3.1 Hogan and Booker’s identification of the plot that universally evokes kama muta

In Hogan’s “heroic narrative prototype” the leader is separated from his or her community:

The fullest version begins when the rightful leader of a society is displaced from rule or prevented from assuming rule, most often by a close relative. He/she is exiled or imprisoned. This exile or imprisonment is linked with death – imagery of death, the threat of death, and so on. While he/she is in exile or imprisoned, the kingdom is threatened by some outside force, typically a (demonized/bestial) invading army or, less often, a demonic beast. The hero defeats the threat to the kingdom. He/she then battles the usurper, and is restored to his/her proper place as leader of his/her society. (Hogan 2003:109-110)

This heroic narrative prototype presumably is based primarily on a period in the narrative in which the dominant emotions are loneliness, humiliation and pride, though Hogan does not mention these constructs, using only the generic concepts of “suffering” and “happiness.” However, we imagine that heroic narratives also evoke kama muta experiences in empathic response to the terrific risks and any pain or injury the hero bravely endures, perhaps along with the deaths of close companions: the kama muta experience of compassion, but even more, kama muta of gratitude for the hero courageously saving the community. But the principal and culminating source of kama muta occurs when the hero, whose exile or imprisonment suspended all of his/her relationships, returns from battle in triumph to not simply renew those suspended bonds, but to immeasurably enhance and extend them. The triumphant savior is warmly welcomed everywhere, everyone instantly includes him, everyone is eager to affiliate with him—and he is desirable not just as a friend or ally, but as a husband. He is surely clasped by his family and feasted by all. In addition, Hogan (2003:236) notes that the prototypical heroic narrative often ends with “the reuniting of families separated during war, especially the royal family, with the rightful heir restored.” This is an additional source of kama muta for the protagonists, and hence for the listener or reader.

Hogan (2003) identifies two other prototypical narratives that are universal but less widespread, and typically less culturally important. One consists of famine, hunger, and then a good harvest, based on what Hogan calls the prototypical happiness of eating when hungry. The other consists of natural disaster interpreted as the punishment of the community by supernatural beings, resolved by divination and propitiatory sacrifice. Hogan says this narrative is based on the prototype of happiness inherent in making sense of misfortune. Hogan characterizes both of these narrative prototypes as based on universal emotions, though few emotion theorists would characterize hunger and satiation as emotions. The anxiety in disaster and the relief provided by divination and sacrifice are emotions by most definitions, although Hogan does not
name or describe either of these emotions. While Hogan does not consider the social relational emotions of these narrative prototypes, ethnology suggests that social bonding is often salient in the feasting that accompanies harvest and first fruit celebrations, and perhaps in the sacrifices that end in commensal consumption of the sacrificial meat, libation drinks, or other foods offered to deities. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter 9, in fact collective disasters do evoke intense communal sharing motives, perhaps generated by kama muta. This suggests that listeners familiar with these famine and disaster experiences may often recognize and identify with the kama muta that the protagonists would experience, and hence experience kama muta themselves.

One of Booker's (2004) plots in Western literature is rags to riches, in which a typically young hero or heroine is

- at the bottom of the heap, seemingly inferior to everyone around them. Often they are the youngest child, and disregarded for being so. Thus they begin in the shadows of more dominant figures around them, who not only can see no merit in them but are usually antagonistic toward them (Booker 2004:54).

In this plot, the hero or heroine went out into the world and had a number of adventures.

- Emerging from the shadows of their wretched former state, they were raised to a position of dazzling splendor, winning the admiration of all who beheld them. The hero won the hand of a beautiful Princess; the heroine won the hand of a handsome Prince. They succeeded to rule over a kingdom. (Booker 2004:53)

The rages to riches plot typically concludes with the couple in "a state of complete, loving union" at the head of a kingdom, in "a perfect state of wholeness, lasting indefinitely into the future" (Booker 2004:66). "Nothing more profoundly conveys our sense of resolution at the end of a story that they should be at last be united, a man and a woman brought together in perfect love" (p. 56). This romantic union clearly affords the reader or audience’s kama muta, which may be much of the appeal of the rags to riches plot. But the main theme of this plot is the dramatic rise in status in the fictional community’s primary authority ranking hierarchy. This indeed solidly places the hero or heroine into the most central position in the family and community, which may evoke kama muta (compare with sports and entertainment winners’ weeping, discussed at the end of Chapter 5). But often the principal emotion evoked by the rags to riches plot may be awe at their sudden rise to the top.

