

Odysseus Returning to Penelope (Metropolitan Museum of New York)

PROMISING HEROES IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

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INTRODUCTION

The *Odyssey* is often fondly recalled as the simple and entertaining story of Odysseus's voyage home and reunion with his wife,[1] important and thematically dense but easy to digest and suitable for young and casual readers. In fact the *Odyssey* exhibits a highly complex narrative structure that has been the object of countless academic studies and would-be imitators. The action of the *Odyssey* can be summed up succinctly: Odysseus escapes from the goddess Calypso and returns to Ithaca with the help of the otherworldly Phaeacians; once home, he infiltrates his palace disguised as a beggar, slaughters Penelope's suitors, and reunites with his wife after a twenty-year absence. Yet this Odysseus frequently falls short of the heroic

[1] Cf. the view of Aristotle that the story (*logos*) of the *Odyssey* is not long and easily summarized (Arist. *Poet.* 1455b16-23).

ideal and is at times disloyal, reckless and weak. He is not even consistently put forward as the protagonist of his own story: most will recall that the *Odyssey* begins not with Odysseus but with the adventures of his son, Telemachus, and his efforts to learn his father's fate and reclaim the palace from the suitors. The most memorable episodes in the *Odyssey*, including Odysseus's encounters with the Cyclops, Circe and the Sirens, interrupt the action and are narrated by Odysseus himself. Once on Ithaca, Odysseus's mission is delayed by his failure to inform Penelope of his return and further complicated by Penelope's display of cunning and endurance and by Telemachus's efforts to tame the suitors. Elements such as these, which are anything but simple and straightforward, have given rise to a series of questions that have long troubled scholars. Why does Odysseus fail to exhibit his heroic qualities almost as often as he demonstrates them? Why do Odysseus's past achievements threaten to outshine the story of his return and defeat of the suitors? Why do Telemachus and Penelope play such prominent roles in the narrative, often working at odds with Odysseus' goals? And why do Telemachus and Penelope exhibit many of the same qualities that we expect of Odysseus?

This book argues that these unusual features and the overall construction of the *Odyssey* can be explained by a narrative pattern designed to elicit anticipation, suspense, surprise and a satisfying sense of closure. The pattern is evident not only the *Odyssey*, but also in adventure stories, family dramas, romances, and modern American movies. The pattern begins with a quality or set of qualities an audience would admire or desire. In the case of the *Odyssey*, these are the qualities for which Odysseus is most famous: cunning, resourcefulness, loyalty, endurance and strength. Characters "prove" that they possess these qualities through challenges designed to test and demonstrate them. Yet in putting these qualities to the test,

challenges cannot help but raise suspense-inducing questions about the possibility of success. We experience a satisfying sense of closure when characters succeed in demonstrating their desirable qualities, often through a final display greater than any that has come before. I call the pattern a "Proving Narrative." In the *Odyssey*, this narrative pattern accounts both for Odysseus's successful demonstrations of his desirable qualities and for his disturbing failures. It explains the role Telemachus and Penelope in the story and explains why they are also given the opportunity to exhibit cunning, endurance and strength over the course of the epic.

The idea of the Proving Narrative overlaps with the concept of plot in the *Odyssey*. First, a word about the term plot.[2] Plot, that is, the particular arrangement of the events selected for narration, is often taken for granted or dismissed as predictable and clichéd, more notable when it fails than when it succeeds, more a matter of mechanics rather than art, more satisfying than illuminating.[3] Compared with timeless ethical inquiries, explorations of universal themes and examinations of narratives as historical and cultural artifacts, the pleasures of plot may seem fleeting. But a better understanding of a work's narrative goals will help us distinguish between profound statements about the human condition and exigencies of the plot. Recent work on the cognitive underpinning of narrative structures has also demonstrated the importance of the emotions for reading and comprehending narratives. Plot is one of the principal reasons we are drawn to stories fictional and otherwise. It is frequently the plot,

[2] See Lowe 2000: ix for possible concerns regarding the term "plot."

[3] See Lanser 2012: 1044-46 for an overview of modern treatments of plot.

specifically our desire to know what comes next and the emotions we experience along the way, that keeps us listening and reading.

At the very least, with its multiple inset narratives and temporal and geographic shifts, the construction of the *Odyssey* cannot be ignored. It is worth putting my approach in the context of previous approaches to the narrative of the *Odyssey*. The study of the *Odyssey*'s structure and of plot in general begins with Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle famously defines a plot as depicting a sequence of connected events that has a beginning, middle and end.[4] Plot is designed to evoke an emotional response, the emotions of fear and pity in the case of tragedy.[5] To this end, plots include elements such as reversal (*peripeteia*), recognition (*anagnorisis*) and suffering (*pathos*).[6] For Aristotle, the *Iliad*'s plot is "simple" and centered on suffering; the plot of the *Odyssey* is "complex," insofar as it includes multiple recognitions *in addition* to a change of fortune, and "based on character."[7] Until relatively recently, Aristotle's account remained the starting point for any discussion of the *Odyssey's* structure. Though modern studies of the *Odyssey*'s narrative depart from Aristotle in many ways, they tend to focus on one aspect of his

[4] Arist. *Poet*. 1450b22-35; cf. 1459a17-20.

[5] Arist. *Poet*. 1452b28-53a12, 1453a40-54a13. Aristotle alludes to the particular pleasure associated with epic but does not specify what they are (1459a17-21). It is likely that epic is also designed to evoke pity and fear. See Halliwell 1986: 263-64.

[6] Arist. *Poet*. 1452a22-b13.

[7] Arist. *Poet*. 1459b14-16; cf. 1452a12-18.

approach or another: they either follow Aristotle in analyzing the structure of the plot or by examining how the plot operates as a delivery system for the emotions.

Since the work of Parry and Lord on the oral nature of Homeric poetry, formal analyses of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have been conducted primarily through the lens of oral poetry.[8] Oral theorists focus on the techniques that aid oral poets in composing extended songs such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These include many of the features that strike modern readers of Homeric poetry: repeated epithets such as "swift-footed" and "godlike" Achilles that helped poets place a name no matter where it appeared in a metrical line; reused and repurposed "type-scenes" available to a poet describing a battle, feast, conversation, ritual or journey; and ring composition, an organizational device in which a series of episodes leads up to a crucial moment, which is then echoed in reverse order until it returns back to the beginning.[9] Oral

[8] Narratology represents a possible exception to the degree that it is used to interpret Homeric epic without regard to oral poetic techniques. In practice, narratology is rarely applied to Homeric poetry without consideration for oral poetics. Cf. De Jong 1996, 2001. See Bakker 2009: 117-36 for an explicit attempt to bridge narratology and oral poetics through a "narratology of performance."

[9] See Edwards 1988 and Clarke 2004 for an overview of the work on epithets in Homer. For type scenes, see Arendt 1993; Lord 1951; Armstrong 1958; Edwards 1975, 1992; Fenik 1968, 1974: 133-71, Clarke 2004. Scodel 2004: 49 reminds us that variations between repetitions are always significant and used to convey meaning. Lord 1960: 119 discusses more broadly how poets borrow within the tradition and how such borrowing influences the telling of a story. See also

poets also structure extended narratives around large-scale "themes" such as "withdrawal-devastation-return" and "return."[10] So-called "composition-by-theme" is of particular interest here because of how it shapes the narrative as a whole. It supplies an overarching structure that is often reinforced through repetition over the course of the epic. This structure allows the poet to expand successful episodes within a unit while nevertheless maintaining a clear sense of where the story is heading. We find examples of "withdrawal-devastation-return" in the *Odyssey* along with other recurring themes.[11] Powell argues that multiple episodes in the *Odyssey* expand upon "a single thematic pattern," in which "Odysseus, held by a deathly

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Slatkin 1996. See Edwards 1991: 44-48, Stanley 1993: 6-9, *passim* and Cook 2014 for ring composition in the Homeric epics. See Douglas 2007 for a more general discussion of ring composition.

[10] See Lord 1960: 159-97, M. Lord 1967, Nagler 1974: 131-66, Edwards 1987: 61-66, 1992: 286; Bakker 2013: 21n2.

[11] Edwards 1992: 286. The most famous example of the "withdrawal-devastation-return" theme occurs in the *Iliad*. Achilles withdraws from the fighting, the Greek troops are (eventually) devastated (particularly with the death of Patroclus) after which Achilles returns. This pattern is echoed most clearly at the outset of the *Iliad* in the Chryses' narrative (*Iliad* 1) and in the middle of the *Iliad* in the story of Meleager as recounted to Achilles by Phoenix (*Iliad* 9). We also find this pattern in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. See Sowa 1984: 95-120, Foley 1994: 92-93.

antagonist, returns to life and is 'recognized.'"[12] Louden uncovers an "extended narrative pattern" that occurs three times in the *Odyssey*, each time with a different cast.[13] The pattern involves "a powerful female figure, hidden identity, a test, movement toward home, the

[12] Powell 1977: 1. Powell suggests that the pattern may be derived (along with the Hesiod's *Theogony*) from "an early cosmogonic story" (p. 66). Louden 1999: 131 similarly observes "the *Odyssey*'s broad kinship with a specific subgenre of myth, in which a wrathful deity demands the large-scale destruction of offending mortals." See also Kearns 1982. Sowa 1984: 212, 213 sees the *Odyssey* as an example of "the Journey Theme," in which "the protagonist feels a loss or lack of something" and "goes in search of the thing or person" while "great devastation" arises at home. He or she receives help from a female and a male helper and "eventually returns, but only at the cost of the Death of the Substitute."

[13] Louden 1999: 2 supplies the locations and the casts including the "powerful females" and abusive young men: "on Aiaia, Odysseus, Kirke, and the crew; on Skheria, Odysseus, Nausikaa/Arete, and the Phaiakian athletes; on Ithaka, Odysseus, Penelope, and the suitors." Louden argues that "[t]he Ithakan sequence, the most expansive, is the goal toward which the other two sequences aim. They are rehearsals or anticipations of what later unfolds at greater length" (p. 3). See Cook 2014 for a similar observation regarding the construction of the *Odyssey* examined in terms of ring composition. See Tracy 1997 for a variety of structuring devices at work in the *Odyssey*. See Nicolai 1972: 144-58, Taplin 1992, Stanley 1993, Schein 1997, and Heiden 2008 for the construction of the *Iliad.*

possibility of sex or marriage, and abuse by young men followed by their destruction."[14] These large-scale extended themes, along with type-scenes and ring composition, explain how poets could have composed a poem like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey.* They help to account for the epics in their present form. Yet how did these patterns appeal to audiences? An awareness of these techniques would be important for listeners to understand and appreciate the narrative. But why did singers settle on these particular techniques after generations of experimentation in front of audiences? Why did Homeric narratives continue to resonate with audiences far removed from the culture of archaic Greek oral poetry? How did they survive the transition from song to writing? And why do the plots of Homeric poems resemble those of stories told and written in vastly different cultures? Bakker,[15] for instance, has recently analyzed the *Odyssey* as a quest narrative using story functions Propp derived from Russian folktales.[16] Bakker's study shows how story patterns of the *Odyssey* parallels those of other traditions.[17] Is this simply a function of influence and imitation?[18]

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[14] See Louden 1999: 2.

[15] 2013: ch. 2.

[16] Propp [1928] 1968.

[17] Bakker 2013: 13-35, 18-20: "Odysseus' adventures may seem diverse and varied at first sight, but on closer inspection they all conform to one and the same basic pattern, which extends beyond the Wanderings." See also Crane 1987 on the *Odyssey* as quest.

[18] Burkert 1979: 14-16 (cited in Bakker 2013: 18) suggests that stories about obtaining things are an inescapable reality of the human experience and account for a level of similarity.

Emotion-centered investigations of the *Odyssey*'s structure examine how the *Odyssey* provides its audience a pleasurable experience and suggest possible answers to these questions.[19] Sternberg argues that the *Odyssey* is designed to evoke the cardinal narrative emotions of sympathy, curiosity, suspense and surprise, emotions that "draw the reader forward."[20] The *Odyssey* invites "sympathetic involvement" in its protagonist by opening with "the most engaging of Odysseus's qualities."[21] Curiosity arises from Odysseus's early absence and from the limited information provided about his past; suspense results from the "clash of our intermittently aroused hopes and fears" whenever Odysseus's chances of survival and success against the suitors are called into question.[22] Throughout the epic, information is supplied, delayed and withheld with an eye to inviting sympathy, challenging expectations and exciting curiosity and suspense.[23]

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[19] Cognitive approaches to narrative assume a level of universality based on similarities in human brain chemistry and the emotions (if not the particular stimuli that excites them). Cf. Lowe 2000: 261.

[20] Sternberg 1978: 65.

[21] Sternberg 1978: 59, 69. Sternberg argues that the *Odyssey* invites further sympathy for Odysseus by suppressing his ambiguous qualities and by heightening the negative portrayal of his antagonists, the suitors.

[22] Sternberg 1978: 59.

[23] Sternberg 1978: 65. See also Morrison 1992: 1-8, who examines how the *Iliad* employs misdirection to generate suspense and surprise, and de Jong 321-22.

Lowe proposes a cognitive model for the *Odyssey* that explains why we feel compelled to listen or read on and how such narratives satisfy our desire for closure. Lowe likens narrative to a kind of game.[24] Narratives provide an account of events unfolding in sequence while simultaneously presenting players, situations and "rules," which allow us to create "a mental model of the story *as a whole*."[25] At any moment in a narrative, we have a sense of the story up till then as well as an overall impression of where the story is going. We are forced to refine and shift this impression as we learn new, potentially conflicting information.[26] According to Lowe, "the *tension* between our twin internal models of the story is the source of the dynamic and affective element in plot."[27] We experience suspense when we are led to anticipate an important moment without sufficient data to predict its outcome; the closer to the important moment the missing data is supplied the better.[28] The climax of the story or its "endgame" should be "the most *affective* point of the narrative, justifying both the reader's anticipation and the author's postponement."[29] Only at the conclusion of a story does the narrative and our

[24] Lowe 2000: 31-32, 36.

[25] Lowe 2000: 59 notes suggests that characters' goals suggest a direction and an endpoint for the narrative.

[26] Lowe 2000: 27.

[27] Lowe 2000: 23-24.

[28] Lowe 2000: 72.

[29] Lowe 2000: 72.

mental projection of it finally converge.[30] Lowe argues that the *Odyssey* establishes rules in the Telemachy, Phaeacis and Apologue[31]: "crime brings inevitable punishment, brain is intrinsically stronger than brawn, and trespass on another's sexual property is an invariably fatal violation."[32] We receive clues as to how the rules might be applied: the suitors are portrayed as criminal in every regard[33]; Odysseus is repeatedly "place[d] in a critical confrontation where he has been systematically stripped of harnassable physical power, obliging him to improvise a narrative advantage from the resources of his naked wits"[34]; Odysseus is seen employing tactics that may prove "possibly relevant" against the suitors.[35] We remain uncertain about Odysseus' prospects until the rules are finally enforced and Odysseus slaughters the suitors and reunites with his wife.

Taken together, oral poetic and emotion-centered analyses of the structure of the *Odyssey* gives us a sense of some the forces that shaped the *Odyssey*. Oral poetic approaches reveal large-scale patterns that would have eased composition for singers. They suggest at least one reason for parallels and repetitions among episodes within the epic. The work of Sternberg

[30] Lowe 2000: 24.

[31] Lowe 2000: 134. Lowe considers these books "preparatory and preliminary."

[32] Lowe 2000: 141.

[33] Lowe 2000: 142.

[34] Lowe 2000: 142.

[35] Lowe 2000: 153.

and Lowe, along with other recent works on narrative and the emotions,[36] argue that we must also consider the emotional impact of the *Odyssey*'s narrative. Shared goals of exciting narrative emotions help to explain not only the resemblance among episodes in the *Odyssey* but also among other narratives that provide protagonists a goal and then place obstacles in the way of achieving them.

My approach to the *Odyssey*'s structure is more general than "composition-by-theme," which attributes the form of the *Odyssey* to techniques tied specifically to oral composition. It is more specific than that of Sternberg and Lowe, which treat the *Odyssey* as a specific example of techniques common to all narratives. I argue that the *Odyssey* is built on a common but by no means universal narrative pattern designed to evoke narrative emotions. In short, the *Odyssey* centers around the demonstration of the qualities that define Odysseus as a hero and that are set out for him in the preface and prologue of the epic. Almost every episode, almost every encounter in the *Odyssey* either successfully illustrates or fails to illustrate one of these qualities. In this way, they elicit hope and fear respectively—the constituent elements of suspense—regarding Odysseus' ultimate ability to defeat the suitors and to reunite with his wife. The qualities are specific to the *Odyssey*. The pattern extends beyond the *Odyssey* and beyond conventionally defined "quest narratives"; its simplicity explains its pervasiveness. In the *Odyssey*, the logic of the pattern explains parallels among Odysseus's endeavors as well as those of Telemachus and Penelope. It also explains the resemblance between these three figures in the narrative of the *Odyssey*.

[36] See, for instance, Keen 2011, Carroll 1996, Smith 1995, Plantinga 2009.

This book contends that the *Odyssey* comprises an extended "Proving Narrative" (more accurately, a series of Proving Sequences) that 1) introduces desirable or admirable qualities with the implicit promise that protagonists will demonstrate them; 2) presents challenges that provide the means through which these qualities are illustrated but also raise suspense-inducing doubts about the possibility of success; and 3) demonstrates these qualities, often in thrilling displays. The idea that narratives give protagonists a goal and then place obstacles or challenges in the way of achieving them has become something of a cliché. We find goal-and-obstacle narratives in heroes' sagas and fairy tales, comedies and tragedies, romances and histories. While the phenomenon is frequently observed, comparatively little effort has been devoted to understanding why it is so common or how it works. I argue it is not the goals and obstacles themselves but rather the qualities they are designed to illustrate that makes these narratives so effective. This admittedly minor shift in how we view goal-and-obstacle narratives nevertheless helps us understand their appeal. These narratives make the implicit promise that their protagonists will demonstrate qualities the audience desires or admires. But it is not enough simply to claim that protagonists possess a quality; they must *show* it by undergoing challenges designed to illustrate the quality in question. Suspense is built into the process: we hope that protagonists will successfully demonstrate a quality but fear that they will not. The greater the challenge, the greater the fear of failure, yet also the greater the potential satisfaction if protagonists succeed. Goals are important only insofar as they they provide protagonists believable or relatable motivations for these displays. Often, challenges become more difficult as the narrative proceeds. Minor successes and positive indications along the way provide their own satisfactions as well as reassurance that protagonists are capable of success.

They balance the discomfort of suspense-inducing challenges and failures. They encourage us to push through frustrations and fears so that we keep listening, reading or watching. Closure in a Proving Narrative is achieved through the coincidence of a decisive, often climactic, demonstration of desirable qualities and the successful completion of protagonists' goals. The particular qualities at the center of the narrative will change from work to work depending on the interests of authors and audiences; the nature of the challenges required to illustrate them must change accordingly, often sending a narrative into a new genre. Yet the underlying structure of the Proving Narrative remains the same.

Previous critics have observed how famous episodes illustrate Odysseus's defining qualities. Friedrich sees Odysseus' ability to resist joining his crew in the slaughter and consumption of Helios' cattle an "*aristeia*" of his ability to undergo suffering and endure (his "*tlemosyne*") even "as the Cyclops adventure is the *aristeia* of his *metis*."[37] Critics have also noted how earlier episodes test skills and characteristics that will be required in later episodes, particularly in Odysseus' trials against the suitors. Hopman notes that both in Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops and with the suitors "Odysseus faces an adversary individually or collectively stronger than him and needs to use guile to defeat them."[38] Odysseus' encounter with Scylla represents "a failed trial" of the physical power that Odysseus will require against

[37] Friedrich 1991: 394. See also Crane 1987: 29. See also Hopman 2012: 6 on the encounter with Polyphemus as "a demonstration of *metis*."

[38] 2012: 24.

the suitors.[39] The key, as Crane suggests,[40] is that Odysseus is not the preeminent hero of *metis or* endurance; he is a hero of *metis*, endurance, loyalty and strength. These are the qualities that are tested with varying results throughout the *Odyssey* not only in Odysseus but also in Telemachus and in Penelope. Odysseus only proves definitively that he possesses them in his encounter with the suitors and in his final reunion with Penelope. These qualities and the kind of challenges required to illustrate them account for similarities in the *Odyssey*'s episodes.

The proem and prologue of the *Odyssey* introduce the particular set of desirable qualities that the audience can expect to see demonstrated over the course of the epic: mental acuity, endurance, martial prowess, and loyalty or devotion.[41] The epic's introduction also lays out goals that provide the context and motivation for Odysseus and define the nature of his success: Odysseus wants nothing more than to return home and reunite with his wife, Penelope, though he must first find a way to remove the suitors. Every episode between the prologue and Odysseus' defeat of the suitors and reunion with Penelope constitutes a challenge designed to test and to highlight the desirable qualities established for Odysseus. Odysseus demonstrates presence of mind and cunning in his encounters with Calypso, the Phaeacians

[39] Hopman 2012: 21, 24.

[40] Cf. Crane 1987: 29: "Odysseus embodies, besides intelligence, toughness and endurance."

[41] Rüter 1969: 36 notes that the qualities addressed in the opening of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus's knowledge, resourcefulness, endurance, and experience, "prove useful" (*bewahren sich*) over the course of the epic.

and Polyphemus and in devising a plan to vanquish the suitors. He exemplifies endurance by surviving threats that kill those around him during his adventures and by submitting willingly to the abuse of the suitors and their servants in the palace. Despite a lack of convincing displays of martial prowess prior to Odysseus' arrival in the palace, in the end his defeat of the suitors rivals his own or any other *aristeia* at Troy. We see Odysseus's devotion to family in the lengths to which he will go to return home, to keep his son safe and to win back his wife. Questions regarding his loyalties arise in his time with Circe and Calypso. These challenges provide opportunities for thrilling displays of desirable qualities but also raise serious doubts as to whether Odysseus will be able to demonstrate them successfully and achieve his goals. Is he clever enough to enter his home undetected and defeat the suitors despite being impossibly outnumbered? Is Odysseus strong enough to draw his old bow, let alone face the suitors in battle, or has his strength been sapped by years of suffering? Does Odysseus retain enough of his greatness to win the admiration and affection of his son and wife, or will he leave them, and the audience, disappointed? These questions give rise to hopes and fears that generate suspense. They grab the audience's attention and propel them through the narrative. Failures and ambiguous episodes raise concerns. Satisfying demonstrations of cleverness, strength, endurance, and loyalty along the way to Odysseus's final goal reassure the audience that Odysseus is capable of success and compensate for the fear and discomfort they experience in the meantime. They reward the audience for their attention and give them a taste of the satisfaction to come. The epic concludes (for the most part) when Odysseus defeats the suitors in a climactic display of cleverness and martial prowess and when he wins back of his wife through loyalty and endurance. These feats represent the simultaneous achievement of his

goals and the successful demonstration of his desirable qualities and provide a satisfying sense of relief and closure.

