



PROJECT MUSE®

και φτερά: Ο μύθος της Οδύσσειας
στη λογοτεχνία και στον
κινηματογράφο του μοντερνισμού
by Maria Oikonomou (review)

Victoria A. Reuter

Journal of Modern Greek Studies, Volume 36, Number 1, May 2018, pp. 220-223
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2018.0012>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/691833>

Maria Oikonomou (Μαρία Οικονόμου), *Κουπιά και φτερά: Ο μύθος της Οδύσσειας στη λογοτεχνία και στον κινηματογράφο του μοντερνισμού* [Oars and wings: The myth of the Odyssey in the literature and cinema of modernism]. Athens: Nefeli. 2016. Pp. 352. Paper €21.50.

I spurred my comrades with this brief address
to meet the journey with such eagerness
that I could hardly, then, have held them back;

and having turned our stern toward morning, we
made wings out of our oars in a wild flight
—Dante, *Inferno*, 26: 121–125 (Mandelbaum 1980)

In Maria Oikonomou's *Κουπιά και φτερά*, oars and wings are more than a titular reference to Dante's Ulysses; they are the central metonymic devices from which her study springs. Oars suggest the modern reader's attempt to navigate the protean slipperiness of myth and its meanings, while wings mark the lines of flight from early versions of the *Odyssey*. Using postmodern theories of intertextuality and semiotics, Oikonomou's book is one of few works that aims to influence the way we study the reception of classics. Indebted to Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, her rhizomatic approach structures the book into two definable segments: genealogies of Odyssean myth and their modernist remakings. Oikonomou's theoretical and methodological approaches will challenge the reader; yet scholars of myth, modernism, and postmodern theory will find it multifaceted and stimulating.

The first section begins with the prelude "Oars & Wings," which broadly defines modernism as an exercise in freedom, a breaking away from contemporary and past realities. The following 50 pages meticulously survey definitions of myth by Niklas Luhmann, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Hans Blumenberg, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, among others, while the latter half follows distinct genealogies of the Odysseus myth. «Το οδυσειακό μυθικό πεδίο» (The field of Odyssey mythology) maps out the myth's many incarnations in eight sub-chapters from «Εικόνα πρώτη: Ανθομηρική και αντι-οδυσειακή» (Image one: Anti-Homeric and anti-Odyssean) to «Εικόνα όγδοη: Η σχολή του Δάντε (και η αγωνία της επιδρασης)» (Image eight: The Dante school [and the anxiety of influence]). With incredible focus and brevity, Oikonomou covers the immoral Odysseus-as-liar (in the traditions of Ovid, du Bellay, and Goethe), as well as allegorical renderings, including an excellent section on Dante's *φυγόκεντρο*

(centrifugal) Odysseus, which is juxtaposed with the νόστος (homecoming) obsessed hero. The seventh subchapter nods to English translations of the *Odyssey* (Chapman, Pope) and their roles in shaping the hero's iconography as an exemplary, likable champion. Oikonomou also catalogues several instances of theme-clusters in other language traditions, such as Nausicaa in German (Goethe).

The introduction to the book's second section, «Ρήξεις και ανατροπές» (Ruptures and reversals), contextualizes anxieties around the field of reception. It introduces her argument: these modernist renderings of the *Odyssey* myth (James Joyce, Jean-Luc Godard, Stanley Kubrick) create a radical poetics. They do not dismantle or imitate classical myth but redefine modes of expression through the creation of new forms both literary (Joyce) and cinematographic (Godard, Kubrick).

In the first and longest of these three author studies, Oikonomou approaches Joyce's *Ulysses* as a hypertext that sends the reader elsewhere, constantly offering other lines of inquiry. Oikonomou revisits extant theories on Joyce's narrative technique, such as parallax and the subjective, often dissonant narratives of the novel's protagonists (Molly Bloom). She draws the reader's attention to the parallel constructions and dialogues between Joyce's novel and developments in theory (Ferdinand de Saussure and Friedrich Nietzsche), as well as literature and technology (Jacques Derrida and the gramophone). The chapter also offers close readings of particular episodes and symbols in *Ulysses*, devoting sections to Proteus, Aeolus, the Wandering Rocks, the Sirens, and Penelope.

Transitioning from literature to film, Oikonomou argues that—like Joyce's *Ulysses*—Godard's film *Le mépris* (Contempt) severs the umbilical cord between myth and mimesis. For the uninitiated, Oikonomou presents an excellent overview of Godard's place as an innovator of modernist film (including montage, contradiction, interruption, synecdoche) and draws connections to theories and potential modes of interpretation: Derrida (interstitial), Foucault (heterotopia), Mikhail Bakhtin (polyglossia). She argues that Godard makes synecdotal use of myth through multiple series of images and color (reminiscent of Paul Cézanne's *A Modern Olympia* [1873–1874]) to create a visual poetics. The end of the film, the blank screen, is not (only) the blank page, the abyss, but an opening for future stories: (new) moving images, their shadows, and their projections.