Another of Booker’s common plots, overcoming the monster, may evoke kama muta in the instances in which the hero who overcomes the monster thereby reunites with his love. Furthermore, the monster is a threat to everyone, so the audience may feel kama muta in response to the hero’s courageous acceptance of suffering, pain, fear, and even death to protect his comrades, his loved ones, and his community. This is an extraordinary enactment of
loving devotion. In Chapter 8, discussing melodrama, we will consider modern cinematic versions of Hogan’s (2003) heroic narrative prototype and Booker’s (2004) overcoming the monster plot (and see Fiske, Schubert, & Seibt 2017a). Another plot is the quest. “The real goal of the Quest emerges as remarkably similar to that happy ending we have seen in our previous types of story: the final coming together of hero and heroine, man and woman, and the succession to, or establishing of a kingdom. In each case it is this, in whole or in part, which enables the Quest to end on an image of completion” (Booker 2004:82). Voyage and return is the fourth plot, which revolves around gaining insight and knowledge. Booker does not address the social relational nature of the return scenes, so it is not clear whether he imagines that they afford an emotional experience like kama muta, but one would expect that after a long separation and perilous journey, a hero’s return to his lover and his family must often be depicted or imagined as evoking kama muta.

The comedy plot is a love story in which confusion or conflict keeps a loving couple apart until they reunite at the conclusion. When comedy begins “people have passed under a shadow of confusion, uncertainty, and frustration;” this gets worse, and then finally when it is cleared up, “the little world is brought together in a state of joyful union” (p. 150). Prototypically the identities of the hero or heroine are not recognized initially, and families are divided; the plot concludes with the recognition of their true identities, allowing them to unite in love and at the same time restore their bonds with their families, while drawing the whole community to them. “Love and friendship are triumphant in all directions. And the story ends on a miraculous image of human wholeness; of everyone brought together” (Booker 2004:129). This is exactly what elicits kama muta experiences, which is evidently the pivotal appeal of comedy.

Booker (2004) analyzes the sixth plot, tragedy, according to five stages: anticipation, dream, frustration, nightmare, and destruction (or death wish). As he characterizes this dynamic, it might appear that tragedy would not evoke kama muta, but in fact the protagonists often die for love, proving their love by the manner in which they die. Their death is often the ultimate self-sacrificing embodiment of love, a theme developed, for example in the Sturm und Drang movement (see Chapter 18).

His seventh basic plot, rebirth, proceeds from the protagonist succumbing to the black magic of a dark power, gradually “plunging the hero into a state of total isolation,” followed by a nightmare crisis. Finally the hero or heroine awakes from his or her sleep, freed from death-like isolation “though the power of love” (Booker 2004:203). The plot concludes with warm “joining together, happiness, hope, love” (p. 204). The protagonist is “redeemed by love,” “at last united with his missing ‘other half’ to make him whole” (p. 213). What could more strongly evoke kama muta?

Booker’s (2004) taxonomy is based on Western culture, and Hogan (2003) limits his attention to ‘literature,’ but what about the popular narratives that ordinary people tell orally but may not be adopted by elite literati? What about tales told in cultures that are less socially stratified, so they
are no literati? Are most ordinary people captivated by tragi-comedy narratives of lovers who overcome obstacles and finally unite? Gottschall et al (2003) coded long folktales from 48 cultures widely varying across regions, subsistence systems, and levels of social complexity. From an original sample of 1470 folktales, they selected 658 in which one of the main protagonists was female. They found that the most pervasive theme in these folktales was marriage. At the beginning of these 658 tales, 22% of female protagonists and 23% of male protagonists were married; at the end, 64% of the female protagonists and 64% of the male protagonists were married. In these tales, finding a mate was the primary motivation of 48% of female protagonists and 51% of male protagonists. For 19% of the male protagonists and 7% of the females the primary motive was to gain social status and material wealth. There is no way of extrapolating from these findings about long folktales with a principal female protagonist to folktales in general; quite likely they are not representative. But Gottschall et al’s (2003) analysis does show that across the world’s cultures people are very often motivated to compose, tell, listen attentively to, remember, and retell stories depicting struggles to find a mate, often concluding in marriage. It is plausible to imaging that people create and engage with these stories primarily because they evoke kama muta experiences in listeners and readers (Fiske, Schubert, & Seibt 2017a).

