert, *Kalypso* (Halle 1919) 28–36, 164–72. In connection with the allegorical interpretation of the cave, it is interesting to recall Porphyry's *De Antro Nympharum*, which treats the cave in *Od.* 13.104–12 as a symbol of the world: souls pass through the cave's northern door for birth into the physical world and through the southern door as they are dissolved at death. For the possible ritualistic significance of the cave, see G. Elderkin, "The Homeric Cave on Ithaca," *CP* 35 (1940) 52–54.

[14] For the funereal associations of the cypress tree see Paus. 2.2.4, 2.15.2–3, 4.33.4–5, 8.24.7; Plin. *HN* 16.60.139; Verg. *Aen.* 3.63–64, 6.216; Hor. *Carm.* 2.14.23, *Epod.* 5.18.

[15] Plin. *HN* 16.45.108, *infelices autem existimantur damnataeque religione quae neque seruntur neque fructum ferunt.* The same notion lies behind Homer's description of alders and willows as *ὠλεσίκαρποι* (10.510). *Cf.* also the legend that Heracles discovered the black poplar on Acheron's banks (Paus. 5.14.3). It should be noted also that Calypso's grove is entirely fictitious, as these trees do not coexist in the natural world: *cf.* Plin. *HN* 16.31.76, 17.39.247, 31.27.44.

[16] Ael. *NA* 10.14. *Cf.* the description of the winged demons of Hades at Paus. 10.28.7.

[17] Ael. *NA* 15.23 echoes Homer with the phrase *κορωναις τε εἰναλίαις* in his account of how sea-crows eat dolphins which have been washed ashore.

[18] *Cf.* Verg. *Aen.* 4.457–65, 12.861–63; Plin. *HN* 10.16.34-35; *cf.* also D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford 1895) 262–64 *s.v.* *σκώψ*.

[19] W. S. Anderson, "Calypso and Elysium," *CJ* 54 (1958) 2–11 (= C. H. Taylor, Jr, ed., *Essays on the* Odyssey [Bloomington 1967] 73–86), suggests that the prospect of Menelaus' afterlife in Elysium and Calypso's offer of immortality to Odysseus are two

If Odysseus is portrayed as symbolically dead and buried in the first half of Book 5, we may expect to find allusions to his rebirth in the subsequent account of his return to the realm of the living. The imagery of the latter half of the book suggests just such a process. In the close description of Poseidon's storm in 5.291–444 Homer includes details which may be read as allusions to the human birth process: the waves batter Odysseus and toss him about as if he were a fetus moving violently in the womb at the moment of its birth.[20] It may be significant, for example, that Odysseus, his raft shattered by the storm, is ordered by Ino to remove the clothes that have been weighing him down: this is the only time in the poem that Odysseus is naked, and he remains so until Nausicaa offers him something to wear.[21] Once undressed, he girds himself with Ino's veil, which in this context is a symbol of the χόριον, the veil-like membrane of the afterbirth which encloses the fetus.[22]

Consistent also is the symbolic significance of the river. Instead of delivering Odysseus to the shore directly from the open sea, Homer has him pass through a river channel. Heeding Odysseus' prayer and pitying him, the river halts its current and creates a calm (γαλήνην, 5.452) so that Odysseus can enter the mouth with ease. Once ashore, Odysseus "bends both his knees and his mighty arms (ἄμφω γούνατ' ἔκαμψε χεῖράς τε στιβαράς, 453–54), for his spirit was overcome by the sea." The ease with which he swims up the river stands in sharp contrast to the violence of the waves which at this moment have torn him from a rock and left the skin of his hands clinging to the crag (424–35). In the allegorical reading of this passage, the river becomes a symbol of the birth canal which the fetus enters after the contrac-

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forms of spiritual death for the heroes. Menelaus acquiesces in accepting his fate, but Odysseus resists.

[20] The first to propose this interpretation of the storm passage was E. B. Holtsmark, "Spiritual Rebirth of the Hero: *Odyssey* 5," *CJ* 61 (1966) 206–10. Also sensitive to the symbolism of death and rebirth in *Od.* 5 is C. P. Segal, "The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return," *Arion* 1 (1962) 17–64, esp. 20–25.

