

## Pope's Homer: The Shadow of Friendship

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AT THE BEGINNING of his poem 'To Mr. Pope', Thomas Parnell admires Pope's skill at combining 'music' and 'affection' in his poems. He says:

To praise, and still with just respect to praise  
A Bard triumphant in immortal bays,  
The Learn'd to show, the Sensible commend,  
Yet still preserve the province of the Friend,  
What life, what vigour, must the lines require?  
What Music tune them, what affection fire?  
—O might thy Genius in my bosom shine!  
Thou shouldst not fail of numbers worthy thine

Pope's translation of Homer, Parnell goes on to say, provides a perfect example of animating friendship; the epic poet has languished 'long unknown, /Like monarchs sparkling on a distant throne', but now Pope's redeeming and befriending language has brought the work to life.<sup>1</sup> I shall suggest in this essay, that Pope's Homer, and in particular his *Odyssey* translation, displays, as Parnell's poem hints, a constant regard for friendship in a variety of contexts, even at moments where Homer's original poem seems to be describing a somewhat different relation. I shall also suggest that Pope's prominent emphasis on friendship, among poets as well as among the characters in Homer, had a precedent in the prose epic of Archbishop Fénelon, *The Adventures of Telemachus*. Further, that Pope's work looks to friendship as a relation which may bridge the dualistic opposition between passion and mind, an opposition which is sometimes said to characterise the Augustan period: in the friendship Pope articulates, tender feeling is given ani-

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<sup>1</sup>'To Mr. Pope', ll. 1–8, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell*, ed. Claude Rawson and F. P. Lock (Newark, London and Toronto, 1989), p. 119.

mation and direction by poetic vision. Again, Pope found a precedent in Fénelon, who was regarded as 'the most amiable philosopher that ever Europe produced', and particularly admired for what William Langhorne described as his 'affluence of imagination'<sup>2</sup>; according to the Chevalier Ramsay, Fénelon treats the reader with friendly candour, and 'lets him into his own Heart'<sup>3</sup>. Pope's characters in his translation of Homer have, like Fénelon's, their own heart and their own mind; they are unsubdued by passion, but capable of a more elevated friendship. I shall also suggest that this regard for wise friendship led Pope, like his epic hero Ulysses, to adopt the goddess Athena as his Mentor, a choice which has broad implications for many of his poems.

Parnell's gesture of friendship towards Pope is answered and extended in Pope's gesture of saving friendship towards Homer; or so Parnell's *Essay on Homer* would suggest. According to Spence, Pope, grudgingly, said of the *Essay*: 'Tis still stiff, and was written much stiffer', but the *Essay* was nonetheless published, after extensive 'correcting' by Pope, and it opens with a sentence which deserves consideration, since it seems to serve as a kind of manifesto for the translation as a whole:

There is something in the Mind of Man, which goes beyond bare curiosity, and even carries us on to a Shadow of Friendship with those great Genius's whom we have known to excell in former Ages.<sup>4</sup>

First of all, then, Pope, with Parnell's help, was doing something new in the *Essay on Homer*, something which is in line with the translation's persistent interest in interpersonal friendship. Translation is always to some extent a collaborative enterprise: the translator must negotiate between his own audience and the ancient original. A crafty translator, however, may use his translation as a means of integrating past, present and future. Such an activity has heroic, even epic, potential; the poet, like the crafty Ulysses, the man of the present, escapes the Cyclops of the past to move into the open seas of the future.

On the other hand, the evident Augustan quality of Pope's trans-

<sup>2</sup>William Langhorne, *The Correspondence of Theodosius and Constantia, from their first acquaintance to the departure of Theodosius* (London, 1765), p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Michael Ramsay, 'Discours de la poesie épique, et de l'excellence du poëme de Télémaque', *Les aventures de Télémaque* ([?] Rotterdam, 1717) quoted from *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses [ . . . ] Done from the new edition just printed at Paris [ . . . ]*, by Mr. Ozell, 3rd ed. 2 vols. (London, 1720), p. xli.

