

KALYPSO, THE DIVINE AMONG THE GODDESSES: ALLEGORISATION, SYMBOLISATION AND RECEPTION FROM HOMER TO STAR TREK

Kalypso, Tanrıçalar Arasında Bir İlahi Varlık: Homeros'tan Star Trek'e Alegorizasyonu,
Sembolizasyonu ve Alımlanışı

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ABSTRACT

According to Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus takes ten years to return home from the Trojan War, yet seven of these he spends on a beautiful island in the company of an equally beautiful goddess. Not only did Kalypso, "the divine among the goddesses" (as she is repeatedly called by Homer), enchant Odysseus, she has also intrigued millions of readers and inspired scholars, writers and artists. In a *tour de force* through 2700 years of scholarship, reception and reworkings, this article traces, by way of example, the different paths that Kalypso has taken ever since she offered Odysseus hospitality and - albeit unsuccessfully - immortality. The cultural significance (broadly defined) of the goddess Kalypso is discussed, beginning with her first appearance in the *Odyssey* and ending with a selection of examples of reception from the twentieth century. First, Kalypso's role and function in the *Odyssey* is discussed, along with an analysis of her name and the epithets assigned to her. Thereafter, three major aspects of Kalypso's reception are considered: allegorical and symbolic interpretations in scholarship, visual depictions, and popular reception. It is demonstrated that allegorical and symbolic readings play an important role in all these areas and that many of them are rooted in hermeneutic challenges and textual gaps that stem from the *Odyssey*.

Keywords: Kalypso, Homer, *Odyssey*, allegorisation, symbolisation, reception.

ÖZET

Homeros'un Odyseia'sına göre Odysseus'un Truva Savaşı'ndan eve dönmesi on yıl sürmüştür, ancak bunun yedi gününü güzel bir adada, kendisi kadar güzel bir tanrıçanın refakatinde geçirmiştir. Kalypso -tanrıçalar arasında bir ilahi varlık (Homeros tarafından defalarca dile getirildiği gibi)-, yalnızca Odysseus'u büyülemekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda milyonlarca okuyucunun ilgisini çekerek akademisyenlere, yazarlara ve sanatçılara ilham vermiştir. Bu makale, alımlama ve yeniden yorumlama çalışmalarıyla geçen 2700 yıllık akademik maratondan hareketle Kalypso'nun Odysseus'a misafirperverliğini ve -başarısız olsa da- ölümsüzlüğü sunuşundan bu yana geçirdiği dönüşümlerin izini sürmektedir. Makalede Tanrıça Kalypso'nun (geniş anlamda tanımlanmış) kültürel önemi, Odyseia'da ilk ortaya çıkışıyla başlayıp yirminci yüzyıldan alımlama örneklerinin bir seçkisiyle sona ererek tartışılmaktadır. İlk olarak, Kalypso'nun Odyseia'deki rolü ve işlevi, adının ve ona atanan lakapların analiziyle birlikte tartışılmıştır. Daha sonra, Kalypso'nun alımlanmasının üç ana yönü ele alınmaktadır: bilimdeki alegorik ve sembolik yorumlar, görsel tasvirler ve popüler alımlama. Alegorik ve sembolik okumaların tüm bu alanlarda önemli bir rol oynadığı ve birçoğunun Odyseia'dan kaynaklanan hermenötik meydan okumalar ve metinsel boşluklardan kaynaklandığı gösterilmiştir.

Keywords: Kalypso, Homeros, Odyseia, alegorizasyon, sembolizasyon, alımlama.

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I. Introduction¹

In an episode from the TV series *Star Trek: Short Treks* – an anthology based on *Star Trek Discovery*, the penultimate *Star Trek* series (streaming since 2017) – the spaceship USS Discovery is portrayed as having held its position in outer space for a thousand years when it retrieves an escape pod with a passenger inside, a man named Craft. The computer system of the USS Discovery has developed considerably over those thousand years; it has become sentient and has adopted the personality of a female called Zora. Zora rescues Craft, then falls in love with him, and therefore keeps him aboard against his will. However, because he so badly wants to return to his home planet, she finally provides him with a space shuttle and releases him. What is most illuminating is the title of this episode: “Calypso.” For anyone even vaguely familiar with the character of the ancient Greek goddess Καλυψώ (Kalypso), the reason for the choice of this title must be obvious: like Zora with Craft, Kalypso rescues Odysseus, keeps him prisoner on her island for seven years, but eventually lets him go (and even helps him build a ship) because he wishes to see his wife and his son again. Aside from the obvious similarities in the story lines, there are also similarities in terms of power relations: Zora is a sentient computer and thus possesses superior powers to humans; Kalypso is a goddess and thus also has authority over the mortal Odysseus. Furthermore, the name of the rescued astronaut is a speaking name, alluding to the man’s skilfulness and his inventive talent; likewise, Odysseus is the prototypical inventor and trickster, and thanks to his manual skills – his *handicraft* – he is able to build his own ship that allows him to leave the island of Kalypso.