Through it all, the *Odyssey* invites the audience to sympathize with Odysseus and invest in his mission largely by presenting him as the figure best suited to provide the satisfying demonstrations of cleverness, strength, endurance, and loyalty that the proem and prologue promise implicitly. The degree to which one approves of Odysseus himself and his goals would, however, influence investment in his story and the pleasure one might derive from it. The case for Odysseus is helped by the portrayal of the suitors as uncouth, impious, greedy, shortsighted, and murderous would-be usurpers and by the portrayal of Odysseus as a just king who only wants what is rightly his. Nevertheless, hints that Odysseus's plan to overcome the suitors is unbecoming for a hero and that their punishment is excessive occasionally endanger sympathy for him. These problematic indications present their own challenges that Odysseus must overcome or offset. In other cases, unsympathetic indications or Odysseus' failure to embody desirable qualities encourage the audience to shift interest and emotional investment to the stories of Telemachus and Penelope. These heroes evince their own Proving Sequences with their own set of expectations, doubts and proof. These are among the pleasures that the *Odyssey* was designed to afford. They inform, consciously or unconsciously, what material the *Odyssey* poet (or poets) chose to include and how the poet chose to arrange it. This *Odyssey* was likely forged in performances to first-time audiences and aimed at eliciting anticipation, suspense and surprise from those unfamiliar with the particulars of the story, if not its outcome. Yet Proving Narratives also provide pleasure for knowing audiences. The *Odyssey* promises heroes. Audiences attend to heroes' stories in hopes that heroes will enact qualities

audience members desire for themselves or admire in others through dramatic sequences that elicit anticipation, apprehension, relief, and satisfaction.

I argue that Proving Narrative can be observed not only in the *Odyssey* but also in a great number of, though by no means all, stories in a variety of genres. Such a claim runs the risk of appearing unfashionably positivist or universalizing.[42] Yet the strength of the Proving Narrative lies not only in its simplicity but also in its flexibility. The general framework of the Proving Narrative remains surprisingly consistent across a number of cultural and temporal boundaries.[43] The desirable qualities around which a narrative is constructed, in contrast, and the character traits employed to invite sympathy and antipathy are, inevitably, culturally specific. They differ from work to work and depend on period and place, let alone group and personal inclination. Different qualities determine the kind of challenges required to illustrate them. This variation results in works that appear drastically different and belong to a wide range of seemingly independent genres. Of course, a narrative model is one thing; the proof lies in its ability to explain a given work and account for its peculiarities. This project starts with the particular qualities set forth in the proem and prologue of the *Odyssey.* I examine whether

[42] Cognitive Theory has revived the plausibility of cross-cultural patterns on the basis of the assumption of an underlying similarity in human brains. See the introduction to Nannicelli and Taberham 2014 and its contents for recent approaches and applications of Cognitive Theory to the arts.

[43] Cognitive Theory has revived the plausibility of cross-cultural patterns on the basis on human brain biology.

subsequent episodes raise or quell fears about characters' ability to demonstrate these qualities, whether they delay, dash or fulfil the implicit promise of the narrative. I pay particular attention to how the *Odyssey* invites judgement of the actions and circumstances of its heroes and its villains through direct references and through juxtaposition with others, especially using inset tales and mythological exempla. The goal is twofold. I hope to explain the goals and structure of the *Odyssey* in terms of Proving Narratives designed to evoke the narrative emotions. I also hope to use an in depth analysis of the *Odyssey* to illustrate how other goal-and-obstacle narratives actually appeal to their audiences. The *Odyssey* provides a particularly interesting test case. The *Odyssey* was composed in a different language and culture over 2,500 years ago. It includes elements that could not help but strike us differently than it did ancient audiences. Characters' interactions with the gods, the role and treatment of slaves, the violence and nature of Odysseus's revenge, his notions of fidelity and his relationship to women in general immediately come to mind. And yet, the *Odyssey* is built around qualities that are surprisingly familiar and relatable to modern audiences. It includes challenges that remain thrilling, engaging and memorable. As such, it continues to resonate with audiences, though differently, without a doubt, than it did for early listeners.

It is no accident that rousing displays of superiority in the face of doubt in which heroes "prove" themselves are among the most memorable scenes in the *Odyssey*. Few lumbering, beastlike, naked men could gain a hearing with a young, defenseless princess in the wild, but Odysseus manages not only to win her ear but also to secure passage home. Odysseus's sorry state and the Phaeacians' taunts raise doubts about his ability to demonstrate his strength and

agility against lauded athletes, but these doubts are erased when Odysseus's discuss throw easily surpasses their marks. Polyphemus's size and ferocity and the conundrum of a blocked cave entrance suggest that all is lost, but Odysseus exacts his revenge and escapes the giant's clutches with nothing more than a false name, wine, an olive tree, and some sheep. Irus's imposing size, Odysseus's (seemingly) withered body, and the suitors' confidence that he will be trounced raise fears about Odysseus's chances, but they are quickly put to rest when Odysseus dispatches Irus with ease and must convince himself not to kill Irus with a single blow. Finally, when Odysseus takes up a bow that men in their prime cannot even string, we are surprised and thrilled to see him string it as easily as stringing a lyre, hit his target flawlessly, and then dispatch the leader of the suitors. Sequences in which heroes overcome doubts to prove themselves may seem a natural fit in the agonistic setting of Homeric poetry,[44] but the *Odyssey's* many recognition scenes also manifest a pattern similar to these challenges and evince their own "tests, disbelief, and signs."[45] They too chart Odysseus's "gradual emergence from this lowly state of anonymous wretchedness to acceptance and honor, crowned by the revelation of his identity after long secrecy" and are "used to build scene after scene of irony, suspense, and poignant emotion."[46] Nowhere is this more evident than in Penelope's

[44] See Gernet 1974: 58-61, Barker 2009: 2-3, Dingremont 2012: 11-12 on the importance of proving oneself in the agonistic environment described in Homeric poetry.

[45] Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009: 217.

[46] Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009: 217. See also Murnaghan [1986] 2009 for an account of recognition scenes in the *Odyssey*.

recognition of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 23, which at first seems unlikely to succeed but goes on to highlight what is best in both of them. Again and again, we are tempted to doubt Odysseus's ability to demonstrate his heroic qualities, only to see him emerge once more, victorious.

ATHENA

We also find a kind of textual corroboration for the importance of this sequence of expectations, doubt, and proof in the interventions of Athena to improve characters' appearance. These scenes occur at least once in every four-book unit with the exception of the *Apologue*. An intervention by Athena "alerts us to the critical nature of what is immediately to follow" and happens "when it is particularly important that [a character] should make a good impression."[47] They signal a moment of doubt even as they look forward to success. These interventions often occur for Odysseus' benefit. Athena improves Odysseus' appearance before he persuades Nausicaa (6.229-37), before he competes against the Phaeacians (8.7-17), before

[47] S. West [1981-86] 1998: 129. I am particularly interested in the narrative function of these interventions. Clay [1983] 1997: 161 and Russo 1999: 24 examine Athena's interventions in terms of their effect upon the character. For Clay, Athena's grace "effects no fundamental transformation," and "the character of the change" is "purely visual," an effect often "emphasized by the use of a verb of perceiving or seeing" ([1983] 1997: 161; 161n54). Cf. Hoekstra [1984] 1990: 275. Hainsworth [1981-86] 1998: 347 suggests that "[s]ince the epic has no diction with which to describe a person's mental state independent of his outer appearance, we should imagine Odysseus as proportionately gaining heroic confidence."

he reveals himself to Telemachus (16.173-76), before his fight with Irus (18.69-71) and before his reunion with Penelope (23.156-62). But Athena's interventions are not limited to Odysseus. She improves Telemachus' appearance before he stands up to the suitors in the assembly on Ithaca (2.12) and pours grace on Telemachus before he walks among the suitors after evading their ambush (17.63-64). Athena gives Penelope gifts and makes her more beautiful prior to her appearance before suitors to win admiration and prizes (18.190-96). She improves Laertes' appearance before he meets Odysseus and faces down the families of the suitors (24.367-69). These interventions signal the importance of Telemachus, Penelope, and, to a lesser extent, Laertes, in the epic. Athena's interventions on behalf of these characters alert us to the presence of satisfying demonstrations of desirable qualities in their storylines as in Odysseus' and signal that they are more than merely supporting characters in Odysseus's story.[48]

[48] Athena intervenes to help heroes in other ways that often move the narrative forward or prevent it from going astray. Athena advises characters directly and assists them by calming storms, sending fair winds and mist, deflecting spears, and shaking the aegis to frighten enemies. Elsewhere, Athena influences how characters think and feel. She gives Telemachus the courage to ask Nestor about his father and gain *kleos* (3.76-78), gives Odysseus the idea to grab a rock in the sea to save himself (5.426-29), gives Nausicaa the idea to wash her family's clothes (6.13-14), gives Penelope the idea to appear before the suitors and prevents her from noticing Odysseus's scar (19.478-79), binds suitors to remain in the palace (18.155-56) prevents them from restraining themselves from abusing Odysseus (20.284-86) makes them laugh uncontrollably (20.345-49), and breathes power into Laertes (24.516-20). Other gods also

The role these characters play is the key to understanding the particular form of our *Odyssey*. My account of the *Odyssey*'s admirable and expectation-raising qualities, doubt-inducing challenges, and satisfying demonstrations suggests a plot that little resembles the *Odyssey*'s multiple foci, inset narratives, and temporal playfulness. The *Odyssey* takes this unusual shape from the particular challenges the poet places before Odysseus. Although Odysseus faces conventional challenges from storms, monsters, angry gods, and suitors, the most serious challenges to his success come from an unusual source: three figures who are very close to Odysseus, namely Telemachus, Penelope, and the memory of the heroic Odysseus about whom stories are told and with whom audience members cannot help but compare Odysseus in his present form. These figures not only provide challenges that Odysseus must overcome, but also challenge his status as the figure best able to exemplify the desirable qualities set out for Odysseus.

Telemachus' story delays Odysseus's story. Odysseus's own account of his past adventures in the *Apologue* interrupts his story. Penelope's story, particularly her unusual behavior in the palace, introduces fears that threaten Odysseus's success and his welfare, fears that she will no longer hold out for Odysseus, is no longer loyal and cannot be trusted. These elements are among the most striking, influential, and controversial aspects of the *Odyssey*. Analysts once rejected them on the grounds that they needlessly complicate Odysseus's story and occasionally threaten to overshadow it. They proposed a simpler version in which Odysseus

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appear to influence characters' thinking. Helen claims that Aphrodite forced her to go with Paris (4.261-64), a claim that Penelope echoes (23.218-24).

returns home after a series of adventures, is quickly recognized by his son and faithful wife, and fights the suitors with their help.[49] Yet the challenges, complications and competing satisfactions that these elements offer are exactly the point. Telemachus' experiences in Ithaca give us insight into the troubles at home and the sins of the suitors that help to justify Odysseus's vengeance. But the focus on this would-be Odysseus for the first four books of the *Odyssey*, almost to the exclusion of Odysseus, not only heightens anticipation for our hero, but also raises fears that Odysseus himself may never appear. As we reconcile ourselves to Odysseus's absence and begin to invest in Telemachus story, the son begins to pose a true challenge to the father. As a young man whose victories lie ahead of him, Telemachus offers a contrast to an aging and initially helpless Odysseus. His resemblance to his father and possession of many of Odysseus's best qualities suggest that he might be a worthy replacement. Though unsuccessful, Telemachus's attempts to dismiss the suitors on his own

[49] See Kirchhoff 1879: 238-74, Bethe 1922: 7ff., 29ff., Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1927: 99-127, Schadewaldt 1958: 327-32, and Merkelbach 36ff. for a *Telemachy* that was separate from the *Odyssey*. See Kayser 1881 and Kirchhoff 1879 for an independent version of the *Apologue.* For the view that Odysseus originally revealed himself to Penelope before the contest, see Schwartz 1924: 110, Wilamowitz 1927: 87, Page 1955: 119-29, Kirk 1962: 245-47, Merkelbach 1969: 14-15. See West 2014: 2, *passim* for a recent attempt to uncover a "proto-*Odyssey*," a combination of "the story of the Blinded One-eyed Ogre and the story of the Returning Husband." I am interested in the *Odyssey* as it stands, not as it might have been before nor how, exactly, it came to be the way it is.

authority directly threaten Odysseus's mission. The fear that Odysseus will be unable to surpass his son colors our introduction to Odysseus on Calypso's island. Slowly, Odysseus's performance among the Phaeacians and the story of his past adventures suggest that he too will be able to find success through his heroic qualities. Only after Odysseus's and Telemachus's reunion are their goals in sync, though even there we see indications of a competition that extends to the very end of the *Odyssey*.

Penelope remains faithful to Odysseus for twenty years and resists the suitors through steadfastness and through cunning. If she were informed of Odysseus's arrival and used her prodigious talents to help Odysseus deceive the suitors and bring about their downfall, she would represent the apex of womanly virtue. We get a sense of the satisfaction one might have felt if the suitors had been captured and killed by the very woman they pursued and intended to possess when Amphimedon complains about Penelope's ractive ole in the plot. By preventing an early recognition, the poet introduces the disturbing possibility that Odysseus's own wife will use her cunning against him and forces both Odysseus and Penelope to demonstrate every quality at their disposal to achieve goals that are not always identical.

Stories of Odysseus's past achievements, particularly in the *Apologue*, are the best evidence for Odysseus's heroism prior to his stringing of the bow, defeat of the suitors and reunion with his wife. They offer much needed reassurance of his capacity for success when Odysseus is absent and when he is forced either through adverse circumstances or by design to play a role that little resembles his heroic self. Yet Odysseus's past also haunts him. So great is the contrast between heroic Odysseus and the Odysseus we see among the Phaeacians or disguised as a beggar in the palace that we may begin to fear that his best days are behind him.

Odysseus's reputation creates an almost impossible standard that Odysseus may no longer be able to reach. And Telemachus, Penelope and heroic Odysseus do not simply pose challenges and obstacles to Odysseus's mission. They each show signs of their own Proving Sequences and Narratives. Their storylines offer moments of suspense and satisfaction that sometimes coincide with Odysseus' and at other times offer something akin to counterprogramming. They offer sources of satisfaction when Odysseus's storyline threatens to frustrate, disappoint, or abandon us. They also give rise to questions about the real hero of the *Odyssey* and lend credence to the view of many recent critics that Telemachus and Penelope play larger and more important roles in epic than one might at first suppose.[50]

Understanding the *Odyssey* through the lens of Proving Narratives not only better accounts for the placement of the *Telemachy* and *Apologue* in the epic and its the portrayal of Penelope. It also addresses the resemblance among episodes in Odysseus's adventures. Critics have observed echoes of Odysseus's struggle against the suitors in the stories told by Menelaus

[50] For the often underestimated role of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, see, for example, Murnaghan [1986] 2009, Winkler 1990, Katz 1991, Felson-Rubin 1994: v, Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 1994: 10, Foley 1995, Clayton 2004, Heitman 2005, Dingremont 2012: 11-15. See Petropoulos 2010 for a reevaluation of Telemachus's function in the epic.

and Helen,[51] the Cyclops episode,[52] the Thrinacia episode,[53] and the fight against Irus.[54] Odysseus's encounters with Nausicaa, Arete, Circe, and Calypso prefigure in important ways his meetings with Penelope.[55] All of these episodes, including Odysseus's time in the palace, defeat of the suitors and reunion with his wife, are designed to test and to demonstrate the same core set of qualities, namely, Odysseus's cunning, prudence, endurance, and, to a lesser extent, strength. It makes sense, then, that these episodes address many of the same issues and do so in similar ways. Odysseus will require all of these qualities when he insinuates himself into the palace undetected, endures the suitors' abuse, vanquishes the suitors through force of arms, and rekindles his wife's love for him. Earlier episodes raise hopes and fears with regard to Odysseus's ability to carry out these tasks and offer their own partial satisfactions along the way to the achievement of Odysseus's goals. Limited demonstrations of Odysseus's strength in particular, not to mention outright failure in set battles, raise concerns about Odysseus's ability to face the suitors in open combat.

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[51] S. West [1981] 1998: ad 4.244, Rutherford [1986] 2009: 169, Olson 1989: 391, Katz 1991: 79, Saïd [1998] 2011: 269, De Jong 2001: 102.

[52] Alden 2000: 3-5.

[53] Nagler 1990.

[54] Levine 1982, Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 62, Nagler 1990: 349, Scodel 2004: 49, Steiner 2010: 16.

[55] As mentioned above, Louden 1999 argues extensively that Odysseus's time with the Phaeacians and adventures in the *Apologue* closely follow the pattern of his time in Ithaca.

The same logic that lies behind Odysseus's demonstration of his heroic qualities through similar challenges also explains why Telemachus and Penelope come to resemble Odysseus over the course of the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* alerts its audience at the outset to the qualities that Odysseus will demonstrate. It makes the implicit promise that it will provide, and that audiences should expect, a narrative with challenges suited to putting these particular qualities to the test. It should come as no surprise that a poet hoping to invite sympathy and generate interest in other characters would endow them with the same qualities that drew audiences to the story in the first place. So it is that Telemachus and Penelope come to resemble Odysseus and to undergo comparable challenges. Telemachus demonstrates cleverness in his interactions with Nestor, Menelaus, and Helen and strength in his almost successful attempt to string Odysseus's bow and in the fight against the suitors. Penelope's "virtue takes the form of the same strength of mind and constancy of memory, the same willed mental endurance that is essential to Odysseus' survival of his adventures."[56] She shows endurance to rival Odysseus's in remaining faithful to him for twenty years despite the suitors' advances and shows Odysseus-like cunning in weaving and unweaving the shroud, beguiling the suitors, and in carrying out the stratagem of the bed through which she outwits her own husband. She ironically demonstrates both prudence and endurance in resisting the urge to fall into Odysseus's arms before confirming that he is her husband. The means through which Telemachus and Penelope display their qualities are also similar to those of Odysseus. They too outwit their enemies (and friends), win spoils, resist abuse, resist temptation, survive sea journeys, and evade ambushes.

[56] Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 91.

This is not, or not simply, a matter of family resemblance between father and son. It is not solely an indication of Odysseus's and Penelope's often-observed "like-mindedness." Nor can it be entirely explained by the accretion of similar types and themes that is characteristic of oral composition.[57] Telemachus and Penelope demonstrate cunning, prudence, endurance, and loyalty because these are the desirable qualities the *Odyssey*'s audience wants and expects to see.

Proving Narratives are not the only source of pleasure to be had in the *Odyssey* or in any other narrative. Ancient audiences might have been drawn to the *Odyssey* for its music. They might have appreciated Homer's voice, language, similes and metaphors, and the pleasing construction of his work. They might have looked to Homer as a teacher. Audiences ancient and modern might delight in moments of humor, pathos, and surprise.[58] They might read Homeric poetry for its heroes, who face tragic decisions and win rousing victories against men and monsters. They might be drawn to the world Homer describes, a world of which only distant memories, isolated artifacts and ruins remained even when the poems were first performed and in which gods are not distantly worshipped but intervene actively and decisively in human affairs. They might respond to themes such as honor, heroism, revenge and family. Modern audiences still study the poems for the insight they offer into Homeric poetry's historical, political and social content, particularly its portrayal of women and the lower classes. They read

[57] Cf. Fenik 1974: 27.

[58] See, for instance, Clarke 1969 and Golden 1990 on humor in Homer; see Griffin 1967, 1985 on pathos.

Homeric poetry for the influence it has exerted on subsequent works and for its cultural cache. The list is endless. The emotional experience of the *Odyssey*'s multiple and complementary Proving Narratives is only one of the pleasures the epic offers, but I assert that it has done more than any other to give the *Odyssey* its particular form. As a concept, the Proving Narrative deserves to be taken seriously both for its prevalence and for its ability to explain the function of narrative patterns and the pleasure we continue to derive from them.

In Part I, I discuss how Proving Narratives function in a wide range of narratives in diverse genres and cultures and in the *Odyssey* in particular. I discuss how desirable and admirable goals shape a narrative by determining the kind of challenges required to illustrate them, how characters' goals provide context, motivation and parameters for success and how challenges generate suspense by raising doubts about the possibility of success while providing satisfaction when overcome. I examine how narratives reassure their audiences to hold their attention despite doubts and discomfort, how the coincidence of achieving goals and demonstrating desirable qualities provides a sense of closure, and how sympathies are invited both through the Proving Narrative itself and through independent characterizing indications. In Part II, I divide the *Odyssey* into four-book units and show how it functions as a complex Proving Narrative composed of individual Proving Sequences.[59] I pay particular attention to how the *Odyssey* sets out desirable qualities and goals, how it uses challenges to test and illustrate them and how it invites sympathies, generates suspense and provides reassurance and

[59] See Thornton 1970: xiii, 120-25 for the division of the *Odyssey* into four-book units.

satisfaction not only through the story of Odysseus but also through the stories of Telemachus and Penelope.

ODYSSEUS

The Proem and prologue of the *Odyssey* introduces Odysseus as a hero who has already demonstrated cleverness, the ability to endure hardship and loyalty in his adventures. He has also invited the gods' attention for better and for worse. Now, he wants to return home to his wife. On the basis of this introduction, audience members might expect to see Odysseus move toward this goal while demonstrating the qualities that he has exhibited in the past and for which he is famous. The first and most serious challenge to Odysseus's success arises in the form of his extended absence in the beginning of the epic and in the prominent position of his son Telemachus, who threatens to replace him. Yet stories highlighting Odysseus and his particular brand of heroism in *Odyssey* 1-4 keep hope alive that Odysseus will emerge as the epic's true hero. Our hopes for Odysseus are all but extinguished when the epic introduces a broken man at the opening of *Odyssey* 5 who is unable to endure even the affection of a goddess. His escape from Ogygia illustrates his prudence and skepticism but little else. A glimmer of hope emerges through indications of Odysseus' desirability and physical strength in his performance before Nausicaa and the Phaeacians and in his defeat of the arrogant Phaeacian youths in the games they dared him to join. These episodes offer their own satisfactions and buoy hopes going forward.

The *Apologue* delightfully and memorably fulfills almost every hope one might have of seeing Odysseus's heroism in action: he battles the Ciconians, outsmarts Polyphemus, and encounters strange people, monsters and gods. He demonstrates endurance when he saves his men from the Lotus-eaters, withstands the song of the Sirens, survives the Underworld, and refrains from eating the cattle of the sun. Though Athena is absent, the intervention of other gods to save Odysseus from Circe and Circe's willingness to take him into her bed give his experiences a divine imprimatur. Even Poseidon's enmity raises Odysseus' status. The episodes of the *Apologue* are entertaining and satisfying and raise hopes that Odysseus will employ these qualities successfully against the suitors. Only evidence of strength in set battles, particularly against the Ciconians' reinforcements and Scylla, are lacking. But Odysseus's past achievements also threaten to eclipse the Odysseus of the present whose achievements have been, up to this point, decidedly less than heroic.

