

The Wolf, the Bear, the Master of the Winds: On the Nordic Roots of Odysseus

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That the early figure of Odysseus is far more ancient than the Homeric poems has already been stated by William B. Stanford's seminal monograph, "The Ulysses Theme". That the Greek hero reflects primitive shamanistic traits has also been pointed out by some prominent scholars since the first decades of the last century. In this paper, I intend to focus the attention on some singular features that can be recognized, in disguised or atavistic form, behind the character of Odysseus: an ancient and multi-layered figure springing from traditions outside the Homeric epics. More specifically, I will examine certain unexpected traits and properties that seem to place the roots of the protagonist of the "Odyssey" in a pre-Hellenic substratum of Nordic origin. This is widely suggested, among other things, by the surprising parallels that surface in the Finnish poem "Kalevala", permeated by shamanistic Lapp motifs, and is confirmed by similar evidence in the Norse sagas, in the German "Märchen", and in many Russian oral epic poems ("Byliny"), which in turn are deeply influenced by Siberian shamanism.

Keywords: *Cataleptic sleep, Ecstatic combats, Limping heroes, Nordic shamanism, Odysseus' ancestry, Theriomorphism*

Introduction

The fact that the early figure of Odysseus is much older than Homer and his poetic genius, was already argued, in the middle of the last century, by William B. Stanford, Regius Professor of Greek at Trinity College, Dublin (Stanford 1954: 8). Behind the multi-layered character that has come down to us under the name *Odysseus/Ulysses* there is the shadow of a more ancient figure springing from bardic traditions outside the Homeric epics (Thornton 1970: 22). That the Greek hero reflects primitive shamanistic traits – the roots of which lies deep in the so-called "boreal world", i.e., in the vast area of the Eurasian north running through Fennoscandia, the Baltic countries and Siberia – has been pointed out, with a variety of nuances, by many scholars of different nationalities (Bakker 2006; Baldick 2000; Burkert 1996; Carpenter 1946; Couliano 1991; Diels 1922; Duichin 2012, 2013; Greene 1996; Hatto 1980; Heubeck 1974, 1981; Lindsay 1965; Mastromattei 1988; Meuli 1935; Muster 1947; Stutley 2003; Thornton 1970; Vitebsky 2001). For evidence of this, it is enough to recall here a couple of fabulous *motifs* embedded in Odysseus' adventures: (a) his descent into Hades, at the northernmost reaches of the world (*Od.* XI: 13ff = TMI F81. *Descent to lower world of dead*)¹, the epic transcription of an ecstatic journey into the Beyond (Burkert 1996: 68; Greene 1996; Martinotti and Chillemi 2013; Meuli 1935: 164; Muster 1947: 20; Stutley 2003: 4), that is, the main performance of the Nordic

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¹ Northern references in Odysseus' otherworld journey: Brunel 2002: 177; Page 1983: 47; *RE* 1894-1980, Suppl. V, s.v. Laistrygonen [Meuli]: 538-539; Thornton 1970: 20-21. The Laistrygonians' country (*Od.* X, 80ff) lies to the north, where the paths of day and night are close together; the sunless land of Cimmerians (*Od.* XI: 13ff), where the entrance to Hades is, was also northern.

shaman;² (b) the profound sleep, "most closely alike unto death" (*Od.* XIII: 79-80 = TMI D1960. *Magic sleep*), so extraordinarily similar to the lethargic trance found in Lapp and Siberian shamanism,³ which seizes the hero on the ultramundane island of the Phaeacians, both on his arrival and on his departure.⁴

The aim of this paper is to show some surprising features that seem to place the Greek hero in a pre-Hellenic substratum of Nordic origin, as suggested by numerous parallels in the Finnish poem *Kalevala*, deeply permeated by Lapp shamanistic motifs (Comparetti 1891; de Anna 2001: 47; Kirkinen and Sihvo 2007: 25; Pentikäinen 1999: 177; Siikala 1986, 1999: 16), and confirmed by similar evidence in the Norse sagas, in the Germanic *Märchen* (Muster 1947: 58, 116) and in many Russian oral epic tales (*Byliny*), in turn influenced by Siberian shamanism (Meriggi 1974; Propp 1978; Vernadsky 1965). According to Apostolos N. Athanassakis (2001, 2002), in fact, the spread of shamanism in ancient Greece⁵ was related to a "northern connection", the remnants of which are reflected in the protagonist of the *Odyssey*, marked (unlike what usually emerges in the *Iliad*) by a combination of traits of a shamanistic kind.

Odysseus' Ancestry: The Son of Sisyphos?

It has long been observed that Odysseus – starting from his enigmatic name, which is certainly not Greek (Austin 2009: 92; Dimock 1956; Kamptz 1982: 355ff; Kanavou 2015: 90-105; Latacz 1990: 134; *RE* 1894-1980, XVII/2, s.v. Odysseus [Wüst]: 1909ff; Stanford 1952), and resists all attempts at interpretation in Indo-European terms (Lesky 1984, I: 70) – is related not only to a pre-Homeric substratum, but also to an un-Hellenic background.⁶ From the 1st century B.C. to

² Muster 1947: 19: "das Hauptstück aller Schamanentätigkeit [...] ist die Jenseits (Unterwelts-) Fahrt"; cf. Eliade 1964: 200ff; Meuli 1935: 172; Hultkrantz 1992: 142: "Only the shaman had the capacity to visit, in his soul, that world [the otherworld] and return again"; Thornton 1970: 23-36: "the 'scheme' of a shamanic journey is still discernible in the wanderings of Odysseus; [...] certain details may also be explicable by reference to a tradition in which shamanic material was incorporated. [...] the poet used material ultimately derived from a shaman's journey into the Beyond, [...] part of bardic tradition long before Homer".

³ Olaus Magnus 1555, I: 17, 121; Schefferus 1673: XI. cf. Grambo 1973: 425: "Ecstatic sleep is the most important means of the Lappish shaman, called the *noa'ide*, to let his soul undertake the fearful journey to the land of the dead". The Lapp shamanism is "a western offshoot of the shamanism found among more eastern Finno-Ugrian peoples; in many respects [it is] basically similar to Siberian shamanism and generally of the same intense type as the latter" (Hultkrantz 1992: 143).

⁴ *Od.* V: 491-493; VI: 1-2; VII: 283-287, 318; VIII: 445; XIII: 79-80, 92. Cf. Bakker 2006: 14; Baldick 2000: 164; Hölscher 1991: 271; Thornton 1970: 23: "Odysseus' sleep is no ordinary sleep. [...] I suggest that this sleep may be a remnant left in the story of a shaman's trance". The idea of a trance-like or death-like sleep is typical of the Nordic shamanism: Chiesa Isnardi 1991: 618-619; Eliade 1964: 59; Grambo 1973; Siikala 2007: 113-114.