[21] Contrast Vergil's adaptation of this storm at *Aen.* 1.81–158. The Roman poet cannot plausibly suggest that a battered fleet of twenty ships is reborn from the sea, nor is this suggestion harmonious with the aims of the book. For this reason, perhaps, the Homeric details which evoke the birth process are absent from the Vergilian parallel. For Vergil's condensation and adaptation of Homeric passages, see G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* (Göttingen 1964) and "Vergil's *Aeneid* and Homer," *GRBS* 5 (1964) 61–84.

[22] *Cf.* Celsus *Med.* 7.29.9: *eas quas secundas vocant, quod velamentum infantis intus fuit*; *cf.* Aristotle's description of τὸ περιέχον χόριον, *Gen.An.* 753b30. Also contributing to the depiction of Odysseus as a δευτερόποτμος is the simile at *Od.* 5.394–97: Odysseus' first glimpse of the Phaeacian shore brings him the joy felt by the children of a father who has long lain in serious illness and finally recovers.

tions subside. The account of childbirth in the Hippocratic treatise *De natura puerorum* provides a good parallel:[23]

> When it is time for the mother to give birth, what happens is that the child by the spasmodic movements of its hands and feet breaks one of the internal membranes. Once one is broken, then the others of course are weaker, and these break too in order of their proximity to the first, right up to the last one. When the membranes are broken, the embryo is released from its bonds and emerges all bunched together. For nothing has any strength to hold it once the membranes fail ... Once the child is on its way, it forces a wide passage for itself through the womb, since the womb is resilient. It advances head first—that is the natural position ... If the infant's momentum is in the direction of the head, the birth is easy for the mother.

Odysseus' violent bout with the sea and the subsequent ease and smoothness of his entrance into the river are analogous to this natural rhythm of violence and calm.

Homer now describes Odysseus' appearance: "All his flesh was swollen, and quantities of salt water gushed from his mouth and nostrils; and in his weakness he lay breathless and speechless" (5.455–57). The swollen features and gushing fluid are also paralleled in newborn infants. The fluid from his head recalls the ὕδρωψ secreted after birth (μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα, *Nat.puer.* 30.12) "from the head and rest of the body in consequence of violence, pain, and heat." After the child emerges there remains the task of expelling the afterbirth. Appropriately at this time, therefore, Odysseus unwraps Ino's veil from around his waist and drops it into the river (459–61).[24] He then crawls (ὑπεκλίνθη, 463) to a secluded spot, makes a bed of leaves, and falls into a deep sleep.[25]

Through an intricate network of suggestion (in Books 1–4) and symbolism (in Book 5) Homer presents Odysseus' entrance into the poem as a metaphorical rebirth. This theme continues into Book 6, where we detect allusions to the ritual described by Plutarch. Like

[23] 30.1–2, tr. G. E. R. Lloyd, *Hippocratic Writings* (Harmondsworth 1978) 341–42. For the Greek text (= Book 4 of Περὶ γονῆς) see R. Joly, *Hippocrate* XI (Paris 1970) 78f.

[24] In discarding the veil without looking back, Odysseus' gestures may recall another ritual associated with a return from the dead, the warning to Orpheus not to look back as he leads Eurydice out of Hades (*e.g.* Verg. *G.* 4.485–527). For a possible vestige of this ceremony, *cf.* the description of the 'Panorio ritual' in R. and E. Blum, *The Dangerous Hour: The Lore of Crisis and Mystery in Rural Greece* (London 1970) 339.

[25] In the subsequent description of the naked Odysseus as σμερδαλέος and κεκακωμένος ἅλμῃ (6.137) Homer may intend an allusion to the *vernix caseosa* which covers newborn infants.

Aristinus, who presents himself to a group of women for washing, swaddling, and feeding, Odysseus now encounters Nausicaa and her maids to receive the same services. In his opening speech to the shy princess he asks, "Please give me a rag to put around myself (δὸς δὲ ῥάκος ἀμφιβαλέσθαι, 6.178), even if only the linen wrapper for your laundry" (εἴλυμα σπείρων, 179). In mentioning the linen wrapper Homer is doubtless evoking the σπάργανον of the ritual.[26] Nausicaa offers to have her maids wash Odysseus, but he modestly declines, saying, "Please stand back so that I myself may wash the brine off (ἀπολούσομαι, 219) my own shoulders."[27] Once bathed, he dons the clothes left by the attendants and ravenously lays to the food set before him. "And the much-suffering Odysseus ate and drank with great eagerness, for he had gone a long time without tasting food" (249–50).