We should pause to note that the sudden intensification of affectionate, loving, solidarity relationships is not apparent in Propp’s (1968 [1928]) classic analysis of fairy tales, which focuses on a Russian corpus. Propp analyzed the 31 “functions”—actions—of fairy tale characters, and the order in which they occur. Despite Propp’s goal of characterizing “morphology,” his isolation of separate narrative segments obscures the overall relationship dynamics. We can’t tell from his analysis whether these tales commonly narrate separation of characters love each other, their struggle to be reunited, and their eventual reunion is invisible. Quite possibly this dynamic does not occur in most Russian fairy tales, but Propp’s division into 31 functions obscures whatever changes in social relationships may occur. Thompson’s (1957) classic six volume motif-index aims to encompass all of the worlds tales, ballads, myths, fables, legends, and more, classifying motifs into 25 major categories, each with several sub-categories containing many specific types. Here there are some hints of likely moments of intensification of love in categories such as L. Reversals of Fortune (some of which restore people to the relationships they seek); N680. Lucky accidents—miscellaneous, which includes N681, Husband (lover) arrives home just as wife (mistress) is to marry another); N730. Accidental reunion of family; N800. Helpers [including cases of unexpected kindness and hospitality]; P310. Friendship [including the formation of ritual bond friendships]; P315. Friends offer to die for each other; T30. Lovers meeting; T50. Wooing; and other love motifs. But most of even these motifs, dissected from their narrative arcs, are too molecular to reveal whether any kind of love or solidarity intensifies. Recognizing and coding sudden intensification of love depends on performing the analysis on the right level: first, with reference to social relationships, not the actions of individuals, and second, with respect to changes in relationships. But existing coding
schemes do not consistently represent the intensification of love, so it is not clear whether or kama muta is as salient in folk-narratives as it is in the Disney versions of them, or as salient as it is in the “literature” that Hogan and Booker analyze. If further research by folklorists reveals that kama muta is less salient and prevalent in “folk” narratives than it is in what scholars have distinguished as “literature,” it would be interesting to try to explain the difference. And it would be intriguing to compare folktales with another form of folk activity, contemporary social media, where kama muta is ubiquitous.

Previous students of narratives, and indeed students of most of the phenomena covered in this book, have asked different questions than we are asking. Few scholars who have studied narratives have considered emotions as such, and fewer have aimed to explain the creation, persistence, diffusion, or psychosocial impact of narrative dynamics by examining the emotions they evoke. (Scholars in the psychoanalytic paradigm, including Dundes (1980), are among those who have considered aspects of this.) Here we are posing new questions about a previously neglected facet of narratives—the same new questions we are posing thought the book about all of the phenomena we examine.
3.2 Kama muta moments when Odysseus’s family and servants recognize him

We will return to their “desire for mourning” later in the chapter. But let’s follow the story. Odysseus and Telemachus make plans to overcome the suitors. Then, while Odysseus remains out of sight in the swineherd’s hut, Telemachus goes on ahead to the palace.

when he had arrived at the well-settled house, he carried his spear over to a tall column, and propped it against it, and he himself went inside, stepping over the stone threshold.

Far the first to see him was his nurse, Eurykleia, as she spread the fleeces on the elaborate chairs. She burst out in tears, and went straight to him, and around him the other serving maids of patient-hearted Odysseus clustered, and made much of him, and kissed him on his head and his shoulders.

But now circumspect Penelope came down from her chamber, looking like Artemis, or like golden Aphrodite, and burst into tears, and threw her arms around her beloved son, and kissed him on his head and both of his shining eyes, and tearfully spoke winged words and addressed him: ‘You have come, Telemachos, sweet light, and I thought I would never see you again, when you had gone in the ship to Pylos secretly, and against my will, for news of the father you love. But come now, tell me what sights you have been seeing.’ (Homer 17:29-44; Lattimore translation)

Later in the day, the swineherd Eumaios leads Odysseus, in his beggar disguise, to the palace. Arriving, they discuss how to avoid the mistreatment the beggar is likely to receive from the suitors.