<sup>4</sup>Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on the Life, Writings and Learning of Homer', *Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, ed. Maynard Mack, The Twickenham Edition of the Works of Alexander Pope, Vols. VII-X (London and New York, 1967), VII. 26 and n.

lation may suggest a somewhat guileless translator, wedded to the criteria of his time. Dr. Johnson, however, replied to the well-known objection that Pope's Homer was not Homeric, by saying: 'elegance is surely to be desired if it be not gained at the expense of dignity. A hero would wish to be loved as well as to be revered.'<sup>5</sup> Johnson, that is, defends an Augustan translation by making the wish for love as well as reverence the attribute of a secondary culture. Parnell's *Essay on Homer* makes these two movements — of reverence and of friendship — common to both ancient and modern cultures, and even, simultaneous: the latter a natural consequence of the former.

The combination of reverence and affection is epitomised in the phrase 'shadow of friendship'; the distant genius casts a long shadow over the younger poet, who in turn responds by waiting on the older with a dogged attentiveness. The translator both is, and is drawn into, a 'shadow of friendship'. Both Pope and Homer are shadows: Homer because he is dead, though great; Pope because he is living, but small; and this reciprocal action generates a friendship, one 'compounded' of admiration, respect, affection and, most importantly, the desire for wisdom.

Pope's searching extension of friendship to the Father of Poetry perhaps anticipates, yet does not quite pre-empt, the move to 'desacramentalize' Homer, as Howard Clarke has called it, performed by later critics such as Thomas Blackwell and Robert Wood.<sup>6</sup> It also distinguishes his approach from that of Joseph Addison in his *A Discourse on Ancient and Modern Languages*. There Addison, like Parnell, regrets the distance of ancient writing, and like him uses an image which longingly imagines the possibility of extending human friendship to distant writers, for the ancients

appear to us in the Splendour and Formality of Strangers. We are not intimately enough acquainted with them, and never met with their Expressions but in Print, and that too on a serious Occasion.<sup>7</sup>

Pope's bolder and more intimate approach may also be distinguished from his earlier rival in translation, John Dryden. Pope often protests

<sup>5</sup>Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, World's Classics ed., 2 vols. (Oxford, 1929), II, 336.

<sup>6</sup>Howard Clarke, *Homer's Readers: A Historical Introduction to the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey'* (Newark, NJ, 1981). See Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer* (London, 1767), p. 298 and Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (London, 1735), pp. 301–2.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Addison, *A Discourse on Ancient and Modern Languages* (Dublin, 1739), p. 23.

deficiency before 'that great man'<sup>8</sup> as he calls him, yet his application of the metaphor of friendship to Homer actually contributes something new to a subject Dryden had also considered.

Pope's translation rarely struggles to establish a literary pedigree. Dryden, however, writes in the *Preface to the Fables, Ancient and Modern*, that poets have 'our lineal Descents and Clans, as well as other Families' and he traces his own pedigree, along the 'threads and connexions' of discourse and of thought, through Chaucer and Boccaccio and Spenser. Such a linear, familial understanding of how poetic tradition is founded applies too to poets' creations, so that, for example, 'Dido cannot be denied to be the poetical daughter of Calypso'.<sup>9</sup> The role of poet, like the essential character shared by Dido and Calypso, descends on the worthy heir like a crown. Dryden is, according to this view, at the end of a long line of such worthy figures.

Pope's metaphor of friendship, however, as applied to his own relation to Homer, is both more fluidly animate — poetic relations are always subject to alteration — and also more private. Modestly, it maintains a discreet distance from the original. But, more stridently, it also claims that the acts of reading and writing can acquire living, responsive, human properties, so that the ancient shade may, through the animating vision of the translator, even become a friend.

