

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - The Wiles Of Argument: Protodeliberation And Heroic Prudence In Homer's Odyssey



“Rhetoric, in the most general sense, is the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through a system of signs, including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions” (Kennedy, 1991, 7). In *Rhetoric* 1.3 Aristotle identifies a powerful form of advancing interests, political deliberation. Such argumentation is directed toward “future action in best interests of a state” (7). Aristotle believes that this form of discourse has a distinctive temporal quality, which “for the deliberative speaker [is] the future (for whether exhorting or dissuading he advises about future events).” A rhetor connects present to future through weighing excess and deficiency in alternatives. Public policy is tested by estimating its future consequences for advantage and justice. Similarly, personal decisions of “what ought to be done or not to be done,” he tells us in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, may be so informed by practical reasoning (Ross, 1988/1925, vi.10). Whether public or private, all deliberation is “reasoning involved in choice,” “a kind of seeking - into what action both is possible in the circumstance and will lead to the goal in question” (Bostock, 2000, 79).

Aristotle’s outlook on deliberation appears appropriate to peacetime circumstance with its plans for progressive reform, support for engaged scientific inquiry, and rising prestige in foreign policy. Of course, the deliberations of a post-war period are somewhat distinct. Such an era cannot rely upon commonly shared connections between past and future. As the lives of ordinary citizens and ruling classes are affected differentially by concerted violence, the processes of social legitimation are thrown into question. Whether prewar goals can flourish in postwar society is always an open question. The duration recedes to a distant past for the fortunate, but for the still grieving its effect remains. Some move on; others cannot. A culture languishes in between times, knowing neither the untroubled, irenic diversions of peace nor the desperate unity of sacrifice. The

past - the war that framed deliberative argument in a singular, urgent, and mounting discourses of bloody struggle - is over; and, yet, its business is not finished.

This essay analyzes the protodeliberations of the *Odyssey* as the rhetoric of an archaic, postwar rhetorical culture. Throughout history, the remaindered trauma of war, with its memories of individual and collective destruction, periodically disrupts lives, alters politics, and unhinges communicative norms. A postwar culture can neither dwell entirely in its losses, nor easily move on to a future; so events drift; issues fail to satiate, if they are raised at all; and reasons tangle in cross-expectations. Who will or will not return? How can men of violence reenter a society based on norms of civility? How is lost time made up or forgotten? Was it worth it after all? Answers to these questions play out controversially in intimate family relations and across the landscape of Attic politics in Homer's comic epic of return and renewal.

The essay proceeds to reconstruct varied norms of archaic communicative reasoning in order to examine the qualities of deliberation in a moment of cultural trauma. It undertakes this task by reading Homer's modeling of argument within and against Aristotle's more streamlined theory of deliberation. Generally, Aristotle's holds, "Deliberative advice is either protreptic ['exhortation'] or apotreptic ['dissuasion']; for both those advising in private and those speaking in public always do one or the other of these" (*Rhetoric* 1.3, 48). When the disappointments of violence render norms of communication problematic, if not entirely suspect, the relationships within which practical reasoning can comfortably offer or evaluate proper advice becomes difficult to know in the specific and the general cases. So it would appear that in such circumstances practical reasoning - if it is to be recovered at all - must be played out or tested against others, as well as one's self, in inventive, if not openly cunning ways.

Characters in the *Odyssey* do deliberate in Aristotle's advisory sense, it will be shown. At the same time, their arguments also constitute a multi-layered invitation to test communicative norms of reasoning. The *Odyssey* enacts unruly encounters through a doubling discursive sensibility: first, interlocutors deliberate choices while testing relational grounds; second, just as norm testing is undertaken by the characters in the work, so a bard's own performance puts his guest status on the line. Performed fictional deliberations may be applauded because they daringly surface unspoken uncertainties and ambivalences - voicing

the uncomfortable silences of postwar society. They could also be flatly offensive. Homer's masterpiece has an edge: just how visible to reflection does audience and artist agree the seams of a culture should become? For instance, as shall be argued, the limits of heroic prudence - even as exhibited even by the cleverest of the Greeks - are pushed to the surface by Homer's epic. Indeed, *Books V and VI* appear to constitute and put at issue a host of communicative norms in archaic society generally. Therein, through literary enactment of conversational argument, Homer dramatizes issues of communicative relations among men and women, the older and younger generations, and the universality of discourse norms for his postwar world - and ours.