⁵ On the controversial influence of shamanism in ancient Greece: Athanassakis 2002; Bremmer 1983, 2002; Burkert 1962; Butterworth 1966; Cornford 1952; Dana 2010; Dodds 1951; Duichin 2003; Eliade 1964; Hadot 2001; Kingsley 1994; Lindsay 1965; Metzler 1982; Meuli 1935; Ogden 2004; Thornton 1970.

⁶ Burkert 1981: 106; Hölscher 1991: 60; Lesky 1984, I: 70; Stanford 1954: 8ff. See now Renaud and Wathelet 2002: 277: "Ulysse est un héros très ancien, sûrement préhellénique, dont le nom ne peut être expliqué par le grec et qui présente des variations révélatrices d'influences

the 5th century A.D., many authors (Crates *ap. Schol. in Od.* X, 86; Tac. *Germ.* 3, 2; Aul. Gell. *Noct. Att.* XIV, 6, 3; Solin. XXIII, 15; Strab. III, 4, 157; Mart. Cap. 6, 629) linked the hero to the far north, pinpointing his wanderings to an area between the Baltic coasts and the Arctic Sea, with detours as far as the Atlantic shores of Lusitania. However, the question I want to ask here, taking up the intellectual challenge launched by Felice Vinci's book (2008⁵), is the following: is it possible to hypothesize a *Nordic* origin of Odysseus that is *compatible* with what the ancient sources have passed down to us (at times also hidden, disguised, or even removed) about him?

While Odysseus is indicated by Homer as the son of Laertes,⁷ if we are to believe an authoritative extra-Homeric tradition, Laertes would only be his *putative* father: instead, his *true* parent, according to the Greek tragedians, followed by several Latin writers,⁸ was Sisyphos, "son of Aiolos" (*Il.* VI: 154; *Apd.* I, 9, 3; Ovid. *Met.* XIII: 26). The identity of Aiolos (maybe a primordial horse-god of winds and storms of Nordic origin)⁹ is unclear: in fact, under this name there are various mythological characters with syncretic traits and an intricate genealogy, often overlapping the attribute of the "eponym of Aeolian people" with that of "ruler of the winds".¹⁰ To complicate things, in the late version of the mythographer Hyginus (*Fab.* 125), who probably was borrowed from older traditions now lost, Aiolos, son of Hellen (and thence father of Sisyphos), is identified with the Homeric *Aiolos Hippotádēs* ("horseman's son"),¹¹ becoming the "master" or the "king of the winds" (*tamiēs anémōn, rex ventorum*) in Greek and Latin mythology.¹²

The "very cunning Sisyphos" (*Il.* VI: 153) was notorious for his endless deceptions and wrong-doing. According to a scabrous alternative version to Homer, supported also by vase paintings,¹³ Antikleia, the daughter of Autolykos (*Od.* XI: 85), conceived Odysseus after having been raped by Sisyphos, or after having been seduced by fraud, on the eve of her marriage to the unaware Laertes.¹⁴ According to other versions, which might contain the misunderstood recollection

étrangères à l'usage hellénique"; Loscalzo 2012: 128: "Odysseus was not properly a Greek hero. His name [...] is proof that he was a hero known by the Achaeans only after their arrival in Greece. [...] he seems to have been transplanted into Greek culture from somewhere outside. His attributes seem to suggest that he is the result of an amalgamation of stories from diverse cultures with different economic and social systems".

⁷ *Il.* III: 200-201; IX: 19; *Od.* IV: 555; VIII: 18; IX: 19, 531; XVI: 118-119; XXIV: 269-270.

⁸ Aesch. fr. 175 Nauck; Soph. *Philoct.* 417; *Aj.* 190 and schol. *ad loc.*; Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 524, 1362; *Cycl.* 104; Lyc. *Alex.* 344, 1030 and schol. 344; Schol. in *Il.* X, 266; Ister, *FGrH* 3B: 183ff; *Suda* s.v. Sísyphos; Verg. *Aen.* VI: 529; Ovid. *Met.* XII: 31-32; Hyg. *Fab.* 201.

⁹ His name has been connected with the Greek word *áella*, "storm" (Ferrari 1999, s.v.: 272); cf. LSJ, s.v., 27: "stormy wind, whirlwind"; Pokorny 1959, I: 82: gr. *áella* "Sturm"; cymr. *awel* "Wind, Hauch [= blow]"; acorn. *auhel* "aura"; mir. *ahél*; aisl "Wind, Hauch". For the "horsy" lineage of Aiolos: Kerényi 1980, I: 173; II: 76.

¹⁰ Hes. *Cat.* fr. 9 M-W; *Apd.* I, 7, 3; Diod. IV, 67; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* VII, 204. Cf. Lindsay 1965: 8; Kerényi 1980, II: 76; Grimal 1987, s.v.: 226-228; Biondetti 1997, s.v.: 233.

¹¹ *Od.* X: 2; Ovid. *Met.* XIV: 224; cf. Kerényi 1980, I: 173; Biondetti 1997, s.v. Aiolos: 234.

¹² *Od.* X: 21; *Ap. Rh.* IV, 765; Verg. *Aen.* I: 51-63; Ovid. *Met.* XIV: 224; *Heroid.* XI: 11-15; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* III, 94.

¹³ *LIMC* 1981-1999, I, s.v. Antikleia: Nr. 2; Kerényi 1980, II: 83.

¹⁴ Cf. *supra*, n. 8. For this motif see Brelich 1978: 256; Carpenter 1946: 126; Hurst 2002: 123; Kerényi 1980, II: 82; Lindsay 1965: 371.

of sexual customs practiced in the boreal area (the so-called *hospitable prostitution* or *sexual hospitality*),¹⁵ it was Autolykos himself, the night before the marriage, that offered "sharp-minded Sisyphos" (Hes. *Cat. fr.* 10 M-W) his own daughter as a compliant "bedmate" (*synkatéklinen*),¹⁶ so that with the *guest* she might beget an equally cunning grandson.¹⁷

Disregarding here Robert Eisler's puzzling remark about the incestuous birth of the hero,¹⁸ Odysseus was the son of Antikleia, and grandson of Autolykos on the maternal side. Through his *natural* father Sisyphos he belonged to the progeny of Aiolos (Verg. *Aen.* VI: 529): a genealogical fact that, according to the above-mentioned version of Hyginus, would link his origin to Nordic shamanism. Aiolos – well-known thanks to the Homeric episode of the "bag of winds" (*Od.* X: 19ff), but far less known as the *possible* paternal grandfather of Odysseus – betrays unexpected shamanistic powers that can be related to the ancient "weather magic", practiced from time immemorial in Finland and Lapland.¹⁹ The connection between Aiolos and the control over the winds attributed to the Finnic and Lapp magicians has long been stated by several authors.²⁰ Furthermore, Virgil had already placed his home in a Nordic setting (*Aen.* I: 51-63), rather different from the usual Homeric localization. In fact, in contrast to the *Odyssey* (X: 1-13), Aiolos does not live in a "beautiful palace" (*dōmata kalá*), located on "a floating island surrounded by walls of bronze", but in a wild region violently shaken by furious winds (*Nimborum patria, loca feta furentibus austris*), jailed in dark caves, very similar to the stormy region described by Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* IV, 88), next to the cave where the north wind is born.