In this article, the cultural significance (broadly defined) of the goddess Kalypso is discussed, beginning with her first appearance in Homer’s *Odyssey* and ending with a selection of instances of reception from the twentieth century, the latest of which is the *Star Trek* example just outlined. First, Kalypso’s role and function in the *Odyssey* is discussed, along with an analysis of her name and the epithets assigned to her. Thereafter, three major aspects of Kalypso’s reception are considered: allegorical and symbolic interpretations in scholarship, visual depictions, and popular reception. It is demonstrated that allegorical and symbolic readings play an important role in all these areas and that many of them are rooted in hermeneutic challenges and textual gaps that stem from the *Odyssey*.

II. Kalypso in Homer’s *Odyssey*

The Kalypso story is narrated in Book 5 of Homer’s *Odyssey* (c. 700 B.C.). Odysseus, on his voyage home after the Trojan War, is destined to be displaced for another ten years before he can finally reach Ithaca and be reunited with his wife Penelope. Therefore, towards the end of the tenth year of his journey, the Olympian gods, prompted by the goddess Athene in her capacity as Odysseus’ protector, decide that he must be returned home. Book 1 of the *Odyssey* (lines 32–95) thus begins with a council on Mount Olympus where the gods discuss the issue and where Zeus, the ruler of the Olympians, promises to have Odysseus sent home; this decision is reiterated at the beginning of Book 5 (lines 1–42) at a second divine council, where Athene again pulls the strings.² Hermes, the messenger-god, is then sent to Kalypso’s dwelling place, the isle of Ogygia, where Odysseus has been kept prisoner for seven years already after he was washed ashore on her island, having lost his entire crew and all his possessions. After rescuing him and giving him food and shelter, Kalypso fell in love with him – so much so that she does not wish to release him. Therefore, after a visit from Hermes with instructions

¹ Greek mythological names are spelt in their Greek rather than Latinised form (hence “Kalypso”, not “Calyпсо”) unless the Latinised form is so familiar that the Greek form would look obscure (hence “Circe”, not “Kirke”). Translations from Ancient Greek are mine.

² Scholars disagree about the motivation for the second divine council at the beginning of Book 5. In my opinion, the point is that Zeus has neglected to keep his promise because he wanted to avoid a conflict with Poseidon and Kalypso, as a result of which Athene must remind him of his promise at the beginning of Book 5 (Bär, 2021).

to release her prisoner (lines 43–148), she makes a last attempt to turn the tables by offering Odysseus immortality on condition that he stay with her for good – but he declines the offer and thus forfeits the prospect of becoming immortal, while Kalypso loses her last hope (lines 149–227). Subsequently, she releases Odysseus as ordered, even assisting him in building a raft, and provides him with the necessary provisions for his voyage on the high seas (lines 228–268). And so, Odysseus leaves Ogygia and approaches the isle of Scheria, where he is about to meet his next benefactors, the Phaiakians; but first, he has a final unpleasant encounter with his arch-enemy, the sea god Poseidon, who torments him with a sea storm that almost drowns him (lines 269–493).³

Homeric scholars, influenced by (outdated) analytic approaches to the Homeric epics, often assume that the character of Kalypso was not inherited from traditional mythology, but must have been invented by Homer, created by analogy with Circe, the enchantress who, according to *Odyssey* Book 10, transforms Odysseus' comrades into swine, but is tricked by Odysseus.⁴ Indeed, the similarities between these two figures are striking (Kaiser 1964, p. 197–213; Scully 1987, p. 406–408) – they both live on remote islands, they both engage in similar activities (weaving and singing),⁵ they both first deceive, but then help Odysseus, they both have sexual intercourse with him, and they even share the same epithets (see below).⁶ However, there is no reason to believe that Kalypso may not be as old as (or older than) Circe; the Homeric epics are our earliest textual sources of ancient Greek literature, and therefore assumptions about the relative age of specific characters in relation to traditional mythology are necessarily speculative.⁷ Genealogically, Kalypso is a daughter of Atlas (the famous Titan who is condemned to carry the sky);⁸ hence, we can conclude that she must have been integrated into the existing system of ancient Greek mythology by the time the *Odyssey* was composed.⁹

As for the name “Kalypso”, it can be analysed as an etymologically transparent derivative of the Ancient Greek verb *καλύπτειν* (“to hide”, “to conceal”). Although scholars from antiquity to the present day have fiercely debated the exact meaning and relevance of this etymology in relation to Kalypso's role in the *Odyssey*,¹⁰ the main point is, in my opinion, quite straightforward: Kalypso lives on a distant island, as the narrator of the *Odyssey* unequivocally states when he reports Hermes' arrival there (*ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ τὴν νῆσον ἀφίκετο τηλόθ' εὐόσσαν*, “but when he finally arrived at the island that was far away”, line 55); thus, Kalypso *hides* in a remote area of the world.¹¹ Furthermore, she is also the *concealer* of Odysseus because she keeps him captive.¹² Speaking names are common in the Homeric epics (Kanavou 2015), and therefore the contemporary audience of the

³ On the narrative structure of *Odyssey* Book 5, see Hainsworth (1988, p. 249–251); Jones (1988, p. 47–48); Lohmann (1998, p. 24–27); Louden (1999, p. 104–129); Myrsiades (2019, p. 61–62).