Now as these two were conversing thus with each other, a dog who was lying there raised his head and ears. This was Argos, patient-hearted Odysseus’ dog, whom he himself raised, but got no joy of him, since before that he went to sacred Ilion. In the days before, the young men had taken him out to follow goats of the wild, and deer, and rabbits; but now he had been put aside, with his master absent, and lay on the deep pile of dung, from the mules and oxen,
which lay abundant before the gates, so that the servants of Odysseus could take it to his great estate, for manuring.
There the dog Argos lay in the dung, all covered with dog ticks.
Now, as he perceived that Odysseus had come close to him, he wagged his tail, and laid both his ears back; only he now no longer had the strength to move any closer to his master, who, watching him from a distance, without Eumaios noticing, secretly wiped a tear away, and said to him:
‘Eumaios, this is amazing, this dog that lies on the dunghill. The shape of him is splendid, and yet I cannot be certain whether he had the running speed to go with this beauty, or is just one of the kind of table dog that gentlemen keep, and it is only for show that their masters care for them.’ Then, O swineherd Eumaios, you said to him in answer:
‘This, it is too true, is the dog of a man who perished far away. If he were such, in build and performance, as when Odysseus left him behind, when he went to Ilion, soon you could see his speed and his strength for yourself. Never could any wild animal, in the profound depths of the forest, escape, once he pursued. He was very clever at tracking.
But now he is in bad times. His master, far from his country, has perished, and the women are careless, and do not look after him; and serving men, when their masters are no longer about, to make them work, are no longer willing to do their rightful duties.
For Zeus of the wide brows takes away one half of the virtue from a man, once the day of slavery closes upon him.’
So he spoke, and went into the strongly-settled palace, and strode straight on, to the great hall and the haughty suitors.
But the doom of dark death now closed over the dog, Argos, when, after nineteen years had gone by, he had seen Odysseus. (Homer 17:290-327; Lattimore translation)

When Odysseus sees his wonderful dog, his joy at the reunion, together with his compassion for the neglect his dog has suffered, evidently evoke kama muta in him, and in the listener or reader.
Odysseus goes into the palace, where the suitors abuse him. Then he approaches Penelope, and tells her he has seen Odysseus. She doubts him, so she asks what Odysseus was wearing. When the stranger accurately describes Odysseus's distinctive clothing and pin, in her joy to hear that he is alive, Penelope takes her “pleasure of tearful lamentation” \( \text{is this oXoXuyn, ololuge?} \) (19:251). Later she tells her handmaids to bathe the stranger and prepare luxurious bedding. He refuses this (perhaps because he doesn't want to be touched by any of the serving women have been sleeping with the suitors), but agrees to have some virtuous old woman wash his feet. So Penelope tells Odysseus's old nursemaid, Eurykleia, who held him when he was first born and who suckled him, to do so. Eurykleia cries with kama muta compassion for the hardships the stranger had to endure, brings a basin, fills it with water, begins to wash his feet—and then sees the distinctive scar on his ankle:

The old woman, holding him in the palms of her hands, recognized this scar as she handled it. She let his foot go, so that his leg, which was in the basin, fell free, and the bronze echoed. The basin tipped over on one side, and the water spilled out on the floor. Pain and joy seized her at once, and both eyes filled with tears, and the springing voice was held within her. She took the beard of Odysseus in her hands and spoke to him:

‘Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you before; not until I had touched my lord all over.’ (Homer 19:467-475; Lattimore translation)

Eurycleia’s “springing voice was held within her” because she was choked up. Moreover, the Greek text on line 471 actually says that “joy and pain seized her \( \text{phrén.} \)” The \( \text{phrén} \) is in the upper chest; we'll get back to that later. But it seems that one could reasonably interpret this phrase as referring to Eurykleia’s feeling the sensation in the center of the chest that is characteristic of kama muta.

Apparently having given up all hope of Odysseus’s survival and return, Penelope now promises to marry the suitor who is strong enough to string Odysseus’s bow and then shoot an arrow through twelve axes. The next day the suitors all try, but none of them can string the bow.