Similarly, the third and final author chapter considers Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a film that has long been considered a journey of image

that “penetrates the subconscious of the viewer” poetically and philosophically (Gelmis 1970, 304). Oikonomou provides a synopsis of its significance to modernism, as well as notable 2001 scholarship, including Paul Virilio and Deleuze. Like the previous two chapters, it is an elegant tracing of paths, as Oikonomou parallels Kubrick’s “trajectory of discovery” (Telotte 2006, 50) with the *Odyssey* both metaphorically (the Cyclopean blinding of HAL, the *Nekyia*, and the *Nostos*) and philosophically, drawing connections to Nietzsche and Theodor Adorno.

Using the work of eight writers, the last third of the book explicitly addresses the two central tendencies of the Odyssean mythic revision that the title promises. The first, wings (also read: Sirens), follows reimaginings that examine seduction and silence or what myths and storytellers show and hide. Oars (also read: Elpenor) traces a range of departures and in some cases more fluid journeys through space, time, and the afterlife. Owing much to Pietro Pucci’s *The Song of the Sirens: Essays on Homer* (1970), Oikonomou first examines works by Giovanni Pascoli, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka, and Bertolt Brecht, all of which are antimimetic interactions with myth that explore the metatextual links between authors, narrators, and the act of storytelling. As a counterpart, «Ελήνηορας—Ἡ το φάσμα της μετριότητας» (Elpenor—Or the phantom of mediocrity), revolves around the modernist obsession with the *Nekyia*, the journey to the underworld, and myth’s minor players or forgotten soldiers. Following Georgios Savvidis’s *Μεταμορφώσεις του Ελήνηορα* (*Metamorphoses of Elpenor*, 1980), Oikonomou examines works by Ezra Pound, Jean Giraudoux, Giorgos Seferis, and Takis Sinopoulos, who use parody, anachronism, and even humor to investigate the many dead that still haunt post-Enlightenment civilization, especially war, its ugliness, and its injustice. To borrow Deleuze’s term, Oikonomou’s expositions flesh out each artist’s rendering as a *ligne de fuite* (line of flight) from Homeric myth. Her innovation lies in bringing together a tangle of modern reimaginings and artfully cataloging their overlapping relationships historically and theoretically.

In Sinopoulos’s poem “Elpenor,” the sailor’s ghost inhabits an oppressive landscape:

and not a ripple of water or wing of bird
only a boundless unwrinkled viscous silence.
(Ricks 2007, 239)

The weight of humanity’s worst legacies paralyzes both water and wing. It also reifies the poetry of Oikonomou’s title and the persistence of movement and inquiry. As the poem’s epigraph asks: “Elpenor, how did you get here . . .” (Ricks

2007, 239), we too are still asking how myth has gotten here, as well as why and how it lingers. *Oars and Wings* echoes, replies, and proliferates these questions.

VICTORIA A. REUTER
Gettysburg College

REFERENCES CITED

- Gelmis, Joseph. 1970. *The Film Director as Superstar*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Mandelbaum, Allen, trans. 1980. *Dante Alighieri. The Divine Comedy: Inferno*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Pucci, Pietro. 1998. *The Song of the Sirens: Essays on Homer*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Ricks, David. 2007. "Homer in the Greek Civil War (1946–1949)." In *Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and the Western Canon*, edited by Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood, 230–244. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Savvidis, Georgios P. (Σαββίδης, Γεώργιος Π.) 1980. *Μεταμορφώσεις του Ελπήνορα: Από τον Πάουντ στον Σινόπουλο* [Metamorphoses of Elepenor: From Pound to Sinopoulos]. Athens: Nefeli.
- Telotte, J.P. 2006. "The Gravity of 2001: A Space Odyssey." In *Stanley Kubrick's 2001. A Space Odyssey: New Essays*, edited by Robert Kolker, 43–54. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stavroula Pipyrou, *The Grecanici of Southern Italy: Governance, Violence, and Memory Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2016. Pp. ix + 246. Cloth \$59.95.

There are two small corners in Italy where indigenous Greek-speaking communities survive. One is located inland within the heel of Italy (Apulia), and the other, which is slightly smaller but better known, is found just beneath the toe in Calabria. Among a handful of villages there—a century ago there were as many as 12 but now there are 5 at best—live people known as the Grecanici, who still speak a local Greek dialect (Grecanica) and regard it as their mother tongue. As with their counterparts in Apulia, the people of the southern Aspromonte area appear to be a remnant of what centuries ago was a much larger Greek-speaking presence in Southern Italy.

In *The Grecanici of Southern Italy: Governance, Violence, and Minority Politics*, anthropologist Stavroula Pipyrou offers a painstakingly researched