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## Two Poems

KATIE HARTSOCK

### Crazy

As to when exactly Penelope knew  
Odysseus was come home, people differ.  
Did she decode her husband in the ragged beggar  
and set the bow contest? Did she hear, contra Homer,  
the ancient nurse gasp at his scar? What steadied her  
to see his bet and bluff her bridal chamber?  
I say it's after the slaughter and just before

he proves himself to be the one who built and knows  
that bed: the moment they bicker, call each other  
*daimoniê*. It is an odd apostrophe  
you use if you're a baffled ancient Greek, baffled  
by someone behaving so unreasonably  
you cannot recognize them—a god, a daimon,  
must be responsible. Between husband and wife,  
a strange term of endearment, when endearment turns  
estranged or strained. Alarm we could roughly translate:

*Baby, don't be crazy.* So far, he's convinced them all  
but her. She keeps her distance once the blood's washed off  
this man, anointed, looking good, and impatient.  
*Daimoniê!* he says, and it's then she hears what  
she cannot doubt—familiar lover's irritation.  
His old *I can't believe you* voice makes her believe.  
*Daimoniê* yourself, she says, and reels him in.

Myrmidons

Stepping off his ship, a young king  
is recognized by the old  
whose harbor and hills surround,  
though the old king hasn't seen him  
since the young king was a boy,  
since the old king was young.

It can happen in these stories,  
a demigodly prescience  
or regal intuition  
as to who, son of whom,  
just entered the room, although  
most faces' fame rode the world  
through Rumor, that gardener  
whose scattered seeds grow wild:

long tall tales of lustrous locks  
tumbling down sculpted backs  
or generous hefts of cleavage;  
cheekbones to make any nymph weep  
or suitor unsheathe his sword;  
footfalls the dirt begs to feel.

Generic descriptions  
prove ample and apt, as lovers  
know as soon as they see each other,  
as heroes pinpoint heroes  
across battlefields, as a shield  
depicts scenes whose details  
are known by all who deal it blows.

Such powers of recognition  
are displayed as often  
as a wondrously complete lack:  
a maiden shames the name of a goddess  
who stands cloaked before her;  
a woman's husband, gone for days  
and in disguise, gains a private  
audience in her chambers,

where she speaks of him to him  
as gone; a divine mother advises  
a half-mortal son, revealing  
herself as she disappears,  
and the human in him despairs,  
grasps at the air that was her.

Some possess the gift to detect  
that nothing is recognizable,  
that some terrific change  
has transfigured a place.  
The young king, surveying  
the island, asks the old,  
Where are his boyhood friends?

The citizens who greeted him  
are many and beautiful,  
strong and dutiful, to be sure,  
and gave him great pleasure to meet,  
but the faces he expected? All  
absent. The kingdom, different.

The old man tells of a ravaging  
heaven-sent plague: the bodies  
rotting through streets and forests  
from a sickness so torturous  
many hearts stopped still by their own  
hands, rather than endure the horror.

As he was ready to end himself,  
the old king saw ants, thousands  
crawling on a sacred tree;  
he prayed to the king of gods and  
men that his people be restored  
to the number of that colony.

Then, antennae sank into sockets;  
hard shiny skin grew soft  
and olive-smooth; the sex of each  
creature manifested; hair streamed  
out from rounded skulls; mandibles  
shrank inward to mouths; two legs  
were lost, two turned to arms,  
and the last stood upright, shakily.

“Do you not see,” said the old king  
to the young, gesturing  
beyond the palace, “something  
of their former nature  
in the way they move—divested  
of instincts they still remember?”

“But I’ve loved them, these child-like  
denizens, since the moment  
of alteranimation,  
since they never doubted  
their reason for being.”  
The old and the young man talk  
of the young’s upcoming war,  
and before long, it is settled;  
the Myrmidons will serve.

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