At this point Odysseus tests the swineherd and the oxherd, asking if they would fight alongside Odysseus if he were to return, or fight for the suitors. They declare that they pray to the gods for Odysseus’s return. He responds,

‘I am he. I am here in my house. After many sufferings I have come home in the twentieth year to the land of my fathers. And now I see that of all my men it was only you two who wanted me to come; I have not heard one of the others
praying that I should return again and come to my own house. Therefore I will tell you the truth, and so it shall be; if by my hand the god overmasters the lordly suitors, then I shall get wives for you both, and grant you possessions and houses built next to mine, and think of you in the future always as companions of Telemachos, and his brothers. But come now, let me show you a proof that shall be manifest, so that you may know me for sure and trust my identity; that scar, which once the boar with his white tooth inflicted on me, when I went to Parnassos with the sons of Autolykos.’ So he spoke, and pushed back the rags that covered his great scar. When these two had examined it and recognized everything, they burst out weeping and threw their arms around wise Odysseus, and made much of him, and kissed him on his head and his shoulders, and so Odysseus also kissed their heads and hands. Now the sun would have gone down while they were still thus clamoring, had not Odysseus stayed them from it and said a word to them: ‘Now stop your lamentation and wailing, or someone may come out from the hall and see us, and tell about it inside. (Homer 21:207-229; Lattimore translation)

Here again, the weeping, hugging, kissing, clamoring, and lamentation constitute a behavioral description of kama muta—which the Greeks had no name for as a phenomenological ‘emotion.’ Odysseus strings his bow and with the help of Telemachus, the swineherd, and the oxherd, kills the suitors; he has Telemachus kill the 12 serving women who slept with the suitors. He then sends Eurykleia to fetch the virtuous serving women who have remained loyal to him.

The old woman went off through the fine house of Odysseus, to take the message to the women and tell them to gather. They came from the main house, and in their hands held torches, and all the serving women clung to Odysseus, and greeted him, and made much of him, and kissed him on his head and his shoulders and hands, admiring him, and sweet longing for lamentation and tears took hold of him. He recognized all these women. (Homer 22:495-501; Lattimore translation)
Then Odysseus sends Eurykleia to tell Penelope that he is here. Penelope has been in a deep sleep sent by Athena. Eurykleia wakes Penelope to tell her that Odysseus has returned and killed the suitors, but Penelope doesn’t believe her. Eurykleia insists it is true,

and Penelope in her joy sprang up
from the bed, and embraced the old woman, her eyes streaming tears, and she spoke to her and addressed her in winged words:
‘Come, dear nurse, and give me a true account of the matter, whether he really has come back to his house, as you tell me, to lay his hands on the shameless suitors, though he was only one, and they were always lying in wait, in a body!’ (Homer 23:32-38; Lattimore translation)

But then Penelope says, no, it can’t be true after all; it must have been a god who killed the suitors. Eurykleia tells her that she has seen Odysseus’s scar, but Penelope still can’t believe Odysseus has actually returned. She replies to Eurykleia,

Still, I will go to see my son, so that I can look on
these men who courted me lying dead, and the man who killed them.’
She spoke, and came down from the chamber, her heart pondering much, whether to keep away and question her dear husband, or to go up to him and kiss his head, taking his hands.
But then, when she came in and stepped over the stone threshold, she sat across from him in the firelight, facing Odysseus, by the opposite wall, while he was seated by the tall pillar, looking downward, and waiting to find out if his majestic wife would have anything to say to him, now that she saw him.
She sat a long time in silence, and her heart was wondering.
Sometimes she would look at him, with her eyes full upon him, and again would fail to know him in the foul clothing he wore. Telemachos spoke to her and called her by name and scolded her:
‘My mother, my harsh mother with the hard heart inside you, why do you withdraw so from my father, and do not sit beside him and ask him questions and find out about him?
No other woman, with spirit as stubborn as yours, would keep back as you are doing from her husband who, after much suffering, came at last in the twentieth year back to his own country.
But always you have a heart that is harder than stone within you.’
Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer:
‘My child, the spirit that is in me is full of wonderment, and I cannot find anything to say to him, nor question him, nor look him straight in the face. But if he is truly Odysseus, and he has come home, then we shall find other ways, and better, to recognize each other, for we have signs that we know of between the two of us only, but they are secret from others.’
So she spoke, and much-enduring noble Odysseus smiled, and presently spoke in winged words to Telemachos:
‘Telemachos, leave your mother to examine me in the palace as she will, and presently she will understand better; but now that I am dirty and wear foul clothing upon me, she dislikes me for that, and says I am not her husband. (Homer 23:83-116; Lattimore translation)

The listener or reader is held in anxious, frustrated suspense: when will Penelope accept that this seeming beggar truly is her dear and honored husband, returned after twenty years? At the end of the epic, Homer prolongs and increases this suspense to maximize the difference between the ‘background’ that consists of Penelope’s courageous fortitude in enduring her sad longing for her husband, contrasted to the soon to be foregrounded ‘figure’ of the sudden intensification of love that occurs when she ultimately does recognize Odysseus. The greater the difference, the greater the kama muta.