⁴ See e.g. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1884, p. 115–116, 139); Lamer (1919, p. 1773); von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1927, p. 177–178); Woodhouse (1930, p. 215); Reinhardt (1960 [1948], p. 80–87); Crane (1988, p. 31–60).

⁵ On weaving and singing as occupations of goddesses and upper-class women, see Zusanek (1996, p. 118–123).

⁶ In contrast, Louden (1999, p. 104–122) emphasises the differences between Kalypso and Circe.

⁷ For example, Dirlmeier (1967) and Alden (1985) assume that Kalypso must have belonged to an older, oral tradition. Some scholars regard Kalypso as the model for Circe (and not the other way round); see e.g. Kranz (1915, p. 106–107); Güntert (1919, p. 7–22); Kanavou (2015, p. 114, n. 36). Scully (1987, p. 406, n. 6) rightly points out that “whichever position one takes, Kalypso comes first in the poem and from a narrative point of view therefore similarities between Kalypso and Kirke must look back to Kalypso”.

⁸ She is identified thus by Athene in *Odyssey* Book 1 (line 52) and by Odysseus in Book 7 (line 245).

⁹ Hesiod (*Theogony* line 359) mentions a daughter of Okeanos with the same name, but the two “Kalypsos” are probably different characters who share the same name (Lamer 1919, p. 1777–1778; von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1927, p. 177, n. 1; West 1966, p. 267; Kanavou 2015, p. 114).

¹⁰ Some of these etymologies are discussed in section III.

¹¹ See also Odysseus' statement in *Odyssey* Book 7 that “no one / befriends her either of the gods or of the mortal humans” (*οὐδέ τις αὐτῆι / μίσηται οὔτε θεῶν οὔτε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων*, lines 246–247).

¹² Heubeck (1965, p. 143) regards *Καλυψώ* as a hypocoristic derived from **Καλυψάνειρα* (*Kalypsáneira*, “the concealer of men”). See also Meillet (1919).

Odyssey will immediately have interpreted Kalypso's name along these lines; in fact, it appears that this name is "perhaps the clearest instance of the sense-bearing name" in the entire epic (Peradotto 1990, p. 105). And indeed, the Homeric narrator puns on the name's etymology at the conclusion of *Odyssey* Book 5 by inserting the Greek verbal root *καλυπτ-* twice within three lines (491–493):

ὥς Ὀδυσσεὺς φύλλοισι καλύψατο. τῷ δ' ἄρ' Ἀθήνη
ὑπνον ἐπ' ὀμμοῖσι χεῦ', ἵνα μιν παύσειε τάχιστα
δυσπνέος καμάτοιο, φίλα βλέφαρ' ἀμφικαλύψας.

Thus Odysseus covered himself up with the leaves. And then, Athene poured sleep onto his eyes, so that as quickly as possible he got rid of the distressing exhaustion, as she covered his eyelids around.

Furthermore, an allusion to Kalypso as the concealer of Odysseus is made by the Homeric narrator right at the beginning of *Odyssey* Book 1 (line 14): *νύμφη πότνι' ἔρυκε Καλυψώ* ("the nymph Kalypso, the mistress, held him back"; Peradotto 1990, p. 102).

As our next step, let us consider Kalypso's roles and functions in the *Odyssey*. First and foremost, Kalypso plays the role of Odysseus' saviour and helper: she rescues and feeds him when he is at the lowest point of his life, and when she is later forced to release him, she provides him with clothing, food and water. This role corresponds to the widespread mythological motif of the divine female helper (West 2004, p. 47–52); in this capacity, Kalypso mirrors Odysseus' principal helper, the goddess Athene, who accompanies and assists her protégé throughout his entire journey.¹³ In complete contrast to Athene, however, Kalypso is also Odysseus' lover and consequently his potential partner too, were he to accept her offer to make him immortal. With this, another two mythological motifs come into play. Firstly, we find the idea of erotic attraction or a romantic relationship between a female deity and a male human. There are several such examples in ancient Greek mythology, like those of Aphrodite and Anchises, Eos and Tithonos, and Thetis and Peleus; they all have in common that they are not fully consensual and that they do not have a happy ending (Bär 2020, p. 35–36). We also find the motif of apotheosis, that is, the fact that divinities are able (and entitled) to make selected humans immortal, as in the famous case of Herakles, who is deified at the moment of his death, or in the case of Tithonos, whom Zeus grants immortality at the request of Eos (Hansen 2004, p. 270–274; Bär 2020, p. 22). As a divinity, Kalypso has power over Odysseus – she can keep him prisoner, she can coerce him into having sex with her,¹⁴ and she can make him immortal. At the same time, though, Kalypso's offer also empowers Odysseus because he can decline it, because he can choose between two "forms of being" ("Daseinsformen", Focke 1943, p. 244; Harder 1960 [1957], p. 162).