Athena's praise of Odysseus, which comes roughly halfway through the epic and after the Phaeacians have conveyed him to Ithaca, confirms that his prudence and cunning, at least, are still intact. His ability to endure the insults and aggression of the suitors demonstrates heroic endurance but raises concerns that suffering and time have reduced Odysseus to the old, battered beggar he appears to be. Even if he retains his old strength, he and his son will likely die if he gives into his anger and reveals himself too early. Through these trying passages, only Odysseus's defeat of the beggar Irus offers some satisfaction in the face of the suitors' insults and hints at the power Odysseus eventually brings to bear against them. Even in this instance, Odysseus must be careful to conceal the extent of his powers. Meanwhile, Telemachus and Penelope begin to come into their own. Telemachus abides by his father's command not to

intervene against the suitors but grows in confidence and threatens to end the suitors' occupation before Odysseus can exact his revenge. Penelope's independence, cleverness and the opacity of her motives further complicate Odysseus's mission. As the contest of the bow and battle with the suitors approaches, Odysseus's strength is still largely untested and we are left wondering if he will be capable of defeating them.

It is through these challenges that Odysseus lives up to and even surpasses his heroic reputation. He has demonstrated cleverness in avoiding the suitors' detection, orchestrating their destruction, and concealing their murder. He has endured their mistreatment and holds his anger in check to avoid early detection. In killing over a hundred men with only his son and a handful of servants at his side, he shows skill in combat beyond anything he exhibited at Troy and proves that he is able to succeed without the help of the gods, even though he retains their support. He has defeated the suitors, but it is still unclear whether Penelope will embrace Odysseus as he is or if she still pines for the man who left for Troy twenty years ago. Penelope matches Odysseus in prudence and endurance and, in the end, Odysseus is recognized more through Penelope's machinations than his own. Odysseus nevertheless achieves his final goal and is reunited with a wife whose virtues rival his own.

TELEMACHUS

Though he is not even mentioned in the proem or prologue, Telemachus's prominence in the first four books of the *Odyssey* and his often-remarked-upon resemblance to Odysseus introduce the possibility that he will not merely play an important role in the epic but will

replace his father as its principal subject. Telemachus' hatred for the suitors coupled with his weakness in the face of them raises expectations that he will stand up to the suitors, take control of his property and prove worthy to be called the son of Odysseus. We find in the *Telemachy* both reassuring indications and signs of persisting immaturity. Prior to their reunion, Telemachus's mission to disperse the suitors if his father is, as Telemachus believes, dead poses a direct threat to Odysseus's Proving Narrative. Even after they embark upon their plan, Telemachus' growing confidence among the suitors and their begrudging respect for him raise questions. Will Telemachus replace Odysseus as the head of household, a development made plausible by Laertes' displacement by Odysseus and role on the periphery? Will Telemachus dismiss the suitors through the force of his newfound authority, thereby robbing Odysseus of his opportunity to take revenge and to demonstrate that he has not lost his ability with bow and spear? Or will Telemachus undermine Odysseus's mission by taming the suitors and rob both Odysseus and us of the satisfaction of seeing the suitors suffer horribly for their crimes?

PENELOPE

Through much of the *Odyssey*, Penelope functions primarily as an object of the suitors' and Odysseus's desire and both as the goal of and as an obstacle to Odysseus's successful return. Her yearning for Odysseus and desire to know his fate, her denunciations of the suitors, and her attempt to stave off their advances through weaving and unweaving Laertes' shroud suggest that she continues to be loyal to Odysseus or at the very least desires to retain her independence. In the first half of the *Odyssey*, she is routinely put forward as a paragon of

wifely virtue in opposition to Clytemnestra. Only the very act of comparing Penelope to one of the most famous adulteresses of the ancient world and the emphasis on the trials Clytemnestra faced as a wife, similarly left behind by her famous husband and faced with a persistent suitor, raise concerns about Penelope's fidelity.

It is difficult to argue that the epic ever presents Penelope as a protagonist on par with Odysseus or even Telemachus, but we find signs in the *Odyssey*'s latter half of a more fleshed-out agent and actor and indications of a Proving Narrative for Penelope. Her appearance before the suitors in *Odyssey* 18 wins her lavish gifts and offers a firsthand demonstration of her cunning. Though this display reassures Odysseus, it suggests that she will not sit idly by while he attempts to rescue her and that she may even, unknowingly, work against his interests. Penelope's decision to hold the contest of the bow despite assurances of Odysseus's imminent return is convenient for Odysseus's plan. It is also intelligible in terms of Penelope's desire to save Telemachus and speaks to the impossible situation in which she finds herself. It may nevertheless suggest that Penelope has given up on her husband at a crucial moment in the plot. Doubts remain concerning Penelope's willingness to acknowledge Odysseus. Ironically, Penelope's Odyssean prudence and endurance prevent her from jumping into her husband's arms. Only after her reluctance pushes Odysseus to give up and she outsmarts our hero does she yield to him.

PART I: PROVING NARRATIVES

CHAPTER 1: NARRATIVE EMOTIONS

A runner lines up at the starting line. A street performer throws an object into the air. A comedian steps in front of the curtain. A singer takes the stage. The team lines up. Why do we pay attention? We are drawn to some of these events because of previous, positive experiences; others grab our attention in the moment. Why do we care? In each case, I argue, we watch and wait in the hopes of witnessing something impressive, be it an athletic feat, a laugh-inducing line, or a song. We might worry that the runner will lose, that the performer will drop the ball, that the comedian will fall flat, or that the singer will fail to impress. But we are we are drawn to the event and willing to risk the disappointment. And we may even have seen it before. Though one may do it faster or slower, there are only so many ways to run a race. Even casual fans are likely to have witnessed close to every permutation of a game of hitting, kicking, throwing, and catching. We have laughed at a bit, heard a moving song. Yet we pay

attention and, for a moment, do not know how it will turn out. Then, in seconds, minutes, or an hour, we find ourselves moved by the experienced and momentarily sated, or disappointed and wishing we had spent our time otherwise. Frequently, we find ourselves coming back for more, drawn to the promise of seeing something impressive and satisfying. These events represent in the real world, though with varying levels of scripting and invitations to invest, stripped down Proving Sequences. They evince the expectations, doubts, and the promise of witnessing impressive qualities in action. For those who have never felt a moment's suspense seeing a runner, performer, comedian, or sports team set to perform, these examples also illustrate the limitations of Proving Sequences: our willingness to give ourselves over to the experience depends on the degree to which we value the qualities that will be on display. These instances give us a sense of some of the core situations, dispositions, investments, and emotions that more controlled, fictive Proving Narratives appeal to and manipulate.

GOALS AND OBSTACLES

The usefulness of the idea of Proving Narratives is not limited to the *Odyssey*. I am interested not only in exploring the *Odyssey* as a narrative, but also in using it as a test case to advance wide-ranging claims about any narrative that illustrates desirable qualities by setting goals for its protagonists and placing doubt-raising challenges in the way of reaching them.[1]

[1] Booker 2004: 18 identifies the fundamental elements of narrative as "conflict and uncertainty." Bordwell 1986: 18 describes the standard plot of the "classical Hollywood film," as

This kind of narrative is terribly common. Perhaps too common: goal-and-obstacle narratives account for clichés across genres in fiction and non-fiction. They include stories of young suitors facing disapproving parents, rival suitors, and separation to win love; heroes on quests to vanquish monsters and rescue those in need; warriors fighting for their people despite overwhelming odds; athletes trying to win games or break records despite fierce competition and poor conditions; young women trying to find love and marriage despite class complications and boorish suitors; isolated adults trying to reconcile with estranged children; detectives solving cases despite colleagues' skepticism and perhaps a drinking problem; would-be saints facing temptation; poor children trying to grow up in a harsh environment; directionless young people working to discover talents and find success. Everyone knows that narratives often begin with a goal and then create a series of obstacles to prevent characters from reaching it. Yet few have ventured convincing explanations for our attraction to this kind of narrative, for its ubiquity, or for its ability to satisfy us despite its familiarity.[2] Few have tried to explain why we feel satisfaction when some protagonists reach their goals while other victories leave us cold.

These stories dramatize the process through which protagonists prove that they possess a quality we find desirable or admirable. I call them "Proving Narratives." The young suitor

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"present[ing] psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals."

[2] One thinks here of movies panned by critics for being clichéd yet widely loved by audiences.

demonstrates devotion and the ability to love wholeheartedly, the hero and warrior show courage and skill at combat, the Olympian shows fortitude and athletic prowess, the young woman shows independence, desirability, and discernment, the isolated adult displays repentance and emotional openness, the detective shows intelligence, resolve, and the merits of experience, the would-be saint shows faith and devotion to god, the poor child shows cunning and previously obscured virtue, the young person shows determination and pride in their work. To the degree that we value these qualities, and we may value some more than others or not at all, we are drawn to stories that demonstrate them, that show us not just how they are achieved but that they can be achieved at all. Their familiarity may sap some of their strength, but the very process of illustrating desirable qualities entails a dramatic sequence in itself. The nature of the quality raises expectations about the course the story will take, as well as hopes and fears about the protagonist's ability to demonstrate it. If we find the quality sufficiently intriguing, it also invites investment in the narrative. If we come for the qualities, we stay for the challenges. These challenges allow characters to demonstrate qualities. The more dangerous and impossible they are, the more impressive the quality required to overcome them will appear, and the greater our fears of failure, the more desperate our hopes of success. In other words, the more suspense we experience. Innovative, thrilling, and shocking challenges are able to revitalize demonstrations of admirable yet well-worn qualities and are often the reason we stomach clichéd storylines. A rousing display of a desirable quality is able to elicit both relief and satisfaction, and we experience a sense of closure when these displays coincide with the achievement of goals set out for characters. As a whole, the process involves emotions that are both pleasurable and uncomfortable. Narratives frequently offer reassuring indications

and satisfying demonstrations along the way to hold interest and assure us that our investment will pay off. On the other hand, genres like tragedy rely on our inclination to invest in characters but explore the emotional fallout when they fail to overcome obstacles set out for them.

When they find an appreciative audience, Proving Narratives provide a satisfying emotional experience. This, along with their almost intuitive simplicity—a narrative cannot prove that a character possesses a quality *without* generating suspense in the process—explains their pervasiveness. Understanding how Proving Narratives work helps us to appreciate how narratives across genres, times, and cultures generate anticipation, sympathetic involvement, suspense, and satisfaction, emotional experiences that are essential to the pleasure we derive from narratives. They also help us to understand why narratives both modern and ancient sometimes fail to resonate, despite adhering to the requirements of a "quest" narrative or hitting all the beats of a classic romance or adventure. Though relatively simple and straightforward in application, the idea of Proving Narratives can illuminate texts ranging from ancient Greek epic to Jane Austin as well as nonfiction such as biographies, histories, and even athletic events.

Previous attempts to describe the principles of successful narratives attest to the prevalence of goals, doubt-raising challenges, and satisfying successes in texts ranging from Russian folktales,[3] myth,[4] influential works of the Western canon,[5] "important canonical works

[3] Propp [1928] 1968.

[4] Campbell [1949] 2008.

[5] Frye 1957.

in all the major written traditions—European, Middle Eastern, South Asian, Chinese, and Japanese,"[6] "a century of film writing and filmmaking around the world,"[7] and Modern Hollywood films,[8] among others. Goals, challenges, and victorious displays are evident among Propp's thirty-one "functions of *dramatis personae*": the hero is approached to right a wrong (IX) and "is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc." (XII), a "task is resolved" (XXVI), "the villain is punished" (XXX), and the hero is rewarded (XXXI).[9] Campbell, in his well-known and popular work on world myth, advances three "great stages" of mythical narratives: "separation" or "departure," which introduces us to hero and quest, "initiation," with its "the trials and victories," and "return," in which the hero may be required to prove himself one more time but is eventually reintegrated into society.[10] Frye influentially defines comedy as involving the struggles of a young man seeking a young woman, with its "opposition" and eventual success.[11] Romance entails a quest, including a "perilous journey" and "minor adventures," "the crucial

[6] Hogan 2003: 12.

[7] McKee 1997: i.

[8] Field [1979] 2005 and Snyder 2005

[9] Propp [1928] 1968: 25-65. See Crane 1987 and Bakker 2013 for attempts to use Propp's stages to understand the *Odyssey.*

[10] [1949] 2008: 28-29. Cf. Van Gennep [1909] 1960: 48, who proposes the stages of "separation," "transition," and "incorporation." See Edwards 1991: 15-16 on the application of these ideas to Homeric epic.

[11] 1957: 163

struggle," and the "exaltation of the hero."[12] Hogan adds that characters in comedy and romance overcome obstacles to achieve success through romantic unions or through the acquisition of power, the "two predominant prototypes for the eliciting conditions of happiness."[13] Lastly, Field and other works written for potential screenplay writers advise using the "three-act structure," with its "set-up," "confrontation," and "resolution."[14] Though they often lack academic grounding and are rarely cited in discussions such as these, books of this sort are of particular interest in that they are written for, and often by, storytellers. The set-up "establishes character, launches the dramatic premise… illustrates the situation… and creates the relationships between the main character and the other characters."[15] In the second act or "confrontation," "the main character encounters obstacle after obstacle that keeps him/her from achieving his/her dramatic need."[16] In the third act, the screenwriter must find a solution

[12] 1957: 187. Frye 1957: 162 identifies four "narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary literary genres," namely "the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric."

[13] Hogan 2003: 101, 109-10 calls Comedy and Romance (and their inversions) "Romantic Tragi-Comedy" and "Heroic Tragi-Comedy" respectively.

[14] Cf. Field [1979] 2005 and Snyder 2005. McKee 1997: 217-22 suggests the possibility of more acts but lands on the three-act structure as the minimum number required and as "a kind of standard."

[15] Field [1979] 2005: 23. Cf. Snyder 2005: 75.

[16] Field [1979] 2005: 25.

to the problems posed by the narrative and decide whether the protagonist succeeds or fails.[17] All of these approaches attest to the prevalence of goal-and-obstacle centered approaches to storytelling in a variety of cultures and genres. The influence of all of these approaches on my formulation of Proving Narratives will become clear shortly.

These works ably uncover pervasive patterns in mythic, literary, and filmic narratives, but two principal factors prevent them from addressing fully the function of the patterns they describe: 1) an often understandable emphasis on seeing patterns rather than explaining them, and 2) an overemphasis on the pleasures of empathy and identification that often results in the conflation of the desires of characters with those of the audience. Of these works, only Hogan addresses explicitly why we are drawn to narratives, that is, for their ability recreate the conditions for happiness that we experience vicariously. Propp is concerned primarily with the morphology of his folktales and does not purport to explain them.[18] For Campbell, the pattern across disparate traditions is, essentially, the explanation. Books offering advice to writers of screenplays largely take for granted the appeal of narratives and focus instead on how one might recreate them successfully. When these books do address the pleasures of narratives, they speak largely in terms of identification with characters: we "see ourselves in [characters] and enjoy a moment, perhaps, of recognition and understanding"[19]; "[w]hen we identify with a

[17] Field [1979] 2005: 26, 90-92.

[18] Propp [1928] 1968: 64-65 does venture some limited deductions regarding the functions.

[19] Fields [1979] 2005: 44.

protagonist and his desires in life, we are in fact rooting for our own desires in life"[20]; or "[t]his character is like me. Therefore, I want him to have whatever it is he wants, because if I were he in those circumstances, I'd want the same thing for myself."[21] Hogan likewise supposes that narrative of the sort he describes "involves a sustained, empathic appeal to readers or listeners."[22] In short, they assert that we experience narratives in order to experience in ourselves echoes of characters' anticipation, fear of failure, and delight in success. The belief that characters' emotions are a conduit for our own is implicit in the familiar observation that characters must experience an "emotional arc…from the beginning to the end," or "undergo a change that brings about a new awareness of who they are."[23]

Film theorist Noël Carroll has argued persuasively that, in most cases, we do not experience the same emotions as the characters we are watching or hearing about. We may fear for characters in life-threatening situations, but we do not fear for ourselves.[24] We may feel happy for characters' success but cannot take pleasure in their accomplishments as if they were our own. We fear for characters who does not realize that they are in danger. We feel embarrassed on behalf of characters who feel no shame. We do not feel what characters feel. Rather, we recognize what they feel in light of their motives and circumstances as we

[20] McKee 1997: 141-42.

[21] McKee 1997: 141.

[22] 2003: 88.

[23] Field [1979] 2005: 68.

[24] Carroll [1984] 1996: 105, 116n22. Cf. Carroll and Choi 2006: 213-15

understand them and respond accordingly with happiness, concern, approval, disdain, or embarrassment *for them*.[25] How, then, and why do we derive pleasure from the actions, experiences, and emotions of fictional characters? *How* do they make us feel?

NARRATIVE EMOTIONS

In her introduction to a volume of *Poetics Today* devoted to "narrative and the emotions," Suzanne Keen points to the resurgence of studies on the fundamental role our emotions play in helping us to understand and appreciate narratives. According to Keen, writers in the Victorian age were preoccupied with narrative's emotional effect on audiences, but developments in psychology, particularly the rise of the behaviorist school of psychology spear-headed by Watson and Skinner, drew attention away from "emotions, moods, and thoughts."[26] Treatises on the emotional impact of narrative were set aside in favor of more "objective,"

[25] Cf. Smith 1995: 79. Unlike Carroll, Smith also acknowledges the importance of empathy, which he calls "central imagining" and defines as imagining oneself in a character's situation, in addition to sympathy, or "acentral imagining," in our response to fictional characters (p. 81). Cf. Plantinga 1999: 13-14. Plantinga 2009: 10 argues that "although the spectator's emotional response depends on and is related to the supposed emotional responses of a favored character, viewer responses is most often independent of the protagonist to a significant degree and is most influenced by the narration at its highest levels."

[26] Keen 2011: 31.

"scientific," and less populist approaches like New Criticism and Structuralism.[27] These new approaches helped shape the view, widely held in the academy well into the 1980's and to this day, that "distinguishe[s] serious fiction's intellectual demands from the affective and bodily effects of popular fiction."[28] This distinction leads to set expectations: "difficult modern narratives…are supposed to cultivate a decoding, puzzle-solving reading style," while genre literature encourages the "readerly practices of attachment, immersion, and identification" and elicit fear, pathos, arousal, and suspense.[29] The passage of time tends to exacerbate these problems. The further removed we find ourselves from the context in which a work was

[27] 2011: 30-31. Keen 2011: 31 observes that Northrop Frye "in the enormously influential *Anatomy of Criticism*…briskly dispenses with "all casual, sentimental, and prejudiced value-judgments." (1957: 18)." See Belfiore 2000, who examines how studies focusing explicitly on characterization fell away in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship and how issues of characterization frequently play an implicit role in these approaches nevertheless.

[28] Keen 2011: 31.

[29] Keen 2011: 31-32. Radway 1997: 142 (quoted in Keen 2011: 31) observes that genre narratives are "picked up precisely because they [are] successful at moving the body and provoking the emotions."

created, the more likely it is that linguistic, temporal, and cultural barriers will impede instant emotional gratification and make problem solving the norm.[30]

Keen and her contributors maintain, however, that emotional responses are essential to how we perceive actions and events in the world around us, let alone how we experience the narratives of non- or "serious" fiction:

> [w]hen human beings have an emotional response to something in the… environment, they make an *affective appraisal* that picks that thing out as *significant to me* (given my wants, goals, and interests) and requiring *attention*. This affective appraisal causes *physiological changes, action tendencies,* and expressive gestures, including characteristic *facial and vocal expressions*, that may be subjectively experienced (and named out of the available emotion terms in a language) as *feelings*, and the whole process is then modified by *cognitive monitoring*" (original emphasis).[31]

Emotional responses determine how we gauge the significance of events both real and fictional. This suggests that, whether we appreciate it or not, and though the variety and magnitude may differ, our emotions play a fundamental role in how we experience every narrative we encounter. Our "appetites, aversions, and desires for fulfillment and delay" are not only "fundamental ingredients of emotional experience," but also, Keen observes, "receive

[30] "Problem solving" is an admittedly inelegant way to describe an approach to texts that undoubtedly hold emotional pleasures of its own, though very different from the ones I am discussing here.

[31] Robison 2005: 113. Miall 2011 cites anecdotal evidence from the classroom and studies measuring brain response to emotional stimuli to argue for the primacy of emotions in response to narratives.

a workout" when we experience any narrative.[32] These emotions help to explain our attraction to successful narratives, our compulsion to hear them out to the end, and the satisfaction we feel at their completion.[33]

Critics have observed many of these narrative emotions at work in the *Odyssey*. Meir Sternberg examines how the *Odyssey* withholds and delays information and cultivates ambiguity to generate the fundamental narrative emotions of curiosity, suspense, with its "clash of hope and fear," and surprise.[34] Fenik finds a poet who consistently "strives for delay, suspense, retardation," and he posits "an important, pervasive theme-complex" in which the poet uses Odysseus's anonymity "to build scene after scene of irony, suspense, and poignant emotion."[35] Lowe argues that we are compelled to attend to plots by means of the tension between our predictions for a story and the story's actual developments, which are designed to play on our predictions according to set rules.[36] Morrison examines how Homeric poetry uses "false predictions and untraditional episodes" so that "the audience…wishes to hear more" despite already knowing the story in outline.[37] Felson-Rubin is concerned with how audience

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[32] Keen 2011: 36. Plantinga 2009: 87 adds to this list "surprise, curiosity, interest, anticipation, and fascination."

[33] Cf. Keen 2011: 36.

[34] 1978: 65, 244; cf. Sternberg 2004: 327-28.

[35] 1974: 104; 55, 60.

[36] 2000: 15-32.

[37] Morrison 1992: 6-7, 1-8. See Richardson 2006 for misdirection in the *Odyssey*.

members "identify with certain characters, embrace their goals, wish for certain outcomes, and undergo frustrations causing them to revise their expectations and desires."[38] She is particularly interested in how the *Odyssey* uses the thematically related stories of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Helen to suggest for its characters a variety of "possible plots," each with their own expectations and desires.[39] Many critics have observed how the portrayal of the suitors marshals sympathy for Odysseus and against the suitors to win approval for Odysseus's actions against them.[40]

These narrative emotions are essential to our understanding of the *Odyssey.* I will make frequent reference to the work of critics who have already treated them in my own examination of how the *Odyssey* elicits curiosity, suspense, surprise, how it shifts sympathies,

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[38] Felson-Rubin 1994: x. Felson-Rubin is particularly concerned with characters' own motives and goals and locates audience engagement in how they invite us to speculate about them and hypothesize but inevitably surprise us nevertheless (pp. 18-19).

[39] Felson-Rubin 1994: x. See also Felson-Rubin 1987, Olson 1990, and Scodel 2004: 54-55. See Alden 2000: 1-47 and 292-96 for a discussion of Homer's use of "para-narratives," particularly in the *Iliad*, and for previous approaches to them.