Now, as Douglas Stewart has observed, there are few instances of real friendship in the *Iliad*. Pope, though, converts other relationships, such as those between Briseis and Patroclus, between Hector and Andromache, and between Glaucus and Sarpedon, into ones which obey all the rules of friendship: the individuals have a high regard for freedom and autonomy; they are mutually responsive; their affection is given distance and dignity by soulful reflection, and they place their relation above the demands of role or of duty. Dryden's Andromache, for example, is primarily a dutiful wife; Pope's, a wisely detached, though affectionate, friend.<sup>10</sup>

The *Odyssey*, however, allowed Pope a freer rein as far as the pursuit of friendship was concerned. The poem is often read as an allegorical expression of the soul's journey to spiritual enlightenment; a recent study, by Jean Houston, *The Hero and the Goddess*, actually describes this journey as a 'crazy friendship' in which divine and human

<sup>8</sup>Pope, *Iliad*, Book 6, l. 462 n, T. E. VII. 349.

<sup>9</sup>John Dryden, *Poems*, ed. by James Kinsley, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1958), IV, pp. 1445–6, 1448.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas J. Stewart, *The Disguised Guest: Rank, Role and Identity in the Odyssey* (Lewisburgh, PA, 1976).

worlds assist each other in their shared voyage of transformation. The impresario of this venture is the goddess Athena, who becomes, in Houston's phrase, Odysseus' Great Friend. Pope was always alert to the rivalrous claims of word and world, of narrative and allegory, and, consequently, he writes a collaborative, if not friendly, translation which puts such a Platonic quest in solidly social terms. In his translation, the self, Ulysses, the 'godlike man', finds a way to divine wisdom through the co-operative exchanges of earthly friendships.<sup>11</sup>

One example of this emphasis on the redeeming power of friendship may be seen in Book 11, which was in fact translated by Fenton, but nonetheless bears the mark of Pope's own vision. Visiting the dead, Ulysses is asked to remember Elpenor. John Ogilby's version, which constituted Pope's first experience of Homer, appeals to domestic loyalty. The dead man begs:

By thy dear Wife, thy Son, and aged Sire<sup>12</sup>

and Cowper's later translation also speaks of family ties:

But now, by those whom thou hast left at home,  
By thy Penelope, and by thy sire  
The gentle nourisher of thy infant growth,  
And by thy only son Telemachus,  
I make my suit to thee.<sup>13</sup>

But Pope / Fenton refers specifically to the 'soft tye and sacred name of friend', and asks 'there call to mind thy poor departed friend'.<sup>14</sup> Friendship, furthermore, takes the place of hierarchical service; Cowper's shade, by contrast, describes himself as 'mariner of thine'.<sup>15</sup>

Friendship, in Pope's translation, is also extended to, and sometimes invoked by, the female temptresses whom Ulysses encounters. So Calypso boasts:

It was my crime to pity, and to save [...]   
Hither this Man of miseries I led,  
Receiv'd the friendless, and the hungry fed;<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Jean Houston, *The Hero and the Goddess* (London, 1992), pp. 300–320.

<sup>12</sup>John Ogilby, *Homer his Odysses translated* (London, 1669), Book 11, l. 62, p. 145.

<sup>13</sup>William Cowper, *The Odyssey of Homer translated into English Blank Verse* (London, 1791), Book 11, ll. 75–9, p. 248.

<sup>14</sup>Pope, *Odyssey*, Book 11, ll. 82, 88, T. E. IX. 385.

<sup>15</sup>Cowper, *Odyssey*, Book 11, l. 92, p. 248.

<sup>16</sup>Pope, *Odyssey*, Book 5, ll. 166, 171–2, T. E. IX. 180.

Calypso also addresses Ulysses actually as a friend, in the following lines:

This shows thee, friend, by old experience taught,  
And learn'd in all the wiles of human thought.  
How prone to doubt, how cautious are the wise?<sup>17</sup>

Book 6, again not initially translated by Pope, but nonetheless bearing his mark, describes Ulysses' arrival on Phaecia, and his meeting with the royal princess, Nausicaa. Many readers have wondered whether there were not romantic potential in this encounter, but Pope made his views on the subject quite clear in a lengthy note. I shall quote it in full, since it clearly illustrates Pope's keenness to play down the role of passion in the life of the man of Ulyssean wisdom:

*Eustathius* and *Dacier* are both of opinion, that *Nausicaa* had conceiv'd a passion for *Ulysses*: I think this passage is an evidence that she rather admir'd and esteem'd, than lov'd him; for it is contrary to the nature of that passion to give directions for the departure of the person below'd, but rather to invent excuses to prolong his stay. 'Tis true *Nausicaa* had wish'd in the foregoing parts of this book, that she might have *Ulysses* for her husband, or such an husband as *Ulysses*, but this only shews that she admir'd his accomplishments, nor could she have added *such a spouse as he*, at all, if her affections had been engag'd and fix'd upon *Ulysses* only. This likewise takes off the objection of a too great fondness in *Nausicaa*; for it might have appear'd too great a fondness to have fall'n in love at the first with an absolute stranger.<sup>18</sup>

It is significant that Pope uses this passage to argue in favour of a form of converse, based on admiration and esteem, which does not depend exclusively on marital, or even extramarital designs, but which is, rather, content to stay as friendship. Though Pope acknowledges the possibility of romantic interest in the first instance, he is eager to chart the progression by which these interests are transformed into a more distanced relation, but one nonetheless which is animated by a mutual regard.

While many interpretations of the poem view Ulysses' adventures as a series of preparations for the final great scene of homecoming, Pope's translation makes the encounter between Ulysses and Athena in Book 13 a cardinal moment, and an archetype for the meetings radiating around it. Pope put this encounter into the 1717 *Miscellany*: this chosen moment is emblematic of the whole poem, and gives a key

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 235–7, p. 182.

<sup>18</sup>Pope, *Odyssey*, Book 6, l. 347 n, T. E. IX. 228–9.

to Pope's understanding of it.<sup>19</sup> A reading which emphasises this central encounter, divides the poem into two halves and enhances its bifocal Janus-like aspect: the first half culminates in the apprehension of wisdom and understanding; the second begins to put that wisdom into practice. The apprehension of wisdom and the experience of enlightenment is, then, the goal of the *Odyssey's* voyage of friendship. It was also Pope's portrayal of this aspect of the poem which many contemporary readers particularly admired.

Parnell was referring to this quality when he said the translation 'reveals the work to light'. Pope reaches the heart of the *Odyssey* and makes its meaning plain. Such contemporary praise is of importance because so many readers have shared the opposite view, most eloquently expressed by Maynard Mack in his introduction to the Twickenham edition of Pope's Homer. Mack writes that:

Homer's directness and simplicity in treating the responses of men and women to each other come figured, in Pope's translation, through a fine silk screen of baroque *sensiblerie*.<sup>20</sup>

The use of the French term suggests that something alien and obfuscating has been placed between original and reader. But the term 'screen' perhaps underestimates the dynamic, responsive nature of Pope's treatment of enlightenment. A remark made by Joseph Spence in connection with *Odyssey* Book 10 in *An Essay on Pope's Odyssey* clarifies Pope's endeavour in this respect:

It is a power almost unknown even to Poetry before, and the Criticks have not as yet found out any Name for it. The extraordinary Beauty I mean, is that *Insight* which the Poet gives his readers into *Circe's Mind*: We look into her Soul, and see the Ideas pass there in a Train. [. . .] Her Mind acts with Tumult and Rapidity, but at the same time with a series and gradual Collection of Truths, at first unknown. Everyone may perceive the Tumult, and the *successive Enlightenings* of her Mind. We are led into a full View of the shifting of her thoughts; and behold the various openings of them in her Soul [. . .] *Circe's* very Thoughts are made visible to us; they are set full in our Eyes, and we see the different degrees, as it were of light, breaking in upon her Soul.<sup>21</sup>

If there is a 'screen' dividing men and women from each other in

<sup>19</sup>Alexander Pope, 'The Episode of Sarpedon, Translated from the *Twelfth* and *Sixteenth* Books of *Homer's Iliads*', *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*, E. Audra and Aubrey Williams, Twickenham Edition, I (London and New Haven, 1961), pp. 447-64.