Book V begins with a scene outside of time. No longer a brilliant young warrior on the planes of Troy - nor an available father, husband or king - the long-absent Ithacan is introduced in tears on a foreign shore. It has been seven years that Odysseus has been living in temporal limbo, whiling away time not unpleasantly on Kalypso's island - Ogygia, a place remote to the gods and mortals alike.

1. "A Lovely Goddess and a Dangerous One"

Dawn, with lord Tithonos by her side, rises to cast "fresh light" for gods and men, opening a scene that suggests the theme of sexual politics. Dawn a goddess has taken a mortal only to have him turned into a grasshopper - ouble standard given the capricious couplings reserved to be a privilege of male gods. However, in the heavens Athena opens up another argument by importuning Zeus to release her favorite from the "thralldom of the nymph," where he "cannot stir" and return home. She argues that mortals might as well rule with injustice since the just king Odysseus is kept from his land while a murder plot is hatched against his son. Zeus does not take issue, but consoles Athena by reminding her that the return is foreordained, hence her impatience premature and complaint groundless. Hermes is sent to deliver the message.

Kalypso is startled by the wing-sandled arrival, and guesses something is up. Rather than offer hospitality, she breaches communicative norms that required her to first offer the resources of the house, and unceremoniously challenges Hermes to state his business: "Now tell me what request you have in mind; for I desire to do it, if I can and if it is the proper thing to do" (5.94-95). Note at one in the same time, the "hidden one" assents to authority while opening a space for disagreement by conditioning assent. Like Athena's complaint to Zeus, the exchange reflects a constrained objection, approaching a deliberative challenge;

but she tempers opposition at the same time. Hermes both notes and ignores the discourtesy, and orders Kalypso to send the Greek “back in haste.” Not concealing a visible shudder, Kalypso criticizes the double standard of the gods “who hate it” when a goddess takes a mortal. “But it was I who saved him,” when Zeus sank the returning warriors’ boat. “I fed him, loved him, sang that he should not die nor grow old, ever, in all the days to come.” Not only is the order unfair, she says, it is impractical for there are no boats available on the island; nevertheless she agrees to comply. Like Athena’s complaint, Kalypso’s objection amounts to naught as she concludes: “My counsel he shall have, *and* nothing hidden [emphasis added],” mysteriously punning on her own name. The pun splits the gifts of her given counsel from the gift her self and seems to tear apart a relationship and signal an attenuation of deliberation.

Kalypso finds Odysseus on the beach in tears and says gently: “O forlorn man, be still. Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel your life consumed here; I have pondered it, and I shall help you go” (5.169-171). The statement is a half-truth; Kalypso has indeed pondered and indeed decided, but it is Hermes who prompted release not her own choice. Some read this passage as a wily persuasive argument, for the only chance Kalypso has to keep her love is to show unselfishness, giving him what she thinks he most desires: freedom. There is scant evidence for this reading; rather, it makes more dramatic sense to see Kalypso as doing the only thing one can when one’s life is so shattered: save some dignity. Startled, and suspecting something more, her paramour responds: “After these years, a helping hand? O goddess, what guile is hidden here?” You want me to go into the ocean on a raft under the protection of the same gods who shipwrecked me here! Odysseus asks for an oath that this is not trickery. Kalypso so swears, and states a grounding norm of deliberative argument, if not all communicative rationality: “What I shall devise, and what I tell you will be the same as if your need were mine” (5.198-199). Yet, the future of the relationship remains unsatisfactory and unsettled.

After an evening’s nectar and ambrosia, the two settle down to converse. Kalypso asks why the Greek captain wishes to go to sea and face adversity rather than enjoy her gifts. Why does he pine so for his for his Penelope? “Can I be less desirable than she is? Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals compare with goddesses in grace and form? (5.220-3). The questions pose a dilemma, of course. If Odysseus answers no, then he has no reason to leave. If he answers yes, then