The members of Homer's audience who have been sensitive to the numerous allusions to the hero's rebirth will find Nausicaa's instructions at this point consistent with the thematic pattern. For if we view Odysseus as a δευτερόποτμος, we expect him to perform the dramatic act of dropping from the lap of a seated woman. For this reason Nausicaa sends him to Arete, not to Alcinous, with unusually explicit instructions: "Once you have passed through the palace and courtyard, go quickly (ὦκα, 6.304) through the hall until you reach my mother. She is seated near the hearth in the glow of the fire ... reclining against a pillar ... Pass by my father and place your arms around my mother's knees in order to see your homecoming day" (303–11). These instructions, stressing the need for haste, make Odysseus complete the ritual without interruption.[28]

Although Homer's audience is able to detect the motive behind the princess' instructions, Odysseus must find her orders perplexing. For Nausicaa prefaces her directions by telling him to pay close attention "in order to obtain an escort and return *from my father*" (παρὰ πατρὸς ἐμοῖο, 290). As she describes the town and palace, furthermore, it is with numerous allusions to Alcinous as sole proprietor and ruler: near Athena's grove, she says, is the park and vineyard "of my father" (πατρὸς ἐμοῦ, 293); once Nausicaa and her maids arrive at

[26] *Cf.* the assessment of Nausicaa as "the genius of rebirth" by C. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1958) 299.

[27] Although physical rejuvenation of Odysseus and others occurs elsewhere in the poem (*cf.* 10.395–96, 16.172–76, 18.66–71, 18.187–96, 23.156–63), Athena's rejuvenation of the hero as he bathes (6.229–35) is particularly harmonious with the theme of his rebirth.

[28] At 7.48–55 Athena also stresses the need for haste: Odysseus must not be timid (μηδὲ ... τάρβει) but bold (θαρσαλέος) and approach the queen first (πρῶτα).

"my father's home" (δώματα πατρός, 296), Odysseus is to search for "the home of my father, the great-hearted Alcinous" (δώματα πατρὸς ἐμοῦ μεγαλήτορος Ἀλκινόοιο, 299); the house is easy to discern, for nothing else in town resembles "the house of Alcinous" (δόμος Ἀλκινόοιο, 302).[29] After these fifteen lines emphasizing Alcinous, the sudden mention of Arete must strike Odysseus, and even the audience, as abrupt. Homer himself is aware of the abruptness: the words μητέρ' ἐμήν occupy the emphatic position in line 305. It is this very abruptness which serves as a clue to the audience that the allusions to the rebirth ritual will continue: Alcinous will arrange for the escort, as Nausicaa promises, but only after the hero presents himself at the feet of the seated queen. Odysseus, on the other hand, must wonder why he is told to ignore the king, the proper object of a supplication.

It is unlikely that at this point Odysseus is convinced by the seemingly self-contradictory words of the princess. Nausicaa is, after all, a young girl, and she may be mistaken in sending him to her mother. Indeed, Odysseus has questioned advice and instructions from more authoritative figures. We may recall, for example, that when Ino instructs him to abandon his raft and save himself with the veil, he does not immediately obey. After deliberating, he does what he himself thinks best (δοκέει δέ μοι εἶναι ἄριστον, 5.360): he keeps the veil as a last resort but does not relinquish the raft until the waves fully destroy it. The goddess' instructions are at odds with his better thinking. In his dealings with Calypso at 5.160–91 he also reacts with skepticism: thinking that her offer of a boat and provisions to help him leave Ogygia conceals a sinister plan to do him further harm, he forces her to swear by the River Styx that her intentions are sincere.[30] It is possible, therefore, that he does not trust Nausicaa's instructions. For this reason he now prays to Athena for help: "Grant that the Phaeacians receive me with friendship and pity" (6.327). In answer to the prayer the goddess will appear to him as a young girl on the edge of town.

It is from the disguised Athena that he hears a credible reason for approaching the queen: Arete holds an exalted position among the Phaeacians. "Alcinous honors her as no other woman on earth is honored . . . and the citizens look on her as if she were a god" (θεὸν

[29] Nausicaa's actions at 48–65 also indicate that she considers her father the major authority in the family: when she finds both parents at home she asks only Alcinous for permission to take the laundry to the river.