<sup>20</sup>Maynard Mack, 'Introduction', Pope, *Iliad*, T. E. VII. li.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph Spence, *An Essay on Pope's Odyssey* (London, 1726), pp. 58-9.

Pope's translation, it is a screen, paradoxically, of 'light breaking in upon the soul'. In this respect, Pope follows the lead of Archbishop Fénelon in his moralistic prose epic, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, whose style Pope apparently disparaged, but nonetheless read 'with pleasure'.<sup>22</sup> This work makes the journey to spiritual enlightenment the central interest; further, its focus is divided between the young hero Telemachus and his elderly wise friend, Mentor, in fact the goddess Athena in disguise. It is their friendship, and the wisdom imparted through it, which really interests Fénelon, and, with a further extension of friendly concern, he, I think like Pope, endows female characters such as Calypso, with an inwardness, dignity and intelligence lacking in other treatments of the same theme — for example, in John Hughes's comic opera, *Calypso and Telemachus*.<sup>23</sup> Fénelon's replacement of the single solitary hero with the pair of friends, makes an important point which Pope, I would suggest, absorbed: the pursuit of wisdom (such as the epic hero is engaged in) and the practice of friendship, go hand in hand.

Pope's concern to locate wisdom in social friendship also determines the goddess that he chooses to regard as his Mentor. Francis Thompson, in *Pope: A Renegade Poet* has written: 'if Dryden was the Mars of English Satire, Pope was the Venus'.<sup>24</sup> However, in his minor poem, 'On receiving from the Right Hon. the Lady Frances Shirley a standish and two pens', Pope suggests otherwise:

Yes, I beheld th' Athenian Queen  
Descend in all her sober charms;  
'And take (she said, and smil'd serene)  
'Take at this hand celestial arms . . .'<sup>25</sup>

Pope is concerned, in the translation and in his own poems, to prove himself, like Ulysses, a disciple of Athena, the giver of just, celestial arms, and the bearer of 'sober charms'. There are several reasons why Pope might have found Athena a congenial Muse. One reason is indirectly suggested by Dr. Johnson, who remarked: 'In the Letters both of Swift and Pope there appears such narrowness of mind, as makes them insensible of any excellence that has not some affinity with

<sup>22</sup>Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. James M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1966), I, p. 222.

<sup>23</sup>John Hughes, *Calypso and Telemachus* (London, 1712).

<sup>24</sup>Francis Thompson, *Pope: A Renegade Poet and other Essays* (Boston, 1910), p. 197.

<sup>25</sup>Pope, *Minor Poems*, ed. Norman Ault and John Butt, Twickenham Edition, VI (London and New Haven, 1954; repr. with corrections, 1964), p. 378.



their own'.<sup>26</sup> Johnson here makes the recognition of affinity equivalent to 'narrowness', equivalent, in fact, to the narrowness of self-love. However, for Pope, as for many poets, the recognition of affinity, of likeness between things, is the source of self-knowledge and the means to both charity and wisdom. Athena, not Venus, is the goddess of likenesses, of similarity in difference.

This may be linked to Athena's own history: she is, in fact, not one goddess, but two. One Athena is severe, helmeted, and girdled, with a firm stride and protective shield, the unvanquished virgin warrior, a female goddess who nonetheless seems to uphold 'patriarchal' values. A few examples of this attitude may suffice here: Pomey's *Pantheon*, for example, in 1698 described Minerva as a 'virago in armour' whose stern looks 'threaten violence'. This image fused with the myth of Britannia, as in John Durant Breval's *Henry and Minerva* (1739), a poem which celebrates the birth of classicism in the sixteenth century and attributes it to a happy alliance of Minerva and Henry the Eighth. The myth of the motherless goddess contributed in some seventeenth-century texts to the ungenerous belief that, as Anthony Ross put it, 'women are hinderers, not furtherers of wisdom and learning'.<sup>27</sup>

There is another Athena, however, who lived as an Earth Goddess on the island of Crete, and who protected the rights of her female suppliants. As Jean Houston has suggested in *The Hero and the Goddess*, when the northern Greeks took over the Minoan mother-goddess they necessarily suppressed this matriarchal association, assimilating her instead into the city-based myth of the virgin-daughter. Such an assimilation may be compared with suppression in Marian cults of the revolutionary Mary who spoke the Magnificat.<sup>28</sup>