the goddess is insulted, justifiably angry, and, well, a raft is not a steady craft in an open sea. Faced with this gambit from the enchanting Kalypso, what does this hero of Troy, inventor of the Trojan horse, this most intelligent and cunning of the Greeks, warrior, master of estates, polymentis, and king do? He buckles. He admits that Penelope “would seem a shade before your majesty,” but confesses “each day I long for home,” and further allows as how he is not afraid of whatever trials the gods will send his way because he has overcome adversity before. Hexter calls Odysseus’s failure to address Kalypso’s supposition a classic “*petitio principii*”, and one might add the bravado expressed at facing hardship is an irrelevant reason (Hexter, 1993, 76). It would seem, contra Thomas and Webb (1994) who put the origins of rhetoric in the 5th century, that just as rhetorical theorists are not necessary to compose wily speeches, an organon is not necessary to depart from valid reasoning. Thus, issues of sexual politics and personal relations are raised by Kalypso, but the arguments are left unresolved, even as the issues are opened publicly by the poet. While most commentators focus on Odysseus’s skill in persuasion, even while admitting that women play a more significant role than in the *Odyssey* than the *Iliad*, the obvious deserves to be noted. The many characters of the epic – god and mortal, rich and destitute, noble and common, young and old, male and female, indigenous and foreign, sympathetic and un – match wits in every argument. All conversation appears open to deliberation, at least in principle. Status is important to the arts of discourse, but it is wit within role, not mere assertion of station, that marks each exchange, and arguments build relational entanglements across episodes of encounter. Bowing to the consensus of the gods, Kalypso provides the tools for Odysseus to build a raft and even gives him a departing gift – her warm cloak, ostensibly as protection from the cold seasonal storms.

2. *The Storm*

Depart the hero does, on a raft of his own making, choosing the world of mortality for which commentators give the *Odyssey* credit as a humanizing work (Thalman, 1992, 11). At this point, deliberation moves from conversational encounter to internal decision-making as the sailor faces, after seven years and seventeen days of drift, that most strident of survival tests, a storm at sea. The ocean seethes with turbulence, which leaves Odysseus little choice but to act; and his prodigious albeit rusty decision-making skills are sorely tested. The raft is not doing well, but swimming seems an unappealing choice. “Rag of a man that I am, is this the end of me? (5. 30), he cries hurling a plaint at the gods. A decent death and a land-

burial would have been kinder than to perish anonymously in the proverbial watery grave. No one listens. Knocked off the boat by a wave, Kalypso's cloak drags him under. He recovers and does the only thing he can: huddle. Ino, a minor goddess of the sea, intervenes and offers the hopefully-attributed "clear-headed" sailor a plan. Leave the raft, tie yourself to a plank with my scarf, and swim. Unable to choose between raft and wave, Odysseus's suspicion turns toward Poseidon who he thinks through Ino may be trying to send him to his final death. "O damned confusion! he explodes. "Can this be a ruse to trick me from the boat for some god's pleasure" (5.379). Events overtake importuning the gods and chewing over alternatives, as a wave smashes the raft. Its sink or swim, and Ino's newer advice of tying a scarf to a log seems more sensible than keeping Kalypso's coat. Two days swimming and a rocky coast line rises into view, but our hero sees no way to come ashore; at this point anxiety trumps prudence. Indeed, it is the discursive habit of weighing both sides of an argument that spins decision-making out of control. Odysseus imagines that should he swim down the coast, looking for a place to land, another gale will blow and he'll meet his end in a shark's gullet. There is no evidence of a brooding storm, of course, nor are there sharks about, and it is clear he will either be drowned or dashed to pieces if he stays where he is. Athena intervenes to restore self-possession. Pulled by the surf, Odysseus is advised to follow the example of the octopus whose flexible arms hold onto rocks when torn from its home. The polytropic hero follows the model, seizes and holds on painfully to temporary ground; and, even though the backwash carries him out with torn hands, the gesture of holding restores enough self-possession that he can make a constructive choice, to swim along the coast toward a river inlet. To get a favorable current, he needs another intervention and simply asks for a break from whatever river god holds local dominion. Fortune smiles, as they say. Finally, exhausted he reaches the beach but has enough sense left to weigh the consequences of sleeping near the water with its certainty of exposure or in the forest with the possibility of succumbing to a dining denizen, and selects the latter. Odysseus builds a bed of leaves in a guarded site and sleeps.

The sort of dire deliberation necessary to move the ex-veteran from his suspended, death-like state on Ogygia, to the shores of a social world is a crisis that exposes the limits of verbal facility, concentrated analysis, cleverness, even the capacity to weigh options. All these fine deliberative strategies articulated in Aristotle's *Ethics* are found insufficient, even counterproductive in the storm. In

the end, Odysseus discovers the bottom of practical wisdom by basically holding on to reason until reasonable options appear. Perhaps, this is why Homer celebrates the returning warrior with the epithet, “the enduring one.”