As befits her divine power, Kalypso is repeatedly called *ἄα θεάων* ("the divine among the goddesses"), a standard designation applied to her as many as eleven times (*Odyssey* Book 5, lines 78, 85, 116, 159, 180, 192, 202, 242, 246, 258 and 276; Zusanek 1996, p. 61–90). But what does the phrase actually mean? Semantically, it is tautologous, as it expresses the same thing (Kalypso's divine nature) twice. Pragmatically, I consider it to be a hyperlative, meaning "the [most] divine among the goddesses". However, the hyperlative nature of the phrase is in contradiction to Kalypso's standing as a minor goddess (she is repeatedly called a

¹³ In addition, *Odyssey* Book 5 (lines 333–353) features another female helper figure, the sea-goddess Ino-Leukothea, who provides Odysseus with a headdress that enables him to swim ashore unharmed (Hainsworth 1988, p. 282; Lüthy 1992, p. 8–15; Kardulias 2001; Canevaro 2018, p. 113–115; Myrsiades 2019, p. 66–68; West 2020).

¹⁴ See especially lines 154–155: *ἀλλ' ἦτοι νύκτας μὲν ἰαύεσκεν καὶ ἀνάγκη / ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι παρ' οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐθελούση* ("but truly he passed the nights – albeit by force – / in the hollow cavern next to her, who was willing – unwilling was he"; Nickel 1972). However, coercion is absent according to lines 226–227: *ἐλθόντες δ' ἄρα τὸ γε μυχῷ σπείους γλαφυροῖο / τερπέσθην φιλότῃτι, παρ' ἀλλήλοισι μένοντες* ("and so the two went into a niche of the hollow cavern / and they enjoyed themselves in their lovemaking, dwelling next to each other"; Mauritsch 1992, p. 102).

νύμφη [“nymph”] in the *Odyssey*; Zusanek 1996, p. 99–100).¹⁵ Kalypso is not one of the Twelve Olympians; on the contrary, the Olympians have the authority to give her orders. The inherent contradiction between her relatively low divine status and the hyperlative nature of her designation can, in my opinion, be explained with regard to the dynamics of the relationship between Kalypso and Odysseus: through this hyperlative designation, the divine character of Kalypso is shown in maximum contrast to the mortality of Odysseus, and thus, the prospect of Odysseus becoming immortal through Kalypso is emphasised more strongly as well. This stark contrast, in turn, also highlights the effect of Odysseus’ refusal.

In *Odyssey* Book 7, Odysseus provides the Phaiakians with a summary of his recent adventures (lines 241–297; Garvie 1994, p. 213–225; de Jong 2001, p. 184–187). This summary includes an account of the Kalypso episode, in which Odysseus describes Kalypso as follows (lines 245–247):

ἔνθα μὲν Ἄτλαντος θυγάτηρ δολόεσσα Καλυψώ
ναίει εὐπλόκαμος, δεινὴ θεός· οὐδέ τις αὐτῇ
μίσηται οὔτε θεῶν οὔτε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.

There dwells the daughter of Atlas, the deceitful Kalypso,
the fair-tressed, the dreadful goddess; and no one
befriends her either of the gods or of the mortal humans.

Later, at the end of his narration of his earlier adventures (the *Nostoi* in Books 9–12), Odysseus once more refers to Kalypso very briefly (Book 12, lines 448–450):

[...] ἔνθα Καλυψώ
ναίει εὐπλόκαμος, δεινὴ θεὸς ἀδῆεσσα,
ἧ μ’ ἐφίλει τ’ ἐκόμει τε. [...]

[...] There dwells Kalypso,
the fair-tressed, the dreadful goddess gifted with speech,
who treated me kindly and cared for me. [...]

Scholars have been puzzled by Odysseus calling Kalypso “deceitful”, “dreadful” and “gifted with speech” despite simultaneously acknowledging her help and her kindness. Why is Odysseus’ characterisation of Kalypso so different from that of the Homeric narrator? Dirlmeier (1967) has argued that Kalypso (like Circe, who is given the same epithets as Kalypso; Garvie 1994, p. 215) originally represented a primordial, non-anthropomorphic deity, and that her epithets are to be explained with reference to this background.¹⁶ Speculative as it is, this hypothesis may well be correct, but it does not take into account the context within which these epithets are used: Odysseus uses them when he recounts his adventures with Kalypso at the court of the Phaiakians. The characterisation of Kalypso is focalised through Odysseus; Odysseus tells the Phaiakians *his* version of the story and how *he* perceived Kalypso, her character and his sojourn on her island. That he calls her a “dreadful goddess” emphasises the unequal power relations between the two. It can also be understood psychologically: Odysseus wishes to present himself in a positive light in front of his hosts, and so it appears logical that he would highlight the coercive nature of Kalypso’s behaviour.¹⁷ Furthermore, arguably, no one can blame him for considering Kalypso “deceitful” in her sly attempts to make him stay with her; and finally, highlighting her faculty of speech may likewise be seen as a reference to her rhetorical skills. In other words, the two

¹⁵ In the Homeric epics, nymphs are typically classified as immortal and hence as goddesses proper; on the other hand, as early as the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (lines 259–261), we find the notion of the nymphs as god-like, but mortal, creatures (Larson 2001; Hansen 2004, p. 239–244; Bär 2020, p. 18–19).