[30] *Cf.* the account of the Trojan horse episode (4.265–90): Odysseus' suspicious nature saved the Achaeans from falling victim to Helen's treachery.

ὥς εἰσορόωντες, 7.71). "If *she* is well-disposed to you in her heart," continues Athena, echoing Nausicaa's earlier lines, "there is hope that you will see your dear ones and reach your high-roofed home and your fatherland" (75–77). The subsequent events do not, however, bear out Athena's claims. For when Arete expresses her approval of the guest and suggests that he be given parting gifts, Echeneus reminds the court that the final order must come from Alcinous (11.344–46). The queen's approval, contrary to Athena's promise, is immaterial. The goddess has misled Odysseus with this false account of Arete's prominence.[31] But without this exaggerated claim, it is conceivable that the suspicious Ithacan would not have bothered to go to the queen. Indeed, when he does comply with the instructions, it is with a degree of reluctance and insecurity. Clasping Arete's knees, he says, "Arete, daughter of godlike Rhexenor, both *your husband* and your knees I approach (σόν τε πόσιν σά τε γούναθ' ἱκάνω, 7.147), after my many toils." Feeling that he should be supplicating the king, but deterred by Athena's emphasis of the queen, he emerges with a compromise, doing what he himself thinks best: he technically obeys the instructions, but he acknowledges the possibility of the king's importance by referring to Alcinous as the first object of his appeal. The subsequent events in the court bring to the fore the duality of this supplication: Echeneus chides Alcinous, not Arete, for his tardiness in raising the suppliant, while Arete later feels compelled to remind the court that Odysseus is technically *her* guest.[32]

The claims about Arete's importance among the Phaeacians come solely from Athena and are directed solely at Odysseus. Homer makes it clear to the audience, on the other hand, that Alcinous is the authoritative figure in the state. This much is evident not only from the words and actions of Nausicaa in Book 6 but also from the opening lines of Book 7. In the account of the acquisition of the nurse Eurymedusa, Homer explains, "the Phaeacians selected her as a prize for Alcinous [*i.e.*, not Arete], because he was lord over all the Phae-

[31] Nausicaa's words at 6.313–15, repeated verbatim at 7.75–77, are doubtless inspired by the goddess as part of Athena's grand design to manipulate Odysseus. Athena has arranged, via the dream in 6.20–40, for Nausicaa to meet and clothe the stranger at the river. As the princess musters the courage not to flee as Odysseus approaches, furthermore, it is Athena who "places boldness in her heart and removes the trembling from her limbs" (6.140).

[32] 11.338, ξεῖνος δ' αὖτ' ἐμός ἐστιν. Odysseus' uneasiness emerges again in 13.200–16: not yet recognizing Ithaca and fearing that the Phaeacians have deluded him, he wishes that he had stayed longer with them and supplicated another king of theirs (ἐγὼ δέ κεν ἄλλον ὑπερμενέων βασιλήων ἐξικόμην, 13.205–6).

acians, and the people heeded him as if he were a god" (*οὕνεκα πᾶσι Φαιήκεσσιν ἄνασσε, θεοῦ δ' ὣς δῆμος ἄκουεν*, 7.10–11). When we hear Athena tell Odysseus some sixty lines later that it is Arete whom the Phaeacians view as a god, we are jarred in the same manner as when we heard Nausicaa suddenly mention her mother. Homer tells his audience one thing, while Athena tells Odysseus another.[33] The reader who is sensitive to the suspicious nature of Odysseus may smile upon seeing the goddess who is herself "renowned among all the gods for intelligence and resourcefulness" (13.298–99) circumvent the wiliness of her darling and actually manipulate him. Athena herself smiles (*μείδησεν*, 13.287) when she eventually tells Odysseus that he did not recognize her when she stood by his side and helped him among the Phaeacians.[34]

When Alcinous responds to Odysseus' supplication of Arete, therefore, and honors his request, there is no problem of inconsistency. The poet has not created a scene of 'unfulfilled promise'.[35] On the contrary, certain details in Alcinous' reception of the guest indicate that the rebirth theme is still in operation. Before offering Odysseus a seat, the king unseats his own son Laodamas, "whom he especially loved" (7.171) and who occupies the chair next to the royal throne. Odysseus is welcomed not as a mere suppliant but as veritable son of