3. *Nausikaa*

Book VI features Odysseus in the land of mortals, the Phaiakians, a people untouched by war and made prosperous by trade. They are an ideal audience for Odysseus’s tales of wandering, and in a later chapter offer him a vehicle for his smooth return to Ithaca. The fortunes of the hero of Troy, however, first turn on the deliberative capacity and judgment of a young woman, princess of the realm, and dreamy teenager, Nausikaa.

The chapter opens. Like teenagers everywhere, Nausikaa has gone to sleep leaving her clothes scattered about her room. Her dreams are woven from associations based on items from the day-before’s world: clothes tossed about her bedroom. The reasoning inspired by Athena’s nighttime visit is associative: get your clothes washed in the morning so “wedding chests will brim by evening. Maidenhood must end!” (6.37-38) To this is added the reason that the “noblest” court thee, which may be true, but washing clothes does not a proposal make. The purpose of a trip to the washing pool is ulterior, of course, as the detail is added that she should take a mule cart - narratively presupposing Odysseus’s appearance and transport needs. The dream-reasons serve the logic of the situation and make sense by turning wishes to symbols to visualized action, which while not constituting a plan based on sound instrumental reasoning, none the less characterize the self-deliberation of dreams.

Nausikaa requests from her dad, Alkinoos, permission to take the mule-cart out for a washing party, on the prudent claims that he needs clean laundry for counsel and her brothers, for dancing. She says no word of her own wedding plans. Like Kalypso, she marshals good reasons on behalf of her request, but does not tell the whole story. Beye says that this is typical of dialogue found in “a comedy of manners, in which persons say one thing and mean another” (151). Nausikaa’s father, sees through the pretext (because washing all the family clothes is a sign of getting ready for a wedding), but loves his daughter and doesn’t take exception: “No mules would I deny you, child, nor anything” (6.75). As in the Hermes/Kalypso and Zeus/Athena exchanges the reasoning of the advocate does not alter opinion, though this conversation ends in an indulged request rather than a dismissed complaint.

Nausikaa and her party arrive at the river, and commence washing. On break, they begin a game of catch. Eros is tossed into play. An errant throw plops in a nearby stream. The girls cry out. The sleeping veteran awakes but knows not from whence the awakening cry. "Now, by my life, mankind again! But who? Savages are they, strangers to courtesy? Or gentle folk, who know and fear the gods?... Or am I amid people of human speech? Up again, man, and let me see for myself" (6.129f). These are the central questions throughout Homer's epic, and their episodically modeled answers challenge the boundaries of postwar practical reasoning. To what extent are the rules of civilization honored here? If norms are strong, deliberation is prudently collaborative; if not heroic prudence requires reasons to be properly concealed even as conversation concocts cooperation. Or, alternatively, is this a situation which can be encompassed by human deliberation at all? If not, the forces of enchantment and monstrosity must be countered by the resources of reasons and words. In these first moments of a return to human deliberation, Odysseus's world is again at stake.

The story that plays out is characteristic of the dramatic enactment of human relationships in the epic. "Almost every episode... is a variation on the typical scene of arrival and hosting," Beye concludes (1993,154; also Stewart, 1976, 77). Murnaghan observes that, the "*Odyssey's* plot also establishes a positive connection between recognition and the observance of hospitality" as "codes of hospitality ... are ... highly valued in the Homeric world" (1987, 94). Recognition "consists fundamentally of the mutual acknowledgement of reciprocal relationships" (91) and is achieved through risking conversation, initially as a gambit - for the possibility of false self-representation on the part of the potential supplicant or host is always lurking. Gradually, hospitality grows into a deliberated bond between guest and host. Deliberation depends upon realizing a shared *ethos* that is reciprocally constructed, and prospers or declines over the course of a relationship. In some places, far off and familiar, deliberation is not possible at all. Of the great many deliberative involvements throughout the epic, Stanford concludes this initial encounter offers "the severest test of tact and resourcefulness" (1963, 20).

The initial meeting holds little promising. Odysseus emerges from the bushes, covered with brine, leaves, bloated, sporting but a branch to preserve modesty. Aware that his presumption of hospitality has been attenuated - since his sight has caused the washing party to flee - he nonetheless approaches Nausikaa who "boldly" stands her ground. "Debating inwardly" what he should do "embrace this

beauty's knees in supplication? or stand apart using honeyed speech," he comes to a swift conclusion and decides "to trust in words" (6.160).