Georges Dumézil, on the basis of the manuscript of Närö (one of the main sources on the early religion of the Lapps), has shown the close analogies between *Aiolos*, "the master of the winds" of classical mythology, and *Bieka-Galles*, "the man of the wind" in Lapp [*Sámi*] tradition: an ancient divinity with shamanistic traits, characterized by two implements (an oar and a winnow) curiously echoing Teiresias's prophecy on the death of Odysseus (*Od.* XI: 126-135), who kept the winds imprisoned in the remote cave where he lived.²¹

¹⁵ The custom of admitting the honoured guest to the bed of the daughter or wife was typical of the boreal peoples (Iceland, Lapland, Siberia, etc.): Blefkenius 1607: 34; Bloch 2001: 84; Bosi 1958: 287; Crawley 1902: 249; de Anna 2003; Fago 1981: 249ff; Lubbock 1879: 130-132; Ploss et al. 1935, II: 118; Schrader 1912: 93; Weber 1923: 51; Westermarck 1891: 81.

¹⁶ Schol. in Soph. *Aj.* 190; cf. *Suda s.v.* Sísyphos: "Autolykos entertained him and provided his own daughter Antikleia as his bed-mate"; Schol. in Lyc. 344: *Anticleam, filiam Autolyki, a patre pro furto pecorum oblatam comprimit, et ex ea Ulysem suscipit.*

¹⁷ For Odysseus as *trickster* see now Nortwick 2009: 83-97.

¹⁸ Eisler 1951: 142: "Autolykos seduces Antikleia, the daughter of the superwise Sisyphos [!]"

¹⁹ *Örvar-Odds saga*, X, XII (= Ferrari 2003: 105, 117); Olaus Magnus 1555, III: 16, 119. According to de Anna (1996: 49; 2001: 42), the episode of Aiolos in the *Odyssey* seems to transpose primitive shamanistic beliefs that flourished in the Fennoscandia, and survived in the boreal peoples' customs.

²⁰ Frazer 1984, I: 129; Grimm 1888, IV: 1473; Tasso 1958, II: 270; cf. J.S. Bailly: Letter to Voltaire, 28.4.1768 (= Boitani 2016: 649).

²¹ Dumézil 2001: 38-39; see Verg. *Aen.* I: 52-54; Ovid. *Met.* XIV: 224.

The Angry Grandson of Autolykos

While the *paternal* ancestry of Odysseus does not win unconditional support, his *maternal* grandfather, unanimously attested by the sources, was Autolykos (with the sole exception, as far as I know, of the Byzantine scholar Tzetzes, who indicates him as the *father* of Laertes and the *paternal* grandfather of the hero!).²² Behind Autolykos, one can recognize the transposition of a primordial shaman-hero²³ with lycomorphic traits, who has parallels in the Finnish legends (Pentikäinen 1999: 198). His therionym is a *talking name*, alluding to his lycanthropic nature: in fact, he is "the wolf in person" (*Autó-Lykos*), "the wolf-man", "the werewolf of Parnassus",²⁴ where Homer placed his inaccessible abode surrounded by windy gorges and thick forests (*Od.* XIX: 409ff). Son of Hermes (*Hes. Cat.* fr. 64 M-W; *Apd.* I, 9, 16; *Hyg. Fab.* 200), the psychagogic god connected to the realm of the dead,²⁵ dating back to an extremely primitive civilization (Brellich 1978: 358), Autolykos had inherited shamanic powers from his divine parent: therapeutic magic, the ability to make everything invisible, the art of changing the shape and color of objects and animals as he pleased.²⁶

In the oldest Argonautic saga (of which the *Odyssey* keeps a precise record),²⁷ Autolykos was one of Jason's "helpful companions" (*Apd.* I, 9, 16), equivalent to the animal-spirits of Eurasiatic shamanism. They made up a strange band of therianthropic heroes (Autolykos, the *wolf*; Lynkeus, the *lynx*; Ankaios, the *bear*; Argos, the *bull*, etc.), each of which – like many heroes of Germanic and Russian fairytales²⁸ – was endowed with a wonderful skill (e.g. sharp sight, extraordinary speed, prodigious strength), and in trance could change into the animal whose name or whose typical features he bore.²⁹ In Homer, Autolykos plays a capital role in the *paideía* of Odysseus: it is in a helmet adorned with boar's tusks, stolen from his grandfather in youth, that the hero undertakes night-time expeditions at Troy (*Il.* X: 261ff); it is Autolykos and his sons, the *maternal uncles* of Odysseus, and not his *putative father* Laertes, that – following a pattern which finds correspondence in the Norse sagas³⁰ – deal with the boar hunting and combat skills of the young novice (the use of weapons, wrestling, boxing);³¹ they are the

²² Tzetz. *Chil.* II: 44: *Autólykos, patēr dé tou̐ Laértou, páppos tou̐ Odysseôs dé.*

²³ Lindsay 1965: 370: "Autolykos is a thoroughly shamanist character".

²⁴ Brown 1981: 374; Burkert 1981: 106; Eisler 1951: 142; Ferrari 2002: 39; Hölscher 1991: 63; Kanavou 2015: 90; Kerényi 1980, II: 82.

²⁵ *Od.* XXIV: 1-14. According to Burkert (1962: 44-45) and Ogden (2004: 111), Hermes (*psychagōgós, psychopompós*) was the divine projection of the shamanic role of the *goēs*: he made an ecstatic journey to conduct the soul of a dead man to the underworld with magical lamentation.

²⁶ *Od.* XIX: 455-460; *Hes. Cat.* fr. 67 M-W; *Schol.* in *Lyc.* 344; *Hyg. Fab.* 201; *Ovid. Met.* XI: 313-315; Tzetz. *Chil.* II, 44.