[33] In similar fashion Homer presents the Phaeacians as hospitable toward strangers (*cf.* 7.226–27, 8.387–97, 11.339–41, 13.172–83), whereas Athena warns Odysseus that they are not (7.32–33). The goddess does not want Odysseus to establish contact with anyone until he touches Arete. Therefore she warns him to walk through the town without speaking (*σιγῇ*, 30) and without even looking at the people. As an extra precaution she pours the mist around him "lest any of the great-hearted Phaeacians encounter him with cutting remarks and ask him who he is" (16–17). For an improper word from Odysseus or the Phaeacians would spoil the sacred *εὐφημία* of the ritual: *cf.* G. Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*[4] (London 1934) 87–89. Uppermost in the goddess' mind may be the concern that Odysseus not touch or speak to any other male until the ritual is complete: for this reason, perhaps, she assumes a female disguise. For the debate on Phaeacian hospitality see G. P. Rose, "The Unfriendly Phaeacians," *TAPA* 100 (1969) 387–406, and G. J. de Vries, "Phaeacian Manners," *Mnemosyne* IV.30 (1977) 113–21.

[34] In this famous exchange between the cleverest mortal and the cleverest goddess, Odysseus retorts (13.322–23) that he did indeed recognize Athena among the Phaeacians (perhaps he detected that she came in answer to his prayer at 6.323–27). If he is telling the truth here he is implying that he allowed Athena to manipulate him into kneeling before Arete. Even so, as has been observed, he succeeds in including the king in his appeal. Unlike the docile Nausicaa, Odysseus is too shrewd to allow himself to become a puppet even to his patron goddess. For an analysis of this contest of wits and a verdict on the ultimate 'winner' see J. S. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton 1983) 186–212.

[35] Although Fenik (*supra* n.4) presents a convincing case that elsewhere in the *Odyssey* Homer creates scenes of 'unfulfilled promise', the Arete-scene cannot fairly be included among them.

the king.[36] Before the end of the book, Alcinous will offer to make the nameless guest his son-in-law: Odysseus is promised Nausicaa's hand in marriage and a furnished house (313–15).[37] Such an enthusiastic reception is unusual even by Phaeacian standards. But the suggestion that Odysseus may become an integral member of the family, whether by replacing Laodamas or by marrying Nausicaa, accords well with the general theme of his being born into the palace.

Seen in this light, Alcinous' actions may include a reference to yet another ceremony associated with the birth of a child. In the ritual of the *ἀμφιδρόμια*, on a set date after the birth, the child is officially accepted into the family by being carried around the hearth. Also on this day the baby receives its name and is given gifts by relatives and friends.[38] During his stay with the Phaeacians, Odysseus, who is led by the hand from the hearth to the throne of the king's son, will, in a sense, receive his name, which he confidently declares at 9.19–20: "I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, famous among all men for my wiles, and my glory reaches the heavens." In addition, he will receive so many gifts from the noblemen that Alcinous will impose a tax on the people in order to compensate for the financial loss (13.4–15). That Alcinous himself looks on this stranger as a newborn, of sorts, is indicated not only by his offer to include Odysseus in the family but also by his initial announcement when he seats the suppliant: "We will see to it that this stranger reaches his homeland without pain or sorrow ... But after that he will suffer whatever destiny and the grave weavers spun for him on his thread of life when his mother gave him birth" (7.192–98).[39] If we are correct in detecting an al-

[36] In having Odysseus occupy the throne of the king's son, Homer may intend a variation of the practice whereby the supplicated, in acknowledgment of the guest's sanctity, entrusts his son to the suppliant: *cf.* Gould 99.

[37] In the context of a potential marriage with Nausicaa, it is interesting to note Hesychius' alternate definition of *ὑστερόποτμος*: *ᾧ ζῶντι ὁ τάφος ὡς τεθνηκότι γέγονεν. ἄλλοι τὸν δεύτερον γάμον.* Athena's instructions to Telemachus at *Od.* 1.289–92 also combine the cenotaph of presumed dead with the remarriage of his 'widow':

> *εἰ δέ κε τεθνηῶτος ἀκούσῃς μηδ' ἔτ' ἐόντος,*
> *νοστήσας δὴ ἔπειτα φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν*
> *σῆμά τέ οἱ χεῦαι καὶ ἐπὶ κτέρεα κτερεΐξαι*
> *πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε, καὶ ἀνέρι μητέρα δοῦναι.*

