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Tiberiana 2: Tales of Brave Ulysses

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Abstract: This is one of five *parerga* preparatory to a book to be entitled *Tiberius on Capri*, which will explore the interrelationship between culture and empire, between Tiberius' intellectual passions (including astrology, gastronomy, medicine, mythology, and literature) and his role as *princeps*. These five papers do not so much develop an argument as explore significant themes which will be examined and deployed in the book in different contexts.

Tiberius was intensely interested in the deeds and character of the hero Odysseus, to the extent that sometimes he seems almost to have been channeling him. "Tales of Brave Ulysses" considers the evidence for this obsession and suggests something of the fresh insight into the emperor's character which it evokes.

Tiberiana 2: Tales of Brave Ulysses

After the Fall of Troy came the great wanderings, the Greek heroes trying to return to their homes, the Trojans to find a new home. Several of them made their way to Italy and settled there, mainly on or near the eastern, Adriatic coast; some of the Trojans also won through to Sicily. “The west coast of Italy on the other hand, so far as the Achaean heroes are concerned, is almost the exclusive preserve of Odysseus, who, unlike his contemporaries, does not in normal tradition settle and die on Italian soil, but returns home.”¹ Once past the straits of Scylla and Charybdis, he made landfall and left many memories in Southern Campania, around the Bay of Naples; in Southern Latium, around Tarracina and Formiae; and in the neighborhood of Rome, which he of course founded.² The Tyrrhenian coast of Italy was reserved for the greatest of heroes: Heracles had passed everywhere on foot, and Aeneas would sail by soon after, stopping in many of the same places. And long, long afterwards the emperor Tiberius would likewise follow, literally and figuratively, in the footsteps of Odysseus. Indeed, the intimate association of the learned emperor with the Greek hero strikes me as one of a richness and complexity unrivalled in the history of such mythological relationships in the ancient world.

1. The prime evidence for this was discovered fifty years ago in the numerous fragments of four massive sculptural groups in marble, found by chance in 1957 in a seaside cavern which was part of a large villa complex on the coast at Sperlonga, 65 miles

¹ Phillips 1953: 53; and passim, for a good collection and clear analysis of the evidence for “Odysseus in Italy”. Much more elaborate: Malkin 1998.

² He also explored Etruria, but that was on a later voyage. Much of the tangled material for his journeys goes back to Hellenistic sources, particularly Timaeus and Lycophron, with whom Tiberius will have been familiar, but the traditions of Odysseus in the West start very early, with Hesiod and the lost *Telegonia* of Eugammon.

south of Rome.³ Everything, everything about them is controversial, chronology of the pieces and their installation, origins, influences, reconstruction, relationships, meanings. And for good reason, since together with the Laocoon, which came from the same Rhodian workshop, they stand, it has been said, “at the heart of the debate about originality in Roman art”. The bibliography is bewildering and passions run high, particularly in Germany, in “the war of Sperlonga” (as a French scholar has called it); and debate is hampered by the lack of full publication of both the site and of the other works of art found there. But only two questions are relevant here. What, broadly speaking, was being depicted in the sculptures? And, regardless of their previous forms and histories, as a group or as individual pieces, who was responsible for their being at Sperlonga?

The subjects of three of the groups are relatively uncontroversial. All four were set facing outwards in a large cavern that opens directly onto the sea and is partly submerged in seawater, with man-made benches, walkways, and wall niches within, and two smaller chambers in the rear. What first caught the ancient visitor’s eye, rising dramatically out of the great pool in the center of the grotto, was the horrifying attack of the sea-monster Scylla, almost 4 meters high, on Odysseus’ ship and crew. Further within and to the right, on the floor of a smaller chamber, another large and stunning group depicted Odysseus and his men blinding the drunken Polyphemus. To the right and left of the Scylla group, on small platforms projecting from the entrance walls, stood two smaller pairs of statues. On the right, Odysseus tried unsuccessfully to steal the

³ See the account in the excellent guide to the site, Cassieri 2000: 20-23.

Palladium from Diomedes at Troy. And on the left stood a version of the so-called Pasquino group, the subject of which continues to be debated. Known in other copies, and especially from the famed Pasquino in Rome, this originally presented a warrior holding the limp body of a dead comrade, and it has been variously identified as Menelaus with the body of Patroclus, Ajax with the body of Achilles, Odysseus with Achilles, even Aeneas with Lausus, the son of Mezentius. The arguments are complex and often highly technical; as far as I can follow them, only one seems probative to me, where Sperlonga is concerned, that is. Three of the four sculptures indisputably depict scenes from the adventures of Odysseus. How could the fourth conceivably not?⁴

No one disputes the programmatic nature of the complex, and A.F. Stewart's paper of 1977 (which strikes me as still the best introduction to the meaning of Sperlonga) showed how the different groups could be read as displaying various and contrasting aspects of the character of Odysseus, both in themselves and in relation to each other.⁵ And again, these were not merely individual items of sculpture on display in a museum: in the succinct description of a recent commentator, "The cave and its sculptures presented a vivid theatrical tableau to the diners on the island triclinium built into the pool outside, and indeed, like a theatre, came complete with seats for spectators,

⁴ This is not to say that the piece might not have been adapted, specifically for use in the grotto at Sperlonga, from a work originally depicting different characters. Weis 2000, 117-124, for a thorough discussion of the Pasquino group, with n. 62, naming 12 scholars for or against the identification with Odysseus. The arguments against, marshaled at p. 119, strike me as inconclusive or misconceived. E.g., that the Pasquino warrior wears a helmet while Odysseus typically has the pilos: to which it must be replied that this Odysseus is not the sailor or the trickster, but the warrior in battle.

⁵ Stewart: 1977.

on either side as you entered the cave.” In fact Odysseus was not only before the diners but all around them, for everyone knew that the hero had undergone some of his trials not only on the west coast of Italy, but particularly in the stretch around Sperlonga.

Observers had but to turn around to see, looming directly behind them on the western horizon across the bay, Mons Circeius, which had very early been identified by the Greeks with the island home of Circe; while only ten kilometers to the East lay Formiae, the land of the Laestrygones.⁶ As all who knew their *Odyssey* would realize, Odysseus had sailed from the Laestrygones to Circe, that is, right past Sperlonga. Somewhat like an historical re-enactment today, the seaside diners were actually observing, almost part of, the hero’s exploits where they had happened, three earlier ones around the sides in the rear – that is, two adventures at Troy and the adventure of the Cyclops – with Scylla yet to come in the center. Artificial, pedantic, yes, but a *coup de théâtre*, with a sense that one could reach out and almost touch the heroic past. The guests must have crossed to the dining platform of the triclinium in the outer pool over movable bridges: when these were retracted, they might even imagine themselves to be on board a ship.⁷

Who commissioned the extraordinary sculptural tableaux and their mise en scène? Surely the emperor Tiberius, as most scholars would agree, with more or less hesitation.

