



Every time Odysseus came back from one of his odysseys, he'd hop into bed with his wife Penelope and — nothing. He could have hopped into bed with the Cyclops for all the effect it had on his sexual prowess.

Not surprisingly, Penelope began taking the suitors I described in a previous narrative about our hero's adventures.

So it was that Odysseus decided to get help from the Oracle at Delphi. He asked me to come along in case he needed assistance with the Oracle's mycological lingo.

As soon as we arrived, the Oracle began her spiel: "Fungi are the world's best medicinals. Bacteria and viruses don't have a chance against their secondary metabolites. What can they cure? For starters, cancer, flatulence, epilepsy, insomnia, tinnitus, scabies, pulled hamstrings, hypertension, hoof-and-mouth disease, gastric ulcers, and AIDs."

"But AIDs doesn't exist yet," said Odysseus. "This is, after all, ancient Greece."

"Exactly," replied the Oracle. "That shows how effective maitake or chaga

really are."

"My friend suffers from erectile dysfunction," I said.

Being at least 800 years old, the Oracle was somewhat hard of hearing, and she thought I said "irritable bowel syndrome." She suggested that Odysseus take a tincture of *Ganoderma lucidum* for fourteen days, after which, he said, "those bowels will cease to irritate you."

At this point, another of her clients — a young woman — showed up. The Oracle reached into a bin and sold the client a packet of dried Psathyrellas. "Their estrogenic activity will work wonders on her irregular menstrual cycles," she observed.

"My friend doesn't have irregular menstrual cycles," I told her. "He has a wonky willy."

The Oracle nodded and brought out some specimens of *Cordyceps sinensis*. "Winter worm, summer grass, it's called in China," she said, adding: "It's so popular that when the supply ran out in China, the Chinese invaded Tibet to get more ..."

Odysseus turned to me with a dubious look on his face. "That's a fungus?" he asked.

VISIT TO THE ORACLE

Lawrence Millman



Aseroe rubra. Photo courtesy D. Hemmes.



Aseroe arachnoidea is very attractive to true flies (Diptera). Photo courtesy D. Hemmes.

"It's a fungus — an ascomycete — that grows on the larvae of the bat moth," I told him.

"And it'll put lead in your pencil," the Oracle said. "By the way, does your spouse have a similar problem? I've got a stinkhorn that will give her spontaneous orgasms. I collected it while on holiday in Hawaii and transplanted it to the mulch here in Delphi..."

Here I interrupted her. "I'm afraid it gives spontaneous orgasms only to dipterans," I said.

"Dipterans?" inquired the Oracle. She got out her map of ancient Greece and began looking for a place called Diptera. For she was constantly on the lookout for new clients.

Upon getting back home, Odysseus ingested some of the *Cordyceps*, whereupon he immediately wanted to make olive oil with Penelope (note: "making hay" was not a euphemism known in those days). He grabbed her, carried her to the boudoir, and began kissing her passionately.

"Yeccch!" exclaimed Penelope. "Your breath is disgusting. It smells like a dead caterpillar or some sort of larva ..." She left the house and went off in search of, presumably, one of her suitors.

"So what should I do now, Homer?" Odysseus asked me the next time we met.

"As a mycologist, I recommend that you take Viagra," I told him. ♪

Shameless

Page 178 of *Exotic Mushrooms* serves up Plate 146, and on this plate rests *Phallus impudicus*, a steamy sprout of a mushroom that looks like, well...

if you know Latin

I need say no more.

Plate 146 also announces, Not Edible, a warning included for the soft-headed, those who demand everything and want it all spelled out.

I might have penciled in my own words but I tried that once in the third grade before a stiff ruler

bruised my knuckles, wielded by a nun— Sister Gabriel—who guarded the pure, white page, archangel at the gates of desire. By fifth grade our textbooks contained not only hastily written words but sketches too, and some of them surprising for their anatomical correctness.

Fifth graders knew so much more than exams could assess, but opening our books back then we had no way to understand character or the dark soil from which it so suddenly grew.

*David Feela
Arriola, Colorado*



Phallus multicolor. Photo courtesy D. Hemmes.