²⁷ *Od.* XII: 70. Cf. Hatto 1980: 130; Lindsay 1965: 202; Meuli 1921, 1935: 168; Page 1983: 44.

²⁸ Grimm 1980, II: No. 71, III: No. 134; Afanas'ev 2014, I: Nos. 145-147; cf. Lindsay 1965: 364-365; TMI F601; AT 301B, 513, 514, 571.

²⁹ *Ap.* Rh. I: 151ff; *Orph. Arg.*: 181; *Val. Flacc.* I: 462; *Hyg. Fab.* 14. Cf. TMI F601.6. *Extraordinary companions are transformed animals*; Brellich 1978: 239; Duichin 2012: 63; Graf 1987: 97-98; Hölscher 1991: 171; Jochelson 1908: 47; Lindsay 1965: 89; Meuli 1921: 9; Thompson 1979: 58-59, 126.

³⁰ *Völsunga saga*, VI-VIII (= Meli 1997, I: 108); cf. Oitana 2005: 262.

³¹ Graf 1987: 97. For Odysseus' skill in wrestling and bare-fisted boxing, according to the Nordic custom (Olaus Magnus 1555: V, 26, 193): *Il.* XXIII: 709ff; *Od.* VIII: 206; XVIII: 90ff;

ones who guide him in his initiatory training amid the wild forests of Parnassus (*Od.* XIX: 428ff), and who treat the wound above his knee by means of a magic ritual (*Od.* XIX: 455-460), unknown in the *Iliad*, but surprisingly similar to the charm employed in the *Kalevala* (VIII: 133ff; IX: 267ff) by a Lapp shaman to heal the wounded knee of Väinämöinen: a ritual that recalls similar practices among North-Eurasian peoples, documented by travelers and ethnologists right up to the modern day.³²

It is from Autolykos that the young Odysseus receives "splendid gifts" (*aglaà dōra*),³³ the actual nature of which (concealed by Homer's silence, but *indirectly* suggested by a parallel in Hesiod, referring to the shaman-hero Periklymenos) can perhaps be seen as a set of "gifts of magic", i.e., extraordinary powers (*dōra pantoî ouk onomastâ*) of a shamanic kind.³⁴ Finally, it is Autolykos that gives his newborn grandson the ambiguous name *Odys(s)eûs* (*Od.* XIX: 403-409), about the meaning of which scholars still wonder. This name, "grammatically obscure" (Kanavou 2015), is known to be at the center of a lasting philological dispute, which an eminent Hellenist like Albin Lesky (1984, I: 70) believed insoluble. In agreement with the most usual etymology, which derives the origin of the name from the verbal form *odýssomai*, in the double sense of "to be wroth against" or "to hate" (LSJ: 1199), I am inclined to accept the first hypothesis, in the active sense of "having become angry at", rather than the passive idea "having incurred the anger of".³⁵ Odysseus would therefore be "the angry one", "the enraged", "der Zürnende": sobriquets that are well suited to the "wolfish" nature inherited from his maternal grandfather Autolykos, and that partly echo his ominous name,³⁶ recalling the ancient Nordic belief that "a man's angry soul could manifest itself to enemies in the shape of a wolf".³⁷

Apd. Epit. 7, 32; *Hyg. Fab.* 126. Cf. Duichin 2012: 70, 74 n.; 2013: 277. Also his extraordinary archery skill (*Od.* VIII: 215ff; XXI: 404ff) can be related to that of the Finns and Lapps, *peritissimi sagittarij*: Saxo 1993 V, 13, 1; Olaus Magnus 1555: IV, 11, 144-145. For the "initiatory" boar hunting of the young Odysseus: Duichin 2012: 57. Behind Autolykos and his sons one can discern an ancient werewolves-brotherhood of Parnassus (Lindsay 1965: 370-371) akin to the *Männerbünde* widespread among Indo-European peoples (Przyluski 1940).

³² "Magic healing" is one of the "three fundamental functions" of the north-Eurasian shaman (Roux 1966: 220; cf. Eliade 1964: 215). Similar practices, attested also in Norse sources (*Völsunga saga*, VIII = Meli 1997, I: 109-110), were recorded by the Italian traveler Francesco Negri (1700: 43-44) among the Lapps, and by the Finnish ethnologist Mathias Alexander Castrén (Marazzi 1984: 550) among the Samoyeds of western Siberia.

³³ *Od.* XIX: 413, 460.

³⁴ *Hes. Cat. fr.* 33a M-W. Shamanic powers as "gifts": de Anna 2001: 47; Pentikäinen 2007b: 33.

³⁵ Cf. Cesareo 1898: 80; Düntzer 1874: 105-106; Ferrari 2002: 39; George-Kokkinaki 2008: 145-146; Hölscher 1991: 62; Stanford 1952.

³⁶ Brelich 1978: 256; Kanavou 2015: 90ff; Stanford 1954: 8ff. According to Carpenter (1946: 131), if the name was originally something like *Olixes/Olykios*, "then Aut-olykos bestowed at least part of his name on his grandson".

³⁷ *Örvar Odds saga*, V (= Ferrari 2003: 84); *lýssa* as "the wolves' rage": Lincoln 1975; cf. Guidorizzi 2010: 137. Some philologists have derived the form *Ulixes* from *luk-* "a wolf" (Stanford 1954: 248 n.); see also the variant *Olys(s)eûs* [from *lýssa?*].

Arkeisios, Odysseus, and the Nordic Motif of the Bear's Son

If Odysseus' patrilineal descent from the "cursed offspring of Sisyphos"³⁸ is related to a boreal shamanistic milieu, though accepting the more usual Laertian genealogy (*Od.* XVI: 118-119; XXIV: 270), there emerges in any case a Nordic background. Laertes was in fact the son of Arkeisios (*Od.* XVI: 118): the "bear", or, to be exact, the "bear's offspring" (*árkeios* = *árkteios*, *of a bear*, LSJ: 241). According to the tradition that was ascribed to Aristotle's authority (*Constitution of the Ithacans*, now lost; cf. *Etym. M.* 144, 22-32, s.v. *Arkeísios*; Eustath. *ad Hom. Il.* II, 632), Arkeisios was born from the intercourse of Kephalos with a young she-bear.³⁹ Yet again, the ancestry of Odysseus takes us to a boreal substratum, reinforced by the polysemy of the grandfather's therionym "Arkeisios", the root of which has a twofold meaning: "bear" (*árktos*), and "north wind" (*pnoē árkeios*: Aesch. fr. 127 Nauck = *a northern blast*, LSJ: 241).