⁶ Carey 2002, 48. Circe: Strabo 5. 3. 6, charmingly, on “Circaeum, a mountain which has the form of an island, because it is surrounded by sea and marshes. They further say that Circaeum is a place that abounds in roots – perhaps because they associate it with the myth about Circe. It has a little city and a temple of Circe and an altar of Athene, and people there show you a sort of bowl which, they say, belonged to Odysseus.” (Loeb trans., H.L. Jones) From Sperlonga the mountain does indeed look like a large island. Laestrygones: Wiseman 1974, 212 n. 2 for refs. (starting with Cicero *Att.* 2. 13. 2).

⁷ ?Coarelli

There is no proof, but the circumstantial evidence is powerful. The fundamental point is that we can place Tiberius in an imperial villa and indeed in a cave at Sperlonga, which is the modern form of the ancient Spelunca. In 26, Tiberius and Sejanus were dining at a villa *cui vocabulum Speluncae*, between the gulf of Amyclae and the hills of Fundi, in the words of Tacitus, in a natural grotto. Rocks at the entrance fell in, some servants were crushed, and rescuers found the praetorian prefect crouched over the emperor's body, shielding him from the stones – from that time his reputation for fidelity was assured. Suetonius in his account of the same incident refers to the *praetorium*, or imperial villa, near Tarracina, called Spelunca, and adds that many banqueters and servants met their deaths, but he says nothing about Sejanus, suggesting that the emperor took the incident as an omen that he would not return to Rome.⁸ Whatever that may signify, we can thus locate Tiberius at a villa near Sperlonga, and in a grotto there with a triclinium, just what we have on the ground. There seems to be no serious chronological objection to the *placing* of the Odyssean sculptures there – whenever and for whatever purpose they might have been *created* individually – during the period of Tiberius' ascendancy between AD 4 and 26.

It might yet be objected that other aristocratic villa owners with similar tastes could be found along this coast,⁹ but it has been well observed that the display of Odyssean sculptural groups with Polyphemus and Scylla became a marker in the

⁸ Tacitus 4. 59. 1-2; Suetonius 39.

⁹ Strabo 5. 3. 6 remarks of this very stretch of coast, between Tarracina and Caieta, that, "There are wide-open caverns of immense size at this place, which have been occupied by large and very costly residences."

definition of imperial space, that is, the two groups at Sperlonga are referred to and played upon in later grottoes and nymphaea at Baiae under Claudius, in Nero's Golden House in Rome, at Domitian's Alban villa, and at Hadrian's Tivoli – all imperial villas – and *only* in imperial properties, and that we should conclude, “It is in their display of a Polyphemus and/or a Scylla group, then, that they declare their relationship with the original imperial grotto at Sperlonga, and distinguish themselves as imperial.”¹⁰ Short of an inscription naming him, this is as close as we will get to proof that the Sperlonga villa, and its famous display of Odyssean sculpture, belonged to the emperor Tiberius.

It is important to realize that the Odyssean grotto was only part of a massive villa whose grounds and buildings stretched for hundreds of meters along the seashore, around a cape and up into the hills, replete with pavilions, dining rooms, and paths, not to mention substantial residential complexes. Its owner was clearly fascinated by a range of myths, but even among the exiguous fragments displayed in the modern museum three elements suggest something about his taste.¹¹ One is the concatenation of a head of Aeneas (or Ascanius) and a striking relief, found near the grotto, of Venus Genetrix

¹⁰ Carey 2000: 61. The thematic similarities with these other properties were of course well known. Note also that they were all villas (including the “Domus Aurea”), not *domus*, that is, their grottoes were a mark of imperial *otium*.

It should also be noted that, even if the sculptures were installed before Tiberius, there is no hint that Augustus had any connection with the villa; on the contrary, it is highly probable that the property passed to Tiberius from his mother's grandfather, M. Alfidius, who was a magistrate at Fundi, which was only 12 or 13 kilometers from the cave, and where one tradition held it that the emperor himself was born: cf. Cassieri 2000: 24, based on Suetonius 5, *Caligula* 23. 2 (but ignore the prosopography in both Cassieri and Suetonius). Yet the resources needed to acquire and display such works of art of the highest quality and unmatched in size must have been truly imperial: another argument for Tiberius, a well-known connoisseur, as the creator of the complex?

¹¹ Finds at the sight were first described by Iacopi 1963: 39-165; sculpture alone by Neudecker 1988: 41-46, 220-233. Most recently, Cassieri 2000: 61-148.

accompanied by a small Eros: that is, the ancestors of the Julian family, so glorified by Augustus, were represented. A second is the archaizing heads of Dionysus and Athena, when taken in conjunction with two authentic fifth century Athenian vases found on the site, both depicting Dionysus as well: that suggests not only an antiquarian but an active collector of antiquities. And third may be the two statues affixed to the cliffs near the grotto, both executed in exotic marbles (although there is controversy over their dates): directly over the Odyssean grotto the eagle of Jupiter flew up to the heavens with Ganymede (a Trojan prince), while on the adjacent cape a few meters to the East the princess Andromeda once hung by a chain, awaiting her deliverance by Perseus.¹² That is, when we take these in conjunction with the Odyssean sculptures in the grotto – Polyphemus in his cave, Scylla rising out of the water – we see not just the dotting of artwork around the property but its active integration into the grounds, in the attempt to create a sort of interactive theme-park, or what has been called, more romantically, a “landscape of illusion”. Eclectic though the taste might have been, Odysseus predominates, in the number, the size, and the artistic quality of his representations. And along with them, but not part of the grotto complex, we must consider the charming under-life-size Hellenistic statue of a young woman who was identified as Circe even before the discovery of the three marble piglets which now lie at her feet in the museum.

¹² Cassieri 2000: 64-66 (Aeneas and Venus; cf. two marble *erotes*, 69-72); 63-64 (Dionysus); 74-75 (Athena); 80-81 (Dionysian vases: cf. the high quality *oscillum* with dionysiac Sileni on both faces, 67-68); 145-147 (Ganymede and the eagle); 20 (Andromeda, found in the sea earlier in the century). On the collection of ancient vases: Cristofani 1995.

