

An Odyssey for Our Time: Barbara Kohler's Niemands Frau (German Monitor)



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In her 2007 poem cycle *Niemands Frau*, Barbara Köhler returns to Homer's *Odyssey*, not to retell it, but to take up some of the threads it has woven into the cultural tradition of the West - and to unravel them, just as Penelope, the wife of the hero who called himself Nobody, unravelled each night the web she re-wove by day. Köhler's return to the *Odyssey* takes place under the sign of a grammatical shift, from 'er' to 'sie', from the singular hero to a plurality of female voices - Nausicaa, Circe, Calypso, Ino Leucothea, Helen and Penelope herself - with implications for thinking about identity, power and knowledge, about gender and relationality, but also about the corporeality and multivocality which underlies the 'virtual reality' of the printed text. The eight essays in this volume explore Köhler's iridescent poem cycle from a variety of different angles: its context in contemporary German refigurations of the classical; its engagement with Homer and the classical tradition; its contribution to feminist philosophy of the subject and a female 'dialectic of enlightenment'; its incorporation of the voices of poetic predecessors; and the surprising alliance it uncovers between poetry and quantum theory.

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