The descent from Arkeisios would liken Odysseus to the Nordic hero Bēowulf ("Bear's Son"), and to the *berserkr* ("bear-coats") of Norse poems.⁴⁰ With all of these, he shares some typically ursine features:⁴¹ (a) the iron grip in wrestling, and (b) the lethargic sleep,⁴² which, according to an Etruscan tradition preserved in Plutarch (*Mor.* 27 E), earned him in old age the singular epithet *hypnōdous* ("sleepy", "somnolent").⁴³ Think, for instance, of the wrestling skill proudly claimed by Odysseus during the Phaeacian games (*Od.* VIII: 206), and which he displays both at the funeral contests in honor of Patroklos (*Il.* XXXIII: 709ff) and during the fight with the beggar Iros at the palace of Ithaca (*Od.* XVIII: 1ff; *Apd. Epit.* 7, 32; *Hyg. Fab.* 126):⁴⁴ probably, the outcome of the training received from his grandfather Autolykos, a real master of martial arts, who had even taught Heracles to wrestle (*Apd.* II, 4, 9; Herodor. *FGrH*, 31 F 14, 17). Furthermore, think of the Odysseus' cataleptic sleep in Phaeacia (the fabled equivalent of the "world of the dead"),⁴⁵ so similar to that which grips Bēowulf on

³⁸ Soph. *Aj.* 189; Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 524; Lyc. *Alex.* 344, 1030; Ovid. *Met.* XIII: 31-32.

³⁹ Stanford 1954: 248 n.; Carpenter 1946, 128: "the Parnassian trails were empty of human beings and the first female which Kephalos encountered was a she-bear. The child of this mating was Arkeisios, the Bearson, and he was the grandfather of Odysseus". For a similar story: *Das Bärenkind* (= Hahn 1918, II: Nos. 75, 86-88).

⁴⁰ Panzer 1910, I; Stitt 1992; cf. Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874, s.v.: 61; Funk and Wagnalls 1984, s.vv.: 127, 137; Lord 1965.

⁴¹ Baldick 2000: 164; Carpenter 1946: 136; Hatto 1980: 123; Lindsay 1965: 369-370. Homer carefully ignores the ursine aspect of Odysseus' family.

⁴² Carpenter 1946: 142; Hatto 1980: 123.

⁴³ Baldick 2000: 165; Carpenter 1946: 130; Thornton 1970: 134 n. According to Agathe Thornton, "The Etruscan tradition suggests that the sleeping of Odysseus was something outside the ordinary". Cf. the "somnolent" *berserkr* *Kveldúlfr* ("Wolf of the Evening"): Dumézil 1970: 142-143.

⁴⁴ In Homer, Odysseus defeats Iros in a bare-fisted boxing match (*Od.* XIX: 90ff); Apollodorus (*Epit.* 7, 32) and Hyginus (*Fab.* 126) replace boxing with wrestling.

⁴⁵ George-Kokkinaki 2008: 154; Hölscher 1991: 101; Sargent 2002; Thornton 1970: 138 n.; Whittaker 1999; cf. Meuli 1935: 168: "Phäaken [sind] ursprünglich Geschöpfe einer andern Welt". According to Carpenter (1946: 150), "The whole Phaiakian episode may be a surviving representative of Bearson's visit to the underworld". The profound sleep that seizes Odysseus on the Phaeacians' land appears as a fairy-tale motif in the Nordic tradition (Grimm 1980, II:

his return from Grendel's ultramundane realm (*Beowulf* XXV: 1792ff), or to that which, in the *Kalevala* (XVI: 119ff), seizes the shaman-hero Väinämöinen after his entry into the depths of Tuonela, the Finnish netherworld.⁴⁶

The presence of an ursine ancestor in Odysseus' kin (*Od.* XIV: 182) has suggested some intriguing interpretations.⁴⁷ The bear, being a totemic animal, plays a central role in the shamanistic cults and rites of northern Eurasia, especially among Siberian, Lapp and Scandinavian peoples (Basilov 1998: 51; Black 1998; Frazer 1984, II: 784; Funk and Wagnalls 1984, s.v. Bear: 124; Hallowell 1926; Pentikäinen 2007a: 24). This role often implies scabrous erotic overtones, increased by Nordic beliefs in the extraordinary sexual vigor of bears and their irresistible attraction to human females (Pentikäinen 2007a: 118-120; cf. Black 1998; Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1986, II, s.v. Orso [Bear]: 169-170; Chiesa Isnardi 1991: 578; Duichin 1996: 30; Harva 1959: 288). The embrace between a bear and a maiden – sporadically attested, as an aberration, in Greek mythology⁴⁸ and in Balkan folklore⁴⁹ – occurs frequently in the Norse and Finno-Ugric traditions,⁵⁰ which record ancient tales featuring a common motif: a girl meets a bear in the forest, is taken to his cave, and remains there to bring forth a son to him (Carpenter 1946: 139).

This motif figures in Saxo Grammaticus (X: 512-513) and Olaus Magnus (XVIII: 30, 627-628), and is widespread in the legends of the Ainu (Frazer 1984, II: 785-786), in the Russian folktales (Haney 2015: 65), in the mythology of Siberia⁵¹ and of Lapland (Turi 1991: 112-113), where the intercourse of a bear with a young woman often appears as the *necessary* condition for transmitting shamanic powers.⁵² Indeed, it is an early Lapp belief that some shamans (*noa'idi*) are marked from birth by an odd anomaly: "a bear's paw" (Turi 1991: 113), i.e., a magic sign of their twofold nature, crossing between anthropomorphism and theriomorphism. The equivalent of this belief is also found in Caucasian tales, influenced by ancient Scythian shamanism, like the ones about the hero *Bear's Ear*, born of a bear and the daughter of the Avars' king,⁵³ or about the Georgian hero *Amirani*, marked by a mysterious "wolf's knee".⁵⁴

No. 97); it refers to the cataleptic trance that precedes the shaman's journey into the otherworld (Grambo 1973: 417).

⁴⁶ The Finnish expressions *Tuonella käydä*, *Tuonelassa vaelttaa*, ("to go into Tuoni", "to wander in Tuonela") refer to "journeying to Tuonela", i.e., "fall into a trance", "falling into ecstasy": Pentikäinen 1999: 179; Siikala 1999: 223.

⁴⁷ Funk and Wagnalls 1984, s.v. Odysseus, 813: "Odysseus himself, it has been suggested, is a Bear's Son"; cf. Carpenter 1964: 136-156.