[40] Cf. Sternberg 1978: 61, Clay [1983] 1997: 34-38, Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 67n13. Lowe 2000: 142 observes that "[t]o heighten these moral antitheses in narrative role, the suitors are systematically presented as transgressors of *all* the other values the poem and its gods hold dear—scorning the rights of guests, strangers, and beggars, insulting the authority of elders and prophets, and plotting cold-blooded murder against an unsuspecting minor."

and how its uses inset stories such as those of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Helen to influence our perception of its principal characters and their experiences. Yet these studies restrict themselves to addressing how the *Odyssey* sustains interest once audience members have already surrendered themselves to its narrative. They do not explain why we are drawn to the *Odyssey* except to suggest that it is a particularly effective vehicle for experiencing narrative emotions. They explain how the *Odyssey* resolves ambiguities and rewards its heroes while punishing its villains. They do not explain how the *Odyssey* satisfies us as a narrative and leaves us with a sense of closure.

CHAPTER 2: PROVING NARRATIVES

What draws us to the *Odyssey*? What satisfactions does it promise as a narrative? How, if at all, does it achieve closure? The answer to these questions lies in combining popular notions of goal-and-obstacle quest narratives with the work of cognitive theorists regarding the function of narratives and the role our emotions play in our appreciation of them. Briefly, characters do not undergo tests and trials for their own sake. **Challenges** provide characters the opportunity to demonstrate **qualities** we find desirable or admirable through **Proving Narratives**. **Goals** set out for characters provide the context and motivation for characters to undertake challenges and define the parameters for **success**. We feel **satisfaction** when characters display desirable qualities in impressive fashion. The greater the challenge, the more spectacular the display, and the greater the satisfaction we derive from it. Our hope that characters succeed, that our investment in them is rewarded, and mounting fears of failure in

the face of difficult challenges generate **suspense**. Periodic reminders of characters' capabilities and demonstrations of desirable qualities along the way offer **reassurance** to counterbalance the discomfort inherent in the process and to encourage us to proceed. We generally feel **sympathy** for the character in a Proving Narrative who is best able to realize the qualities we desire. Positive and negative characterizing indications can reinforce this distribution of sympathies or challenge it.

DESIRABLE QUALITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

The demonstration of qualities the audience finds desirable or admirable is the foundation upon which Proving Narratives are built. These qualities can be mental, physical, or emotional. We might desire them for ourselves or find them impressive despite knowing that they are not for us. These qualities include cardinal virtues such as wisdom, intelligence, strength, expertise, and attractiveness that are widely prized by a variety of cultures. In other cases, they may appeal only to a tiny subgroup or "cult." The choice of quality will affect a work's popularity and commercial viability, but should not influence its ability to satisfy the audience that admires the quality in question. Qualities might fall in line with contemporary notions of morality, but may also include more ambiguous but no less impressive qualities such as the ruthlessness required to make those who have harmed us pay, the skill required to pull off a bank heist, the ambition to achieve success no matter the cost, and so on.[1] In fact, so-

[1] See Carroll [1984] 1996: 105.

called “anti-heroes” are often not villains with whom we inexplicably sympathize, but characters whose problematic qualities, such disdain for others, violence, or lawlessness we are willing to overlook in order to see their decisiveness, expertise, attitude, cunning, or sense of humor in action.[2] We might even admire their brutality or less-than-nuanced moral code when stripped of disturbing consequences. Odysseus himself exhibits a range of qualities, some more ambiguous than others. As Rutherford observes, Odysseus is a hero “in whom we find not only wisdom, prudence, and endurance, but also curiosity, vanity, and above all a delight in crafty tricks and lies.”[3] Audiences have responded differently to Odysseus’s penchant for lying and deception, and we find conflicting indications regarding them in the text.[4] But Odysseus’s

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[2] We might think here of the thrill some viewers experience when the downtrodden protagonist proves that he can stand up for himself and protect his family by (too?) brutally attacking the young men who mock his son because of a handicap in an episode of *Breaking Bad*. One might also think of horror movies in which audiences anticipate the monster’s next grisly, inventive kill while caring very little about his underdeveloped and uninteresting victims.

[3] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 157, cf. 162.

[4] Cf. Rutherford [1986] 2009: 157 on previous critics’ trouble “reconcil[ing] the poem’s dominantly moral tone and the moral status of its hero.” Rutherford argues that Odysseus becomes progressively more moral. Critics have attempted to show that Odysseus’s deceptive nature would have been acceptable to the *Odyssey*’s archaic Greek audiences. Although Athena approves of Odysseus’s skepticism and lying, the treatment of his quest for poison suggests that it may not have been viewed as entirely positive.

escape from Polyphemus and the elaborate lies he tells Athena, which win her admiration in *Odyssey* 13, suggest that his cunning and penchant for misrepresentation are intended at least in those instances to be impressive and satisfying.

Desirable qualities determine the nature of the challenges required to demonstrate them and so advertise the kind of story the audience can expect.[5] These expectations generate anticipation that is critical for capturing audiences' attention.[6] For this reason, desirable qualities are often introduced early in the narrative,[7] as happens in the *Odyssey*. In fact, the *Odyssey* illustrates a variety of techniques for signaling heroes' potential. A narrator may provide a brief introduction to the protagonist and his chief virtues as the poet does for Odysseus in the proem and prologue. The stories of Nestor, Menelaus, and Helen show how

[5] See attempts like that of Booker 2004 to synthesize narratives into "seven basic plots" based on the particular kinds of challenges they pose and the rewards they offer.

[6] See Miall 2011: 335-37 on the importance of anticipation to the act of reading literature (as opposed to expository writing). See also Brooks 1984: 38 on the importance of desire, which "is always there at the start of a narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun." Desire, according to Brooks "is the wish for the end, for fulfillment, but fulfillment must be delayed so that we can understand it in relation to origin and to desire itself (p. 111)." It is tied to Freudian notions of erotic desire and desire for death (pp. 107-12).

[7] This is borne out in the observation of Campbell [1949] 2008: 29 that the hero is often selected early as "a personage of exceptional gifts."

characters highlight protagonists' desirable qualities by describing them in glowing terms. Protagonists' enemies can achieve a similar effect through fearful or bitterly admiring accounts of the threat they pose. Often, it is the striking lack of a quality in the protagonist that raises hopes of seeing it demonstrated. Telemachus's immaturity and helplessness in the face of the suitors raise the expectation that he will act like an adult and bravely prosecute the suitors for their crimes against him and his family. We recognize this tendency in familiar generic tropes: characters who are victimized will stand up for themselves and punish their tormentors, isolated characters will open up to friends or partners, a bad spouse, parent, or child will prove capable of affection and devotion. Though we do not see it in the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad*, a narrative might also begin with an exciting set piece to show what characters are capable of before the true story begins.[8] Finally, desirable qualities might be implicit in the goals or quests set out for a character.

GOALS

As we have seen, many if not all narratives introduce goals that motivate protagonists and give them something to strive for. Propp observes that the hero is often asked or commanded to remedy a family member's "lack" or "desire" (VIIIa, IX). For Snyder, it is something the hero "wants or is lacking."[9] Field speaks of "what the character wants to win,

[8] See Snyder 2005: xv.

[9] 2005: 75.

gain, get, or achieve during the course of the screenplay,"[10] and McKee points to the importance of "an Object of Desire."[11] Critics often suggest that these goals must be goals we can imagine for ourselves. It must be a "compelling goal we identify with as human beings" such as "[s]urvival, hunger, sex, protection of loved ones, fear of death."[12] Scodel, for instance, argues that "Homeric characters seek goals with which the hearer sympathises—to satisfy injured honour, to drive away invaders, to protect a home and son…."[13] Yet most of us have found ourselves rooting for a thief or a would-be avenger to achieve a goal that we would hesitate to endorse in everyday life. Odysseus's revenge against suitors, for instance, might give us pause because of its severity.[14] To the degree that we are able to glean them from her actions and limited utterances, Penelope's goals in the *Odyssey*, to put off the suitors, and to protect her son, and to remain faithful to Odysseus at all costs, frequently put her in conflict

[10] [1979] 2005: 25.

[11] 1997: 192.

[12] Snyder 2005: 48; 54-55.

[13] 2004: 46.

[14] If we are said to "sympathize" with these goals, it is in the sense that we admire the virtues and skills required to achieve them. This shift in thinking is the motivation for my emphasis of demonstrating desirable qualities. These exceptional cases illustrate what it is about protagonists' goals that truly interests us. In most cases in which we appear to sympathize with characters' goals, it is because we approve of the qualities they are likely to demonstrate.

with Odysseus's goals, particularly in *Odyssey* 23. Yet this does not prevent us from admiring the qualities she demonstrates in pursuing them.

We need not share or approve of characters' goals to enjoy a narrative. Goals provide the context, one might even say the pretext, for the challenges that will allow the hero to demonstrate a desirable quality. Odysseus wants to return home, reunite with his wife, and punish the suitors. More importantly, these goals require him to demonstrate cunning in winning trust and transport from the Phaeacians, avoiding detection in the palace, and overcoming the suitors, endurance in resisting the urge to answer the suitors' abuse, and military prowess in defeating them. Penelope must concoct strategies to resist the suitors, endure both her husband's absence and the possibility that she will have to marry another man, and resist blindly accepting that Odysseus has returned. Telemachus would learn his father's fate and reclaim his home from the suitors and must ably navigate the world of his father's aristocratic guest-friends and stand up to the suitors to do so.

Character's goals are important to the degree that they constitute success for the character, whether we approve of it or not. This is important when it comes to closure, about which more below. Goals may change over the course of a narrative. It is clear from the examples above that characters may have different goals that occasionally run contrary to one another. Odysseus originally wants to return to Ithaca and his wife, but the suitors get in the way. In the palace, Odysseus wants to punish the suitors, and we want to see them punished. But Odysseus also wants to remain undetected to avoid being killed before he is able to carry out his plan. This conflict not only challenges Odysseus's endurance but also plays to our fears and desires for him. When a character's goals come into conflict with one another, it can raise

fundamental questions about which goal is more meaningful or likely to demonstrate a more admirable quality. Aeneas must choose between his affection for Dido and his duty to found Latium. An adolescent must choose between the most popular girl in the school or the friend who is a better fit and cares for him. Narratives such as these play on the conflict between our desires for a character and their desires for themselves.

CHALLENGES

Stories often center on characters facing conflict,[15] but these challenges and obstacles do not exist for their own sake or for the sake of the characters.[16] They provide protagonists the opportunity to demonstrate the qualities we want to see realized and highlight these qualities in impressive fashion, though not before raising doubts about protagonists' ability to display these qualities and reach their goals. These challenges are the meat of the narrative. As Crane observes in an article on the *Odyssey* as quest, a well-designed challenge "brings out," "shows

[15] Cf. Bordwell 1986: 18, 1985: 13; McKee 1997: 210-13.

[16] This view is most common among guides to screenplay writing. McKee 1997: 317 concludes that "[t]he more powerful and complex the forces of antagonism opposing the character, the more completely realized character and story *must* become." For Snyder 2005: 64 (cf. 50), the ideal character "has the most conflict in the situation [and] has the longest emotional journey," though Snyder also suggests that the character also "need[s] to learn the biggest lesson."

off," and "elicits from the hero those qualities that set him apart from ordinary men."[17] Importantly, it is often through challenges designed to illustrate them that qualities come to be seen as admirable and desirable. The more engaging and impressive the challenges, the more the audience is likely to value the qualities required to face them. Challenges make the story. Desirable qualities such as intelligence, strength, attractiveness, and expertise may be admirable and desirable, but they are not particularly interesting in the abstract. Stories that use conventional challenges to illustrate admirable yet predictable qualities are likely to be deemed cliché. As McKee advises, the author "must not only fulfill audience anticipations, or risk their confusion and disappointment, but he must lead their expectations to fresh, unexpected moments, or risk boring them."[18] If, as the idea of Proving Narratives would suggest, we have been telling the same kind of story for millennia, it is the storyteller's ability to devise innovative, unusual, shocking, and unpredictable challenges that keep it from getting old. In the *Apologue*, Odysseus faces conventional challenges from monsters, seductresses, and impossible voyages. Yet the poet's portrayal of these challenges renders them among the most memorable elements in Odysseus's story: Polyphemus, with his striking combination of brutal savagery and sympathetic pining, Circe surrounded by strangely tame animals and shifting from dire threat to amiable helper, the sirens' song, the Lotus-eaters, a *katabasis*, all woven together with thematic echoes of forgetfulness and being forgotten, cannibalism, seduction, and

[17] Crane 1987: 32, 16, 29. See also Rüter 1969: 36. Cf. Friedrich 1987b: 394 on the Thrinacia and Polyphemus episodes as *aristeias* of Odysseus's *tlemosyne* and *metis* respectively.

[18] 1997: 80.

survival. But it is the poet's decision to highlight the challenges Odysseus faces from those closest to him, his son, his wife, and his younger self, that is truly innovative and responsible for the epic's most notable and controversial elements.

As important as their role in illustrating the nature and value of desirable qualities is how challenges raise doubts about characters' ability to succeed. The more impressive the feat, the more we doubt a characters' ability to achieve it. Through these challenges, our desire to see characters demonstrate desirable qualities is tinged with fear that characters will be unable to find success. This combination produces suspense that draws us into the story.[19] Doubts about characters' capabilities arise when they are faced with a seemingly insurmountable task. Characters may themselves may doubt their ability to carry out a quest or goal to signal its

[19] Carroll and Smith 1995 define suspense as dependent upon one's investment in the human actors involved in the narrative as opposed to more "universal" views like that of Sternberg. Sternberg 2001: 117 argues that suspense "arises from rival scenarios about the future: from the discrepancy between what the telling lets us readers know about the happening (e.g., a conflict) at any moment and what still likes ahead, ambiguous because yet unresolved in the world." Cf. Sternberg 2004: 328 in response to character dependent definitions of suspense: "[y]ou may wish the hero well or ill, depending on your attitude; you may suspect the hero's avowed motivation in advance of its breakdown or swallow it at the time, depending on your skill. The suspense you experience either way en route to resolution, in the one case, and the polarity between curiosity and surprise dynamics, in the other, nevertheless testify to the unbreakable lawlikeness of the narrative process as such." See also Lowe 2000: 72.

immensity as when Odysseus and his men cannot fathom a voyage to the Underworld. Theorists observe a common early stage in quest narratives, in which protagonists question their abilities and must decide whether to proceed.[20] Campbell calls it the "refusal of the call.[21] Other characters may also reinforce our impression of a task's difficulty, either by commenting on the difficulty or by underestimating the character. This kind of internal underestimation, as when Euryalus doubts Odysseus's ability to compete against the Phaeacians, can render protagonists' success particularly satisfying. Doubts also arise when characters are barely able to pass a test, or when they fail an early challenge. Propp, for example, identifies story functions in which the hero "submits to deception" (VII),[22] "is branded" or wounded (XVII), "is pursued" and must be rescued (XXI, XXII). These stages seem calculated to raise doubts about the hero's abilities at crucial moments in the narrative. McKee suggests that protagonists' first, conservative attempt to reach their object of desire should fail ("First Action"). Only then do protagonists realize that they must take a risk and face conflicts that entail "progressively greater risk and jeopardy" to reach their goal.[23]

Doubts arise every time characters face a serious challenge, but narratives often strive to orchestrate a moment when the audience believes that there is no hope of success, a

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[20] Snyder 2005: 77.

[21] [1949] 2008: 56. Cf. Campbell [1949] 2008: 56 on the situation after a refusal in the *Arabian Nights*: "it will require a miracle to consummate the union of this eternally predestined pair."

[22] This may be a "victim" other than the hero.

[23] 1997: 149; 151.

moment that sometimes resembles a kind of death. Campbell describes a stage when the hero "is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died" ("The Belly of the Whale").[24] Hogan characterizes this sequence as the inversion of the standard pattern: whereas the overall narrative reproduces a sequence that elicits happiness, this interlude produces the "prototype eliciting conditions for sorrow" and serves to intensify "the joyful conclusion."[25] Snyder describes a scene when the "bad guys close in" or "internal dissent, doubt, and jealousy begin to disintegrate the hero's team."[26] These scenes are followed by the "all is lost" moment, when the hero appears to lose everything,[27] and by "Dark Night of the Soul" scene, in which the character once again considers giving up.[28] These scenes, which often precede a finale, represent the apex of doubt regarding protagonists' capabilities and require the most impressive possible demonstration in order to be overcome. In some cases, these doubts prove so fatal that they derail a Proving Narrative such that it becomes a tragedy. In cases such as modern American action movies, storytellers must go out of their way, engineering more and more impossible situations, to combat firm genre expectations that the hero will prevail no matter what. A similar problem presents itself in the *Apologue*, where Odysseus's narration of his adventures assures us of his survival. If strong suspicions regarding a story's outcome

[24] [1949] 2008: 74.

[25] 2003: 103.

[26] 2005: 85.

[27] 2005: 85.

[28] 2005: 88-89.

threaten emotional investment, one might imagine that the threat of reduced emotional investment would be all but insurmountable in the case of highly traditional epics or narratives which one had heard numerous times. Yet cognitive theorists have observed and made various attempts to account for the phenomenon they call the "paradox of suspense": audiences are capable of experiencing suspense or something that closely approximates it even in the case of works with which they are already familiar.[29]

SATISFACTION

As important as the doubts raised by impossible challenges is the thrilling sense of satisfaction and relief we feel when characters overcome them by demonstrating the desirable quality we have been anticipating. Our expectations are fulfilled. The protagonist has achieved what we and other characters feared they could not, and, at least for the moment, we no longer need to fear the possibility of failure. Just as moments of doubt are marked by other characters' mockery and underestimation, these moments of satisfaction are often punctuated by internal representations of admiration or disbelief. Our satisfaction does not, as is sometimes suggested, depend on characters' developing or changing unless it is a function the

[29] See, for instance, Carroll 2001 and Smuts 2008, discussed in the context of Greek tragedy and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in Bednarowski 2015.

specific quality being demonstrated, as in the case of maturity or emotional growth.[30] Our perception of characters changes in the sense that we no longer harbor doubts about their abilities; the characters themselves need not.

Why do we derive pleasure from seeing fictional characters (or historical figures, lightly fictionalized) find success demonstrating qualities we desire or admire? Carl Plantinga offers a somewhat speculative explanation of why we are drawn to filmic narratives and the enjoyment we often take in them:

> [they] can offer audiences a sense of enlarged possibilities [and] demonstrate what we can be like or how life might be. Their adventures, heroisms, strong ideals, and excitements can affirm individual identity and allow spectators to see possibilities, to feel against a sense of individual potency…. [They] embody deep and sometimes obvious human needs and desires (however culturally inflected), and from this draw their power.[31]

This seems like a good start. By definition, Proving Narratives present characters achieving feats through qualities that reflect our "needs and desires." And they impress us. They show us what we are able to achieve at our best and how we might be rewarded for similar displays. Seeing fictional characters display qualities we desire and achieve feats we admire provides an opportunity to recall and to re-experience imaginatively similar moments from our past and to

[30] See Rutherford [1986] 2009: 159-60 on whether characters ever "develop" or learn from experience in ancient literature. Rutherford argues in the positive, citing Achilles in the *Iliad*, Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes*, and Croesus in Herodotus.

[31] 2009: 35-36.

consider the possibility of demonstrating similar qualities in the future.[32] These characters and their stories show us the process through which we might impress others and help us explore what it might mean to do so. Their successes not only suggest the feasibility of such demonstrations but also come without the specter of competition or envy that might haunt the success of those closer to us. Conversely, seeing characters fail and make mistakes warns us of the dangers inherent in such struggles and affords us the opportunity to explore the ethical challenges and compromises with which they are fraught. They allow us to consider our own failures and fears without requiring painful introspection or evoking the pain or uncomfortable pleasure that might arise from the failure of an acquaintance.

[32] See Miall 2011: 331-35 on the importance of "self-reference" or "autobiographical memory" in the understanding and appreciation of narrative. Miall cites a study in Seilman and Larsen 1989, in which literary texts were found to evoke autobiographical memories more often than expository writings. Larson and Seilman 1989 note that descriptive passages evoke more memories than action or dialogue (cf. Miall 2011: 334). Field [1979] 2005: 44 suggests that when watching characters in films, we "see ourselves in them and enjoy a moment, perhaps, of recognition and understanding." This may be what McKee 1997: 141-42 means when he says that "[w]hen we identify with a protagonist and his desires in life, we are in fact rooting for our own desires in life.

REASSURANCE

At its simplest, a Proving Narrative might include one desirable quality and one challenge to illustrate it in a satisfying fashion. More often, narratives include multiple challenges and demonstrations that become progressively more difficult.[33] An extended narrative such as the *Odyssey* plays a delicate game, in which the stakes are audience engagement and investment: definitive demonstrations of desirable qualities are delayed in the interest of building anticipation and suspense but at the risk of frustration or boredom. As Lowe observes, "[t]he narrative has then to satisfy two difficult and seemingly irreconcilable demands. First, it has to *delay* the anticipated endgame by interposing other material that will carry the reader's interest just as well."[34] Too much doubt without reprieve will have audiences walking out or render too unbelievable a final success. For this reason, narratives frequently remind the audience of protagonists' promise.

Reassurance comes in the form of minor successes that are often paced to balance out growing doubts. Odysseus charms Nausicaa, impresses the Phaeacians with his athletic prowess, gains safe passage to Ithaca by narrating his adventures, and defeats the beggar Irus. He does not achieve his goals through these demonstrations of prudence, cunning, strength, and endurance, but they remind us of his capabilities; they reassure us that he has a chance against the suitors despite indications to the contrary; they partially satisfy our expectations but

[33] Lowe 2000: 71 calls this "escalation." Cf. McKee 1997: 149; 151, Snyder 2005: 89.

[34] Lowe 2000: 71.

leave us wanting more. Snyder advises a sequence roughly in the middle of a narrative that fulfills "the promise of the premise" in exhilarating fashion, reminds audiences why they came in the first place, and steels them for the increasingly dire and doubt-inducing passages that will all but extinguish hope of success before the climax.[35] This sequence corresponds to the placement and function of the *Apologue* in the *Odyssey*, which comes roughly in the middle of the epic and offers much needed reassurance of Odysseus's heroism after his limited successes among the Phaeacians and prior his infiltration of his palace, punishing disguise, and combat against the suitors.

Glowing stories about Odysseus's past likewise remind us that this is the hero who sacked cities, deceived whole populations, saved his comrades at Troy, won the hearts of goddesses, and faced giants and monsters. They suggest that he might demonstrate the same heroism again against the suitors. Campbell's observation that heroes are selected because they are exceptional reflects the importance of signaling protagonists' potential early in the story.[36] Reassurance also comes when the hero receives outside help, as in the case of Propp's "magical agent or helper" (XIV) who restores hope in an impossible situation.[37] Athena's frequent interventions on behalf of Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope, and the assistance that Ino and Circe render Odysseus fulfill this function in the *Odyssey*. They remind us that these characters are capable of succeeding even in the direst of situations. Athena's

[35] Snyder 2005: 81 calls this "fun and games."