¹⁶ See Dirlmeier (1967, p. 22): “Bei solchen Wesen ist es begreiflich, daß ihre Sprachfähigkeit betont wurde [...]. Desgleichen ist es verständlich, daß solche Wesen für Menschen verderblich, tückisch sein können.” (“Regarding such creatures, it is comprehensible that their faculty of speech was emphasised [...]. Likewise, it is understandable that such creatures could be baleful, treacherous for humans.”)

¹⁷ This interpretation is consistent with Odysseus’ use of emotional and evaluative language before the Phaiakians (de Jong 1992; Beck 2005).

passages tell us less about Kalypso's actual nature than about Odysseus' point of view. Nevertheless, Odysseus' characterisation of Kalypso and his use of these epithets have had an influence on later interpreters and commentators, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

III. Allegorical and symbolic interpretations of Kalypso from antiquity to the present day

Along with the rationalising method, allegorisation was the principal method of interpreting myths and mythical characters in antiquity (Hunger 1954; Graf 1993 [1987], p. 194–198), and the allegorisation of the Homeric epics and of epic characters, especially the gods, was particularly common (Wehrli 1928; Small 1949). Allegorical (and symbolic) interpretations of Kalypso and her name were therefore widespread, and we can find traces of such traditions in various sources from antiquity and the Byzantine period. Pontani (2013, p. 45–52) has discussed these sources and the traditions connected to them in detail; in what follows, I select only three of them, listing them according to the degree of allegoricity involved, proceeding from almost literal to fully allegorical.

To begin with, a scholion on line 14 of *Odyssey* Book 1 interprets the name of Kalypso like contemporary scholarship does, that is, as “the concealer of Odysseus”, but it restricts the concept of concealment to Kalypso's imprisonment of Odysseus in her famous cave. It also explicitly frames the interpretation as literal (στοιχειακῶς, “literally”), although it adds an allegorical twist through the reference to Kalypso's cave (Schol. Y α 14d):

Καλυψὼ δὲ νοήσαις ἐντεῦθεν στοιχειακῶς τὴν κάλυψιν καὶ τὴν ἀφάνειαν, ἥτις ἐπεκράτει τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα “ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι”, ἤγουν ἐν τόποις ἀδήλοις, ὅτι ἀδηλος καὶ ἀφανὴς ἦν ἐτι τοῖς αὐτοῦ φίλοις.

And therefrom one might understand Kalypso literally as the concealment and the invisibility that prevailed over Odysseus “in the hollow caverns”, that is, in invisible places, because he was still invisible to, and unnoticed by, his own beloved ones.

The entry on Kalypso in the *Suda* (a Byzantine encyclopaedia from the tenth century A.D.), however, reads Kalypso's act of concealing in relation to herself – yet not to her dwelling on Ogygia, but to her mindset; thus, her epithet *δολόεσσα* is explained (*Suda* κ 273):

Καλυψὼ· ἢ μὴ ἀπλῆ, καλύπτουσα δὲ τὸ διανοούμενον. δολόεσσαν γὰρ λέγει αὐτὴν Ὅμηρος.

Kalypso: the one who is not plain, as she hides her intention. For Homer calls her deceitful.

Finally, Eustathios of Thessalonike (a Byzantine scholar from the twelfth century) offers an insightful interpretation that is explicitly allegorical (τῆ ἀλληγορία, “through allegory”; Eust. in *Od.* 1389.42):

μεταπλάττουσι δὲ αὐτὴν τῆ ἀλληγορία εἰς τὸ καθ' ἡμᾶς σῶμα, ὡς συγκαλύπτουσαν ἐντὸς δίκην ἐλύτρου τὸν ψυχικὸν μάργαρον, ἥτις καὶ αὐτὴ κατεῖχε τὸν φιλόσοφον Ὀδυσσεῖα ὡς ἄνθρωπον ἐνδεδεμένον σαρκί.

They¹⁸ remodel her through allegory into the body (according to our understanding), as she hides inwardly, in the manner of a shell, the pearl of the soul – she who personally kept captive the philosopher Odysseus, bound in his flesh.

Contemporary scholars also interpret Kalypso's nature both allegorically and symbolically, often taking into consideration the etymology of her name in doing so. An interpretation that was popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was that of Kalypso as a goddess of the Underworld; accordingly,

¹⁸ Eustathios refers to his unacknowledged sources here, that is, ancient scholars, perhaps from as early as the Hellenistic period.

Odysseus' escape from Ogygia was seen as his symbolic rebirth after a death-like state.¹⁹ Of particular influence in this context was the monograph by the German linguist and historian of religion Hermann Güntert, who, based on a diachronic study of linguistic and mythographical evidence, argued that Kalypso stemmed from a pre-Indo-European death goddess and that Ogygia originally represented an entrance to the Underworld, if not the Underworld itself (Güntert 1919).²⁰ Correspondingly, the scholar interpreted Kalypso's name not as "the concealer", but as "the undertaker", claiming that the original meaning of the Greek verb *καλύπτειν* had indeed been "to inter", "to bury" (Güntert 1919, p. 22–36).