Why Odysseus? After considering how the sculptures fit well with Tiberius' "peculiar interests" in literature, Stewart suggested two converging explanations. One was that the western coast of Italy had long been filled with memories of Odysseus.¹³ The other was that the character of Odysseus, wily, secretive, indomitable, the sacker of cities, displays "a curious similarity in some respects to that of the emperor"

Stewart presented the case splendidly:

Certainly Tiberius, like Odysseus, 'cherished dissimulation'; his intellect was penetrating, his caution excessive, his anger quick, his harshness proverbial, and his pride in his own achievements, especially military ones, enormous

Close to some extent, then, in temperament and close also in fortune: Tiberius, too, had spent a great deal of his life (up to his fifty-first year) abroad; he had had his time of campaigning in the field, and his time in exile (eight years to be precise), enduring multiple humiliations before attaining what was due to him.

And then, lest this "be dismissed as merest fantasy", Stewart shrewdly recalled the questions with which Tiberius, addicted to mythology, notoriously tested his grammarians: "Who was Hecuba's mother?" "What was the name of Achilles among the maidens?" "What were the Sirens in the habit of singing?" (Suetonius 70. 3):

All three may be referred, in one way or another, to Odysseus and his doings.

Hecuba failed to denounce him when she discovered him in Helen's bedroom, and on the fall of Troy became his slave; it was he who discovered Achilles 'among the

¹³ On which see Phillips 1953.

maidens' at the court of Lycomedes; and as for the songs of the Sirens, there was only one man who could have enlightened Tiberius as to these.¹⁴

The case for the emperor's intense interest in, even identification with, the hero, strong already from Sperlonga alone, can be strengthened further, and it leads in interesting directions. Without considering yet just *why* Tiberius may have felt so close to Odysseus, the following seem to offer insights into his Odysseus complex.

2. No less an authority than Augustus himself had made the comparison. Writing to Tiberius while he was away at war, that is, sometime between AD 4 and 13, and wishing he were at his side to take counsel, the emperor says that a verse of Homer came to him: "Were he to go with me, both of us could come back from the blazing / of fire itself, since his mind is best at devices." Tiberius of course knew the context, Diomedes choosing his companion for a raid on the Trojan camp, "Odysseus the godlike, he whose / heart and whose proud spirit are beyond all others forward / in hard endeavors."¹⁵ A striking compliment to Tiberius, in an age alive to the nuances of the significant quotation in context.

3. Tiberius' interest in Odysseus must have been well known to his contemporaries. Suetonius recalls the learned men who competed to write commentaries on his three favorite Greek poets, Euphorion, Rhianus, and Parthenius, and then offered them to the

¹⁴ Stewart 1977: 87-88. In fact the Argonauts had heard the Sirens and passed them safely by when Orpheus overwhelmed their song with the sound of his lyre: Apollonius 4. 891-921.

¹⁵ Suetonius 21. 6, quoting *Iliad* 10. 246-247.

emperor.¹⁶ As it happens, a stray notice in Diogenes Laertius tells us of a grammarian, Apollonides of Nicaea, who dedicated to Tiberius Caesar a commentary, not on the works of his three known favorites, but on the *Silloi* (“Satires”) of Timon of Phlius, the immensely sophisticated third century satiric poet and sceptic philosopher.¹⁷ In three books the poem parodied philosophical battles in Homeric terms, vividly pinning down the philosopher/warriors – their doctrines, their personalities, their deeds on earth – with a memorable sharpness which surely appealed to a man with the emperor’s sardonic disposition. Even more to his taste, most and probably all of the poem was cast in the form of an Odyssean *nekuia*, a trip to the underworld where the protagonist encountered the bickering shades of great thinkers, just as Odysseus had met the heroes in Hades in Book XI of the *Odyssey*. The hero of Timon’s poem was apparently the one philosopher who came in for nothing but praise, his master, the original sceptic, Pyrrho of Elis. Best of all, in one fragment the poet says of him “for no other mortal could strive with Pyrrho”, lifting a half-line from Homer: “for no other mortal could strive with Odysseus.”¹⁸ Tiberius must have been delighted by the combination of Homeric *nekuia* and sharp satire.

¹⁶ Suetonius 70. 2. All three of course wrote on Odysseus in one way or another. Stewart 1977: 85-86, suggests a parallel between Euphorion’s treatment of Odysseus and that of the Sperlonga sculptures.

¹⁷ Diogenes Laertius 9. 109. Two excellent introductions to the *Silloi*: Long 1978; Ax 1991.

¹⁸ *Nekuia*: it is an old debate whether or not the whole poem was a visit to the underworld. Long 1978: 81 is dubious. Ax 1991: 182-183 (and *passim*) gives good arguments for it. Pyrrho as a second Odysseus: Ax 190. The Homeric line is *Iliad* 3. 223; Timon’s parody of it is preserved at Eusebius *Praeparatio Evangeliae* 14. 17. 17. As Ax rightly observes, the original context is significant for a war of words, since it refers to Odysseus’ pre-eminence as a speaker, not a warrior.

4. A passage in Juvenal further suggests that Tiberius' interest in Odysseus was common knowledge even after his death. Unfortunately, the lines have proven extraordinarily difficult to understand, with or without emendation. Worried citizens converse about the grim consequences of the fall of Sejanus:

‘perituros audio multos.’

‘nil dubium, magna est fornacula.’ ‘pallidulus mi

Bruttidius meus ad Martis fuit obvius aram;

quam timeo, victus ne poenas exigit Ajax

ut male defensus. curramus praecipites et,

dum iacet in ripa, calcemus Caesaris hostem.’¹⁹

Everyone agrees that the reference here should be to the *armorum iudicium* between Ajax and Ulysses/Odysseus at Troy, as they vied to inherit the armor of dead Achilles: Odysseus won, Ajax went mad and killed himself. But there is fierce disagreement as to whom Juvenal represented by the two heroes in the calamity of October 31: was Ajax Tiberius or Sejanus?²⁰ Rather desperate emendations have been

¹⁹ *Sat.* 10. 81-86 Clausen. ‘I hear that many are to be purged.’ / ‘That’s right, they’re turning the heat on, and no mistake.’ / ‘My friend / Bruttidius looked somewhat pale when I met him in town just now – / Our slighted Ajax, I fear, is out for blood: disloyal / Heads will roll.’ / ‘Come on, then, quickly, down to the river – / Boot Caesar’s foe in the ribs while his corpse is on show.’ (trans. P. Green)

²⁰ Housman, for instance, following Madvig, and followed by Stewart 1977: 87 and Nisbet 1988: 105, argued that Ulysses = Tiberius, Ajax = Sejanus; for Friedländer, followed by Courtney 1980: 463 (a long and inconclusive note) and Hendry 1998: 260-261 (and apparently by Green in his translation above), Ulysses = Sejanus, Ajax = Tiberius.

proposed.²¹ Yet one observation is surely pre-emptive: Ajax lost the struggle and Ajax died, therefore he must be Sejanus, and the lines make perfect Juvenalian sense in the light of Ajax' death.