Athena, therefore, represents a fusion between male and female principles; a fusion which more often bears witness to a process of erasure and appropriation, than to the confident acceptance of divergent ideas and loyalties. However, Athena's patronage of male and female craft ideally gestures towards an image of breadth and open-ended expansiveness; and such a combination appealed, I think, to Pope. In his translations, he goes some way towards reinstating the

<sup>26</sup>Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, II, p. 316.

<sup>27</sup>François Antoine Pomey, *The Pantheon* (London, 1694), p. 108; Anthony Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus or the Muses' Interpreter* (London, 1648), p. 282.

<sup>28</sup>Houston, *Hero and Goddess*, p. 42. See also Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens* (London, 1985).

fluid, animate, multiple, dynamic goddess, in place of the statuesque, spear-brandishing warrior of which Pomey's *Pantheon* and Anthony Ross's *Muses' Interpreter*, speak.

To understand still better why Pope might have been drawn to Athena, the goddess of wisdom, of craft and, Walter Otto has suggested, of friendship too,<sup>29</sup> we need to turn for a moment to two nineteenth-century disciples of Athena, W. E. Gladstone, and John Ruskin. Gladstone's *Studies on Homer* takes pains to point out Athena's unique role among the Greek gods, and in particular the paradoxical relation she represents between purity and worldly action. This paradox returns in Gladstone's discussion of Athena's ambiguous status among the gods: though she never, as he puts it, submits to dishonour, yet she is not 'above condescension to deceit'. Her multiple forms express divine approval of the variety of creation; yet, at the same time, her care for Ulysses is:

a contact so close and intimate, a care so sleepless and so tender, embracing alike the course of events without, and the state of mind within; so affectionate in relation to the person, yet so entirely without the least partiality and caprice; so personal, yet so far from what Holy Scripture calls, with the highest perfection of phrase, respect of persons<sup>30</sup>

Such an image of constant, attentive presence recommended itself to John Ruskin too; in the *Queen of the Air*, he interprets such constant presence as referring to what he calls the 'ruling power of the air' — air which nourishes, strengthens, and is essential to many forms of practical art. This infinitely changeable, yet infinitely constant aspect of Athena, which Gladstone and Ruskin recognised, is also truer to the spirit of Athena in Homer's *Odyssey* than certain commentators, whom I have mentioned, realised.<sup>31</sup> W. J. B. Stanford has written in *The Ulysses Theme* of the poem's evolutionary character: and its evolution, furthermore, is one which is promoted and represented by Athena herself. Stanford also reminds us that Homer's portrayal of the relationship between Athena and Ulysses is unique, since it is neither simply erotic in its nature nor specifically practical in its function. So, as Stanford puts it, 'a special relationship between a divinity and a mortal

<sup>29</sup>Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*, trans. Moses Hadas (London, 1955), p. 54.

<sup>30</sup>W. E. Gladstone, *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1858), II, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup>John Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air* (London, 1869), pp. 56, 69.

needed a special explanation', and that explanation came in Book 13 of the *Odyssey*.<sup>32</sup>

At the core of this book is a single experience: the discovery of affinity amidst apparent difference. Such an experience, too, informs Pope's translation. As usual, Pope uses a pair of characters to point up individual distinctiveness. An aside in the 'Postscript' to the *Odyssey* similarly suggests that we should read it for 'its own nature and design' and not with 'an eye to the Iliad'; Pope habitually 'brings things into pairs', then directs one's attention to the distinctive, individual elements that constitute them.<sup>33</sup>