"Mistress: please: are you divine, or mortal?" and so with the first question, the honey loosens and a words begins to flow. Actually, the speech is a deftly structured, reasonable appeal that takes shape as a narrative locating speaker and listener in a productive relationship. The speech has four parts. The first recognizes the young princess's family station and makes inference that she has been a joy to the household, suggesting the speaker to be a person of discerning judgment to the listener. The second explains Odysseus's own rather dire appearance as accidental, rather than an essential attribute, the fault of circumstances, not his character; it also cleverly excuses his initial tactical choice as he claims that he was too much in "awe" to supplicate abjectly. The third forwards a minimal request, especially in light of the circumstances, for directions and a rag for covering. The fourth expresses well-wishes for the future, a blessing: "may the gods accomplish your desire: a home, a husband, and harmonious converse with him - the best thing in the world being a strong house held in serenity where man and wife agree. Woe to their enemies, joy to their friends! But all this they know best." Woodhouse calls these "the most beautiful words, surely, ever spoken about wedded life, by anybody, in any age, or in any language" (1930, 57).

Whether one agrees, the speech is certainly a timeless model of building ethos from the scant visible resources. Toohey claims that Homer's speeches do not reflect a sophisticated model of rhetoric (1994,153). To the contrary, this address constitutes a marvelous paradigm of an ethos-originating deliberation. Indeed, speeches of request-and-reply throughout the work exhibit a remarkable range of sophistication by testing how people initiate, reconstitute, or sustain a relationship in deliberation under the sign of hospitality. While not naively open, such deliberations do spark a relational ethos - that is an invested, bi-directional bond which (re)constitutes one's self in articulating mutual regard and obligation. For instance, the ex-officer ingeniously tells the princess of a fragmentary memory - a slim palm tree he saw at Delos when returning with his troops, a tree that "filled my heart with wonder," a symbol of hospitality, like Nausikaa. The simile flatters the listener, but achieves much more. Odysseus's recovery of a slip of memory as a base for present judgment enables him to begin to connect past and present, thereby uniting great temporal distances. So, the *formerly* storm-

tossed, at-a-loss skeptic takes a tremendous stride. From that moment, his piquant longing for home turns increasingly toward the directed action and an end to the postwar world.

Dialogically, the narrative works because its utterance *argues* that, contrary to appearances, Odysseus is neither a “predatory animal” nor “a rapacious god,” and so “he can claim to be a civilized member of human society,” one who anticipates a relation within the ambit of social values and cultural institutions. When a speech of request succeeds, a supplicant can expect the things that typically accompany hospitality, “meals, changes of clothing, baths, conveyance home, guest-gifts” and the like (Murnaghan, 1987, 91). The narrative is a famous instance of doubling in performance for, like Odysseus, the archaic story teller prompts his own hosts enthymematically to honor the gods by according him hospitality for a tale well told. Of course, Nausikaa’s reply does full justice to the request(s).

An address of request offers a number of choices, including the most basic as to whether to acknowledge the request as satisfactory. Nausikaa so recognizes the speech and states her duty: “Stranger, there is no quirk or evil in you that I can see. You know Zeus metes out fortune to good and bad men as it pleases him. Hardship he sent to you, and you must bear it. But now that you have taken refuge here you shall not lack for clothing, or any other comfort due to a poor man in distress”(6.201-204). Note that such a judgment requires appraisal, the capacity to resolve contrasting words and appearances. Note also, that the relationship is frankly stipulated as time-bound, for the other must bear one’s own burdens. In each host-guest relation, the question of departure is implicitly deliberated in the grant of hospitality. The law of hosting according to Menelaos says, “It is equally bad when one speeds on the guest unwilling to go, and when he holds back one who is hastening” (Hohendahl-Zoetelief, 1980, 177). Guest laws would appear the reverse. Deliberative arrangements have a half-life within which the relationship continually calibrates available resources to ostensible needs among all parties. Recognition is not the end of a relation, it is only a threshold and an ever present backdrop against which actions and events confirm and disconfirm initial judgments while the potentialities of the situation continue to unfold.