[38] *Cf.* Pl. *Tht.* 160E; Ar. *Lys.* 757. Hesychius' definition: *ἀμφιδρόμια· ἡμέρα ἀγομένη ... τοῖς παιδίοις, ἐν ᾗ τὸ βρέφος περὶ τὴν ἑστίαν ἔφερον τρέχοντες κύκλῳ. καὶ ἐπετίθεσαν αὐτῷ ὄνομα, ὅτε ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκείων καὶ φίλων δῶρα ἐπέμπετο.*

[39] *Cf.* the manner in which Alcinous inquires about Odysseus' name (8.552–54):

> *οὐ μὲν γάρ τις πάμπαν ἀνώνυμός ἐστ' ἀνθρώπων,*
> *οὐ κακὸς οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλός, ἐπὴν τὰ πρῶτα γένηται,*
> *ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τίθενται, ἐπεί κε τέκωσι, τοκῆες.*

lusion to the ἀμφιδρόμια, the shift of attention from Arete to Alcinous receives a smooth transition. For in treating Odysseus as a father treats a son, Alcinous continues the thematic thread which the poet has been weaving into the narrative.

Conclusions may be drawn from this study on two levels. On the psychological level, the evocation of the birth process suggests a new beginning for the hero: his break with the imaginary world is complete. Calypso's offer of immortality may have initially enticed Odysseus, but he ultimately rejects such a way of 'life'. This break with the past, furthermore, is irrevocable, made permanent by the enactment of ritual. As Odysseus buries the past, he buries that part of his psyche which longs for the carefree existence of the gods. His return to the human world, therefore, reaffirms the value of human life, despite its sorrows and sufferings. Specifically, Odysseus' rebirth implies a celebration of his own personal spirit. The hero who sits on the Ogygian shore and cries for home is not the hero known to Homer or his audience; nor is the Odysseus who reacts to a storm at sea by longing to die the indomitable survivor over all tribulations and obstacles. As Odysseus enters the poem he buries any traits of diffidence which he exhibited when he was spiritually dead. Once born into the narrative, he proceeds to establish that dauntless identity and sense of self which enables him to declare his name to the Phaeacians with pride.

This study also provides insights into Homer's poetic genius. Although he begins the poem *in mediis rebus*, he presents the protagonist from the moment of his symbolic birth. In a strictly literal sense Homer is the 'maker' or ποιητής of his hero, for Odysseus' literary life and physical life are one and the same. As Odysseus enters the poem, the audience either consciously perceives or instinctively feels an experience shared by all human beings. For whether we openly recall the birth process (through having delivered a child or having witnessed a birth) or subconsciously sense allusions to our own birth, Homer succeeds in making Odysseus' plight analogous to our own. Striking a common chord between hero and audience, the poet engages our sympathy: we are seriously interested in Odysseus, for his story could be our own. Despite the aura of the fantastic that surrounds his adventures, his experiences seem to imitate life itself. It is hardly credible, for example, that anyone would survive three days at sea with only a veil around his waist.[40] But Homer presents

[40] *Cf.* the censure of Homer in [Longin.] *Subl.* 9.14 for the incredible ten-day shipwreck in which the survivor has no food.

such illogicalities within a framework that makes them not only credible but even enjoyable. Such is the charm of this poet who, according to Aristotle, "sweetens the absurd with other virtues."[41] In the end, we react to Homer's genius with a response which echoes the reaction of Aristophanes of Byzantium upon reading Menander: "O Homer and life, which one of you imitated the other?"[42]

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[41] Arist. *Poet.* 1460b1, *νῦν δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀγαθοῖς ὁ ποιητὴς ἀφανίζει ἡδύνων τὸ ἄτοπον.*

[42] Syrian *In Hermogenem Commentaria* II 23 Rabe; *cf.* Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.69. This paper originated in a course in Greek Literature in Translation which I taught at Kent State University in spring 1982; oral versions were presented at the university in 1982 and at the convention of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in 1983 at Columbus, Ohio. My thanks are extended to Gary Bond, a student in the course, and to Dr D. J. T. Webster of the Welsh National School of Medicine for many helpful suggestions and insights; I also express my gratitude to the anonymous referees at *GRBS*.