Furthermore, we have already encountered Franz Dirlmeier's view that Kalypso at an earlier stage must have represented a primordial deity who was not originally anthropomorphic and to whom therefore an epithet such as *αὐδήεσσα* ("gifted with speech") could be applied (Dirlmeier 1967). Such an interpretation ultimately appears to be in the tradition of James Frazer's (1854–1941) theory of the urmyth, that is, the idea that all myths and mythical figures can be traced back to an original, "unpolluted" version (Csapo 2005, 57–67). Yet, at the same time, such an interpretation is allegorical in the actual sense of the word, as it reads a hidden meaning into the figure of Kalypso. Along similar lines, Richard Harder sees traces of a fairy in Kalypso and, accordingly, her coercing Odysseus into having sex with her as "the spell of the fairy" ("Elfenbann", Harder 1960 [1957], p. 155). Others, in turn, regard Kalypso as a goddess of the deep seas (Lesky 1947, p. 76–77, 181) or as a death demon of shamanic origin (Thornton 1970, p. 26–32). The latter interpretation has its roots in the "myth and ritual school", a school that also goes back to James Frazer and that regards mythology as rooted in ritualistic practice.²¹

IV. Visual depictions of Kalypso from antiquity to the present day

Unlike her "doppelgänger" Circe (Moraw 2020, p. 55–83), Kalypso is rarely attested in visual depictions from antiquity. The *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* mentions as few as seven visual depictions of Kalypso in ancient Greek and Roman sources, and another four that are uncertain (Rafn 1990; see also Caprino 1959). Although scenes from the *Odyssey* are commonplace on Greek pottery, there is only one surviving portrayal of Kalypso on a Greek vase from the classical period, showing Kalypso in her well-known function as a helper: on a Lucanian red-figure hydria from Paestum (Italy), dated to c. 390–380 B.C.²² It depicts the moment before Odysseus' departure: Kalypso presents Odysseus with a box of provisions for his voyage, while Odysseus sits on a rock on the shore, a sword in his hand, looking thoughtful, longing for Ithaca and Penelope.

Since the late eighteenth century, Kalypso has occasionally been the subject of paintings. The Swiss-Austrian painter Angelika Kauffmann (1741–1807) produced several paintings that feature Kalypso: two of them refer directly to *Odyssey* Book 5, one of which shows Kalypso swearing everlasting love to Odysseus, while the other displays her mourning in her cave after Odysseus has left her. These two motifs are characteristic of how Kalypso is seen, and what she stands for, in most modern reception: as a symbol of eternal (but unrequited) love, and as a symbol of eternal solitude. It is, however, another of Kauffmann's Kalypso paintings that is most inventive: its motif does not stem from the *Odyssey*, but from François Fénelon's (1651–1715) novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*: "The Sorrow of Tele-

¹⁹ See Lamer (1919, p. 1773–1777) for an overview of these (and other) theories from the nineteenth century. The symbolic reading of Odysseus' rebirth has been revived by scholars in recent years (Powell 2004, p. 123–124; Loudon 2011, p. 124–134; Canevaro 2018, p. 112).

²⁰ Similar interpretations were also proposed later, e.g. by Anderson (1958). On Ogygia, see also Radermacher (1915, p. 27–31).

²¹ Frazer's famous work is *The Golden Bough* (first published in two volumes in 1890, in three volumes in 1900 and in twelve volumes in 1906–1915; the latest abridged version was published posthumously: Frazer 1994). See Graf (1993 [1987], p. 39–43, 50–53) for an overview and Ackerman (1990) for a detailed study of Frazer's ideas and influence.

²² Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, 81839 (H 2899). LIMC V, Kalypso 5.

machus" (1783) displays Kalypso stopping her fellow nymphs from singing about Odysseus because she notices that Telemachos is saddened by their song (Figure 1). Telemachos extending his search for Odysseus to Kalypso's island is an invention of Fénelon's; Kauffmann's painting thus breaks with the canonicity of the Homeric version. Furthermore, unlike the two paintings mentioned previously, it does not reduce Kalypso's role to that of the eternal lover or the eternal solitary, instead showing Kalypso as in charge and simultaneously caring and empathic towards Telemachos (Peterli 1976/77).



Figure 1. Angelika Kauffmann, "The Sorrow of Telemachus" (1783). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession 25.110.187. Picture from Wikipedia licenced under Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication.

Perhaps the best-known Kalypso painting is that by Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901) from 1882 (Figure 2). Almost snow-white, half-naked, seated on a deep-red carpet, Kalypso stands in sharp relief to her surroundings, which are painted in dark, gloomy black and brown hues. Odysseus stands with his back towards the onlooker, gazing out over the sea, longing for Penelope; Kalypso turns her head towards Odysseus, knowing that he will leave her soon, longing for him as much as he longs for his wife. In comparison to the *Odyssey*, there is a clear shift of emphasis here: in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his longing for his home and his wife take centre stage; here, the focus is on Kalypso, her longing for Odysseus and her eternal solitude.²³



²³ Other paintings that depict Kalypso as the eternal solitary include "Calypso" (1869) by Henri Lehmann (1814–1882) and "Calypso's Isle" (1897) by Herbert James Draper (1863–1920).

Figure 2. Arnold Böcklin, “Odysseus and Kalypso” (1882). Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv.-Nr. 106. Picture from Kunstmuseum Basel, public domain.