The tale, as its common version had developed by the time of Tiberius, is succinctly told by Apollodorus. After the funeral games for Achilles, his armor was offered as a prize to the best warrior, and Ajax and Odysseus competed for it. Odysseus was chosen by the Trojan judges or, as some say, by allied ones. Deranged by grief, Ajax planned to attack the army at night, but Athena made him insane. She turned his sword in hand toward the cattle, so that in his madness he slaughtered them and their herdsman, thinking that they were Achaeans. When he later recovered his sanity, he killed himself.²²

In Juvenal, the interlocutors look forward apprehensively to the aftermath of Sejanus' fall, and one of his henchmen, Bruttidius, appears especially pale. Then something like "How I worry that defeated Ajax may take revenge, since he was badly defended." This passage, which has prompted such concern, should mean: as Ajax with the Greek army after the *armorum iudicium*, so Sejanus (alive or dead, it does not much matter), will have his vengeance on those who have deserted him, both his cronies like Bruttidius, now joining nervously in the public rejoicing at the altar of Mars, and the fellow-citizens who either supported or tolerated him in life, and now demonstrate their

²¹ Nisbet suggested reading *non timeo* for *quam timeo*, thus turning the sense on its head. Hendry suggested *a male defensio* for *ut male defensus*, making not Ajax but bystanders "poorly defended" (whatever that might mean).

²² *Epit.* 5. 6-7, trans. M. Simpson.

loyalty to Tiberius by hurrying to abuse his corpse. That is, they will suffer in the aftermath of his fall, and this is his “revenge” for abandoning him. The image may be puzzling at first, but it vividly captures the enormous shock and confusion of October 18th, 31, and the imminent slaughter.

The victor in the contest, Ulysses, was surely Tiberius, who had already shown his preference at Sperlonga for a version of the tale that had Odysseus, not Ajax, retrieve the body of Achilles from the battle. Some three years after the fall of Sejanus, his successor as prefect, Macro, engineered the destruction of a dissolute nobleman and ex-consul, Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus. The official charges were adultery with the princess Livilla, and the practice of magic, but Macro, who knew his Tiberius, showed that certain lines in a play written by Scaurus could be twisted into criticism of the emperor. The work was a Euripidean tragedy on *Atreus*, the very type of the savage tyrant, and when he learned of it Tiberius remarked that it had been written about him and that he was Atreus because he was stained with blood. He added, “And I shall make him Ajax”, forcing Scaurus to kill himself.²³ It may be too fanciful to see Tiberius as Odysseus yet again. Perhaps the curious point to emphasize is that twice victims of the Roman emperor are cast in mythological terms as Ajax the suicidal loser in the contest of arms, once by Juvenal, once by Tiberius himself – the only emperor of whom it was written *maxime tamen curavit notitiam historiae fabularis usque ad ineptias atque derisum*, yet his special aim was a knowledge of mythology, which he carried to a silly and laughable extreme.

²³ Tacitus 6. 29; Dio 58. 24. 3-5.

5. Acute awareness of the mythological landscape, so visible in the Odyssean cavern at Sperlonga, can be seen as well at Capri, Tiberius' home for the last eleven years of his life and reign. There he had a much larger canvas to work on, for the island had been the private property of the emperor since Augustus acquired it in 29 BC.²⁴

Tiberius allegedly peopled the caves and rocky hollows, *loci Venerii*, with little Pans and Nymphs: the sexual scandals may be doubtful, but the mythological play-acting is significant, as is their location in *antra et cavas rupes*, for Capri is famous for its seaside caves. In 1964 and 1974 some badly corroded statues, along with other fragments, emerged from the waters of the Blue Grotto itself. They have been reconstructed as a sort of marine *thiasos*, a company of three (?) tritons rising from the sea and apparently affixed to the wall, celebrating a fourth figure, Neptune, the god of the sea. The grotto itself was presumably part of the villa at Gradola, up the cliff nearby to the East, or even of the huge villa of Damecuta that dominates the northwest headland of the island.²⁵ Two other somewhat isolated grottoes, the Arsenale, near the Marina Piccola, on the South coast of the island, and Matermania on the East, were also transformed into *nymphaea*, and preserve remains of elaborate decoration and furniture, the former for dining, the latter for cult.²⁶ And yet another great villa, on the height of Castiglione, 250 meters above the sea, with panoramic views to the south, enjoyed two grottoes, both developed by man, the larger of which held niches for statues and was

²⁴ Strabo 5. 4. 9 (private property, *idion ktēma*, acquired from Naples in exchange for Pithecussae), Suetonius *Aug.* 92. 2. Date: Dio 52. 43. 2.

²⁵ Belli et al. 1998: 208-216; Adamo Muscettola 1998: 263; cf. Stewart 1977: 84.

²⁶ Belli 148-150, 145-148.

certainly the *nymphaeum* for the villa above – the same villa that enjoyed a small bronze statue signed by Athanodorus son of Hagesander, one of the three sculptors of the Laocoon and of the Sperlonga Scylla group.²⁷ All fragmentary evidence, but suggestive of the mental landscape.

Greatest of all the imperial properties on the island was the Villa Jovis, the Villa of Jupiter, on its northeastern corner, towering in eight stories on its cliff some 334 meters, more than 1,000 feet, over the sea, and recently revealed in its glory as the first palace in the Roman West.²⁸ Again, the land in plain sight was Odyssean all around the Bay of Naples: one tradition, not in Homer, had the hero land on Pithecusa, the modern Ischia; Baiiae and Misenum were named after his shipmates, Baius and Misenus, who were buried there (although the latter was claimed by Aeneas); and just out of sight behind them lay Lake Avernus, the entrance used by Odysseus in his visit the Underworld.²⁹ But above all, the coast opposite Capri was (in the phrase made famous by Norman Douglas) “Siren Land”. About 35 kilometers due North, across the Bay, lay Parthenope, otherwise Naples, named after one of the three sirens; some 65 km to the South East was the island of Leucosia, another of the three, off the cape of Poseidon, between Poseidonia/Paestum and Velia/Elea; closer, less than 15 km down the coast of the mainland lay the actual Islands of the Sirens, the Sirenes or Sirenussae (modern Li Galli);

²⁷ Belli et al. 1998: 199-202. *IG XIV. 898* (Capri). Athanodorus seems to have been a favorite of the Julio-Claudians, his work turning up in their property on Capri, in Rome (Pliny *HN* 36. 37, probably the *Domus Aurea*), at Anzio (*IG XIV. 1227*), and at Sperlonga (above). Given the close association of two of those places with Tiberius, the taste may have been his.