[36] [1949] 2008: 29.

[37] Propp [1928] 1968. Campbell [1949] 2008: 58 calls it "supernatural aid."

transformations of her favorites and bestowal of grace impart a very particular sort of reassurance in the face of doubt. The attentions of the minor goddess Calypso (and Circe to a degree) and the enmity of Poseidon confirm that Odysseus is more than an ordinary man, no matter how helpless he might appear to be and despite our fears that his best days are behind him. Divine attention assures us that whatever Odysseus and his family do and experience, it will be worth the telling. Related to the *Odyssey*'s use of divine interventions are its divine counsels, omens, dreams, which remind the audience that the gods and fate are on Odysseus's side.

CLOSURE

We experience satisfaction and relief when characters successfully demonstrate their admirable or desirable qualities in overcoming challenges. We experience a sense of closure when characters successfully demonstrate their admirable or desirable qualities to achieve their goals.[38] McKee suggests that an extended sequence of increasingly difficult challenges

[38] Cf. Propp [1928] 1968 stages 18 and 19. Lowe 2000: 72 suggests a definition of closure in his observation that "[i]n jokes, anecdotes, and synopses, the most effective textual structure is that which releases as much as possible of the accumulated narrative potential as late as possible and in the fewest possible words." This is not the only way closure is achieved. See Richardson 2002: 249-55 for a review of previous approaches to the concept of closure. See Fowler 1989: 75-122, Roberts, Dunn, and Fowler 1997 for an examination of closure in Greek

should culminate in a final, climactic display "that the audience has been anticipating," though it should not be in the way that they expect.[39] A final challenge stands in the way of achieving the goal and often comes only after the protagonist has "exhausted all actions to achieve his desire, save one."[40] For McKee, the climax brings about a "crowning major reversal," that is, a "revolution in values from positive to negative or negative to positive."[41] After this, subplots are resolved, greater implications revealed, or time is given to recover in the aftermath.[42] Odysseus's has two goals, to kill the suitors and to win back his wife, so his story has two possibilities for closure. It is telling that Odysseus's reunion with Penelope is not portrayed as a mere afterthought or as a reward for demonstrating cunning and strength to vanquish the suitors. He does not simply "get the girl" in the end. The reunion is his final, climactic challenge and proves more difficult than the battle that preceded it. Interestingly, Odysseus's reunion with Penelope undermines the positive portrayal of his cunning to highlight Penelope's and to

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and Roman texts in particular. My conception of closure is unrelated to the issue of closed or open endings. Odysseus's achievement of the goals set forth in the proem and prologue provides a satisfying sense of closure despite the fact that his story remains unfinished and the inland journey lies ahead of him.

[39] McKee 1997: 310.

[40] McKee 1997: 303. Cf. Snyder 2005: 89 on the hero's discovering a new solution to the problem and "dispatching the bad guys…in ascending order."

[41] McKee 1997: 309.

[42] McKee 1997: 309-14.

demonstrate loyalty and devotion in both of them. The *Odyssey* does not in fact end here, though more than a few critics have suggested it should.[43] Only after the fact is Odysseus's, Telemachus's and Laertes' battle against the families of the suitors revealed to be a formality rather than a new, life-threatening development.

SYMPATHY

Our opinion of protagonists and antagonists influences how we respond emotionally to the actions and events that narratives describe; we are drawn to narratives that reward sympathetic protagonists and punish hateful villains. These ideas are as old as Aristotle,[44] and they continue to this day. Snyder tells screenwriters to ask themselves "Who deserves to win and why? Who deserves comeuppance and why?" because "we still want to see justice meted out for characters we hate and victory granted to those we admire."[45] Loaded terms such as "hero" and "villain" reflect the importance of our opinion of characters. Heroes must be

[43] See Page 1955: 101-36, Merkelbach 1951: 142-55, Kirk 1962: 248-51, but see Lord 1960: 177-85, Erbse 1972: 166-244, Moulton 1974, and Heubeck [1981-86] 1998 *ad* 23.297 in favor of its authenticity. It will become clear that I consider *Odyssey* 24 an important conclusion to the epic, especially in light of the competing storylines of Odysseus and Telemachus.

[44] Cf. Arist. *Poet*. 1452b30-53a22.

[45] 2005: 59. On the importance of sympathy for our appreciation of narratives, see Carroll [1984] 1996: 105; Smith 1995: 4, 62, 84-85, 187-227; Plantinga 2009: 31-33.

possess “a certain shared humanity” and be “somebody to get behind” or “someone to root for.”[46] Snyder advises a hero with whom we can “identify” and “root for” or “at least understand,” and who is “demographically pleasing.”[47] Generally, texts garner sympathy for their protagonists by attributing to them actions and traits that the audience considers positive. Carroll observes that

> [o]ften in Hollywood films, a character is designated as good in terms of his courteous, respectful, and thoughtful treatment of supporting characters, especially ones who are poor, old, weak, lame, oppressed, children, etc.—that is, characters who are in some sense the protagonist’s inferiors, but whom the protagonist treats with consideration.”[48]

Propp observes that the folktale hero often “shows mercy to a suppliant,” “renders…a service to a dead person,” “frees a captive,” or “shows mercy to a suppliant” (XIII).[49] Snyder describes a scene early in the film in which “we meet the hero and the hero *does* something—like saving a cat—that defines who he is and makes us, the audience, like him.”[50] Texts invite antipathy for villains when they perform actions and display traits the audience considers distasteful. The villain’s “role is to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune,

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[46] McKee 1997: 141. Cf. Snyder 2005: 60 who advises a hero we can “identify” and “root for” or “at least understand.”

[47] 2005: 60, 49; cf. 52.

[48] [1984] 1996: 105. Cf. Smith 1995: 190

[49] [1928] 1968: 42-43.

[50] Snyder 2005: xv.

damage, or harm."[51] In Frye's pattern for comedy, "obstructing characters" are often "usurpers."[52] Hogan adds that these usurpers are often "demonized" or "bestial."[53] This kind of distribution of sympathies is an important component in our emotional response to narratives. It is most evident in revenge narratives, such as the Suitor Plot in the *Odyssey*, where the suitors' wastefulness, disrespect, impropriety, impiety, abuse of the weak, overweening pride, and scheme to murder Telemachus invite our support for Odysseus and Telemachus, whet our appetite to see them pay for their crimes, and hold our attention until they do. In this kind of story, new information or actions can endanger or dramatically shift our sympathies for previously sympathetic characters and alter our hopes and fears for the outcome of the narrative.[54] We find this both in the indications that the suitors are not entirely responsible for their actions and in the indications that Odysseus goes too far in his punishment.

In Proving Narratives, positive and negative characterizing indications are not the only means of eliciting sympathy for characters. All other things being equal, we care about and invest in the story of the character best able to demonstrate the qualities we desire or admire. As Carroll observes, a character's display of virtues such as "strength, fortitude, ingenuity,

[51] Propp [1928] 1968: 15.

[52] 1957: 163.

[53] 2003: 109.

[54] See Bednarowski 2015 for shifts of sympathy in *Agamemnon* and how they influence audience members' hopes and fears for Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

bravery" are "the basic means of establishing the moral sympathies of a film."[55] The same can be said of other desirable qualities in narratives generally. When the *Odyssey* begins, we expect Odysseus to put on thrilling displays of cunning and endurance and strength and are likely to feel a tinge of disappointment when the story shifts from Odysseus to Telemachus. But when Telemachus stands up to the suitors and displays admirable qualities of his own, we begin, perhaps tentatively, to invest in his story and to see in it the potential for satisfaction of a slightly different sort. In stories with multiple Proving Sequences such as the *Odyssey*, different characters' successes and failures can be can be distributed to offset one another or generate suspense by delaying desired outcomes in other storylines. As Telemachus's story begins to show promise and compensate for our initial disappointment at Odysseus's absence, the scene shifts in *Odyssey* 5 to Odysseus on Ogygia. We finally see Odysseus, but it is an Odysseus even more disappointing than the young Telemachus. Odysseus's story not only interrupts Telemachus's and leaves us wondering whether Telemachus will survive the suitors' ambush but also forces us to acclimate ourselves to Odysseus's initially unsatisfying storyline and to overcome fears that he will be unable to live up to our expectations. Penelope's appearance before the suitors raises questions about her loyalties and introduces a potential threat to Odysseus's mission. But it also offers an admirable display of her beauty and cunning at a time in the story when we are being forced to watch Odysseus put on an impressive but unsatisfying—even distasteful—display of endurance in submitting to the suitors' abuse. Likewise, as Odysseus inhabits almost too well his beggar disguise, Penelope and Telemachus

[55] Carroll [1984] 1996: 105.

become more assertive and impressive in their opposition to the suitors. As Telemachus's storyline becomes more intriguing, we may find ourselves hoping, if only for a moment, that his attempts to dismiss the suitors on his own authority prove successful despite how it will impact Odysseus's story. The poet strikes an intriguing balance of sympathies in Penelope's outwitting of Odysseus in the reunion scene.

Although it is chiefly characters' ability to demonstrate desirable qualities that draws us to them, the revelation of a particularly egregious trait or action might threaten to spoil any satisfaction we could derive from their success. In a simple Proving Narrative, a character's capacity for demonstrating a desirable quality coincides with positive characterizing indications; negative indications are attached to those who would oppose them. In more nuanced narratives, ambiguous or negative traits can function as a different kind of obstacle. By endangering our sympathy for protagonists and forcing us to reevaluate our investment in a character's storyline, these traits raise fears about characters' ability to satisfy our expectations as effectively as any challenge. Fears that Odysseus might kill the innocent along with the guilty in the *Mnesterophonia*, for instance, coupled with sympathetic indications for individual suitors such as Amphinomus might shift sympathies against Odysseus and spoil the pleasure of seeing him display marshal prowess and achieve his goal. In some cases, the introduction of a problematic quality might help engineer a shift of sympathies from one character to the next.

SUBVERTED PROVING NARRATIVES

Proving Narratives can be negated or subverted. Many "postmodern" narratives can be understood as a reaction against conventional Proving Narratives and against our desire for narrative satisfaction. Some of these narratives achieve Proving Narratives despite their atemporal or highly referential nature. Others deconstruct Proving Narratives through unreliable narrators, discourage emotional investment through irony, or employ endings that are devoid of closure or satisfaction. The genre of tragedy entails a more fundamental negation of the Proving Narrative but one very much dependent on its structure and underlying assumptions. Frye argues that the initial phases of tragedy correspond to those of romance.[56] Expectations that characters will demonstrate desirable qualities are raised and even fulfilled when "a strong emphasis is thrown on the success or completeness of the hero's achievement."[57] This success is followed, however, by "the typical fall of the hero through hybris and hamartia." The audience is left to witness the world that emerges as a consequence of the hero's failure.[58] Hogan succinctly defines tragedy as comedy cut short at the moment when lovers are separated or when the enemy has prevailed.[59]

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[56] 1957: 219.

[57] 1957: 220.

[58] 1957: 221, 222.

[59] 2003: 103-4.

There is as much emotional power in an unfulfilled Proving Narrative as there is in one that is successful. If a Proving Narrative gives us a sense of satisfaction, relief, and closure, a subverted Proving Narrative leaves us with a profound sense of discomfort and raises questions about the nature of a universe in which the just are not rewarded and the unjust go unpunished. The only sense of closure is the finality of the separation or defeat. We see this in a subset of tragedies, in which audience members are actively encouraged to hope for a happy outcome despite the likelihood that things will not work out. These tragedies raise expectations that a character will demonstrate a desirable quality. Oedipus will solve the mystery of Laius' death just as he solved the riddle of the Sphinx. Yet the next challenge either proves too much for them, or an external force intervenes to destroy them and crush our hopes of a "satisfying" conclusion, at least for that character's storyline.

The *Choephori*, for instance, opens with the Chorus's and Electra's denunciation of the murder of Agamemnon, arguments in favor of revenge, and expressions of their hatred for Clytemnestra (32-74; 75-83; 93-95, 102, 130-37), all of which marshal sympathies against Clytemnestra. The mention of Orestes followed immediately by prayers for an avenger (115; 117-21) raises the expectation that Orestes will avenge his father's death and that Clytemnestra will receive her comeuppance. Doubts regarding the act of matricide are addressed and likely mitigated through Apollo's support for the deed (269-75). The murder of Clytemnestra proves to be more problematic than we might have been expected, but Orestes goes through with the deed despite a moment of doubt. And yet, despite divine assurance, Orestes is persecuted for the act, and his allies fall away. In the *Eumenides*, his life hangs in the balance.

The opening of *Hippolytus* sets Phaedra the impossible challenge of resisting the influence of the goddess Aphrodite by dying without revealing her love for her step-son, Hippolytus (38-40). This goal, along with the victimization of this noble (εὐκλεής, 47) woman at the hands of a god, is likely to win sympathy for Phaedra. The Chorus's description of Phaedra suggests a woman already driven mad by a god (141-47), and Phaedra herself seems aware that she is the victim of external influence (241-42). In spite of these forces, Phaedra is ashamed of what she has said (244) and refuses to reveal the source of her suffering (271, 273, 279). She is trying to starve herself to death rather than bring her shame to light (275, 277). She has resisted Aphrodite thus far, and we are encouraged to entertain the possibility that she will remain steadfast. Even after she reveals to her nurse that she loves Hippolytus, she intends to die rather than disgrace her family (391-430). Of course, Phaedra's best intentions fall by the wayside when, contrary to her wishes, her Nurse reveals her secret to Hippolytus. We are then forced to watch as she is denounced and denounces in turn and as a father prays for and accomplishes the death of his son.

Deianeira's gratitude for Heracles' saving her from Achelous (19-21), the fear she feels on his behalf (28-29, 36-41, 43-45), and the pain she feels at his absence (41-42) all lead us to believe that she will prove a loyal spouse. The first test of her devotion is a serious one, but Deianeira remains faithful despite learning that Heracles is in love with Iole, the slave whom Lichas has led into her home. Deianeira refuses to denounce Heracles or Iole (438-67).[60] She

[60] Bowra 1944: 124 and Easterling 1982: 127 reject the view that Deianeira's graciousness is a calculated deception.

fears that she will be replaced (547-51) but wants no harm to come to either of them. Ironically, she simultaneously demonstrates her devotion and brings about disaster when she turns to the blood of Nessos to insure that Heracles does not forget her (572-77).[61] She kills herself when she realizes what she has all but killed Heracles. These are examples of subverted Proving Narratives. It is important to note that some of the most famous tragedies can be seen as Proving Narratives of a different order. They show protagonists' undergoing the worst life has to offer to provide them the opportunity to demonstrate impressive qualities such as the ability to endure unthinkable tragedy in *Oedipus Tyrannos* and Euripides' *Heracles* or to display eternal devotion in *Romeo and Juliet*.

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

If Proving Narratives are so common, why do they sometimes fail to resonate or go unnoticed? Proving Narratives are powerful yet fragile. When successful, they elicit forceful emotions at the core of the narrative experience. But they are built on the delicate foundation of shared sensibilities. The satisfaction we derive from a Proving Narrative depends both on the degree to which we find its motivating qualities desirable or admirable and the degree to which we the share the assumptions and expectations through which the text invites sympathy and antipathy for its characters. Frye notes that "[i]n every age the ruling social or intellectual class

[61] Easterling 1982: 145 observes the ambiguous phrasing that leaves open the possibility that Heracles "will not love anyone any more (because he will be dead)."

tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy."[62] Speaking specifically of comedy, he observes that "the comic dramatist as a rule writes for the younger men in his audience, and the older members of almost any society are apt to feel that comedy has something subversive about it."[63] And disagreements about desirable qualities and cultural assumptions occur not just across time periods and age gaps. They occur within the same decade, city, neighborhood, and household depending on one's social class, sexual orientation, education, race, religion, age, gender, political outlook, job, personal taste, etc. Divisive figures such James Bond display charm, participate in sexual exploits, and demonstrate skillful displays of violence that make them a hero to some and a villain to others. The pageant of gay, foreign, and disfigured villains, and of male, misogynistic, violent, and emotionally-stunted heroes in mid-twentieth century narratives offers clear and uncomfortable evidence of how our ability to take pleasure in narratives shifts along with our attitudes. How surprising it would be if we found general agreement on the virtue of storylines in the same Cineplex, let alone in narratives composed two thousand years ago in a different culture.

The *Iliad* offers a useful illustration of how our sensibilities might influence our experience of a text. According to Lowe, in the quarrel at the heart of *Iliad* 1

[62] 1957: 186.

[63] 1957: 164.

> Achilles is discharging his own side of the contract by putting his life on the line and making the most impressive individual contribution to the war. But Agamemnon's status as commander-in-chief pre-empts Achilles' claim to proportionate reward.[64]

Viewed in this fashion, a modern reader might find Achilles' resistance admirable and support him in his opposition to Agamemnon. Yet if one were to point out that the injustice perpetrated against Achilles is exemplified through the struggle over a "war bride," whom Achilles has won after killing her family and her people and with whom he has the "right" to have sex whether she is willing or unwilling,[65] one might find Achilles' arguments against Agamemnon's rule hypocritical at best. In some cases, this barrier to appreciation will prove insurmountable. We often hear the argument that we must engage with a text, particularly a "classic" firmly ensconced in the canon, on its own terms. Some might be convinced by the argument that the taking of a "war bride" would not have seemed out of place to audience members who in many

[64] Lowe 2000: 121.

[65] The *Iliad* offers some justification for Achilles' feelings about his relationship with Briseis in her dismay at being taken away from Achilles and in the suggestion that Patroclus might have orchestrated their marriage, and in later indications that Achilles had a special relationship with Briseis that he, at least, considered akin to marriage. Nevertheless, he won her after murdering her brothers and husband. See Dué 2002 on the complexity of the *Iliad*'s portrayal of Briseis.

cases possessed slaves of their own.[66] Posner, defending literature against the "ethical criticism" of Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum, argues that

> [t]o understand and enjoy a great writer such as Shakespeare fully, one must set aside one's political and ethical views, whether about law, or equity, or money-lending, or capitalism, or marriage, or wealth, or aristocracy, or Jews, and enter into the imaginative world that Shakespeare creates.[67]

Some audience members might even feel ashamed to impose their own assumptions on another culture. They may find nevertheless that narratives centered on demonstrating qualities of which they disapprove or whose cultural cues fail to resonate or actively offend leave them cold.[68] It may be more disturbing that audience members are sometimes willing to ignore or set aside problematic indications in order to enjoy a narrative. One might think here of propaganda, but less blatant examples, in which storytellers are merely relying on their own assumptions to craft likable and unlikable characters, may be even more insidious. Murray Smith asserts that "[c]haracter structures are perhaps the major way by which narrative texts

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[66] This is certainly the line one would take in trying to understand how a narrative offered a satisfying story pattern to contemporary audiences.

[67] 1998: 407.

[68] Cf. the discussion of the offense Wayne Booth's colleague took at the portrayal of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, an "overt ethical appraisal," which Booth first dismissed but attempts to address and justify in Booth 1988: 3-4. Of course, the same line of reasoning could be used to explain, if not justify, the shortcomings of a sexist, racist, or classist approach to a text.

solicit our assent for particular values, practices, and ideologies."[69] Popular and potentially enjoyable narratives that are nevertheless prefaced on racist, classist, gender-biased and others biases may be one of the most influential and powerful ways of perpetuating damaging stereotypes.

LIMITATIONS

We might not always appreciate a Proving Narrative, but why, despite their supposed ubiquity and importance, do we sometimes fail to observe Proving Narratives? Are we not trying hard enough? Have we failed to observe the significance of important cues? Sometimes we fail to observe a Proving Narrative because it simply is not there. Not every story is a Proving Narrative.[70] Even in the relatively short history of American cinema Janet Staiger observes periods that have emphasized "diverse spectacles" as opposed to sustained narratives that encourage the kind of "engagement with the characters" that a Proving Narrative would require: "every period of history (and likely every place) witnesses several modes of cinematic address, several modes of exhibition, and several modes of reception."[71] Some genres lend

[69] Smith 1995: 4.

[70] Hogan 2003: 100 observes that his heroic and romantic tragi-comedies are surprisingly common but not ubiquitous.

[71] 2000: 33; 12-17; 24.

themselves to this kind of narrative; others do not. Comedies proper,[72] for example, employ a variety of means to generate humor that range from character-based, situational humor to jokes or linguistic and visual puns that are only loosely connected to the characters delivering or enacting them. They may employ Proving Narratives or they may not. Mysteries may evince Proving Narratives in which the detective stands up to an overbearing boss, stays sober, and maintains resolve in the face of contradictory evidence, or they may focus on the shocking nature of the crime, the social issues it lays bare, the setting, or the process of solving the crime. Some audience members will likewise be more attuned than others to the pleasures of Proving Narratives.[73]

Even when present, a perfectly executed and satisfying Proving Narrative does not a great narrative make. A romance that provides its target audience a particularly satisfying Proving Narrative but little else in the way of characterization, style, or novelty is likely to be quickly forgotten. At best, it may belong to the category of works that are loved by its public but universally derided by professional critics who either fail to appreciate the Proving Narrative, reject it as overly conventional or clichéd, or set aside their emotional satisfaction in the interest of a more "objective" appraisal of the narrative's virtues. At worst, we may feel foolish upon reflection or in conversation to have been entertained by such a transparent and

[72] I mean comedic performances, as opposed to comedy broadly defined as the inverse of tragedy.

[73] Staiger 2000 examines in detail diverse "modes of reception" on the part of the audience and proposes a range of styles of attending to narratives (pp. 38-40).

inelegant appeal to our emotions: the characters were flat, the coincidences were preposterous, and the characterizing cues were culturally insensitive.[74] On the other hand, a beautifully constructed, thematically rich exploration of how we live that subverts convention at every turn, takes place in a novel setting, is brimming with ideas, makes ardent social arguments, and ends on a note of complicated and though-provoking ambiguity might enrage a majority of audience members while thrilling critics and academics. One suspects that most successful narratives, stories praised by critics and sufficiently popular to be considered "important," find a balance between these two extremes. I suspect (but cannot prove) that many works now regarded as "classics" found success at least in part because of the satisfaction afforded through Proving Narratives. When time and shifting cultural assumptions intervened to obscure these pleasures, subsequent generations were left to explain the virtues of these texts in other ways, and so focused on their themes, style, and the insights they provide into a bygone era.[75] Failing to detect a Proving Narrative, they mistake indications

[74] On this last point, cf. Booth 1988: 74-76 on his realization that the pleasure he took in the comeuppance of "Big Nurse" in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* depended on sexist assumptions.