⁴⁸ See the stories of Polyphonte (Ant. Lib. *Met.* 21) and Egesta (Serv. *ad Verg. Aen.* I, 550); cf. Duichin 1996: 61.

⁴⁹ Hahn 1918, II: *Das Bärenkind. Anmerkungen*, 486-487; Lindsay 1965: 369-370.

⁵⁰ Black 1998, 344: "Hence the multitude of stories found throughout the area where bear beliefs persist of bears inciting women to join them as lovers or wives".

⁵¹ Borneman 1988, s.v. Zoofilia [Zoophilia]: 905; cf. Baldick 2000, 134: "in [Siberian] folklore bears have intercourse with women". For the "copulation of a human female with a bear", sometimes "in a dream", see Black 1998: 345.

⁵² Pentikäinen 2007a: 119: "The coupling of bear with human is a central theme of Sámi myth, and moreover a foundation of Sámi shaman's power: they are a bear or at least of the bear's race".

⁵³ Funk and Wagnalls 1984, s.v.: 127; Hartland 1896, III: 24. In the area of distribution of bear cults, "the birth of a son is *prima facie* evidence of sexual copulation between a human female

Therianthropy: Wolves, Bears, Shamans, and Limping Heroes

Like many Greek (Oedipus, Melampous, Philoctetes, Achilles et al.), and Nordic (e.g. Hadingus) characters,⁵⁵ Odysseus too belongs to the number of so-called "limping heroes": a group of figures in whom a wound to the knee, the foot, the shin-bone, the heel, the thigh, or – more generally – a defect in the lower limbs, is often accompanied by shamanic powers and therianthropic traits (Duichin 1992; 2013: 281). The "shamanistic" link between therianthropy and crural defects recurs both in the Finnish hero *Väinämöinen* and in the Russian hero *Igor'*. *Väinämöinen*, affected like Odysseus by a youthful wound to the knee (*Kalevala* VIII: 158-159), was able to take the shape of an otter and a snake (*Kalevala* XVI: 119ff); *Igor'*, endowed with metamorphic powers (*Slovo o pŭlku Igorevĕ*: 188-191 = Saronne 1988: 154), could transform himself into an ermine, a hawk, and – above all – into a "barefoot wolf" (*bosy vŭlkŭ*) (Saronne 1988: 155): a rare specimen which, unlike ordinary wolves, had a "white paw", presumably, the atavistic relic of a bloody maiming.⁵⁶

The seminal researches of Carlo Ginzburg (1989: 206ff) have showed the thousand-year-old link that, across a wide area of the Eurasian continent, covertly connects the crural anomaly to shamanism and lycanthropy. At times, the bloody mutilation is symbolically replaced by theriomorphic throwbacks (a bear's paw, a wolf's knee, etc.), or by identifying brands that are milder and less bloody (a scar, a tattoo, a birthmark, etc.). In any case, it is an *indelible* stigma, which reveals the hidden *therioanthropic* nature of certain individuals: according to a very archaic belief, if a lycanthrope's paw was cut off, he immediately reacquired a human shape,⁵⁷ but the mutilation remained on his body for the rest of his life.⁵⁸

In the 5th century B.C., Herodotus gave a strange information about the *Neuri*, a Scythian tribe described as a people of *gōētes* (i.e. "shamans", according to the *interpretatio graeca* by Burkert 1962: 36), whose members periodically changed into wolves (Hdt. IV, 105; cf. Mel. II, 1, 14-15; Solin. XV, 2). Some centuries later, Tacitus (*Germ.* 46, 4) would incredulously mention the *Oxiones*, a Finnish tribe whose members were said to have a "human face but beastly body and limbs" (*ora hominum vultusque, corpora atque artus ferarum*). Tacitus relegated this belief to the many fabulous rumors about the peoples from the far north. On the

and a bear" (Black 1998: 345); but "Very exceptionally the child is born of a she-bear and begotten by a man" (Carpenter 1946: 139; cf. Panzer 1910, I).

⁵⁴ Charachidzé 1988: 41-42; cf. Duichin 2012: 57-58. See also the Thracian *lykopedes* ("wolves-foot"): this "unexplained word is a counterpart to the Westphalian word *Büksenwolf* for the werewolf" (Eisler 1951: 151n.).

⁵⁵ Saxo Grammaticus 1993 I, VIII, 4 and 13; Olaus Magnus 1555, III: 15, 117-118; cf. Dumézil 2001: 37. For some shamanistic implications of Hadingus' limp and Odysseus' wounded knee: Duichin 2013: 281; Eliade 1964: 383; Galloni 2008-2009: 107; Ginzburg 1989: 249, 274 n.

⁵⁶ Saronne 1988: 236 n.; cf. Duichin 2013: 282. See the ancient Swedish epithet *guldfot* ("golden foot"), having the value of a taboo-word for "wolf" (Oitana 2005: 266); similarly, in Finnish tradition the epithet *Mesikäpälä* ("honey paw") is a taboo-word for "bear" (Pentikäinen 2007a: 99).

⁵⁷ Petron. *Satyr.*, 62; Gervasius von Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, CXX, 51. Cf. Duichin 2012: 64-65 (Odysseus); Ginzburg 1989: 229.

⁵⁸ Summers 1933: 206: *si quid eos laedat, penetrent si vulnera quaeque, vere in corporibus semper cernuntur eorum*. Cf. Lecouteux 2005: 19-20; Thompson 1979: 363; TMI D702.1.1.

unclear identity of the *Oxiones* scholars were long divided, and several misleading interpretations have been given of their ethnonym (cf. de Anna 1988: 55). Tuomo Pekkanen (1983) and Juha Pentikäinen (2007a) had the merit of showing that "Oxiones" is a self-referential name, deriving from the Finnish *oksi*: one of the most archaic words (cognate with the Livonian *okš*, and still used in Finland as one of the alternative terms other than the more common *karhu*) used by proto-Finnic peoples to call the *bear*. The mysterious *Oxiones* were, in few words, simply the clan of the "Bears", once living between Finland and Russian Karelia (Pekkanen 1983: 50). The passage from Tacitus records a confused memory of shamanistic rites practiced of old by Finns and Lapps, and surviving until recent times among some ethnic groups in Siberia (Pentikäinen 2007a: 23). So, the fabulous *Oxiones* of semi-beastly appearance had their roots in ancient ecstatic rituals, during which, wrapped in bearskins,⁵⁹ the clan members were magically "transformed" into the totemic animal whose name they bore.⁶⁰ Both in Herodotus and in Tacitus, individuals belonging to ancient peoples living in northern Eurasia were credited with the power to periodically assume, in a state of trance, the shape of *wolves* and *bears*: the same animals that the classical mythology regarded as the ancestors of Odysseus, personifying them in two therianthrope heroes (*Autolykos* and *Arkeisios*).