²⁸ Krause 1998, 2003.

²⁹ References in Phillips 1953.

while an ancient temple to the three stood somewhere on the Sorrentine peninsula, opposite the Villa Jovis, on what some called the Cape of the Sirenessae. Best of all, “there is a sanctuary of Athena, built by Odysseus, on the tip of the Cape.”³⁰ On the top floor of the Villa Jovis there stood a grand semi-circular *coenatio*, oriented due East, with stunning panoramic views of the two bays of Naples and Sorrento, to the North and the South. Every time the emperor dined there with his guests, perhaps quizzing them about the finer points of Odyssean mythology, he and they would be looking at Odyssean landfalls and the Siren Land all around, and across a narrow strait directly at the Temple built for his patron goddess by Odysseus himself.

But there is an interesting problem with their vantage point, for, despite the common (but not universal) acceptance of the name, the “Villa Jovis” is a phantom. The widely available bilingual Loeb edition of Suetonius, the English translations of which I am aware (with one exception), and modern historical and archaeological scholarship on Tiberius: all accept it as the “Villa of Jupiter”. But M. Ihm, the editor of the standard, Teubner edition of Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum libri VIII*, was adamant: the proper name was not “Villa Jovis” but “Villa Iovis”, the “Villa of Io”.³¹ And thereby hang several tales.

Suetonius’ narration of Tiberius’ destruction of his all-powerful, unsuspecting prefect, Sejanus, is a tour de force, compact and suspenseful. As the plot unfolds in Rome, Tiberius awaits events anxiously on Capri. Contingency plans are in place: if there

³⁰ Strabo 5. 4. 8. On the homes of the Sirens in the West, see Breglia Pulci Doria 1987: 88-96.

³¹ Ihm 1901: 287-291.

is a rising in the capital, the emperor's imprisoned grandson is to be released and put in charge there, and ships stand ready to whisk Tiberius away to the legions. He spends his time watching from a very high cliff, *ex altissima rupe*, for signals which he has ordered to inform him immediately of each step as the plot unfolds:

Verum et oppressa coniuratione Seiani nihilo securior aut constantior per novem proximos menses non egressus est villa, quae vocatur Iovis.

But even when the conspiracy of Sejanus was crushed, he was no whit more confident or courageous, but for the next nine months he did not leave the villa which is called Jupiter's.

Suetonius then goes on at length and in confusing fashion about Tiberius' mental anguish during the bloodbath after the death of Sejanus, but the climax of the tale is surely the stunning image of the emperor in deep seclusion in the "villa which is called Jupiter's". This must indeed be the great palace known today as the Villa Jovis, towering over the sea on its headland, access to it on the landward side of the island strictly controlled over the steep upward slope, the *altissima rupis* from which he anxiously watched for signals, *Tiberi principis arx*, the citadel of Tiberius Caesar.³² How appropriate that the emperor should be so secluded, far from the blood in the streets of Rome, high above human affairs, brooding in a villa named after the greatest of Roman gods.³³

³² Suetonius 65. Seclusion: Dio 58. 13. 2 adds that he refused even to receive an embassy from the senate. *Arx*: Pliny *NH* 3. 82.

³³ An unnecessary emendation in another text has produced false support for "Jovis" in Suetonius. In his precious description of Capri, 4. 67, Tacitus notes *tum Tiberius duodecim villarum nominibus et molibus insederat*, a puzzling clause which Church and Brodribb interpret as "Tiberius had by this time filled the island with twelve country

But it was not called the Villa of Jupiter. The manuscript tradition clearly preserves IONIS (the genitive of Io) from the archetype, not IOVIS (the genitive of Jupiter). “Ionis” was the reading Ihm found in all but one of the manuscripts he consulted for his text, including the best of them, the Memmianus; the one exception (along with some much more recent manuscripts) was the Laurentianus, but all of its close relatives preserve the vulgate “Ionis” against its “Iovis”, and it frequently transposes the letters “v” and “n” elsewhere. The great palace was apparently called the Villa of Io.

Why? Ihm thought we just couldn’t know and that there was large room for the play of fantasy: the name might, for example, derive from an artwork that depicted the myth of Io, a painting perhaps, one especially beloved by Tiberius. (But naming a palace after a single and otherwise unattested work of art seems gratuitous, and is unparalleled.) Be that as it may, attempts have been made to show the importance of Io to the Julio-Claudians, but the evidence is virtually non-existent and the interpretation bizarre.³⁴ Granted, Tiberius may not himself have been responsible for naming the villa

houses, each with a grand name and structure of its own.” The reading *numinibus* for *nomnibus*, gods for names, was suggested long ago: hence each villa was named after one of the twelve Olympians, with the greatest naturally being Jupiter’s. This unlikely double conjecture, has not found much support (cf. Federico & Miranda 1998: 512), but turns up occasionally in the literature on the “Villa Jovis”. Martin & Woodman 1989 have a long and thorough note on the passage at pp. 244-245, leaving the passage marked as corrupt; for his translation Woodman tentatively suggests *amoenitatibus*, translating as “attractive” (villas). Bob Kaster suggests the appealing *moenibus et molibus*.

³⁴ In a nutshell, the tale is that Io, a mortal beloved of Jupiter, was turned by him into a cow to escape Juno’s wrath; Juno gave the cow to be watched by the many-eyed Argus, Mercury slew Argus and Juno sent a gadfly to torment Io; as a cow she wandered the earth until she arrived in Egypt, was restored to human form by Jupiter, and gave birth to his son, Epaphus, the ancestor of Argive and Egyptian royalty. For some, Io may represent Egypt liberated from Argus/Mark Antony by Octavian (Augustus)/Mercury: Adamo Muscettola 1998: 254-256, following Ghedini 1986. Augustus was certainly portrayed as Mercury (Brendel 1935), but the rest is fantasy.

(as Ihm noted), but – whoever chose it – surely the name must have had some significance for him or for his father Augustus. It is very hard to see how a victim of Jupiter’s love, a woman whose whole story amounts to being first imprisoned and then forced to wander the earth in the form of a cow, could have such a special (and otherwise unsuspected) resonance for the first men in Rome that one of them, let alone any third party, would name a palace after her.

