

Leukothea's Veil and the Monstrosity of Odysseus

This paper will demonstrate how the salvation of Odysseus by his use of Ino-Leukothea's veil and his subsequent meeting with Nausikaa (*Odyssey* 5 & 6) is an episode which describes a moment wherein Odysseus has been driven so far by the necessities of his return voyage that his own actions might completely derail that very journey. Odysseus' use of the magic veil saves him from Poseidon's wrath; with that very action, however, the hero destabilizes nearly every dimension of his identity, straddling the realms of male and female; mortal and divine; man and beast; human and monster. When Odysseus accepts Ino-Leukothea's offer of help, he embraces complete liminality, essentially becoming an unkillable sea-creature.

Further, I will show how the destabilization of Odysseus' heroic, civilized identity by his use of the veil and his disturbing experiences at sea render the civilized realm of the Phaiakians unintelligible to him, and that he arrives on their island as a monster rather than a man. *Odyssey* 6.119-138 reveals both Odysseus' distressing state and the real danger he presents to Nausikaa and her companions through clear lexical and thematic allusions to the both the cultural confusion and cannibalistic carnage of the Cyclops Polyphemus in *Odyssey* 9.252-259 & 9.287-293.¹ This potentially violent and tragic outcome to his tale is avoided only by Nausikaa's bravery, his own wiliness, and, presumably, the will of the gods. Thus, Odysseus' reintegration into civilized human society is immediately preceded by the point where he is furthest from it.

In making this argument I will focus on lexical and thematic commonalities within the text of the *Odyssey* which reveal a dialogue on monstrosity and the blurring of sartorial boundaries internal to the narrative of the poem. I will also address and incorporate recent scholarship on the relevant passages and consider my subject in light of previous scholarly approaches towards the topic of liminality in the *Odyssey*.

¹ Interestingly, both Odysseus and Polyphemus are referred to as a "hill-born lion," λέων ὄρεσίτροφος, in similes, a connection which I will focus on in my argument.

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