[75] Cf. the observation of Derrida [1967] 1978: 3, though in a different context, that "[*f*]*orm* fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself." This phenomenon is particularly evident in the reading lists for high school English classes. A work like *The Catcher in the Rye*, which, one imagines, was introduced to the curriculum because, unlike Chaucer or Shakespeare, it spoke directly to the concerns of students in the 1950's, may

intended to raise momentary doubts or generate suspense for thematic or philosophical claims.[76]

How, then, given all of these barriers to detecting and appreciating Proving Narratives has the *Odyssey* managed to escape the fate of having its emotional pleasures go entirely unnoticed and unexperienced? Why, despite being composed so long ago, in such a different place, among such different people, and in a fundamentally different way, does it still stir our emotions? The wide and lasting appeal of the *Odyssey* can be attributed in part to the wide net it casts with its relatable characters, qualities, and challenges. The *Odyssey* illustrates the difficulties faced by a young man trying to carve out a place for himself among adults, by a middle-aged man whom others consider past his prime, by individuals of low status who are

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still resonate with modern students but requires some historical and cultural contextualization. A similar fate undoubtedly faces works like *The Hunger Games*, which are currently being introduced for the sake of relevance to contemporary teenagers but which will undoubtedly require clarification in twenty years.

[76] There is a strong whiff of authorial intent in this talk of mistaking intentions but the notion is, I think, unavoidable when talking about dramatic effects. In most cases authors create works with the intention of eliciting a particular response (or are emulating works that intended to do this). See Plantinga 2009: 13-4, who suggests that "most films, much of the time, are constructed so as to generate intended or preferred responses." Of course, this is not how all, or perhaps any, audience members will actually respond. Cf. the notion of "camp" entertainment.

unjustly mistreated as a result, and by a women at risk of having her fate decided for her and whose talents are viewed with suspicion. Each of these storylines ends in a satisfying fashion in which characters achieve their ends through widely prized qualities such as loyalty, cunning, endurance, and physical strength.[77] Unlike many other works of ancient literature, surprisingly few discordant notes are struck to mar the satisfaction these storylines might offer. Yet the *Odyssey*'s ultimate success cannot be a function of its Proving Narratives alone. Satisfying stories of Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope, each tailored to and able to elicit investment from different potential audiences, must account for some of the *Odyssey*'s continued success as narrative. But its hallowed place in the canon can only be explained when we consider the *Odyssey*'s Proving Narratives *in addition to* its language, its humor and pathos, its setting, subject matter, themes, its theology, its evidentiary value, its lessons, its familiarity, and its strangeness.

[77] The emphasis on Odysseus's ability to deceive has given some pause in this regard. Cf. Walcot 1977 and Emyln-Jones 1986 on the complexity of Odysseus's penchant for lying and deception.

PART II: PROVING NARRATIVES IN THE *ODYSSEY*

CHAPTER 3: *ODYSSEY* 1-4—PROLOGUE, PROEM, AND THE *TELEMACHY*

DESIRABLE QUALITIES

We are told that proems in early Greek poetry are "designed to shape audience expectations efficiently by specifying where, and with what thematic emphases, the material for the performance at hand will be selected from the traditional repertoire."[1] The *Odyssey* proem (1.1-10) provides surprisingly little information about the material it will take as its subject matter. It identifies the *Odyssey*'s hero and touches on his experiences after the war. After sacking Troy (1.2), the initially unnamed man at the center of the epic was forced to wander and suffered extensively at sea (1.1-2, 4). In the process he "saw the cities and knew

[1] Nagler 1990: 335-36. See also Bassett 1923, Groningen 1946.

the minds of many men" (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, 1.3). He tried but failed to save his companions who died for eating the cattle of the sun (1.5-9). The prologue and the divine counsel (1. 11-19; 19-95) set the stage for the plot of the *Odyssey*. Of those who survived the war, he alone has yet to return home (1.11-12). He pines for a return (*nostos*) and for his wife but has been detained by the nymph Calypso, who yearns to make him her husband (1.13-15). All of the gods but Poseidon pity Odysseus (1.19) and have decided after many years that he should return home (1.16-19). Though Poseidon was unable to oppose their plan, he will continue to rage against Odysseus—this is the first mention of his name—until Odysseus reaches his homeland (1.20-26). On Olympus, Zeus reassures Athena that her fears that he is displeased with Odysseus's are unfounded. How could he forget Odysseus's generous offerings (1.59-67)? Though Odysseus blinded Poseidon's son, Polyphemus (1.68-69), Zeus affirms that Poseidon will eventually relent (1.77-79). Athena advises that they send Hermes to release Odysseus (1.84-87). And so our *Odyssey* begins.

This introduction gives us a general sense of where in Odysseus' timeline the story will begin. It tells us remarkably little about the particular episodes the poet will treat in the *Odyssey*.[2] Almost every event it alludes to, Odysseus's travels, the cattle of the sun and loss of his crew and Polyphemus, has already occurred when the action begins. We would be likely to

[2] Critics have worried that the *Odyssey* proem does not describe the whole poem or even allude to its most notable episodes; it creates expectations that go unfulfilled. Line 3 in particular seems to suggest a story different from the one we have. See Groningen 1946: 282-84, Rüter 1969: 34, S. West [1981] 1998: ad 1.1-10, Dimock 1989: 8, Nagler 1990, Pedrick 1992: 39.

suppose, if incorrect, that the poet will not address them presently. We can only be confident that Odysseus will leave Calypso and Ogygia. The persistence of Poseidon's anger suggests that he will face more trouble at sea. The matter of a reunion with the wife he longs for is left unspoken, but the suggestion that he will undergo trials on Ithaca "even among his loved ones" (καὶ μετὰ οἷσι φίλοισι, 1.19) seems ominous.[3] We find no mention of Telemachus or the suitors. But if the proem, prologue and divine counsel fail to hint at the complexity and breadth of the *Odyssey*, they do offer clear indications of the *kind* of stories the *Odyssey* will tell. They do this by introducing us to "the most engaging of Odysseus's qualities," the qualities around which the story will be constructed. Critics have dubbed Odysseus the hero of *metis* or of endurance, but it is the constellation of qualities introduced here, namely cunning and resourcefulness (*metis*), loyalty, endurance, and strength that define the kinds of challenges and goals set out for Odysseus and his family.[4] It is worth examining how the *Odyssey* draws these qualities out.

[3] It seems likely that most audience members came to these performances with a healthy sense of Odysseus as a hero and of the genre as a whole that would inevitably influence their predictions regarding the present performance. See Martin 2005: 11-15 for a general account of the genre of Greek Epic working from Aristotle's definition. See Nagy 2013: 9-25 for a brief account of Heroic Greek Epic that includes the religious, cultural and performance context of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

[4] It is worth noting that many of these qualities and the achievements that embody them are reflected in Odysseus's epithets. Cf. Austin 1979: 6, for whom epithets are "the fundamental elements to which Homer comes back again and again." See also Edwards 1997: 272-81.

We find a number of indications in the proem, prologue, and divine counsel of Odysseus's mental acuity, including his "technical skill, cleverness, craftiness, and duplicity,"[5] qualities largely captured in the familiar epithet πολύμητις.[6] The epithet πολύτροπος, "of many turns," appears in the first line of the epic and has been called Odysseus's "characterizing epithet."[7] It appears even before we know his name. It speaks to Odysseus' extensive travels and to his susceptibility to the driving force of the gods. It also points to his ability to extricate himself from impossible situations and his inability to be pinned down.[8] The reference to the many cities Odysseus saw on his voyages and the minds he knew (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων…νόον ἔγνω, 1.3) reinforces the impression of Odysseus as a man of vast experience and understanding. It suggests not only extensive travels but also worldliness and deeper understanding.[9] The inclination that led him to seek out these experiences also reflect points to

[5] Clay [1983] 1997: 32.

[6] Cf. Odysseus's other, similar epithets: πολύφρων, "mindful," πολθμήχανος, "resourceful," and πολυκερδής, "very crafty," "able to gain the advantage."

[7] Nagler 1990: 336. Cf. Bassett 1923: 340.

[8] On the range of meanings for this term, see Rüter 1969: 34-9, Detienne and Vernant 1978: 27-54, S. West [1981] 1998: ad 1.1, Clay [1983] 1997: 29-34, Pucci [1987] 1995: 15-16, Peradotto 1990: 115, Goldhill 1991: 3.

[9] The impression of vast experience is strengthened by the repetition of the prefix *poly-*, "many," with regard to his travels, sufferings, and encounters in these lines. See Clay [1983] 1997: 31.

Odysseus' driving curiosity.[10] Although its significance is primarily temporal, reference to *his* sacking of Troy (ἔπερσεν, 1.2) recalls the achievement for which Odysseus is arguably most famous and for which he is called πτολίπορθος, "city-sacker."[11] This reference to the stratagem of the Trojan Horse reminds us of Odysseus's inventiveness, his affinity for deception and his essential effectiveness in all matters.[12] The juxtaposition of Odysseus's crew, who were fools (νήπιοι) and died through their own recklessness (αὐτῶν…σπετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο, 1.7; cf. 33-34), with Odysseus, who abstained from recklessness and tried to save them, underlines Odysseus's intelligence and prudence. These same qualities are further illustrated through the contrast with Aegisthus. Zeus condemns Aegisthus for acting recklessly and ignoring the will of the gods (1.33-37, 42-43) while praising Odysseus for surpassing other mortals in mindfulness and in sacrifices (περὶ μὲν νόον ἐστὶ βροτῶν, περὶ δ' ἱρὰ θεοῖσον, 1.66).

We find evidence of Odysseus's loyalty primarily in the brief but emphatic description of his reaction to the fate of his crew and in his continued desire to be reunited with his wife in spite of the forces pulling him in other directions. Despite his crew's foolishness and

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[10] Friedrich 1991: 26 elsewhere attributes to Odysseus something akin to "intellectual curiosity."

[11] Haft 1990: 45 notes that the epithet may refer to other cities that Odysseus (and other heroes called πτολίπορθος) sacked. See also Stanford 1965: ad 8.3-4, 9.39-40.

[12] Other associations with the Trojan War are harder to pin down. The *Iliad*'s portrayal of Odysseus is almost entirely positive. Odysseus's deportment in the *Doloneia* and subsequent accounts of his behavior at Troy less so.

recklessness, Odysseus strives (ἀρνύμενος) to bring his crew home safely and grieves their loss and his inability to save them. A goddess and daughter of Atlas wants to marry Odysseus and "charms him with tender and flattering words so that he will forget Ithaca" (αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἱμυλίουσι λόγοισι | θέλγει ὅπως Ἰθάκης ἐπιλήσεται). Nevertheless he longs for his wife and home (1.13-15, 55-59). As S. West observes, his "preference for his middle-aged wife over Calypso in her earthly paradise…is rightly stressed at the outset.[13]

Our introduction to Odysseus notably dwells as much on his passive suffering as it does on his successes.[14] He was driven to wander extensively (πολύτροπος, μάλα πολλὰ πλάγχθη) and has suffered much on the sea. He tried but failed to save his companions. He desires his wife and home but is trapped by Calyps. He is hated by and suffers at the hands of Poseidon. His suffering outstrips that of the other Greeks who survived Troy. Yet despite his suffering,

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[13] S. West [1981] 1998: ad 13. See Nagler 1990: 337 on the theme of suffering in the proem.

[14] See Nagler 1990: 337 and Cook [1999] 2009: 113 on Odysseus's suffering and passivity. See Cook [1999] 2009 for an account of Odysseus's "active" and "passive" heroics in the epic as a whole. Critics have observed a contradiction in a paragon of active resourcefulness who cannot escape enduring passively. They locate the contradiction in the active and passive meanings of the name Odysseus, "hates" and "is hated." See Dimock 1956: 53, Austin [1972] 2009, Clay [1983] 1997: 54-66, Goldhill 1991: 24-26, Rutherford 1992: ad 19.406-9. Peradotto 1990: 48-52, 54-58 attributes the contradiction to the *Odyssey*'s roots in folk "narratives of desire accomplished," and mythic "narratives of desire frustrated." I see Odysseus's resourcefulness and his endurance as distinct but complementary desirable qualities.

Odysseus is πολύτλας, "much enduring."[15] Unlike many Greeks who fought at Troy, he still lives, and he will return home. He will face trials there too, but will, presumably, endure them as well. Only Odysseus's desire to die rather than live with Calypso (1.59) rings a false note that threatens the portrayal of Odysseus as the preeminent hero of endurance.

Although Odysseus's physical strength plays a significant part in his final display against the suitors, we find little explicit evidence in the *Odyssey*'s introduction to him or in the *Odyssey* as a whole. The reference to Troy in the second line of the epic may remind us of Odysseus's martial prowess. He was by no means the most impressive warrior at Troy but did acquit himself admirably in the fighting.[16] The reference to Polyphemus seems to emphasize Odysseus's victory over a powerful opponent rather than his use of cunning in doing so: Zeus's account of the blinding makes no reference to Odysseus's deceptions. Instead, he makes it clear that Odysseus defeated a half-divine giant "whose strength is the greatest of all of the Cyclops" (ὅου κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον | πᾶσιν Κυκλώπεσσι, 1.69-70). Nevertheless, little emphasis is placed on past demonstrations of Odysseus's power. It is likely that his strength is underplayed

[15] See Crane 1987: 29 on Odysseus's "toughness and endurance" and on the epithet πολύτλας, best illustrated when Odysseus withstands the hunger to which his companions succumb on Thrinacia when they eat the cattle of Helios. Friedrich 1991: 22 speaks of Odysseus's "*tlemosyne*, his exemplary endurance" that allows him to undergo "further, and graver, humiliations" at the hands of Polyphemus and give Odysseus' the opportunity to exercise his *metis* against the Cyclops.

[16] Cf. his part in the fighting in *Il.* 4, 5, and 11.

here and elsewhere in the epic specifically to raise concerns regarding Odysseus's plan to face the suitors in open combat and thus to heighten suspense during that scene. This may also explain the failure to mention the encounter with the suitors in the proem or prologue.

In addition to establishing the qualities that audiences can expect to see Odysseus demonstrate over the course of the *Odyssey*, this short introduction also sets forth a goal for Odysseus, offers grounds for sympathizing with him and reassures us that he is a worthy subject of epic. The goal is simple enough, though it will be complicated with the appearance of the suitors: Odysseus wants to return home to his wife. At this point, we are likely to support this mission insofar as it offers our best hope of seeing Odysseus display his desirable qualities. We also get the sense that Odysseus is a victim of injustice. Odysseus is alive, but he alone has been forced to wait this long for his *nostos* and to suffer to such an extent. And while Aegisthus has paid for his crimes, Odysseus has not been rewarded for his deeds. These factors encourage our investment in his endeavor. The interest the gods pay him strongly suggests that this story will be worth our time. Calypso desires him. Athena sympathizes with him and petitions her father for his release.[17] Zeus is concerned for him and agrees to send Hermes to intercede on his behalf. Even Poseidon's enmity suggests a hero who has exceeded his mortal bounds and will face otherworldly challenges.

Scholars have observed that the *Odyssey's* introduction to Odysseus places more emphasis on the set of desirable qualities to be demonstrated than on the hero himself. The

[17] It may be noteworthy that, in the *Iliad*, it is Achilles' own mother who speaks to Zeus on his behalf.

poem begins only with a *man* (ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε). It does not name its hero until line 21.[18] Critics offer a variety of explanations for this decision. Clay connects the delay of Odysseus's name in the proem to the frequent suppression and delay of his name elsewhere in the epic.[19] Goldhill suggests that the proem's accumulation of qualities and identifiers surrounding an anonymous man and its culmination in the name "Odysseus" "provides a programmatic model for the narrative of Odysseus' gradual re-establishment on Ithaca."[20] For Peradotto, "the poem sets out quite deliberately to create what Barthes…calls a *figure*, an anonymous and impersonal network of symbols, before attaching a proper name to it" and argues that this prevents audience members from "fix[ing] too early or too firmly its hero's character and destiny by finding them in his name."[21] But the delay may have less to do with how audience members are intended to view the figure of Odysseus and more to do with the function the qualities play in the epic. The *Odyssey* foregrounds the qualities themselves instead of Odysseus because he will not be the only character to embody them over the course of the epic. As Telemachus and Penelope gain prominence, they too display mental acuity, endurance, loyalty, and strength in Proving Narratives of their own. The emphasis on the qualities over the character, then,

[18] Cf. *Il.* 1.1. See Clay [1983] 1997: 25-34. Rüter 1969: 35 argues that the description and reference to Troy make Odysseus's identity clear enough.

[19] [1983]: 1997: 27.

[20] 1991: 4.

[21] Peradotto 1990: 117 quoting Barthes 1974: 94; 116.

prepares us for shifts of focus away from Odysseus. In the *Telemachy*, it eases an early and jarring transition from Odysseus's story to Telemachus's.

TELEMACHUS

Odysseus's first challenge in the *Odyssey* threatens to end his story before it begins and comes from an unlikely source. The *Telemachy* undeniably plays a variety of functions that are crucial to Odysseus' story. This story, which focuses on Telemachus's experience at home, lays bare the crimes of the suitors. A story that focuses solely on Penelope might be limited by the restrictions placed upon noble women's interactions with men. The portrait of the suitors might be softened because of the dissembling and flattery they perform in her presence. In the case of Telemachus, whether the suitors view him as an inconsequential boy or as a threat, he is able to bring out the worst in them.[22] Telemachus' search for his father also builds anticipation and shapes our expectations of Odysseus before we see him in the flesh. But Telemachus is not simply a window into the inner workings of the palace or an audience surrogate. Above all, he poses a threat to his father. Unlike Odysseus, whose best days may be behind him, Telemachus is a hero on the cusp of adulthood whose victories lie in the future. A success on Telemachus'

[22] See Bassett 1923: 346, Calhoun 1934: 155, Klinger [1944] 1997: 194-96, Delebecque 1958: 137, Rose 1967: 391, Patzer 1991: 35 and Gottesman 2014: 56 for the importance of Telemachus to the portrayal of the suitors.

part in wrangling the suitors would render Odysseus's return unnecessary. Here the specter of Laertes, a noble king replaced by a superior son, looms large.

Audiences familiar with the *Odyssey* can take comfort in the knowledge that the *Telemachy* merely delays Odysseus's appearance in epic. This would not be so obvious for audiences experiencing this version of the *Odyssey* for the first time. Early indications suggest that Telemachus might, despite his apparent shortcomings, be the epic's true focus. Murnaghan identifies the underlying premise of the *Telemachy* as "the assumption that Odysseus will not return, that is in conflict with the central message of the poem as a whole."[23] Odysseus is set out in the proem as the subject of the poem. Yet after a brief account of his heroic qualities and exploits, Zeus quickly changes the subject to Aegisthus and to Orestes, who killed Aegisthus to avenge the death of his father, Agamemnon (1.29-30; 40-41). The application of Agamemnon's story to Odysseus's situation would be clear enough.[24] It suggests a worst-case scenario for returning heroes and raises fears about Odysseus's fate, particularly at the hands of his wife and her suitors, a fear Agamemnon himself will voice in *Odyssey* 11.[25] But why the emphasis on Orestes? S. West suggests that "[t]his sounds like the opening of an

[23] Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 158.

[24] We have already heard of the Greeks who achieved a *nostos* by escaping "war and sea," (1.12) and, indirectly, of those who did not (cf. 1.11).

[25] See D'Arms and Hulley 1946: 212, S. West [1981] 1998: 60, Olson 1990. Olson 1995: 69 notes the contrast between Aegisthus's contempt and Odysseus's respect for the gods.

Oresteia; the poet surely intended us to be surprised."[26] Aegisthus was warned not to kill Agamemnon or to pursue his wife (1.39), the very crimes the suitors would commit against Odysseus (cf. 2.246-51).[27] But Agamemnon's story casts the son, not the father, as the avenger of the wrongs committed by a suitor, thereby directing attention to the role that Odysseus's as-of-yet-unnamed son might play in the epic.[28] Athena later uses the paradigm to encourage Telemachus (1.296)[29] and encourages him to consider whether he will attack the suitors openly or through guile (δόλος). In this way, she implies that Telemachus, not Odysseus, will punish the suitors (1.294-96; cf. 2.325-30).[30] Rose argues that these indications reflect Athena's plan for

[26] [1981] 1998: ad 1.29-31.

[27] Cf. de Jong 2001: 13.

[28] See Bassett 1923: 346-47 for an attempt to explain this reference to Telemachus's role in the revenge. See also D'Arms and Hulley 1946: 211, Woodhouse 140-41, 246-7. Olson 1990: 59-60 argues that "Homer's audience has no compelling reason to think specifically of the suitors and Telamchus when the hear of Aegisthus and Orestes." He suggests that the audience would have cast Odysseus as the returning Orestes. Cf. de Jong 2001: 13-14.

[29] See Olson 1990: 62 on how the paradigm might play out judging by indications in *Odyssey* 1.

[30] Rose 1967: 392 argues that these indications reflect Athena's plan for Telemachus to enact vengeance upon the suitors "with or without his father" and "become the hero of the poem." In the divine council in *Odyssey* 1, Athena asks only that Zeus allow Odysseus to return home (1.80-87). Olson 1990: 62n17 observes that it is only in *Odyssey* 5 that Zeus mentions Athena's plan for Odysseus to return and take revenge on the suitors (5.23-24). The omen of the eagles'

Telemachus to enact vengeance upon the suitors "with or without his father" and "become the hero of the poem."[31] Telemachus clearly imagines that this will be the case (cf. 2.314-17; 3.205-6). The suitors likewise view Telemachus as the primary threat to their welfare. They wonder whether he intends to amass an army abroad or to obtain poison with which to murder them (2.325-30).

Even when Athena and Zeus return to Odysseus and consider his return, Athena's plan places greater weight on the role Telemachus will play: the gods should send Hermes to effect a seemingly passive release for Odysseus (1.84-87); Athena herself will encourage Telemachus to denounce the suitors, and she will send him to Sparta and Pylos to learn of his father's *nostos* and to win good *kleos* among men (1.88-95).[32] Murnaghan notes how notions of immortality in the *Telemachy* reinforce the impression that Telemachus will be its true subject:

> [t]he *Telemachy* is an exposition of the forms of immortality a hero enjoys in the normal course of experience: not the transcendence of normal mortal limitations that Odysseus enjoys with Athena's aid, but the forms of immortality that come through children and through celebration in song.[33]

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attacking the suitors (2.146-54), however, suggests that Telemachus and Odysseus will punish the suitors together. Cf. Mastorides' prophecy in response to the omen regarding Odysseus's return (2.161-76).

[31] 1967: 392.

[32] See Patzer 1991: 17 on this unexpected shift and on the seemingly "unnecessary" nature of the *Telemachy*.

[33] Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 117-18.

Audience members under the impression that a hero's fame and the success of his children are the most desirable kind of "immortality" a hero could hope for under normal circumstances might be more likely to accept Telemachus's story as a worthy sequel to his father's heroic tales.