If that is so, emendation of Suetonius’ text is indeed in order. Perhaps “Iovis”, after all, but in that case surely not chosen by Augustus or Tiberius, who would never dream of comparing themselves to the ruler of the gods in this fashion. Or perhaps indeed, closer to the paradosis, “Iunonis”, as conjectured by Heinsius.³⁵ Or perhaps we should accept “Ionis” as transmitted, but translate it differently, as the genitive singular not of Io (feminine) but of Ion (masculine), making it the “Villa of Ion” son of Apollo, king of Athens, and protagonist of the play by Euripides.³⁶ But Ion has no mythical resonance. Much more attractive than any of these is the conjecture “Inonis”, making it the “Villa of Ino”, a figure from myth both relevant to Capri and significant to Tiberius.³⁷

Ino conjures up a whole web of stories and rites, but the essence of her tale is this. Daughter of Cadmus, aunt and foster mother of Dionysus, she bore two sons, Learchus and Melicertes, to her husband Athamas, a king in Boeotia. Jealous of Dionysus (Zeus’ son by Semele, Ino’s sister), Hera drove Athamas mad. He shot Learchus with an arrow and would have killed Ino and Melicertes as well, had not the young Dionysus

³⁵ According to Ihm’s *app. crit.* Where and why the emendation was made I do not know, or even which Heinsius proposed it.

³⁶ Bernacker 1981: 109 n. 3.

³⁷ Bernacker *ib.*, preferring Ion or Ino to Io, without explanation; developed at Federico & Miranda 1998: 508. I suspect that the proposal predates Bernacker, and that I have seen it before, but I do not know where it might come from.

temporarily blinded him. Ino leapt from a cliff into the sea with her remaining son and drowned, but Zeus took pity on her and changed them both into gods, her Leucothea, him Palaemon, in whose honor were founded the Isthmian Games. The story has many permutations, and the mother-son pair of gods was eventually assimilated into the Roman pantheon as Mater Matuta and Portunus. Ino has three claims on our attention.

First, as everyone knew, she played a very special role in the *Odyssey*. After his fabulous adventures on the return from Troy – the Lotus-Eaters, the Cyclops, the Land of the Dead, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis (twice), and so forth – Odysseus, the last survivor of all his crew, is washed up on the shores of Ogygia, the island of the nymph Calypso (*Od.* 9-12). There he languishes in the goddess' power for seven years, until Athena persuades Zeus to set him free, and Zeus sends Hermes with his command to Calypso. Odysseus builds a raft and sets out with directions home from Calypso, but his enemy Poseidon conjures up a terrible storm. Odysseus prepares to die, but then

The daughter of Kadmos, sweet-stepping Ino called Leukothea,
saw him. She had once been one who spoke as a mortal,

but now in the gulfs of the sea she holds degree as a goddess. (*Od.* 5. 333-335)

Ino takes pity on Odysseus, and in the form of a gannet persuades him to strip himself of his clothes and abandon his raft. Entrusting himself to her immortal veil he is to swim to the land of the Phaeacians and there, with face averted, he must return the veil to the sea. The ever-dubious Odysseus, not knowing who the friendly god may be, decides to obey, his raft is destroyed, and after several harrowing escapes he washes up in Phaeacia, where he dutifully returns the veil (*Od.* 5). The mysterious, unmotivated intervention of the unknown goddess into his story is rich in implications, and Ino/Leucothea has generated

considerable scholarship.³⁸ However one may interpret the incident, it is clearly of fundamental importance in Odysseus' journey home: Ino brings about the end of his adventures in the world of the fantastical and his reintegration into the world of daily life, through the liminal realm of the Phaeacians, whence he will be whisked by magic to Ithaca. Odysseus, Tiberius' hero, was deeply in Ino's debt, for bringing him home.

Second, Ino or Leucothea, the white goddess, has a peculiar connection with the coast of Italy opposite Capri. In his list of offshore islands, Pliny the Elder eventually works his way down past Pithecusa/Ischia and Megaris/Castel dell'Ovo (Naples), arriving at "next, about eight miles from Surrentum, Capreae, renowned for the citadel of the emperor Tiberius, about 11 miles in circumference, and then Leucothea." Without further comment he veers off to Sardinia. Then, three sections later, he returns from Sardinia to the coast with "over against the Gulf of Paestum is Leucosia, named for the Siren buried there," and so on down.³⁹ Where was the mysterious island of "Leucothea"? No one seems to know, standard reference works omit it, and it does not appear in Talbert's magisterial *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*.⁴⁰ But here the Sirens may come to our aid. In the western tradition, which is quite distinct from that of mainland Greece and seems to go back to Timaeus, the three Sirens are given the names Parthenope, Leucosia, and Ligeia.⁴¹ The geographical locations associated with them may be sorted chronologically into three successive groupings. As noted earlier, the

³⁸ Kardulias 2001, emphasizing the initiatory aspect of the incident, offers extensive bibliography.

³⁹ Pliny *NH* 3. 82, 85.

⁴⁰ Not in *Pauly-Wissowa* or *Der Neue Pauly*; nor in William Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* (London, 1868); in the list of ancient place names in Heinrich Nissen's *Italische Landeskunde II* (Berlin, 1902) at p. 986, with the Pliny reference and a question mark, but no discussion in the text.

⁴¹ Breglia Pulci Doria 1987: 88-96, for the sources.

scene of their singing and the destruction of passing sailors were the Sirenes or Sirenussae islands, off the coast from Positano, visible from Capri. So upset were they when Odysseus and his crew escaped them that they threw themselves into the sea, and each washed up in a different place: Parthenope at Naples, Leucosia near Poseidonia, and Ligeia near Terina much further down the coast. Parthenope was famously honored by her eponymous city, later Neapolis, while Leucosia may have received cult at Poseidonia. But (thirdly), the three of them enjoyed a temple together, in which (according to Timaeus) “ancient offerings” were on display, somewhere on the Sorrentine peninsula, again, probably within sight of Capri. That is, they were mortal creatures, they died by throwing themselves into the sea, and they returned as goddesses. Which is exactly what happened to Ino, and it was observed long ago that Leucothea and Leucosia were one and the same name.⁴² Now if we understand Pliny rightly, the island of Leucothea lay somewhere between Capri and Leucosia (which was down near Poseidonia). The only islands that appear on the map between these two are the three Sirenes, which Pliny happens to ignore: it is an easy conjecture that each of them was given a name, hence that one of them was his Leucothea. That is, a “Villa of Ino” on Capri would fit into a mythological landscape, looking East towards the Island of Leucothea, and North to the city of Parthenope, or Neapolis, where the cult of Leucothea happens to be attested.⁴³

Third, there is of course the villa’s setting: *imminet aequoribus scopulus*.⁴⁴

Tiberius was notoriously sardonic: “The Villa of Ino”, one might almost say “Ino’s Leap”, would be a grimly appropriate nickname for a dwelling set so high above her

⁴² Cf. Breglia Pulci Doria 1987: 88.

⁴³ *Iscrizioni greche d’Italia. Napoli* II. 94.

