

The Chorus of Nausikaa: Parthenaic Chorality in the *Odyssey*

Scholars have only begun to recognize the pervasiveness of choral poetics in non-choral poetry (Richardson 2011, Ladianou 2016, Carruesco 2016), refining foundational work on the literary and cultural ubiquity of the chorus (Calame 1977, Nagy 1990, Athanassaki and Bowie 2011, Budelmann and Phillips 2018) and especially its development in the genre of tragedy (Herington 1985, Swift 2010, Gagné and Hopman 2013). This paper offers a nuanced theory of choral poetics that illuminates the import of chorality for non-choral texts. It first establishes the paradigmatic qualities of *chorality* through analysis of Alcman, and then uses this theory of chorality to provide a new reading of the scene of Odysseus' and Nausikaa's first encounter on Skheria in *Odyssey* 6. I argue that the pervasive choral mode of the scene on Skheria has been overlooked, in part because of critical neglect of parthenaic texts. By demonstrating the scene's repeated engagement with – and subversion of – the framework and markers of chorality, I both highlight the significance of parthenaic chorality and freshly reinterpret the scene. Not only do I revise critical understanding of *Odyssey* 6, but my methodology reveals the parthenaic fragments to be a productive framework for further readings.

The paradigmatic source of parthenaic dance-song is Alcman; I use the fragments of Alcman 3 to exemplify parthenaic chorality, characterized by polyvalent deictic markers, ritual self-referentiality, manipulation of the fluid concept of *kharis*, and words evoking the body: a distinct kind of embodied speaking voice. Further, the poem visually objectifies Astymeloisa, maneuvering the gaze of the audience to align with that of the narrator. Such a technique, as in the case of Odysseus and Nausikaa, utilizes the language of created-ness and creation, of looking and being seen, of ekphrasis and epigram, blurring the lines between narrative and description.

These dynamics connect parthenaic chorality to early hexameter and Sappho fragments 44 (Andromache's wedding) and 94 (the erotic display of the *parthenos*).

Specifically evoking the parthenaic or hymeneal chorus, both Nausikaa and Odysseus are figured as idealized performing objects and eroticized choral leaders. The juxtaposition of Odysseus' relationships with Nausikaa and Penelope relies on recurring allusions to pre-nuptial activity throughout the Phaiakian episode. I argue that the erotically-charged interaction between Nausikaa and Odysseus should be understood as an elaborate parthenaic dance, leading to an unconsummated marriage. The prior scene further alludes to and in turn subverts parthenaic dance: Nausikaa, surrounded by her female servants, is marked by the language and imagery of chorality. In two similes, Nausikaa is compared to the divine leader of a chorus (Swift 2016). In turn, when Odysseus encounters Nausikaa's 'chorus', his sexualized objectification follows choral logic but reverses both gender expectations and subject/object expectations. Odysseus becomes the object of Athena's creation; the focalized gaze of Nausikaa objectifies him with a comparison to a work of metalcraft. Thus, this example demonstrates the strength of the 'choral imaginary' (Curtis 2017): it is recognizable even when conventional roles are subverted, when the genre or medium is changed, and when no explicit dance-song is present.

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