Odysseus then warns that the suitors’ families will seek vengeance for their deaths. He tells Telemachus that the four men should bathe to clean off the blood of the suitors they have killed, then lock the doors and have music played, so it sounds to anyone outside like a wedding. Then Odysseus chides Penelope for not recognizing him and acknowledging that her husband has returned. She tells Eurykleia to make up the bed for him that he himself built — but the bed is immovable, which only she and Odysseus himself know. When he replies, telling Penelope why the bed cannot be moved, she bursts into tears, runs to him, wraps her arms around him and kisses him. Which makes him cry as he holds her.

He wept as he held his lovely wife, whose thoughts were virtuous. And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming, after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them, and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil; so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,
and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms. Now Dawn of the rosy fingers would have dawned on their weeping, had not the gray-eyed goddess Athene planned it otherwise. She held the long night back at the outward edge, she detained Dawn of the golden throne by the Ocean. (Homer 23:234-246; Lattimore translation)

Odysseus and Penelope talk for a moment, then go to bed and make love, then talk some more.

The characters not only weep with kama muta, they are repeatedly said to have an ‘appetite’ for doing so. Here is how Homer describes the scene as the disguised Odysseus tells his wife Penelope a tale of entertaining Odysseus:

He knew how to say many false things that were like true sayings. As she listened her tears ran and her body was melted, as the snow melts along the high places of the mountains when the West Wind has piled it there, but the South Wind melts it, and as it melts the rivers run full flood. It was even so that her beautiful cheeks were streaming tears, as Penelope wept for her man, who was sitting there by her side. But Odysseus in his heart had pity for his wife as she mourned him, but his eyes stayed, as if they were made of horn or iron, steady under his lids. He hid his tears and deceived her. But when she had taken her pleasure of tearful lamentation, then she answered him once again. (Homer 19:203-213; Lattimore translation)

And in other Greek literature, Homeric characters permit themselves ‘the joy of weeping’ and ‘take delight in’ solitary weeping for a loved one from whom they are separated (Konstan 2009). Moreover, during both ritual lamentation and at other times, people weep together, apparently finding the weeping sweeter when they are joined in tears (Föllinger 2009:26). Ancient Greek kama muta was an emotion that the characters were represented as desiring and enjoying, and that satisfied them when they had enough of it – though they could not name it except by reference to the recognition reunion situation that evoked it, its tears and vocal lamentation, or by its location in the phrén, such as the passage we read when Eurykleia recognizes Odysseus and “joy and pain seized her phrén” (16:471). The phrén, φρένα, is something located in the upper chest (loosely identified with the lungs or diaphragm; often plural phrēnes) that thinks, rejoices, feels fear and anger, is sad and grieves, is infatuated or impulsive, is morally good and makes moral commitments, is implicated in immoral actions, may be associated with courage, genuinely welcomes friends or guests or is open to forming close relationships, and that is soothed by music (Sullivan 1988, 2000). Phrēn(es) are involved in a variety of emotional, mental, social processes that are impossible to precisely identify from narratives created
thousands of years ago. But the phrén’s location in the chest, its association with recognition reunion, and its focal involvement in the vicissitudes of close relationships suggest that perhaps the ancient Greeks often felt something in the upper center of the chest when they experienced this emotion they could not directly name.

Apparently the ancient and classical Greeks did not make close conceptual connection among the emotions of nostalgia for the bonds of military comrades, loving memory of the dead, and reunions of loving partners after long and challenging separation. They recognized that all these social moments evoked tears. They had words and phrases for the nostalgic situation, the physical locus of the sensations, the desire and appetite for weeping and its satisfaction, and the joy of it. But no word for the subjective state itself. Thus Greek literature shows that any culture may elaborate and value many aspects of kama muta in particular artistic, ritual, institutional, and family contexts without creating an integrated concept of the emotion itself.