⁴⁴ Ovid *Met.* 4. 525, introducing Ino’s suicide.

waters. At the same time, the emperor was a romantic: Ino had fallen as an innocent and unhappy queen, but she had risen again as a happy immortal. As a goddess she would save the one hero worth saving, Odysseus, and for that she deserved every honor.

6. Other connections have been suggested between the hero and the emperor, some more attractive than probable.⁴⁵ Two parallels between their careers strike me as worth consideration. We know that Tiberius was consumed with the study of mythology and that he was happy to recreate the mythic past in his words and in his environment. Let us assume that he was alive to the parallels between his own character and career and those of his hero, along the lines sketched by Stewart. Two of Tiberius' wanderings might be

⁴⁵ B. Andreae, who has done so much to elucidate the program at Sperlonga, has argued that Tiberius was a descendant of Odysseus, through Telegonus, the offspring of the hero's union with Circe: Andreae 1994: xxx, cf. 1995: yyy, and Gorostidi Pi 2003. But that startling suggestion is based on the acceptance of two highly unlikely assumptions: that the Claudii, who everyone agrees (Suetonius, Dionysius, Appian) came from Regillum, in the land of the Sabines, claimed to be from Tusculum, in whose territory Regillum lay; and that they claimed to be descended from its founder, Telegonus. But that assumes that Regillum lay within the Tusculan territory in 504 BC, and that anyone from Tusculum was descended from Telegonus. Over against this must lie the massive silence of our sources: we have a lot of information about the *gens Claudia*, and about Roman claims to descent from Greek heroes, but no poet, no moneyer, no historian makes the connection with Tusculum or Telegonus (whereas the much less distinguished *gens Mamilia* trumpeted both). The best support for the claim is an unnecessary and meaningless emendation at Suetonius *Claudius* 40. Tiberius did indeed have a villa at Tusculum, as did many another Roman nobleman, but he showed no more interest in it through visits or local patronage than he did in any other of his many suburban properties. In sum, attractive though such a descent might be, the argument from silence is overwhelmingly against it.

Nisbet 1988. 105 n. 29 mused on the sculptures at Sperlonga: that Odysseus' retrieval of the body of Ajax may been meant to recall Tiberius's journey back from Germany with the body of his brother Drusus ("It has been suggested (I cannot trace by whom)"; that Julia was perhaps Scylla, for she had been banished to Rhegium, "where the unfilial monster had her cave" (and whose attached dogs were, in one version, her ex-lovers); and that "Polyphemus (the uncouth son of Neptune) would be a good nickname for Agrippa Postumus (the uncouth son of an admiral), who lived on an island and was outwitted by Tiberius."

given an Odyssean color by him or by others. As it happens, his motives in each case baffled his contemporaries.

In the summer of 6 BC, with little warning and against the vigorous opposition of his mother and stepfather / father-in-law, Tiberius sailed away into self-imposed exile on Rhodes.⁴⁶ Speculation as to his “real” reason(s), as intense now as it was in Tiberius’ day, has generated a considerable and sterile bibliography, with much argument and assertion about factional infighting, but no certainty. Real dislike of his wife Julia, who had been forced on him for dynastic reasons by Augustus, and deep resentment of her sons, whom Augustus was grooming for the succession, seem adequate motivation: a proud patrician and a mainstay of the regime chose to forestall his inevitable exclusion by a voluntary departure.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, in his absence Julia fell, spectacularly. She was accused of liaisons with several lovers, including five from the highest nobility, and was banished to the island of Pandateria (later to Rhegium, on the mainland) by Augustus, who was devastated by his daughter’s adulteries. He rebuffed Tiberius’ subsequent applications to return to Rome, but after Julia’s two elder sons, his sons by adoption, died, he was forced to rely again on his stepson, who finally came home in AD 4, to resume his place as the second man in Rome. Augustus disinherited Julia and

⁴⁶ All of the sources are collected in my “Itinera Tiberi”, to appear elsewhere. The fullest account is Suetonius 10-14.

⁴⁷ The latter was essentially the reason Tiberius afterwards gave, that he did not wish to overshadow his stepsons, and that he was moving aside to avoid any semblance of conflict with the rising generation, as Agrippa had with Marcellus: Suetonius 10. 1, Velleius 2. 99. 2. He also claimed at the time, legitimately, that he needed rest from his labors – and however much one may want to reconstruct factional struggles in the corridors of power, there is always the simplest of reasons, however naïve it may seem to believe it, that the patrician was also a scholar, and he simply did not want to be there.

forbade her burial in his mausoleum. Soon after his death in 14 she died of starvation, allegedly with Tiberius' acquiescence.

Tiberius remained on the island of Rhodes for 7 long years, just the length of time that Odysseus languished on Calypso's island, an unwilling guest pining for home; Odysseus was released by Zeus, Tiberius summoned home by Augustus.⁴⁸ What might a dedicated Odyssean make of that? While her husband was detained abroad, Julia was unfaithful, allegedly committing adultery with noblemen, not to mention lesser senators and knights. When the debauchery, or conspiracy, was unmasked, one of the ringleaders killed himself, the others were sent into exile, and at least one of them was executed soon after the death of Augustus in AD 14.⁴⁹ There was of course a long, post-Homeric tradition of the unfaithful Penelope – in different versions of the tale much-suffering Odysseus returns to Ithaca only to banish his unchaste wife to her father's court or even to kill her, after which he sets out on his travels again.⁵⁰ A tale old in the time of Herodotus (2. 145) has her bear the god Pan to Hermes; others have her seduced by one or other of her noble suitors, while one outrageous version has her give birth to Pan after enjoying intercourse with "all" of the suitors (hence the god's name). Curiously, but not surprisingly, Tiberius subscribed, later if not sooner, to the version that made an adulteress of Penelope. When news reached him of the death of the god Pan, and he was inclined to believe it, his learned men conjectured (in Plutarch's words) that Pan was the son of Hermes and Penelope. Hardly a conjecture, since the story had been widespread for a long time (Cicero knew it), the point must be that Penelope was mortal, the only one

⁴⁸ Velleius 2. 99. 4; Homer *Od.* 7. 261.

⁴⁹ The five are named at Velleius 2. 200. 5; the death of Sempronius Gracchus at Tacitus 1. 53.

⁵⁰ Gantz 1993: 713 for references.

of Pan's proposed mothers who was, and hence that her son was a god who might die.⁵¹ Would Tiberius' *philologoi* have dared to impugn the chastity of Odysseus' wife if they knew that the emperor, whose love of the hero must have been common knowledge, would resent it? The story of the exiled prince, longing to return, turning his back on immortality and eternal youth for the love of his wife, even as the wife commits adultery with noble suitors at home: that would be a very nice image to be projected by a frustrated romantic like Tiberius.