The German painter Max Beckmann (1884–1950) depicts yet another, completely different, Kalypso (Kahl 2008; Schulze 2022, p. 468–472). In his 1943 painting “Odysseus and Kalypso”, Odysseus and Kalypso are not separated, but together; the painting evidently adopts the theme of the repeated sexual encounters between the two as they are described explicitly in the *Odyssey*. However, upon closer inspection, the topic of Kalypso’s solitude is alluded to here as well. Kalypso tries to seduce Odysseus, but he does not respond; instead, he is still wearing some of his armour (as if he were just passing by from the Trojan War), and he appears to be looking into the remote distance, longing for Penelope. The three animals involved add to the symbolic depth of the scene: Kahl (2008, p. 4) reads the snake as a symbol of the complicated relationship between Odysseus and Kalypso, the bird as standing for Odysseus’ wish to escape, and the cat as symbolising Kalypso’s attempt to retain him. Taken as a whole, the scene gives expression to the ephemeral nature of Odysseus’ and Kalypso’s encounter and to the one-sidedness of their attraction, and hence the motif of Kalypso’s eternal solitude is clearly present here as well, although only on a second glance. At the same time, the deceitfulness of Kalypso comes to the fore; Kalypso’s attempt to seduce Odysseus, expressed through the symbolism of the cat, harks back to the deceitfulness which Odysseus spells out in the *Odyssey*.

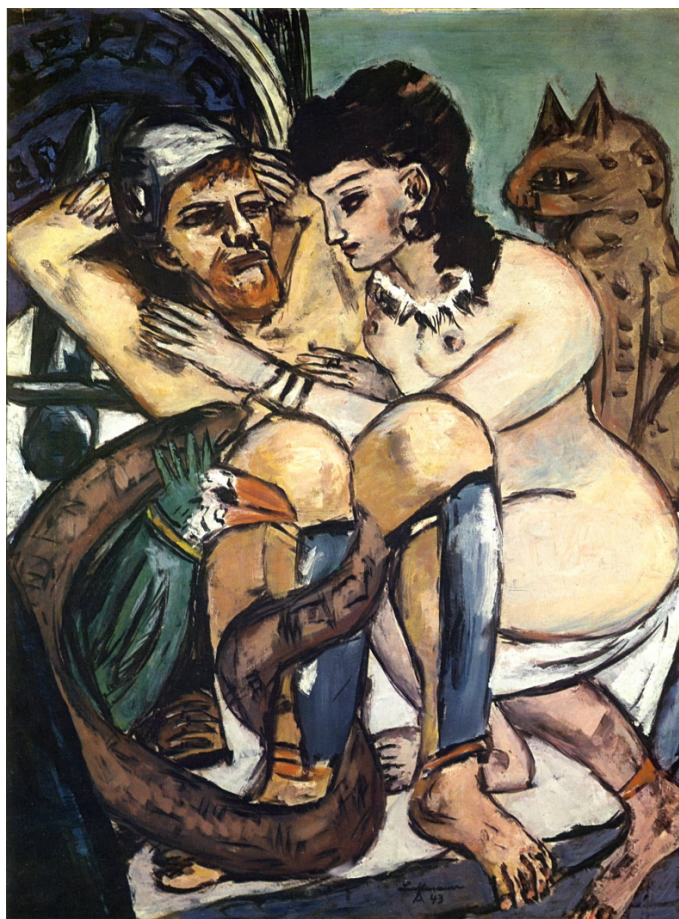


Figure 3. Max Beckmann, “Odysseus and Kalypso” (1943). Hamburger Kunsthalle, Inv.-Nr. HK-2887. Picture from WikiArt, public domain.

V. The reception of Kalypso in popular literature and film

Kalypso has had an afterlife in twentieth-century writings from philosophy to popular literature. Here too, only a selection can be discussed. One should, of course, mention the famous allegorical interpretation of Kalypso and Circe by

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as “diligent weavers [...] resembling both mythical powers of fate and bourgeois housewives” in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* from 1944,²⁴ an interpretation that boldly combines mythical allegorisation with social criticism. Other writings with an allegorical twist are Alfred Döblin’s (1878–1957) *Gespräche mit Kalypso* (“Dialogues with Kalypso”, 1910), where Odysseus and Kalypso are the interlocutors in conversations about the nature of music, and more recently, Michael Köhlmeier’s (*1949) novel “Kalypso”, a renarration of *Odyssey* Book 5 that received mixed reviews from critics (Laman 1999, p. 96). What I wish to focus on here, though, is the reception of Kalypso in popular literature and film. A recent example is provided by Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* books (2005–2009), a series of five novels, written primarily for teenagers, that locates the world of ancient mythology in the United States of today. Percy Jackson, a teenager and the son of Poseidon, is the protagonist, and on many occasions, he adopts the role of an Odysseus-like figure; thus, very often the *Percy Jackson* novels appear to be creative rewritings of the *Odyssey* (Nagy 2020; Bärtschi 2022, p. 362–366). In *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008), Percy is stranded on Ogygia, and Kalypso takes care of him as she once cared for Odysseus. In a dialogue before Percy’s departure, Kalypso explains why she lives alone in this remote area of the world (Riordan 2008, p. 222):

Kalypso rose and took my hand. Her touch sent a warm current through my body. “You asked about my curse, Percy. I did not want to tell you. The truth is the gods send me companionship from time to time. Every thousand years or so, they allow a hero to wash up on my shores, someone who needs my help. I tend to him and befriend him, but it is never random. The Fates make sure that the sort of hero they send...”