The question at the center of the *Telemachy*—is this Odysseus' story or Telemachus'?—will continue to resonate throughout the epic. It will lend weight to subsequent scenes in which Telemachus' success would render Odysseus unnecessary. This includes Telemachus's attempts to drive away the suitors on his own authority and to string his father's bow and extends to the very end of the *Odyssey*, when Laertes observes that father and son are competing against one another. Telemachus expects to learn that his father is dead, replace him as the head of his household and remove the suitors without his help.[34] Odysseus's survival only complicates his plans. Will the competing efforts of Telemachus and Odysseus to punish the suitors result in a complicated jockeying for power as the early allusion to the trials Odysseus will face at home "even among his loved ones" (καὶ μετὰ οἷσι φίλοισι, 1.18-19) might suggest?[35] Knowing audiences can rest assured that this will not happen or at least that it does not prove disastrous. Even as Telemachus threatens to replace or merely overshadow his more famous father, his storyline raises expectations regarding Odysseus and whets our appetite for his return. In the meantime, however, Telemachus affords the audience narrative satisfaction in Odysseus's absence.

[34] Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 120.

[35] Cf. Thalmann 1998: 171.

Initially the idea of Telemachus's replacing Odysseus seems unpromising. When we first see Telemachus, he is as concerned about Odysseus's absence as we are. He sits among the suitors but imagines his father returning home to disperse them and reclaim his honor and possessions (1.115-17). It is clear that Telemachus does not measure up to his father. He is certain that Odysseus is dead (1.161-2) but believes that Odysseus alone could vanquish the suitors (1.163-8; cf. 2.58-60). Athena Mentes repeatedly draws attention to Telemachus' shortcomings: unlike Telemachus, a "sensible" (πινυτός) man would be enraged to see the suitors behave as they do (1.228-29). Telemachus does nothing; if *Odysseus* were to walk through the door, *he* would swiftly dispatch the suitors (1.253-56). Telemachus does not even consider winning *kleos* for himself. He pines for the *kleos* his father might have won him as a dead hero of the Trojan war (1.240).[36] Time spent in the presence of this underwhelming protagonist has led some critics to describe the "pleasurable frustration" of waiting for Odysseus to appear.[37]

In fact, these and other indications lay the groundwork for Telemachus's Proving Narrative, which has its own sequence of expectations, doubt-raising challenges and

[36] Jones 1988: 501 sees Odysseus as the only possible source of *kleos* for Telemachus and argues that he wins *kleos* on his journey by proving that he is Odysseus's son. Cf. Murnaghan 1987: 157.

[37] Scodel 2004: 46. For Ahl and Roisman 1996: 33, the search for Odysseus in his absence is the source of "the dramatic tension (in which the *Odyssey* arguably surpasses all other Greek and Roman epics)."

demonstrations of desirable qualities.[38] Telemachus immaturity and powerlessness suggest the possibility that he will assert himself and take his father's place. His identity as the son of Odysseus and resemblance to his father, which become a running theme of the *Telemachy*,[39] offer the first indications that Telemachus might possess, or be capable of possessing, qualities audiences have been led to expect of his father such as cunning, resourcefulness, endurance and strength.[40] Athena's encouragement points Telemachus in the right direction and raises

[38] As in the case of Odysseus's story, I am less interested in whether Telemachus develops as a person or undergoes a genuine change than I am in how his story provides a satisfying narrative experience. See, for instance, Millar and Carmichael 1954 and Austin 1969 on Telemachus's development. Olson 1995: 75-79 argues that Telemachus "does not undergo any fundamental personal growth or development." Parry 1971: 454 implicitly challenges the idea that the *Telemachy* offers a satisfying experience: he argues so strongly in favor of the *Telemachy*'s dependence on the rest of the *Odyssey* (against the view Analysts) that he ends up denying that the *Telemachy* holds any interest on its own.

[39] On Telemachus's identity as the son of Odysseus, see 1.215, 2.271, 274; 1.206-9, 1.222-23, 279. On his resemblance to his father, see 4.138-50, 4.148-50; cf. 4.116-19, 4.611, 4.207-11. See Rüter 1969: 142, Clarke 1969: 30-44, Apthorp 1980: 12n53, A. T. Edwards 1985: 28-30, Katz 1991: 65.

[40] See Katz 1991: 9. Klinger [1944] 1997: 206 argues that Athena is trying "to awaken a new Odysseus in Telemachus." Roisman 1994: 1 observes that "we do indeed have a distinct feeling

expectations that he might follow his father's example. She suggests that Odysseus would vanquish the suitors in an open battle and alludes to his search for poison (1.254-56, 1.260-64); shortly thereafter she advises Telemachus to consider whether *he* will kill the suitors using deception or in the open (ἠὲ δόλῳ ἦ ἀμφαδόν, 1.294-96).[41] She suggests that Telemachus should display Odyssean endurance by traveling abroad for a year even if he is worn down (ἦ τ' ἄν τρυχόμενός περ ἔτι τλαίης ἐνιαυτόν), if, that is, Odysseus still lives (1.287-88). N. Austin sees an early indication that Telemachus is "put[ting] himself firmly on the path of Odyssean cunning" when he disguises Athena's true purpose and divinity from Eurymachus (1.413-20).[42] Telemachus's goals, his desire to stand up to the suitors, learn his father's fate and win *kleos* (1.93-95, 281-283), provide the means through which he will achieve independence and live up to his father while demonstrating similar desirable qualities. The parallels between the plan outlined for Telemachus and the adventures of Odysseus facilitate this process. Telemachus

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that the father and son share similarities, not only in form and shape, as Mentor, Helen, and Menelaus testify, but in character as well."

[41] See Allione 1963: 12, Jones 1988: 500, Olson 1995: 71. See Austin 1969: 45-63 and Jones 1988: 505 further examples of Telemachus's "Odyssean characteristics."

[42] 1969: 54. Cf. Heath 2001: 139. Roisman 1994: 8-9 argues that Telemachus's epithet πεπνυμένος should be translated "straightforward" and indicates Telemachus's, at least initial, lack of natural guile. Heath 2001: 138 notes that "the epithet remains his to the very end, even after he becomes thoroughly 'resourceful'."

must deal with a group of reckless and dangerous men not so different from Odysseus's crew.[43] Telemachus will undergo a sea voyage (cf. 2.333), search for an authoritative guide,[44] encounter a powerful woman (Helen instead of Arete or Penelope) and even be recognized through song-induced tears.[45] Through it all Athena's concern and interventions to assist Telemachus not only parallel her relationship with Odysseus, as Nestor observes (3. 221-22, 375-79), but offer the same kind of reassurance that Telemachus is a worthy protagonist and likely to repay our investment.

Before Telemachus can face the suitors, he must first assert his right to speak for the household and for his mother. Penelope's objections to Phemius's song provide Telemachus the opportunity to establish himself as the head of the household (τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, 1.346-59) and to stake out authoritative speech (μῦθος) as the province of men, amongst whom he counts himself. This may be "the easiest place to do it, setting himself above women, especially his mother,"[46] but it is a necessary first step. Penelope's surprise (1.360) suggests

[43] Cf. Nagler 1990: 345.

[44] N. Austin 1975: 183 compares Telemachus's Nestor and Menelaus to Odysseus's Teiresias, all of whom are described as *pepnumenos*.

[45] See Apthorp 1980: 14-15; Reece 1993: 71-99, 1994: 170; de Jong 2001: 3. N. Austin 1975: 181-82 attributes similarities between Telemachus's time in Sparta and Odysseus's time in Phaeacia to the fact that these are poetic variations of Odysseus's interactions with Penelope in Ithaca.

[46] Heath 2001: 139.

that Telemachus has not challenged her before now.[47] Her approval is signaled when she takes Telemachus' words to heart (1.361).[48] The fact that Telemachus' justification of Phemius' song echoes Zeus's sentiment regarding human responsibility (cf. 1.32-34) lends further weight to Telemachus' words.

Telemachus's rebuke of the suitors in the palace provides unambiguous satisfaction. Athena's initial encounter with the suitors emphasized their impropriety, shamelessness and greed as well as Telemachus' powerlessness. Audience members are likely to take pleasure when Telemachus stands up to the suitors for the first time, forcing them to reckon with their crimes and astonishing them with his bravery (1.376-77; 381-82). Telemachus' claim that his father is dead and his professed disinterest in news of him (1.413-16) stress Telemachus' independence and lend credence to the view that he will become the new king of Ithaca (1.386-87; 389-96). Yet even here Telemachus victory is a partial one. He requires Athena's inspiration to stand up to his mother and the suitors (1.320-22), acknowledges his powerlessness and can only appeal to the gods for revenge (1.378-80).[49] He would forsake the rule of Ithaca if only he

[47] Millar and Carmichael 1954: 60 but see Olson 1995: 74-75n27.

[48] Heath 2001: 139. Critics are divided as to whether Telemachus's treatment of his mother is an appropriate assertion of his authority (cf. Katz 1991: 36, Clark 2001: 338) or rude and immature (cf. Clarke 1963: 131, S. West [1981] 1998 *ad loc.*).

[49] Scott 1918: 422.

could become master of his own home (1.397-98).[50] Even this would be a function on his father's greatness rather than his own (cf. 1.386-87, 1.397-98).

In *Odyssey* 2, Telemachus makes his case against the suitors to the people of Ithaca. Telemachus leaves his house "looking like a god" (θεῷ ἐναλίγχιος, 2.5). Audience members may nevertheless doubt his largely untested powers. Moments before Telemachus takes his place, however, Athena pours divine grace upon Telemachus (θεσπεσίην δ' ἄρα τῷ γε χάριν κατέχευεν Ἀθήνη) and the people gaze upon him in wonder (τὸν δ' ἄρα πάντες λαοὶ ἐπερχόμενον θηεῦτο, 2.12-13). This is the first time that Athena intervenes to alter the appearance of a character before a crucial moment in the *Odyssey*. A divine intervention bodes well for Telemachus's performance, but a pattern has yet to be established. Its effect upon Telemachus remains to be seen. We will see here and elsewhere, however, that Athena's intervention signals a doubt-inducing moment of crisis but invites admiration from internal audiences and assures the external audience of the character's success in the endeavor.

Implicit comparisons to Odysseus here invite both anticipation and apprehension about whether Telemachus will be able to live up to his father's reputation. Telemachus takes his father's seat (2.14), and we learn that such a meeting has not been convened since Odysseus left Ithaca (2.26-27). Antiphus expresses admiration for the man with the audacity to do so now (2.28-34). Telemachus's place of honor among the elders and taking of the scepter provide outward signals his newfound status (2.14; 2.37-38).[51] With scepter in hand, Telemachus makes

[50] Scott 1918: 422.

[51] Scheid-Tissinier 1993: 5.

an impassioned argument, appealing to the Ithacans' affection for Odysseus (2.46-47, 71-74), laying out the suitors' crimes (2.48-57, 138-43), arguing that the Ithacans are complicit in them (2.64-67, 74-79) and calling for them to put a stop to the suitors' occupation (2.68-70). Despite Telemachus's damning words, the people of Ithaca are overcome by pity (οἶκτος) and dare not challenge him (2.81-83).[52] Telemachus' words win him an ally in Mentor, who echoes his sentiments (2.229-41). Zeus himself answers Telemachus' prayers with an omen portending the destruction of the suitors (2.146-54) and Telemachus' ultimate success. And yet, Telemachus' performance may leave audience members wanting. His angry tears and the throwing down of the scepter (2.80-81) may suggest that he has not yet divested himself entirely of his childishness.[53] Although his speech has an emotional impact upon the Ithacans, Telemachus is unable to persuade them to act (cf. 2.257-58). He has no discernable effect on the suitors (cf. 2.194-207).[54] Telemachus admits that he does not have the power to save his house from them (2.62-64) and must once again call upon the gods for aid (2.143-45).

Telemachus' subsequent voyage to Pylos and Sparta to learn about his father offers another avenue for him to win *kleos* and to satisfy audience expectations. Early doubts emerge about Telemachus' ability to accomplish it and reveal that this is a significant step in proving his maturity. The suitors question Telemachus' resolve and predict that, despite his ambitious

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[52] See Olson 1995: 79n37 on the success of Telemachus's speech.

[53] Scott 1918: 422, Clarke 1963: 132, S. West [1981] 1998 *ad loc*.

[54] Cf. Scott 1918: 422 and Clarke 1963: 131-32 on Telemachus's "abortive and ineffective" oratory.

pronouncements, he will end up staying at home to wait for news of his father (2.255-56). Telemachus' helpless prayer to Athena for assistance in the face of opposition from the suitors and other Greeks (2.262-66) does little to reassure us that the suitors are wrong on this count.[55] Athena points to the momentousness of the voyage and suggests that it will determine whether Telemachus deserves to be called the son of Odysseus. She confronts him with the possibility that he, like many sons, will not live up to his father and will therefore be unable to complete the journey.[56] She suggests, however, that because he possesses some of his father's *metis*, there is some hope that he will succeed (2.270-77, 278-80). Telemachus' first steps are again unpromising. He shows little initiative in the preparations for the voyage. Athena Mentor tells him what to do, gathers a crew, finds a ship (2.285-95; 382-92), puts the suitors to sleep to ensure that Telemachus leaves without their notice (2.395-98) and sends a favorable wind (2.420-21).[57]

Telemachus does show some potential just before his departure. The suitors recognize as much when Telemachus returns to the palace for provisions and frightens them for the first time. In response to Antinous' condescending invitation to set aside his enmity and eat with the suitors (2.303-5), Telemachus informs them that he is no longer a child (νήπιος) who is powerless to stop them (2.312-13). He is a grown man (μέγας εἰμί). He will learn from others on his journey, his anger will grow and he will try to kill suitors (2.314-17). Although the suitors

[55] Cf. Scheid-Tissinier 1993: 6.

[56] Athena in fact suggests the more extreme possibility that Telemachus is not his father's son.

[57] See Scott 1918: 424, Olson 1995: 80-81 on Telemachus's passive role on the voyage to Pylos.

mock him (2.323), they fear him in a way that they did not when he spoke against them privately or before the assembly. They view him as a genuine threat and imagine that he will bring troops from Pylos or Spartra or obtain poison as his father did to vanquish them (2.325-30). The end of *Odyssey* 2 reinforces the impression that Telemachus is becoming his own man. He spares his mother by concealing his journey from her (2.373-76) and makes Eurycleia swear an oath to keep his secret. The wisdom of this decision is revealed when Penelope later learns of his voyage and says that she would have done everything in her power, including threatening suicide, to keep him home (4.732-34).[58] The book ends with Telemachus finally taking control of his mission, commanding his crew to load provisions and to prepare the ship (2.410-12; 422-26).

In both Pylos and Sparta Telemachus overcomes doubts to impress his father's friends. Telemachus' fears are at first those of a young man. They suggest that, if successful, his ability to handle himself among Nestor, Menelaus and Helen will demonstrate his maturity. As he approaches Nestor, Telemachus expresses concern about his lack of experience and about the propriety of a young man (νέος ἀνήρ) questioning an elder (3.23-24). He requires prompting from Athena (3.76-77). But he performs so well in Nestor's presence that Nestor compares his speech to Odysseus'. Nestor even expresses surprise that a younger man (ἀνήρ νεώτερος) could manage such a feat (3.124-25). He echoes Athena's use of Orestes as exemplum and her praise of Telemachus as big, strong, powerful and worthy of praise from later generations (3.197-200 = 1.299-302). Nestor appears to reproach Telemachus when he asks whether

[58] Olson 1995: 80n38 suggests that the plan is a failure because Penelope eventually learns of it.

Telemachus subjects himself to the suitors willingly or because the people of Ithaca and the gods oppose him (3.214-15).[59] But he reassures the audience when he suggests that Telemachus might succeed if Athena loves him like Odysseus as we know that she does (3.218-24).[60] We get a glimpse of the old Telemachus when he suggests that this is too much to hope for (3.226-28; cf. 208-9), but Telemachus' fears prompt Athena herself to affirm the power of the gods to help him (3.330-3).[61] Through his respectful directness and flattery (cf. 3.243-46), Telemachus gains recognition as the son of Odysseus despite earlier doubts (3.352; cf. 3.122-23) and wins a place for himself in the palace beside Nestor's sons (3.346-55; 416). He is bathed by Nestor's beautiful daughter (3.464-65), and Nestor sends his son Peisistratus to accompany Telemachus on his journey.[62]

Telemachus' approach to Menelaus, this time without Athena, like his approach to Nestor, begins inauspiciously. Although Menelaus immediately recognizes Telemachus and Peisistratus as sons of noble men (4.62-64), Telemachus' wonder at Menelaus's magnificent palace (4.43-46, 68-75) raises concerns that he is once more out of his depths.[63] Telemachus' failure to address Menelaus directly seems to reinforce this notion.[64] When Menelaus and

[59] Cf. Scheid-Tissinier 1993: 9 on Nestor's criticism of Telemachus's passivity.

[60] Fenik 1974: 24.

[61] Nestor himself later sees evidence of Athena's care for Telemachus (3.373, 375-79).

[62] See Clarke 1963: 134 on Telemachus's achievements in Pylos.

[63] Clarke 1963: 134-35.

[64] Scott 1918: 423, Olson 1995: 81.

Helen observe Telemachus' resemblance to Odysseus, Peisistratus's response casts Telemachus's silence in a new light. Peisistratus informs Menelaus and Helen that Telemachus did not reveal himself because he is "discreet" (σαόφρων) and did not want to act rashly because of the respect he has for Menelaus (4.158-60).[65] Telemachus' response to Menelaus's offer of gifts suggests that he is as thoughtful as Peisistratus would have us believe. In response to Menelaus's offer of an extended stay, horses and a chalice (4.587-92), Telemachus emphasizes the need for haste even as he assures Menelaus that he would gladly listen to him speak for a year (4.594-99). He tells Menelaus that while the horses would be of little use in Ithaca, they would bring greater honor (ἄγαλμα) to Menelaus if they remained in Sparta (4.601-8). Telemachus' combination of logic, directness and flattery wins him not only Menelaus's admiration (4.611-12) but also his most prized object, a bowl crafted by the god Hephaestus himself (4.613-19). Despite doubts raised by Telemachus' initial hesitation, he emerges as a canny participant in aristocratic rituals.

The clearest indication of Telemachus' success on his voyage is how much it disturbs the suitors. They suitors are amazed that he had the courage to undertake the journey (cf. 4.638-39, 664). They learn when they question Noemon about Telemachus not only that Noeman viewed Telemachus as an authoritative ἀνήρ who could not be refused but also that Telemachus appeared to have divine assistance (4.649-51; 653-56). Antinous is disturbed and angry (4.660-61). Although he speaks of Telemachus as a "young boy" (νέος πάις), he fears what he might do (4.665; 667) and embarks on the plan to ambush and murder Telemachus

[65] See Austin 1969: 53 on Telemachus's "discretion" in these scenes.

(4.669-72). The suitors display presumptuous arrogance both in their desire to conceal from Penelope a plan of which she is already aware and in their false belief that they have the advantage (4.770-71, 774-77). Their behavior marshals sympathy against them and heightens anticipation of Telemachus' (or Odysseus's) punishing them even as it raises fears that they might kill Telemachus before he is able to do so.

In his voyage to Pylos and Sparta, Telemachus learns that his father still lives but is held captive by Calypso. He encounters positive examples of hospitality (3.34-53, 69-70; 4.30-36) and piety (3.34-53, 380-84, 393-94, 418-29; 4.78-79) from both Nestor and Menelaus. He overcomes initial doubts. He is recognized as the son of Odysseus and deemed a worthy guest by Odysseus' friends. Telemachus demonstrates cleverness like his father's in his dealings with Nestor and Menelaus. He uses his wits to win gifts, "[o]ne of the most important proofs of heroism."[66] Finally, Telemachus proves himself a viable threat to the suitors. The example of Orestes continues to exert an influence on the narrative. Both Nestor and Menelaus mention Orestes (3.193-98; 4.546-47). Telemachus himself recognizes Orestes as a positive example, wishing he had power like Orestes' to pay back the suitors for their "painful transgression" (ὑπερβασίη ἀλεγεινή, 3.205-7). Repeated allusions to Orestes' story argue for the importance of Telemachus to the *Odyssey* as a whole. They keep alive the fear that Telemachus will be forced to avenge his father and the hope that he will prove capable. The example of Neoptolemus, who, we are told, rules over his own kingdom and has orchestrated an

[66] Jones 1988: 502.

aristocratic marriage to the daughter of Menelaus and Helen (4.5-9), suggests how Telemachus' story might conclude if he is successful.[67]

PENELOPE

The *Telemachy* portrays Penelope primarily as the worthy object of the suitors' affections, as an obstacle to Telemachus,[68] and as the loyal wife of Odysseus. She cuts an impressive figure. Athena suggests that she may be as much a source of Telemachus' reputation as Odysseus (1.222-23). Antinous describes her as a woman whom Athena has generously endowed with skill at crafting beautiful works, with fine wits and with cunning to rival all (ἔργα τ' ἐπίστασθαι περικαλλέα καὶ φρένας ἐσθλὰς | κέρδεά θ', οἷ' οὔ πώ τιν' ἀκούομεν οὐδὲ παλαιῶν, 2.117-121). The combination of Penelope's fine qualities and Odysseus's property has drawn the suitors to the palace. Penelope's attachment to Odysseus prevents her from choosing a suitor and freeing Telemachus from them (2.130-37, 2.125-26).[69] In the meantime, she fears for Telemachus' welfare (4.703-6, 716-34, 787-90, 817-23) and would understandably prevent him from winning *kleos* through adventure (4.732-34).

Apart from Penelope's narrative function as goal and obstacle, there are signs of a character of greater independence and depth not so different from her husband. In answer to

[67] Of course Neoptolemus's own story does not end well.

[68] See Katz 1991: 37 on Penelope as an obstacle to Telemachus.

[69] Antinous asserts that Penelope is also motivated by a desire for *kleos* (2.125-26).

Telemachus' charges against the suitors, Antinous attempts to shift the blame to Penelope (2.87-88): Penelope "knows cunning arts" (κέρδεα οἶδεν, 2.88) and has been stringing the suitors along for years. She encourages the suitors by making promises and sending messages to them individually, though "her mind has other designs" (νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ, 2.92). Antinous goes on to describe Penelope's "deception" (δόλος), in which she wove and secretly unwove a shroud for Laertes at the completion of which she promised to marry a suitor (2.94-110). He reports in full the speech through which she convinced the suitors saying that she desired marriage but feared resentment if Laertes were to die without a shroud (2.96-102). Penelope is capable of deception and flirts with impropriety. At this stage, however, there is little reason to doubt that her cunning serves any purpose other than preserving her marriage to Odysseus.[70]

Penelope shows Odysseus-like endurance in remaining loyal to her husband and resisting suitors for close to twenty years. Her loyalty to Odysseus appears to be genuine. When Phemius sings of the Achaeans' "sorrowful return" (νόστος λυγρός, 1.326-27), Penelope bursts into tears and asks him to stop. The song reminds her of the husband for whom she feels grief that cannot be forgotten (πένθος ἄλαστον) and for whom she still longs (1.341-44). Telemachus tells her to "endure" the song nonetheless (σοί δ' ἐπιτολμάτω κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀκούειν, 1.353). Lest one fears that Penelope's loyalty is a pretense, we are told that she cries herself to sleep thinking of Odysseus after Telemachus dismisses her (1.363-64). Whereas Telemachus

[70] Cf. Katz 1991: 25.

claims to have given up hope on Odysseus, we are told that Penelope still asks every new arrival about Odysseus and solicits prophecies about him, even after close to twenty years (1.414-16).