Pope's version of the encounter between Athena and Ulysses, consequently, loses some of its charming ease, but gains instead a not uncalled for emphasis on the element of surprising compatibility, of friendly equivalence, between hero and goddess. Each borrows the attributes of the other's kind: Ulysses is a 'godlike' man, Athena a 'blue-ey'd maid'. While Ulysses tells his tale of woe, she 'began / With pleasing smiles to view the godlike man'. This response suggests that even the gods can be charmed, though the susceptibility implied by 'pleasing smiles' is tempered by the cooler, more distant 'began / To view'. Further, Pope omits the detail given in the original that Athena 'fondles' the hero, as if he wished to place the friendly nature of the relationship beyond question.<sup>34</sup>

This indeed suggests that, in Pope's view, the process of deification is a mutually dependent one: Athena's human appreciation of Ulysses facilitates his repossession of godlike, or rather, Pope suggests, kinglike, status. Ulysses' infinite capacity for dissimulation, however, also acts as a trigger for Athena's own transformation into the 'divinely bright', heavenly daughter of Jove. Yet even after this apotheosis, she is only, according to Pope, 'divinely' bright; her brightness still retains qualities which may be perceived by mortal eyes. And furthermore, she speaks in terms which not only Ulysses, but Pope too, would have understood.

On the one hand she is, Pope says:

Like a fair virgin in her beauty's bloom,  
Skill'd in th' illustrious labours of the loom.<sup>35</sup>

With their heavy alliteration and rather leaden rhythm, the lines point

<sup>32</sup>W. J. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford, 1963), p. 30.

<sup>33</sup>Pope, 'Postscript' to the *Odyssey*, T. E.X. 386.

<sup>34</sup>Pope, *Odyssey*, Book 13, ll. 327-8, T. E.X. 23.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 329, 331-2, p. 23.

up the archaic nature of the simile. But when a moment later Athena speaks herself, her terms are thoroughly contemporary:

O still the same *Ulysses*! she rejoin'd,  
 In useful craft successfully refin'd!  
 Artful in speech, in action, and in mind!  
 Suffic'd it not, that thy long labours past  
 Secure thou seest thy native shore at last?  
 But this to me? who, like thy self excell  
 In arts of counsel, and dissembling well.  
 To me, whose wit exceeds the pow'rs divine,  
 No less than mortals are surpass'd by thine.  
 Know'st thou not me? who made thy life my care,  
 Thro' ten years wand'ring, and thro' ten years war;<sup>36</sup>

Ulysses, Athena reminds us, represents a union of 'counsel', and artfulness. 'Counsel' is a useful word in this connection, since it contains both the sense of prudent privacy (self-possessed is probably the modern equivalent) and also of open conversation or debate. As Gladstone pointed out in his *Studies on Homer*, Athena is exceptionally mobile among the gods, in terms of the numbers of mortals and immortals that she talks to, but she is also exceptionally good at self-effacement, at disappearing and delegating.<sup>37</sup> Pope, collaborating with Broome and Fenton in such a way that individual voices are lost in the service of the 'whole' translation, would have responded with alacrity to Athena's versatile person.

Versatility requires a person to possess both inwardness and force of will. Gladstone, on the one hand, chooses to emphasize Athena's executive powers; Jupiter cannot operate without her practical assistance among mortals. Modern commentators, such as Anne Baring and Jules Cashford in *The Myth of the Goddess*, have stressed the opposite: Athena's 'self-disciplined awareness' and her powers of inward reflection.<sup>38</sup> Pope, by contrast with both these approaches, and also properly, I think, combines the process of private thought and its realisation in worldly action, in the phrase 'arts of counsel'.

Similarly, George de Forest Lord has commented that Pope's style, compared with that of Chapman's *Odyssey*, tends to elevate its subject matter and treat the speeches in a 'uniformly elegant' manner, consequently eliminating the local, accidental or individual differences which

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, ll. 333–43, pp. 23–4.

<sup>37</sup>Gladstone, *Studies on Homer*, pp. 133–6.

<sup>38</sup>Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess* (London, 1992), pp. 332–345.

animate Homer's original poem.<sup>39</sup> In the original, Athena actually acknowledges Ulysses' self-interested guile, yet, contrarily, condones it, because she admits to similar faults in herself. Pope's version, it is true, smooths over these faults, and presents them in favourable terms, as 'useful craft'. Pope emphasises equivalent excelling: both Athena and Ulysses are more crafty than other people and other gods. The recognition of another master-craftsman — such as Homer, in Pope's case — becomes the means by which the excelling hero can be adjusted to his non-heroic world.