Nausikaa admonishes the maids not to be afraid, reasoning that her land is under the protection of the gods and that Zeus, the god of “strangers and beggars,” has

sent a "small gift." Odysseus turns down Nausikaa's offer to have the party bathe him, as do Nausikaa's friends who hand over the necessary oil and clothes. Apparently, the code of hospitality does not extend to obedience; prudence on both man and women's parts regulate the relationship here. Odysseus performs his own makeover in private. Then as now, clothes make the man, and he emerges from the river with appearance so changed the washing party swoons. "The spectator has become the spectacle," Hexter says (1993, 92). Arresting appearance creates a reversal, from: What is that? to Who is he?

Nausikaa's judgment is confirmed by Odysseus new, handsome appearance, and the form of the ancient folk tale fulfilled. The shipwrecked frog turns out to be a proper prince, but Homer reworks the cultural material to usher in another foray into sexual politics. A complication slips into Nausikaa's mind, as she plots how to affect a means to satisfy her guest's need for transport. She tells the stranger to get up on the mule cart for a ride to town, but before he can do so she halts to deliberate a plan (an ingenious variance from her dream logic of the night before). If she is to meet the obligation of hospitality and find transportation for the stranger, a means must be contrived to introduce him successfully at court; and she must persuade the stranger to follow the plan. "You have good sense, I think; here's how to do it" she says - like Ino taking the lead in a collaborative moment.

The argument to convince Odysseus involves two hypothetical scenarios. The first is a procataleptic excursus into what Nausikaa imagines gossips might say should she enter into town, back from the beach, with an older man. She anticipates the effect of a malicious rumor on the probability of Odysseus's success at court. The second is the better plan, which involves Odysseus less honorably traveling behind and making a clandestine entrance to town, an act that would cast him temporarily outside the safe perimeter of hospitality. This risk is acceptable because - according to Nausikaa - an untarnished appearance would improve the chances of winning approval. The teenager's deliberative assumption appears sound: just as the stranger made the best of surprise and was able to convince her of his character, likely he could do just as well with her mother, the powerful queen Arete.

Some scholars have claimed that the first scenario constitutes a self-serving half-truth, not unlike Kalypso's offer of help. Consider the princess's imagined gossip by insolent sea-dogs: "Some might say...."

Who is this handsome stranger trailing Nausikaa?
Where did she find him? Will he be her husband?
Or is she being hospitable to some rover ... A god maybe?
descending now - to make her his forever.
Better, if she's roamed and found a husband
somewhere else: none of our own will suit her,
though many come to court her, and those the best! (6.294-300)

In a short span, Nausikaa reveals her name; conveys that she thinks highly of the stranger, even a god; dubs him marriage material; and specifies that not only is she popular, but that she is courted by the best. Could prudential reasoning be serving a non-ostensible set of interests? The wiles of argument may turn Nausikaa's earnest thinking into "broad hints" of an imagined liaison (Woodhouse, 1930, 58); however, the text suggests more interestingly, I think, that the *ingenium* of argument here relates to the field of associations begun in the dream work of the previous evening, sustained in the morning wedding similes, and amplified by the stranger's altered appearance. The wiles of argument create affiliations because thought filters into deliberation out of the imagination of a present, metaphorically unified. Nausikaa's courtship imagery performs a role similar that of the octopus and the palm tree in previous episodes. It serves as a basis of shared invention and self-affiliation in the argument. Her adolescent field of personal-political associations does brush the scene with comic danger, but her reasoning is sound, if her address is not wholly prudent (Tracy, 1990, 43).

Just as with Kalypso, Ino, and Athena, the Greek captain follows the plans of Nausikaa. Judging from these scenes, prudent choice is more a matter of making the better plan, rather than insisting on any prerogatives of status, experience, age or gender. Mature goddess, minor deity, or young woman, all, successfully deliberate plans of action that set Odysseus, themselves, and the postwar world on its way.

4. *Deliberations in a Comic World*

The *Odyssey* invites us to conjecture on the practices of deliberation in an archaic, postwar rhetorical culture. Gods deliberate apart in a time of their own, while mortals appear usually startled, impelled, or allured into reasoning. Whether god or mortal, the move toward deliberation would appear to begin in a plaint that marks some injustice. We first encounter this in Athena's ironic twist,

contrasting Zeus' piety and Odysseus's condition; its counterpart, the consolation, may resolve the injustice by diminishing a plaintiff's significance, as Athena's complaint is dismissed but not ignored by Zeus. When disruption and complaint are not followed by consolation, resentment swells and deliberative relations may fracture. Kalypso's arguments (whose psychology commentators note resembles more that of a human than a folk-figure) against Hermes' injunction give rise to a split between the consensus of the gods and her own estimations of justice, and so she raises objections indirectly, through variations in formalities, and withdraws agreement even as she assures compliance. The resentment spirals into open confrontation as Kalypso traps Odysseus in a dilemma; and while she lovingly capitulates in the breakup, Homer leaves ambiguous the intent of her gift, a heavy cloak for a sailor embarked on autumnal seas.