A thought might go also to some inexplicable behavior towards the end of his life. Suetonius asserts that, after he removed to Capri in 26, Tiberius tried only twice to return to Rome, once (in 32) getting as close as his gardens near the Naumachia across the Tiber, once (in 37) advancing up to the 7th milestone on the Appian Way; but in fact, the biographer misses at least four other occasions when he came up, for each year after the fall of Sejanus the emperor journeyed to the immediate outskirts or close suburbs of his capital.⁵² The mysterious motives for what his nephew Claudius called his *apsentia pertinax* from the city excited much speculation. Suetonius variously suggests that the reason was unknown, that he feared the people or the aristocracy, that he was alarmed at a portent; or (in Tacitus) the stars had warned him not to return.⁵³ Yet Tacitus offers two vivid sketches of the elderly emperor, not secluded in his palace on Capri at all, but wandering restlessly near Rome. Under the year 26, after leaving the city for the last time, Tacitus claims that "he passed his extreme old age nearby in the countryside or on

⁵¹ Gantz 1993: 110.

⁵² "Itinera Tiberi" for the other references. His not quite returning to Rome in his last six years is a curious pendant to the first two years of his reign, when he could not bring himself to leave the capital, to the point that people called him Callipedes, presumably after a comic who ran in place: Suetonius 38.

⁵³ Suetonius 72. 2; Tacitus 4. 58. 2. Claudius: *ILS* 206.

the shore, often encamping at the walls of the City.” And under 33, after giving only vague reasons for his absence, Tiberius had the senate decree for him a military escort whenever he entered the senate house, “but he never once approached even the roofs of the city, still less the public council [i.e., the senate], on frequent detours encircling and dodging his fatherland.”⁵⁴ These strange wanderings, near but never quite reaching home, might remind us of the voyages of Odysseus, the man who strove for so many years to come home without actually getting there. And although Odysseus did eventually return to his kingdom, several different tales tell how he was obliged to set off on his travels again, in the restless search for adventure or, variously, to atone for the deaths of the noble suitors, in disgust at the adultery of his wife, or in apprehension of the prophesy that his son would kill him. Perhaps Tiberius knew better than to go home at all.

“What then resided in the devious mind of Ti. Caesar, no biographer could tell, or anybody else.”⁵⁵ In his learned analysis of the Sperlonga sculptures, A.F. Stewart argued

⁵⁴ Tacitus 4. 58. 3: *cum propinquo rure aut litore et saepe moenia urbis residens extremam senectam compleverit.* 6. 15. 3: *ne tecta quidem urbis, adeo publicam consilium numquam adiit, deviis plerumque itineribus ambiens patriam et declinans.* Compare his own description (at 3. 47. 3) of a *peregrinatio suburbana* in 21.

⁵⁵ Syme 1989, 418 n. 46, on Tiberius’s avoidance of Rome. In his own later years Syme seems to have developed a growing affection for the elderly emperor (a subject perhaps to be pursued).

convincingly this “mixture of an updated Lysippan style and the last word in Pergamene baroque” was both of its time and the reflection of a particular sensibility. Summing up:

as far as their setting, arrangement and treatment of subject-matter are concerned, these sculptures fit in fairly well with what one might look for in grandiose mythological compositions of the early Julio-Claudian period, though the blend of pedantry and horror in decoration meant for the dining-room perhaps indicates an owner of somewhat unusual interests; and ... the literary and artistic tastes of Tiberius, together with his known predilections in dinner-table entertainment, were such as to furnish a suitable climate in which sculpture of this kind, erudite, academic and monstrous, could have flourished.⁵⁶

What this suggests to me is that his obsession with mythology, absurd or not, might offer arresting insight into “the devious mind of Ti. Caesar”: not perhaps into his motives but, just as valuable, into his tastes and character. His extraordinary interest in Odysseus seems to be well established, and from that it is easy to deduce a resemblance (as Stewart was the first to contend) between emperor and hero, and even a self-identification in character, word, and deed.

Which leads us to two salient traits of the emperor that are *not* Odyssean, but which may be illuminated by the hero. One is his extraordinarily sardonic sense of humor, bleak and to many contemporaries even repellent, a good expression of his notorious *saevitia* and his *tristitia*. Anecdotes abound, many literary and mythological. Best of all, when ambassadors from Ilium offered him belated sympathy for the death of his son Drusus, he extended in return, mockingly, *irridens*, his condolences on the death

⁵⁶ Stewart 1977: 86.

of their distinguished citizen, Hector: very witty, but not funny.⁵⁷ “I shall make him Ajax” reflects the same sensibility, that of a man who would relish the harsh Odyssean satire of futile battles among dead philosophers, and perhaps that of a man who would name his house, set on a cliff high above the sea, “Ino’s Villa”.

But Ino, as mentioned earlier, is an ambivalent figure, the wretched queen and the serene goddess, and Tiberius’ bitter misanthropy is closely tied to an intense romanticism. Throughout his adult life there runs a theme, the longing for escape, from the years on Rhodes to the years on Capri, from the frustrated attempt to evade the empire in 14 to the repeated harsh rejection of his fellow men in Rome.⁵⁸ Escape, such as it was, lay above all in the mental and physical “landscapes of illusion” offered by myth, and in the life of the intellectual, but there could be no real escape for a man driven by duty and necessity. Tiberius captured the essence of empire in the folkloric phrase that was supposed to be constantly on his lips: he had a wolf by the ears; the dilemma was impossible, he couldn’t hold on and he couldn’t let go. The hero might wander, the emperor could not. Tiberius the frustrated romantic may seem at first glance an odd figure, but he peeps through the hostile historical narratives repeatedly. The best illustration comes in an anecdote which, true or not, sounds more like a passage from a Greek novel than an incident in Roman life. In 12 BC the 29-year-old Tiberius was living happily with his wife, Agrippina, by whom he had had a son, with a second child on the way. For reasons of state he was compelled by his stepfather, Augustus, to divorce her and to marry Augustus’ own daughter, of whose light-hearted morality he

⁵⁷ Suetonius 52. 1.

⁵⁸ Baker 1929: 8 gets it right, on the yearning to withdraw: “Tiberius had a spiritual Capri in his mind from the first.”

disapproved. Nevertheless, the ever-dutiful Tiberius did as ordered. Then the heartbreaking part. In the words of Suetonius,

But even after the divorce he regretted his separation from Agrippina, and the only time that he chanced to see her, he followed her with such an intent and tearful gaze that care was taken that she should never again come before his eyes.⁵⁹

Tiberius as the hero in an ancient romance is an interesting character: not this time the story of Odysseus and Penelope, but Orpheus and Eurydice.

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