The reports by the ancient historians helped to increase for centuries the most varied legends about the "lycanthropy" of boreal peoples, without their shamanistic implications being understood. The discovery (or rather, the "rediscovery") of Nordic shamanism by Western culture dates back to a relatively recent age, between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries (Bremmer 2002: 27-28; Flaherty 1992; Ginzburg 2006; Roux 1961). It was in those years, for instance, that the Italian traveler Francesco Negri, the first one to reach the North Cape, described the Lapps' alleged ability to change into *bears* and *wolves*, interpreting this "natural affliction called *Lycanthropy* by physicians" as a type of "temporary madness" (*pazzia temporanea*) (Negri 1700: 44).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Norwegian scholar Just K. Qvigstad published a strange account about the *Skolt Sámi*, a Lapp tribe with shamanistic customs, living in northern Finland: the young males, according to local informers, could transform themselves at will into *bears* and *wolves* (Qvigstad 1927, III/1: 403-407). The unusual fact was the singular behavior of the clan, when faced with a such metamorphosis: instead of causing fear or shock, it was viewed favorably by the parents of the pretended "lycanthropes", who thought it better for their children to run around as wild beasts than to be recruited as soldiers in the service of the king of Sweden.⁶¹ Now, it is quite reasonable to suppose that in order to

⁵⁹ Eliade 1964: 459: "For primitive man, donning the skin of an animal was becoming that animal, feeling himself transformed into an animal".

⁶⁰ de Anna 1988: 57-58; Pentikäinen 1999: 198; cf. Dasent 1903, CXVII: "Finn and Lapps, who from time immemorial have passed for the most skilful witches and wizards in the world, can at will assume the shape of bears". Similar practices among the Nenets (Samoyeds) of Siberia: Basilov 1998: 33.

⁶¹ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Lapp soldiers were employed in the service of the Swedish army; Lapps were particularly feared by the enemy since they were believed to have extraordinary powers connected to their fame as sorcerers: de Anna 1996: 62-63; Pentikäinen 2007a: 43-44.

escape from military conscription, the young males simulated (as Negri had already guessed) a *temporary madness*, during which, in a trance-like state, they imitated the behavior and the cries of *bears* and *wolves*, their totemic animals: not by chance, the *Skolt Sámi* were regarded by the surrounding tribes as "a cunning people" (Qvigstad 1927, III/1: 407; Pentikäinen 2007a: 110).

These primitive beliefs may arouse a smile, but it must be remembered that also the cunning Odysseus, "master of every trick" (*Od.* IX: 19-20), descended on the maternal side from a lycanthropic ancestor (Eisler 1951: 142), and on the paternal side from an ursine kin (Carpenter 1946: 127; Lindsay 1965: 369-370), resorts to a similar trick, feigning momentary madness "in order to avoid conscription" (Hurst 2002: 123; Stanford 1954: 82). The story was known to Homer, who however makes only a cursory reference to it (*Od.* XXIV: 115-119). Fleetingly echoed by later sources (Schol. in *Lyc.* 818; *Apd. Epit.* 3, 6-7; *Ovid. Met.* XIII: 57), and described in more detail by Hyginus (*Fab.* 95), the hero's madness was the leitmotif of the *Odysseús mainómenos*, a lost tragedy by Sophocles "about his attempt to avoid fighting at Troy by pretending to be insane" (Thorburn 2005: 374). Unfortunately, precious clues to the symptomatology of Odysseus' insanity have been lost forever. However – thanks to the tidings about the "lycanthropic" behavior of many Greek heroes (Orestes, Heracles, Ajax, Dolon), who, in the grip of delirium, "changed their shape" and "bellowed like bulls, and howled like dogs", or assumed a lycomorphic semblance to escape their enemies⁶² – we can reasonably image the *modus operandi* of the cunning Odysseus, inherited from his natural father Sisyphos (the *trickster*), and from his grandfathers Arkeisios (the *bear*) and Autolykos (the *wolf*).⁶³

So, it is no coincidence that some modern scholars have recognized in Odysseus (Burkert 1981: 106), Dolon (Gernet 1981: 125), and Orestes (Devereux 1978: 62), the disguised traits of the "werewolf". Moreover, physicians in late-Antiquity (Galenus, Oribasius, Aetius, Marcellus of Side) had a good knowledge of a psychotic syndrome called *kynánthrōpos nōsos*, *kynanthropía*, *lykanthropía*, *furor lupinus*, *morbus lupinus*, and *insania lupina*, which made some men temporarily similar to wolves and rabid dogs (Buxton 1987; Eisler 1951; Roscher 1896); to the *momentary* symptoms manifested during periodic crises, Galenus (*De atra bile*, 3) added the presence of a *permanent* anomaly characterizing the so-called *lycanthropes*, mysteriously afflicted by incurable wounds to the legs (*tibias exulceratas insanabiles*).

Shamanistic Metamorphoses and Ecstatic Combats

In the Greek mythology, "shamanistic" figures like Proteus and Periklymenos, but also the Telchines (spiteful sorcerers and *góētes*), similar to the goblins and kobolds of Nordic legends (Rose 1964: 167), can assume the most varied of forms:

⁶² *Eur. Iph. Taur.* 281-295; *Herc. fur.* 867-869; *Soph. Aj.* 317-322; *Ps-Eur. Rh.* 208-215 (cf. *Il.* X: 334). For the Orestes' crisis as a form of lycanthropy "of a specifically Greek type": Devereux 1978: 62; it shows a striking similarity both to the delirium of Heracles (Guidorizzi 2010: 165-166) and to the shamanic trance of the Finnish *tietäjä* (Siikala 2007: 107-113).