All this leads to interesting questions about how the subjective emotional experience of interacting persons is shaped by the cultural recognition, conception, elaboration, and valuation of an emotion, along with its linguistic representation. Clearly the lack of a word for kama muta didn’t prevent classical Greeks from experiencing, wanting, and valuing it. But did familiarity with the theme of recognition reunions affect how people experienced their own separations from and reunions with family members, servants and masters, or lovers? Did hearing tales of heroes with an appetite for nostalgic weeping together affect the phenomenology of it in the lives of the listeners, or their display of it? And among many other contexts of kama muta, in ancient and classical Greece why and how was it that reunion, particular, culturally evolved into the most prominent presentation of it?

There is a pair of contexts that were salient in classical Greece where we would expect participants to experience kama muta, but in which we can’t find evidence about what emotions human participants or audiences experienced, or what emotions literary characters were imagined to experience. As Odysseus makes his way home from Troy, there are several scenes in which Odysseus, having craftily survived some great danger, arrives at a noble’s home. Odysseus is unkempt, weather-beaten, poorly dressed, and unrecognizable as a person of importance — let alone as the brilliant and famous Odysseus. Yet the noble host graciously offers his travel-worn guest the most generous hospitality (Perrin 1909, Gainsford 2003). The host munificently has Odysseus bathed and fed, and lodges him comfortably. The ancient Greek concept of honor was closely linked to the sacred duty of hospitality xenia (ξενία), and the enduring bond of guest-friendship xenios (ξενιός) that they could form out of it. This very strong relationship is a pivot of the Odyssey (Kakridis 1963:86–108; Reece 1993; Yamagata 1994:28–39, 40–41,135–136, 163–164). Although in general Homeric Greeks recognized no moral or legal obligations toward strangers, who were at the mercy of anyone they encountered, it was a sacred duty of the host to provide hospitality to supplicants; in both the Iliad and the Odyssey, Zeus is the god of hospitality, avenging violations of this obligation. A host had to
receive any stranger, without asking his identity. Once a host received a guest, the host was bound to give him aid and protection – even if they were otherwise enemies – and then to send or take his to his next destination (Kakridis 1963:94, Reece 1993). Homer’s representation of Greek hospitality is that the host feasts the anonymous guest with meat and wine and other foods, and then either guest or host may toast the other with a goblet of wine. This meal shared by host and guest has a special, sacred quality (Kakridis 106–107). After the stranger reveals his identity and exchanges information with the host, the host may provide entertainment. The guest may pronounce a blessing on the host, who may invite his guest to share in a libation or sacrifice. The host provides a bed and has the guest bathed by women of his household; the guest is offered clothing. When he departs, the host may initiate a long term bond by giving his guest a special gift. The host may provide a departure meal before they pour a libation and exchange farewell blessings. This xenios gift and meal ritual creates an emotional and moral bond friendship transmitted for several generations (Kakridis 1963:101–106; Yamagata 1994:74–75, 94, 135–137). The honor (τιμή) of the Homeric host and guest depend on their fulfillment of their mutual moral obligations. Similarly, from pre-Islamic to recent times, Arabs received any visitor – and indeed, attempted to attract any voyager or passing stranger – without asking his identity, his home, or his destination (Robertson Smith 1957 [1889], Canaan 1931, Farès 1932, Zeid 1966, Abu Lughod 1986). Traditionally, the host sacrificed his best or his only livestock, and fed his guest lavishly, whether he could reasonably afford to or not (Farès 1932:94–98, 120–121). Indeed, the honor (ʿird and ʿizza) of the host made it imperative to give refuge to any fugitive, to feed him, and to protect him against any harm, even from enemies among the host’s kin (Farès 1932:88–91, 151–152).

In the texts we’ve found that portray Greek and Arab hospitality and Greek xenia, there is scant information about any emotions the participants may feel. We don’t read Greek or Arabic, are not familiar with all that many classical texts in translation, and have not done fieldwork in the region, but we offer a hypothesis that experts could fruitfully explore: when a weary traveler was graciously received by a traditional Greek or Arab host, we imagine that the traveler was likely to experience kama muta.


3.3 Kama muta evoked by reconnecting with a deceased great-grandmother

I was born and raised in Vietnam... There is a popular cultural belief of Vietnam called “lên đồng”... in which a living human can become a spirit medium that allows [him or her] to contact a dead person and let the dead person attach to their body for a few minutes.