Her voice trembled, and she had to stop.

I squeezed her hand tighter. “What? What have I done to make you sad?”

“They send a person who can never stay”, she whispered. “Who can never accept my offer of companionship for more than a little while. They send me a hero I can’t help...just the sort of person I can’t help falling in love with.”

This element of the story – Kalypso being alone because of a divinely inflicted curse – was invented by Riordan; it reinforces the topos of Kalypso as an eternal solitary, which, as we saw above, is a major element of Kalypso’s reception. Simultaneously, by answering the question of why Kalypso lives alone, it fills a textual gap (*Leerstelle*) from the *Odyssey*.²⁵

Finally, we have Kalypso in film: probably the best-known film that features Kalypso is *Ullisse* from 1954. What is particularly insightful here is the way this film elaborates on the idea of Odysseus as a potential partner, and hence the potential equal, of Kalypso by using the same actress for the roles of Kalypso and Penelope (Silvana Mangano). This double role picks up on an idea that is already inherent in the *Odyssey*, namely, that through Kalypso’s offer to make Odysseus immortal, the relationship between the two had the potential to become real, in which case Kalypso would have replaced Penelope as Odysseus’ wife.²⁶

The 1997 mini TV series *Odysseus* has little, if anything, to offer in terms of allegorisation and symbolisation of Kalypso (or of any other character, for that matter); however, it deserves mention for the fact that “only in Odysseus’ extended visit” to Kalypso, “acted by the stunning singer Vanessa Williams”, is there “sexual chemistry and sensual physical contact” (Hall 2008, p. 191) in a film that was otherwise ridiculed (rightly so, in my opinion) for its politically correct dullness

²⁴ Quoted from the English translation by Edmund Jephcott (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002 [1944], p. 58).

²⁵ On the remoteness of Ogygia, see *Odyssey* Book 5, line 55 and Book 7, lines 246–247; see above, section II, with note 11. On the concept of the *Leerstelle* (“textual gap”), see Iser (1976, p. 315–327).

²⁶ On Kalypso as a parallel figure to, as well as counterpart of, Penelope in the *Odyssey*, see Harder (1960 [1957], p. 156). On Penelope in the *Odyssey*, see the seminal studies by Felson (1994) and Clayton (2004).

(Paglia 1997, p. 170–181; Green 1998, p. 148–153). More interesting, though, is our penultimate example of cinematic reception: in the second film in the series *Pirates of the Caribbean (Dead Man's Chest, 2006)*, Naomie Harris plays a voodoo priestess called Tia Dalma (Figure 4). Tia Dalma was once in love with one of the pirates from the series, but she cursed him after he betrayed and left her. In the third film (*At World's End, 2007*), it is then revealed that Tia Dalma is actually Kalypso – her character is, in fact, just the human guise of the goddess (and her name appears to be an allusion to the Homeric epithet $\delta\iota\alpha\ \theta\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\omega\nu$). By making Kalypso a voodoo priestess, the film both combines a character from Greek mythology with the Afro-American type of the so-called “conjure woman” (Martin Samuel 2012) and harks back to the Homeric idea of Kalypso as a “dreadful goddess”, which, as we saw, stems from Odysseus’ characterisation of Kalypso in his storytelling at the court of the Phaiakians. In this way, it creates a story around Kalypso’s character that explains this puzzle from the *Odyssey*.



Figure 4. Naomie Harris as Tia Dalma in *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2006, 2007).
Picture from Fandom.com, published in line with German copyright
 (“Bildzitat” according to UrhG § 51).

VI. Conclusion

Following the discussion of Kalypso in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, only one instance of cinematic reception remains – and with this, we are back at the introduction to this article: the episode “Calypso” in *Star Trek: Short Treks*, where the Kalypso story is transferred into the science fiction genre. As shown in the introduction, this example of reception uses the name of Kalypso and the story connected to her as an emblem of an impossible love story; a love story character-

ised by an unequal relationship between a more powerful female and a weaker male, but one which eventually leaves the female in a weaker position because the male is successful in pursuing his journey and hence in returning to his true love. The *Star Trek* example may be seen as a trivialisation of the Kalypso episode from the *Odyssey*, but the central elements are, in fact, identical. 2700 years of reception and reworkings in texts and in the visual arts have shown that Kalypso is often used as an emblem of eternal (but unrequited) love and of eternal solitude. Allegorical and symbolic interpretations play an important role in scholarship from antiquity to the present day, but they can also be found in creative reception. Likewise, the puzzling Homeric designation of Kalypso as “deceitful”, “dreadful” and “gifted with speech” has not only been explained differently by scholars in different periods, but has also left traces in the arts, as, for example, in Max Beckmann’s painting “Odysseus and Kalypso” or the character of Tia Dalma in the film *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

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