Such a transition from friendly recognition to a reaccommodation in the social world, furthermore, marks many passages in Pope's *Odyssey*, and many, though not all, involve female characters, whom Pope remodels in the form of the goddess Athena. The most striking example in his own poems, however, of Pope's explicit self-dedication to Athena comes at the end of the *Epistle to a Lady*. The poem performs an Odyssean journey around the 'characters of women', relocating its series of female characters in the conceit of a gallery. Miss Blount, whose words we have heard at the beginning of the poem, returns to the poet's vision after a period of absence. She is adorned with 'the Moon's more sober light' (and 'sober' is a word Pope associates with Athena) and 'Serene in Virgin Modesty she shines, / And unobserv'd the glaring Orb declines.'<sup>40</sup> Athena, too, is often 'unobserv'd'; she is also the giver of good temper or restraint, and, most importantly, she sustains a constant character beneath an array of diverse disguises.

In the encounter scene in Book 13, Ulysses exclaims 'He who discerns thee must be truly wise, / So seldom view'd, and ever in disguise', to which, a little later, Athena replies, 'How prone to doubt, how cautious are the wise! / Who, vers'd in fortune, fear the flattering show, / And taste not half the bliss the Gods bestow.'<sup>41</sup> Of the characters of women, Pope makes a similar point about their paradoxical variety and consistency, and in the course of the poem, Pope displays his own wisdom in perceiving and expressing the character of the true woman, the poem's lady, who is, like Athena herself, subject to many disguises, both divine and yet also visible to mortal eyes. The Lady is, like

<sup>39</sup>George de Forest Lord, *Homeric Renaissance: The 'Odyssey' of George Chapman* (London, 1956), p. 207.

<sup>40</sup>Pope, *Epistle to a Lady*, ll. 249–56, *Epistles to Several Persons (Moral Essays)*, ed. F. W. Bateson, T. E. III. ii (London and New Haven, 1951), p. 70.

<sup>41</sup>Pope, *Odyssey*, Book 13, ll. 375–7, T. E. X. 25.

Athena, independent, 'Mistress of Herself'; Pope even refers to 'those blue eyes', with which he had adorned his Athena, where 'grey' or 'bright' is the more usual translation.<sup>42</sup>

Such an understanding of affinity, of compatibility in an alien world, won Ulysses Athena's constant friendship. And such a generous acknowledgment on the Lady's part of the necessarily separate nature of their paths, won Miss Blount Pope's friendly tribute:

The gen'rous God, who Wit and Gold refines,  
And ripens Spirits as he ripens Mines,  
Kept Dross for Duchesses, the world shall know it,  
To you gave Sense, Good-Humour, and a Poet.<sup>43</sup>

These are some of Pope's most elegant, and yet also most generously self-deprecating lines; whereas Ulysses and Athena recognised a shared pre-eminence in comparable fields, Pope acknowledges the Lady's superiority in her own field, and makes his own achievement sound as trifling as the gawky rhyme. Imitating her example of self-possession, he refrains from appropriating her charms, although they are also his inspiration. Instead, he pays tribute to her respect for freedom, as essential to friendship as Athena's uncompelled assistance is to the completion of the epic journey.

<sup>42</sup>Ruskin takes pains to point out that the Greeks were concerned not with colour as such, but with degrees of light, the extent to which something is bright or dark. See Ruskin, *Queen of the Air*, pp. 105, 107.

<sup>43</sup>Pope, *Epistle to a Lady*, ll. 289-92, *Epistles*, T. E. III. ii. 74.



*Honoratiss. Dominus. Margaritæ Comitissæ*  
*de Orrery Tabulam hanc* **EMDDIO** *L. 13.*

Pallas Athene and Odysseus on the coast of Ithica, plate from John Ogilby's translation of the *Odyssey* (1665), probably known to Pope as a child.