I remember that when my great-grandmother died, my family made a really big funeral. My grandfather said that making a big funeral is a way to show my family's gratitude toward my great-grandmother and her devotion to my family. The funeral lasted for three days. My grandfather hired a band to sing many songs about mother and family.

And every year after that, my family makes a death ceremony for my great-grandmother and we invite many relatives. We cook many Vietnamese traditional dishes and we eat together.

I have a great-aunt; she was really close to my great-grandmother when she was alive. My great-aunt took care of my great-grandmother when my great-grandmother was sick, and according to my grandfather, my great-grandmother loved my great-aunt a lot.

The story I am about to tell happened last year, when my family was celebrating the death ceremony of my great-grandmother.

My great-aunt was eating the traditional dishes with her cousins and other relatives around a table next to the kitchen. Suddenly, a woman, Thanh, who is a relative of my great-aunt, just stopped eating, she looked at everybody and started saying something weird. My great-aunt asked:

- Are you ok, Thanh?
- Nga (my great-aunt’s maiden name), is that you? Why did you buy that house? It’s such a small house, I had a hard time finding a way to get there! – the woman said.

My great-aunt said to me that she stopped breathing while listening to the woman. She felt strange because the only person in my family that called her by maiden name is my great-grandmother. She felt scared, but then, she kept asking:

- Yes, it’s me, Nga, are you here, grandma?
- Yes, I’m here. Why did you give me this dish, I don’t like it. – the woman shakes her head
- I’m sorry, grandma.
My great-aunt started to feel comfortable talking to my great-grandmother. She felt really happy and curious about how my great-grandmother could talk through the woman.

Then, many other relatives made a circle around the woman and started to ask questions. My great-grandmother slowly answered all of those questions.

In this case, the woman is in a state of “lên dong” and she became a spirit medium. I asked my great-aunt about the woman, how did she feel when she became a medium, when she can talk with my great-grandmother, my great-aunt told me that the woman felt nothing, it was like a dream to her and she couldn’t remember anything she was saying. However, when I asked my great-aunt the feeling of other people at that phenomenal moment, she told me that at first, most of them felt scared, but then, when my great-grandmother started to talk about the memories between them, everybody felt like a reunion, everybody felt so happy about it. My great-aunt sat next to the woman and she gave the woman a hug. That moment, my great-aunt felt like my great-grandmother was there, was actually there.

I think the moment when everybody heard the woman said, they have experienced kama muta. They feel like a reunion and for some moment, they stopped breathing for a few seconds. After the woman left and the conversation ended, everybody felt so exhilarated and they even said that they cannot wait to see my great-grandmother again... 

When I explained to my great-aunt about kama muta, what is kama muta, and the feeling when she met my great-grandmother is kama muta, my great-aunt told me that it was so special and she wants to experience kama muta one more time.

I also did interviews with my grandmother to ask if she felt kama muta after her dreams when she saw her deceased loved ones visited her. My grandmother usually dreams about her deceased relatives and I really want to know her feelings after that and if she has ever experienced kama muta.

My grandma usually dreams about her dead mother. She said that for the first time, she can’t remember which day was it, she only remembers the feeling of it. It was a short dream, her mother yelled at her because she broke a dish. My grandmother said the moment she saw her mother in her dream, she felt so happy so that she stopped breathing for a second. She said that was her feeling in the dream and I could not know if she felt that way in the real life when she was sleeping. But she did feel kama muta when she woke up crying and she felt something warm in her heart. “It was like a reunion to me when I saw her!” – My grandmother said.

My grandmother said that she has always wanted to see her mother again, in her dream, because it makes her feel so happy.
The second time she saw her mother was when she went home after her mother’s death anniversary. That time, she cried while she was sleeping because her mother told her that: “You have to take care of yourself, you lose some weight already!”

“That was a sad moment, I couldn’t even say thank you and goodbye to her because it was like something stuck in my throat and made me really hard to talk!” - My grandmother said while she was crying telling me this.

I think this is kama muta, even in the dream. When people are unconscious, they can still feel kama muta because of the love they have for their dead ones.

In my culture, seeing the deceased loved ones might be considered as a bad luck, however, for me, the great thing about speaking to a spirit medium or dream about our deceased loved ones is that we can see our loved ones one more time and we can experience how we are “moved by love”.

We all have to experience the pain of losing our loved ones at some point in our life. But not many of us can have a chance to see them one more time. It’s a miracle, a miracle named “reunion”. 

Hoang Tran