Second, the depiction of Odysseus at sea illustrates that the resources of internal deliberation in dire circumstances become greatly tested and may be for a time wholly insufficient to circumstances. The hero's capacity to weigh arguments is undercut when the contexts within which choices are made are eroded by doubt, as he knows not whom to trust, Kalypso or Ino or any of the gods. Further, while slow deliberation is ordinarily prudent, events do overtake thought. Excess and defect cannot be balanced when it's sink or swim. Serial crises propel estimations of risk into a self-feeding hyperbolic trajectory. Common sense is restored by taking hold of whatever is available, like the effort of the octopus to retain its home. In tight spots, a little luck is needed, too. Once restored, prudence recovers quickly and even on a barren unknown foreign shore, the exhausted Odysseus is able to weigh alternatives. This model of self-deliberation would seem appropriate for a time in a culture when social and personal alternatives are unclear but choice imminent, transitions mandatory but unmapped, and the available resources of prudence, its habits, propensities, and directions, in need of reconstitution - the blank horizons of a postwar culture.

Third, in initiating a relationship, dream memory or image recollection may play a role, preparing a metaphorical field for argument invention. While it would be useful on such occasions for appears to conform to words, words can trump appearances if they invest a relationship with ethos, articulating the possibilities of trust, good-will, and sense. The host-guest relation once established is tested by weighing resources and needs within a negotiated common time. Entering into a deliberative space is always risky. For Nausikaa, the relationship turns out

happily. Not so for everyone. The Phaiakians receive Odysseus, just as Nausikaa plans, and become charmed by Odysseus's tales, but eventually are punished by Poesidon for helping the Ithacan return. In retrospect, Alkinoos appears to take in one guest too many, just as later on the suitors stay one night too long. From a comic perspective, tragedy depends upon where one sits - when the music stops.

Across all three episodes, deliberation roils against and within a partially articulated world; Athena's complaint of the not yet, impatient to wait for the fullness of human time, Kalypso's anguished compliance and ironic invocation of the norms of cooperation, Odysseus loss and recovery of compass during a storm, Ino's bracing advice, Nausikaa's bold stance and sound plan spun from dreams, Alkinoos' willing complicity in his daughter's schemes - all these elements show that persuasion is gathered from a field where common cause, not common grounds, are sufficient to release action; cross-expectations are the rule, not the exception, in the transitional worlds of departures, arrivals, and relationships for now - the deliberations of a postwar culture. It's not that such a culture is necessarily cynical or that its deliberations are mere displays of distrust, manipulation, and deception. While commentators have been charmed by Odysseus tactical brilliance, basically lies, into concluding that "Odysseus trusts no one" (Beye, 1993, 149) and by extension rework skepticism into every character, this alternative reading shows that trust like candor is not an absolute, but a matter of degree and circumstance. Thus, communicative encounters can exhibit intelligence and concern in the face of trauma, even if understanding of issues are not exactly comparable between interlocutors nor full disclosure available in such conversations. So visited the text, Homer's epic shines as a great gift, modeling for humankind the breathtaking variety of communication rendered possible by deliberative sensibility.

At the end of the *Poetics*, while confessing admiration for Homer, Aristotle defends the development of a younger, sleeker art, tragedy. He elevates tragedy over the ancient epic because of the latter's elegant efficiency. An epic may "furnish subject for several tragedies," he notes (16.6), whereas a tragedy is more pleasurable because of a highly unified "concentrated effect" which is "not spread over a long time and so diluted" (16.5). One wonders if Aristotle would have held the same developmental judgment for comedy. The *Odyssey* fashions an epic with numerous comedies, though at times approaches tragic recognition. To me, its complicated, polyepisodic quality seems more pleasurable than could any

“compact comedy” – a term that is something of an oxymoron in any case, like “a limited sense of humor.” Tragic form is undoubtedly powerful because its relentless, unrelieved focus leading to a necessary recognition, reversal and climax. While understandably a mainstay of postwar culture, tragedy offers necessarily fewer opportunities for connecting with varied events and attitudes of a world renewed. A comic epic veritably disgorges a sprawling flow of personal and public dust-ups and set-tos thereby offering opportunities for audiences to recognize multiple reconnections and transitions in deliberating a postwar world. Had Aristotle held that the value of an art hinged, at least in part, upon the temporal fractures or ambiguities throughout its audience, what would have followed for the West’s understanding of deliberation? At a minimum, could deliberation be doubly constructed, premised in some times as a continuous path of present to future and at others on the need to build new or reconstruct old linkages once assumed in place and available? What difference would such a double grounding make to deliberative possibilities and practices?