⁶³ Some ancient northern peoples (e.g. the Celts) believed that "Lycanthropy ran in families" (Eisler 1951: 138).

lion, boar, panther, bull, snake, eagle, and even bee, fly or ant,⁶⁴ the very same animals and insects into which the Finnish and Russian epic heroes are transformed in trance, when they need to escape from danger, enter inaccessible places, or fight threatening opponents.⁶⁵

The ecstatic combat between two theriomorphic shamans is an extremely archaic motif, shared by Finno-Ugric and Palaeoasiatic peoples in the boreal regions, whose origins are believed to date as far back as the Neolithic age (Diószegi 1952; Tolley 1994). During the ecstatic trance that accompanies the fight, the soul of the Nordic shaman usually takes the form of a reindeer (or at times of an elk, a seal or a whale), but it is not unusual to find metamorphoses into wild beasts (bear, wolf, boar), and birds of prey (eagle, hawk, horn owl) (Athanasakis 2002: 52; Diószegi 1952; Eliade 1964: 89; MacCulloch 1905: 161; Pentikäinen 1999: 197-198; Siikala 2007: 137ff; Waida 1983: 232ff). The Russian oral poems (*Byliny*), deeply influenced by Siberian shamanism, retain many traces of lycomorphic and ornithomorphic transformations, often together (Saronne and Danil'čenko 1997). In the *bylina* of Vol'ga, for instance, the hero can assume many shapes, including that of a "wolf" [171] and a "horn owl" [75]; in another ancient *bylina*, Volch changes into "grey wolf" [47], and into "flashing hawk" that "flies afar on the azure sea, destroying geese and white swans" [80-82]. In the *Poem of Igor*, Bojan changes into a "grey wolf on land and ash-colored eagle under the clouds", launching "ten hawks on a flock of swans" [3-4]; prince Vseslav "runs the night in the form of a wolf" [155-159], and the *bogatyr* Igor, besides changing into a "barefoot wolf", flies "under the haze in the shape of a hawk, killing geese and swans" [189-190]. Similarly, in the Finnish shamanistic runes, Väinämöinen too destroys "a flock of swans and a gaggle of geese" (*Kalevala* XVI: 132-133); the shaman-hero Lemminkäinen "travels to Pohjola in the form of a wolf" (*Lemminkäinen's Rune* = Pentikäinen 1999: 199), and, in order to get his bride, he must shoot "the swan of Tuoni raising a single arrow" (*Kalevala* XIV: 373-382).

The shamanistic motif of combat in the form of birds of prey is not only confined to the Finnish and Russian epics, but also appears in the Icelandic (Ellis 1968: 126, Siikala 2007: 139) and Celtic sagas (Agrati and Magini 1982: 110-112). Furthermore, it is not unknown to classical mythology, where the hero Periklymenos, to whom Poseidon granted the shamanic power to change during combat into whatever he wanted, is oftentimes depicted as an eagle.⁶⁶ In the version of his death handed down by Ovid (*Met.* XII: 560-561), it is in the shape of an eagle that Periklymenos engages in a fatal duel with Heracles, behind which there emerge semi-cancelled relics of an ecstatic fight between shamans.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Proteus*: *Od.* IV: 349ff; *Diod.* I, 62; *Nonn. Dionys.* I: 14ff; *Ovid. Met.* VIII: 731ff; *Verg. Georg.* IV: 406; *Tzetz. Chil.* II, 12; Athanasakis 2002. *Periklymenos*: *Hes. Cat. fr.* 33b, 43 M-W; *Apd.* I, 9, 9; II, 7, 3; *Ap. Rh.* I: 156-160 and schol. 156; *Ovid. Met.* XII: 556ff; *Schol. in Od.* XI, 289; *Eustath. ad Hom. Od.* XI, 285; Duichin 2013: 288. *Telchines*: *Diod.* V, 55; Grimal 1987, s.v.: 640; Lindsay 1965: 195.

⁶⁵ *Kalevala* XVI: 189ff; Pentikäinen 1999: 206; Saronne 1988: 59, 145, 155; Saronne and Danil'čenko 1997: 107, 113, 121-125.

⁶⁶ *Hes. Cat.* 15, fr. 33b M-W; *Ovid. Met.* XII: 556ff; *Hyg. Fab.* 10.

⁶⁷ Burkert 1979: 86. According to other versions (*Eustath. ad Hom. Od.* XII, 285; *Schol. in Il.* II, 236; *Apd.* I, 9, 9), Periklymenos is killed after taking the form of a *fly* or a *bee*. See also the

Conclusion

Dreaming of an eagle is a typical experience in Finno-Ugric shamanism, in which this totemic bird often constitutes the chosen form that the shaman takes during a trance to fight opponents in the semblance of geese or swans (Corradi Musi 2004: 61; Eliade 1964: 71; Roux 1990: 169). A striking parallel recurs in the *Odyssey* (XIX: 535ff), where Odysseus appears in a dream to Penelope in the shape of an eagle (*aietòs órnis*) exterminating a gaggle of geese. It is a "shamanic" dream, symbolizing the demise of the Suitors, the hero's arrogant enemies destined to fall under the arrows of his infallible bow (Mastromattei 1988), already foreseen by Teiresias (*Od.* XI: 115ff). It is worth summing up: swooping down from a mountain, a majestic eagle breaks the necks of twenty geese that are pecking at wheat at Penelope's home, killing them all;⁶⁸ then, the eagle soared off into the sky, and he came back again, perching on the roof of the palace; from there, he speaks to Penelope with a human voice, revealing his *secret* identity and, at the same time, the *latent* content of the dream: "Before I was an eagle, / and now again come back as thy husband, / and to all the suitors I will bring a shameful death" (*Od.* XIX: 548-550).

Now, in the light of similar episodes that have many Nordic heroes as protagonists, the strange aquiline metamorphosis of Odysseus discloses an unexpected meaning (often neglected or misunderstood by scholars),⁶⁹ which seems to retain traces of a shared shamanistic substratum, strengthening the hypothesis of a hidden link between the Homeric *Odyssey* and the ancient epics of northern Eurasia.

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mortal combat between Heracles, the shamanic "Master of animals" (Burkert 1979), and Kyknos ("the Swan"): Hes. *Scut.* 57ff; Plut. *Tes.* 11; Apd. II, 7, 7; Hyg. *Fab.* 31.

⁶⁸ For a Lapp parallel: Siikala 2007: 135. Curiously, also the Celtic hero Cú Chulainn, endowed with shamanic powers, kills a flock of *twenty* swans (Agrati and Magini 1982: 28).

⁶⁹ Harsh 1950; Hölscher 1991: 274; *RE* 1894-1980, Suppl. VII, s.v. Odyssee [von der Mühl]: 750; Rozokoki 2001; Schwartz 1924: 110; Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1927: 87; Woodhouse 1930: 88; see now Duichin 2013: 289-290. Among the few who sensed the hidden shamanistic connotation of the episode, cf. Weicker (1902: 22), according to whom the eagle was the soul of Odysseus which "mysteriously left his body during the spirits' hour".

⁷⁰ For the sake of brevity, the bibliographic references do not include, except for the Homeric poems (*Iliad* [1951], *Odyssey* [1968]), the Greek and Latin sources, quoted in the text according to the usual standard abbreviations.

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