One difference surely would have been to expand the place of narrative in the deliberative art. “Narrative is least common in deliberative oratory, because no one narrates future events,” Aristotle tells us. However, “if there is narrative,” he reports, “it is of events in the past, in order that by being reminded of those things the audience will take better counsel about what is to come (either criticizing or praising)” (*Rhetoric*, Book 3.10). For the characters and audiences of the *Odyssey*, narrative is more than a historical yardstick yielding relevant examples to measure prudential choices. Narratives announce, stress, test, and confirm the relational contexts within and through which deliberation is released. Without coming to terms with time as enveloped in renewed or initiated human relationships, the context necessary to formulate a reciprocal exchange in the present remains unreleased from the past. Only as guest and host exchange parts of the story – as they are differentially impacted and framed by the tendrils of war and return – can plans of action be crafted, communicated and enacted. Thus, guests and hosts are narratively enabled into motion by the appearance of common cause, even while testing common grounds as actions unfold (Thornton, 1970, 38-51).

Aristotle’s deliberative sensibility seems to be constrained understandably by an anxiety over ambiguous temporal contexts that might engender political extremes. Truly, the modeled outcomes of Aeschylus, while cathartic for the

audience, are not politic for the people. So, he moves temporal dislocation entirely out of the deliberative realm and places it into the aesthetic form of tragedy, where dynastic disasters are transmuted more safely into an aesthetic pleasure or moral admonition. The *Odyssey* suggests that misrecognitions need not turn out badly. One imagines bardic performances as initially loosening strictures on personal and public talk by aesthetically transmuting frozen, possibly unspoken social questions into a cultural form where relationships are modeled and given room for play.

There is a price to be paid, of course, one must be willing to endure or accept the indignities of turn-about in argument, with laughter or without. Then, however, the deliberations of gods and mortals, men and women, the older and younger generations, living and the dead may be performed with urgency and uncertainty, disguise and recognition, warm hospitality and harsh endurance, in isolation and in the company of fellows - all the deliberations of a rhetorical culture come alive with style, mindfulness, wit and action. The scenes of contest and encounter from the *Odyssey* deserve to be so appreciated and explored as they underwrite a refreshed and refreshing deliberative sensibility. Only then will Aristotle's comedy appear to us as something other than a lost work.

5. Coda

As I conclude this paper, another return of sorts plays out on the public scene, on an island made remote by the distances affected in Soviet-US confrontation, a war that supposedly ended a decade or so ago. Former President Jimmy Carter arrived on a Sunday in Cuba - the first former or current U.S. chief executive to set foot on the Caribbean island since Calvin Coolidge in 1928. The press report reads: "Carter, 77, plans to stay in Cuba through Friday. He is expected to meet with Cuban President Fidel Castro, 75, at least twice, including an official dinner Sunday night." "We welcome you with warm and sincere friendship," Castro said upon Carter's arrival And we honestly hope that your visit to Cuba is not used by anyone to question your patriotism, to diminish your merits or to affect the assistance that your foundation provides to so many poor, neglected and forsaken people as there are in the world today." With a faint echo of the classics, the press dubs the visit an effort to "jump-start a dialogue between the two nations." Carter's excoriation of Castro's human rights policy in the late 1970s, matched by Castro's subsequent admiration for Carter's "moral and religious values," cross expectations, as does Carter's repudiation of Bush's naming of Cuba as part of the axis of evil. Come see for yourself, Carter jibes. "A good neighbor policy" is

anticipated in spite of those who say that Castro the dictator will “last forever.” If the relation of hospitality cannot guarantee universal deliberation, at least it puts a ball in the air, and we may soon begin to recognize human voices of complaint and consolation. The visit creates a new wrinkle in a joint narrative of relations between two men and possibly a new chapter in the story of two nations. How else do fresh deliberations start and a new era begin?

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