Ironically, it is Nestor's assurance that raises doubts about Penelope's fidelity to Odysseus. Up to this point, the story of the house of Atreus has served as an exemplum for Telemachus. Any application to Penelope's situation has gone largely un-activated. Yet when Nestor describes how a woman who had her wits about her (φρεσί…κέχρητ' ἀγαθῇσι, 3.266) fell prey to the will of the gods and to the wiles of the man who planned to kill her husband (3.269; 270-72), one might conclude that even a woman as admirable as Penelope is not safe.[71] Nestor warns Telemachus not to leave his possessions too long amongst the arrogant (ὑπερφίαλοι) suitors (3.313-16). Audience members may be more concerned about Penelope, especially because she currently lacks a male chaperone, as did Clytemnestra when she succumbed to Aegisthus (3.267-71).[72] Menelaus's conclusion that the murder of Agamemnon came about "by the treachery of his destructive wife" (4.91, δόλῳ οὐλομένης ἀλόχοιο) points to how great an impact Penelope's virtue will have on Odysseus's future prospects. The figure of Helen likewise suggests worrisome possibilities for Penelope. Helen's account of the "blindness" (ἄτη) that Aphrodite imposed upon her and that led her to abandon her fatherland, child, bedroom and husband (4.261-64) reinforces the idea that divine intervention might sway Penelope, even against her will. Helen's delight in Odysseus's killing Trojans because she had changed her mind and come to regret coming to Troy (4.259-61) adds *human* fickleness to the

[71] Katz 1991: 45.

[72] Katz 1991: 45.

mix. The two stories told of Helen, one in which she helps to maintain Odysseus's disguise and is a party to his mission (told by Helen), the other in which she impersonates a series of faithful wives to draw out the Greek heroes and bring about their destruction (told by Menelaus), clearly suggest "two potential outcomes for the second part of the *Odyssey* and the role given by Odysseus to Penelope in his revenge."[73] Penelope might prove an ally to Odysseus in disguise or draw him out to be slaughtered by his enemies before he can slaughter them.

Whatever fears we might harbor about Penelope, the final scenes of the *Telemachy* are likely to put us at ease. The suitors' plot against Telemachus places them firmly in opposition to Penelope. Penelope takes an active role against them and attempts to summon Laertes to "weave a cunning plan" and appeal to the people of Ithaca (4.735-41). The comparison of Penelope to a lion cornered by hunters (4.791-92) conjures images of a hero, perhaps like Odysseus,[74] momentarily outnumbered by lesser men but still capable of defending herself. Although she is more worried about Telemachus than Odysseus (4.819), she still asks about Odysseus when Athena appears in the form of her sister to comfort her (4.831-34).

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[73] Said [1998] 2011: 269. Rutherford [1986] 2009: 169 observes that "[b]oth Menelaus' and Helen's tales prefigure later events of the poem (thus)." See also S. West [1981] 1998: ad 4.244; Olson 1989: 391; De Jong 2001: 102. See Katz 1991: 79 for further similarities between Penelope and Helen.

[74] Doherty 1991: 34. Doherty notes that Odysseus is the subject of the other five lion similes in the epic.

ODYSSEUS

Accounts of Odysseus in the *Telemachy* grant Telemachus *kleos* by association with his father and hint at the kind of man Odysseus' son might prove to be. They shape expectations of Odysseus and keep alive hopes that he will emerge as the epic's true protagonist.[75] References to Odysseus portray him in a positive light and underline the qualities set out for him in the proem and prologue. Talk of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 1 and 2 show his concern for his home and for the people of Ithaca. They focus on the contrast between the Ithaca under Odysseus' rule and Ithaca in his absence.[76] Visitors used to flock to the palace to see Odysseus (1.176-77). He protected the house from troubles and would quickly dispatch a threat like the suitors were he to return (1.232-33, cf. 2.59; 1.257, 265-66). Odysseus ruled Ithaca like a gentle father (2.46-47, 230-34) and worked with the people in public assemblies that have since been abandoned (2.26-27). Athena Mentes assures Telemachus that Odysseus is "exceedingly resourceful" (πολυμήχανος) and will devise a way home "even if iron chains hold him" (1.204). Nestor vouches for Odysseus's *metis* and capacity for every kind of deception, in which arena "no one ever wished to be compared openly" with him (οὔ τίς ποτε μῆτιν ὁμοιωθήμεναι ἄντην |

[75] Cf. West 1981 [1998]: 55: "the general respect in which Odysseus is held (cf. iii 126 ff., 218 ff., iv 105 ff., 169 ff., 240 ff., 267 ff., 333 ff.) enhances the picture of the father whom he has yet to meet, while heightening our expectations in preparation for the moment when Odysseus actually appears." See also Calhoun 1934: 159.

[76] See Saïd [1998] 2011: 135.

ἤθελ[ε], 3.120-22; cf. 163). Nestor touches on Odysseus's loyalty in always considering what was best for the Greeks (φραζόμεθ' Ἀργείοισιν ὅπως ὄχ' ἄριστα γένοιτο, 3.127-29) and in returning to help Agamemnon after Agamemnon and Menelaus quarrelled and divided the Greek forces (3.162-64). Menelaus grieves for Odysseus more than any other: Odysseus worked harder and achieved more than any other (4.104-10), and Menelaus still owes him a debt of gratitude (4.169-82).

Sternberg observes how the stories of Menelaus and Helen offer tangible evidence of Odysseus's nature and convey

> in the most impressive and unambiguous manner, Odysseus's manifold heroic nature: his great physical strength and powers of endurance, his fearlessness and nerve, his resolution, self-control, and resourcefulness—in short, the rare complex of qualities that enabled him in the past to cope single-handed with the most dangerous situations, time and again and against great odds, and to emerge victorious and unscathed.[77]

Helen's story of Odysseus's infiltrating Troy disguised as a beggar recounts Odysseus' endurance in subjecting himself to "unseemly blows" (πληγαί ἀεικελίαι) to alter his appearance, his cunning in eluding Helen (κερδοσύνῃ ἀλέεινεν), his martial prowess in killing Trojans, and his resourcefulness in bringing intelligence back to the Greeks (4.244-58). Menelaus' story of Odysseus' resisting the urge to respond, and preventing others from responding, to Helen when she called to the Greeks in the voices of their wives (271-89) further illustrates his superior discernment, endurance and concern for those around him. Tales of Odysseus's heroism like these have already spread across Greece (cf. 4.814-16).

[77] Sternberg [1973 [1978]: 75. Cf. Olson 1993: 83, who adds to the list Odysseus's "murderous military efficiency." See also Rengakos 2002: 181.

Menelaus' tale of his own wandering offers a potential template for the experiences of Odysseus and perhaps Telemachus. Some audience members may find it more telling than the stories of Odysseus's time in Troy. At the beginning of the story, Menelaus is in a position much like Odysseus'.[78] He is detained because of the anger of the gods (4.352-3) and would never have escaped if a goddess, Eidothea, had not taken pity on him (4.363-66). Eidothea advises Menelaus to seek out her father to tell him how to return home and inform him of what is happening at home in his absence (4.390-92). The course Eidothea sets out for Menelaus includes Odyssean hallmarks such as the deception (4.437) and ambush (4.388, 395, 441) of Proteus, for which Menelaus must cover himself in a sealskin and suffer the stench of seals "with an enduring heart" (τετληότι θυμῷ, 4.447). Throughout his travails Menelaus receives help from his patron goddess. This story suggests one course Odysseus' return home might take. We see elements of it when Circe tells Odysseus to seek out Teiresias for help in returning home.[79] The stories of Ajax and Agamemnon present alternate courses for Odysseus' return. Ajax incurred the wrath of a god (Athena) but would have survived "if he had not tossed out a reckless word" (εἰ μὴ ὑπερφίαλον ἔπος ἔκβαλε, 4.503). As it is, he cannot help himself, and Poseidon, despite having just saved him, sends him to his death (4.499-511). We might recall Ajax's fate when Odysseus boasts to Polyphemus and again in Odysseus's contentious, but ultimately successful, exchanges with the goddesses who come to his aid. Though Calypso and Athena appreciate Odysseus's skepticism, Ajax reminds us that the gods are not always so

[78] Lord 1960: 165, S. West [1981] 1998: 192, Saïd [1998] 2011: 147.

[79] Lord 1960: 165-66; S. West [1981] 1998: 218, Saïd [1998] 2011: 147.

receptive to criticism and haughtiness. The fate of Agamemnon hints at a more disturbing story pattern. Informed of Agamemnon's arrival by his lookout, Aegisthus deceives and ambushes him. He invites Agamemnon to dine and slaughters him as he eats along with the rest of his men (4.512-37). Though Menelaus makes no mention of Clytemnestra, Helen and her history of adultery are close at hand. Menelaus's story begins with a woman's treachery in the form of Eidothea's betrayal of her own father (4.365). It is hard not to consider the possibility that Odysseus will be betrayed by his wife and killed by one of the suitors. Those looking for evidence that Telemachus will eclipse his father might find it here: after Odysseus is killed, Telemachus, like Orestes (cf. 4.546), would be called upon to avenge him.

These stories give us a sense of how Odysseus might face the challenge of vanquishing the suitors and reuniting with his wife. They raise concerns about whether he will succeed. To these concerns we might we might add the fear that Odysseus is no longer the man he once was. Athena does not tell Telemachus that Odysseus would vanquish the suitors if he walked through the door right now. She says that he would vanquish them if he came as he was "when I first knew him" (1.257, 265-66). Menelaus is similarly thinking of the strength of a younger Odysseus when he wishes that Odysseus would deal with the suitors as he did back when he wrestled Philomeides (4.341-46).[80] These examples of heroism and those of the Trojan War took place long ago. Much has happened to Odysseus in the intervening years. Some audience members might wonder whether Odysseus will be able to live up to his reputation. These

[80] See West 1981 [1998]: ad loc.

concerns are likely to reemerge given the state in which we find him at the beginning of *Odyssey* 5.

Other indications in the *Telemachy* introduce the possibility that, even if Odysseus succeeds, our lack of sympathy for his cause will prevent us from taking pleasure in his victory. The information that Laertes never slept with Eurycleia in order to avoid his wife's anger is presented in an aside (1.433) but might indicate wrongdoing on Odysseus's part in light of his dalliances with Calypso and Circe and look forward to tension between Odysseus and Penelope.[81] Perhaps he deserves a comeuppance of his own. Elsewhere, the poet seems to raise moral questions regarding Odysseus' deceptive nature and particularly the strategy of surprise and ambush. Athena does not qualify the option of deception and secrecy when she asks Telemachus whether he will approach the suitors secretly or in the open. She appears to weigh the two options equally. Yet we learn that Odysseus's request for poison, one of the ways in which one might vanquish a superior force, was rejected by other men for fear of

[81] Doherty 1991: 42n27. We might distinguish here between men's affairs with women while abroad and the idea of bringing another woman into the home. *Agamemnon* and the *Trachiniae* argue that the distinction is an important one. Rutherford [1986] 2009: 163 suggests that Odysseus's "womanising overseas with glamorous goddesses has been discreetly kept to a minimum, though not entirely bowdlerized," and observes that "[t]here is some evidence that in other tales Odysseus' fidelity to Penelope was less uncompromising, his sexual morals more lax." Cf. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 34 on the possibility of Menelaus's having an extra-marital affair.

inviting divine anger (1.262-63). This suggests that the stratagem might be considered ambiguous at best. Worse, the strategy of deception and ambush through which Odysseus (or Telemachus) might defeat the suitors is repeatedly associated with unsavory characters such as Aegisthus, Clytemnestra and the suitors themselves.[82] Edwards argues that the *Odyssey* presents ambush (λόχος), which the *Iliad* cast as "a stratagem of desperation, cowardice, and deceit," as "a stratagem by which the weak defend themselves against the injustice of a more powerful foe."[83] The use of the stratagem by Aegisthus and particularly by the suitors might suggest otherwise.

[82] Cf. Katz 1991: 24. Deception and ambush are painted in a more positive light when Eidothea advises Menelaus to use them to trap Proteus and gain his help (4.388, 437).

[83] 1985: 41. Dué and Ebbott 2010: ch. 2 argue for a more positive depiction of ambush in the *Iliad*.

CHAPTER 4: *ODYSSEY* 5-8—OGYGIA AND SCHERIA

CALYPSO

The introduction to Odysseus in *Odyssey* 5 plays up the distance between Odysseus and the stories told of him. It is likely to heighten fears that Odysseus will be unable to live up to his reputation. As Ahl and Roisman observe the disconnect between Odysseus as he is and as he was:

> The Muse's narrative "reality" of Odysseus's dispiritedness contrasts sharply with the lionhearted husband Penelope remembers and whose return she is said to be awaiting (4.724, 814)…. We sense that Odysseus would be lost to memory without the timely intercession of Athena.[1]

Zeus's and Athena's plans for Odysseus and Calypso's love for him are reassuring despite our worst fears. Zeus and Athena assure us that he will be honored like a god among the

[1] 1996: 44.

Phaeacians, that he will be given more treasure than he could have won at Troy; it is his fate (μοῖρα) to see his loved ones and return home (5.36-42). They strongly imply that he will punish the suitors (cf. 5.23-24), though we meet a man who seems ill-suited to the task. The gods are concerned for Odysseus's welfare. Calypso's anger at the suggestion that she must let him go (5.118-44) offers an indication of the intensity of her affection for Odysseus. So smitten is she that she told Odysseus she "would make him immortal and ageless all his days" (ἔφασκον | θήσειν ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήραον ἤματα πάντα, 5.135-36). Audience members may be less impressed. They are not introduced to a soldier, master tactician, thinker, escape-artist, or spy. They find instead a broken man "at the very nadir of his fortunes,"[2] sitting on the shore as always, crying, groaning, wracked with pain, looking longingly at the sea, and pondering his return "as his sweet life passed him by" (5. 151-58, 82-84). He is forced to sleep with Calypso though she no longer pleases him (5.153-55). Despite his dissatisfaction, Odysseus does nothing to change his circumstances. He appears particularly passive, neither resourceful nor a "model of endurance"[3] in any way that could be considered admirable.

Odysseus shows little improvement even after the gods intervene to free him. His encounter with Poseidon on the sea is full of suspense but offers little opportunity for Odysseus to impress us. When Odysseus sees the storm sent by Poseidon to destroy him, he is overcome by fear and wishes he had died at Troy (5.299-312). He "cuts a pathetic, nonheroic figure."[4] He

[2] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 165. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 43 consider him "pathetic."

[3] Cf. Vernant [1982] 1996: 188.

[4] Ahl and Roisman 1996: 45. Cf. Hogan 1976: 204-5.

at least has the presence of mind to cling to the remnants of his raft (5.224-25). Leucothea must intervene to save Odysseus, though even with her veil, Odysseus loses hope at the prospect of being crushed against rocks on the shore (5.406, 408-23). Only Athena's intervention saves him (5.426-7, 437). A final prayer brings him to safety (5.445-50; 451-53). These scenes prove little about Odysseus except the degree to which he is beloved by the gods.

All is not lost, however. Odysseus is bruised and battered, but we see glimpses of his famed prudence, cunning, and endurance.[5] Odysseus appears ungrateful when he questions Calypso's intentions and insists that she swear an oath not to harm him, but, in doing so, he wins her renewed affection and praise for his intelligence (5.177-79, 180-83).[6] Elsewhere, Odysseus shows similar skepticism regarding the gods' designs (cf. 5.356-57, 419-23) that might be characterized charitably as prudence. We might be impressed by Odysseus's presence of mind when he assures Calypso, regardless of his true opinion, that she is stronger, taller, more beautiful and more youthful than Penelope (5.216-18). Odysseus's greatest and most programmatic demonstration of endurance comes with his rejection of Calypso's offer of ease

[5] Hainsworth [1981-86] 1998: 249 suggests that Homer "introduces Odysseus at a low ebb in his fortunes (151-9), a virtual prisoner, impotent and despondent," expressly so that Odysseus can live up to his epithet πολύτλας. Holtsmark and Bergren 1980: 117 speak of Odysseus's symbolic rebirth when he leaves Calypso.

[6] Calypso's approval seems to argue against the view of Rutherford [1986] 2009: 171 that "[t]his is negative and unprofitable suspicion."

and immortality.[7] Despite this offer and every assurance that he will suffer immeasurably if he reject it—Calypso assures him that he would not go if only he knew (5.206-10)—Odysseus embraces mortality and pain in a way that reminds us of the proem: "I will endure with a long-suffering heart in my chest since I have already suffered **very many things** and labored **much** because of waves and war (τλήσομαι ἐν στήθεσσιν ἔχων ταλαπενθέα θυμόν | ἤδη γὰρ **μάλα πόλλ**' ἔπαθον καὶ **πόλλ'** ἐμόγησα | κύμασι καὶ πολέμῳ, 5.206-10; 221-24). There are indications that Odysseus has the skills required at least to reach Ithaca. We see his resourcefulness when he chops down trees to build a raft for himself (5.243-61) and when he steers it skillfully (5.270).[8] Odysseus's careful assessment of the perils he will face at sea (cf. 5.356-65, 465-75) shows us a man who is aware of his circumstances and constantly weighing his options.

THE PHAEACIANS

Odysseus's time among the Phaeacians, including his encounter with Nausicaa, his conversation with Arete and Alcinous, and his performance in the games, represent a series of Proving Sequences. They create a blueprint for Odysseus's subsequent encounters and

[7] See Vernant [1982] 1996.

[8] Ahl and Roisman 1996: 44.

recognition scenes in the *Odyssey*, particularly in books 13-24.[9] Formal analyses of recognition scenes that focus on the latter half of the *Odyssey* tend to obscure the similarity between these scenes and later recognitions.[10] Proposed steps for recognition scenes such as testing, deception, and foretelling are well suited to Odysseus's mission in the palace to test potential allies and remain undetected,[11] but they obfuscate the similar function played by implicit testing and withholding of identity of the sort we find when Odysseus is among the Phaeacians.[12] In every case on Phaeacia, in the *Apologue*, and in the palace, Odysseus is initially underestimated by a character or characters who fail to recognize him. They either show him kindness despite his perceived weakness or mistreat him on account of it, often in the context of hospitality. These encounters, whether positive or negative frequently introduce challenges in which Odysseus displays desirable qualities, excels expectations, and in which his hosts are either rewarded for their kindness or punished for their misdeeds.[13] Odysseus must use cunning to convince Nausicaa to help him despite being naked and looking fearsome. She is

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[9] See Reinhardt [1948] 1996: 126 for similarities between the recognition scenes on Scheria and on Ithaca.

[10] Cf. Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009 and Gainsford 2003.

[11] Gainsford 2003: 41-42 proposes these steps, along with final recognition, as the "four possible moves" in recognition scenes.

[12] Cf. Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009: 217.

[13] The example of the Phaeacians is somewhat problematic insofar as they are rewarded in the short-term for their hospitality but ultimately punished in definitive fashion.

pleasantly surprised when Athena reveals him to be a hero rather than a beggar. He demonstrates devotion to Penelope when he fails to entertain the offer of Nausicaa's hand in marriage. Odysseus displays cleverness in convincing Alcinous and Arete of his intentions and wins prizes and an escort home as a result. They, in turn, learn that they are hosting the famous hero Odysseus and that tales of their hospitality will spread throughout Greece. In the games, Euryalus's ill treatment of Odysseus and questioning of his athleticism pushes Odysseus to show that he still possesses the strength of his youth and surpass his Phaeacian competitors. For his impertinence, Euryalus is forced to apologize to Odysseus. Through it all, divine support reassures both the Phaeacians and the audience of Odysseus's worthiness and potential. The pattern will continue in Odysseus's encounters with Polyphemus, Circe, Telemachus, the suitors, and Penelope.

Each of these instances constitute a Proving Sequence. The stories we have heard about Odysseus suggest that he should easily surpass the expectations of his internal audiences. New challenges introduce hopes that Odysseus will prove himself alongside fears that he will not. Internal underestimation heightens our fears of failure even as it stokes our desire to see him succeed, either proving his detractors wrong or impressing his allies and suggesting that they were right to come to his aid. In more extreme cases, characters who wrong Odysseus marshal our sympathies in his favor and increase our desire to see them punished. Successful displays of Odysseus's heroic qualities give us a sense of relief and satisfaction. Up to this point, the pattern is essentially the same as the pattern we have seen in the *Telemachy*. Odysseus's Proving Sequences are both complicated and enhanced by the addition of Recognition motifs. Odysseus's anonymity provides ample opportunity for dramatic irony, in which we observe

characters who admire, love, or fear Odysseus have dealings without knowing it. Telemachus was an untested quantity. Neither we nor his internal audiences knew exactly what to expect of him. When Odysseus is in disguise or goes unrecognized, we know that this is none other than Odysseus, the storied hero, the divine darling, the sacker of Troy, the fated destroyer of Polyphemus, the Phaeacians, and the suitors, the long-absent father, husband, and son. The pleasure we derive from this irony only heightened when characters help him without expecting a reward or foolishly take advantage of him. And yet, despite these assurances, we fear that this will be the occasion on which Odysseus fails to impress his interlocutors and fails to live up to his reputation. So, when successful Proving Sequences are crossed with Recognition Scenes, the satisfaction and relief of seeing Odysseus display heroic qualities is compounded by the thrill of recognition, when, in an instant, the ironic distance is closed and the hero revealed.

These narrative goals and the patterns associated with them suggest an explanation for why Odysseus does not reveal himself immediately when Arete asks him and why Odysseus does not reveal himself to Penelope upon their meeting in *Odyssey* 19. Fenik has argued convincingly that "all important identifications of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* are subjected to considerable delay" designed to heighten "irony, suspense, and poignant emotion."[14] We can go a step further: Odysseus never reveals himself to the "disappointment" of his internal audience. He only reveals himself after he has impressed through the demonstration of desirable qualities or, at the very least, through the divine support for which he is famous. This

[14] 1974: 16, 55.

makes perfect sense when Odysseus is in the palace. If Odysseus were to reveal himself before he has demonstrated his cunning in orchestrating the ambush and strength in stringing the bow and hitting his targets, the suitors would kill him immediately. Odysseus's motivation for concealing his identity until he has proven himself is less obvious elsewhere as, for instance, when he later impresses Telemachus with the help of Athena prior to revealing himself. Mattes argues that, on Scheria, this is a function of Odysseus's self-confidence: "he is a man visited with inhuman suffering, a man plagued with a longing for home still almost without hope of fulfillment…, and for this man he has no name."[15] The purpose of Odysseus's time among the Phaeacians, Mattes maintains, is to allow him to win back the "awareness of his greatness and his fame" lost over the last ten years.[16] It is only in *Odyssey* 8 that he feels worthy of the name.[17] The idea of Proving Narratives, however, suggests that it is not for the sake of Odysseus and his emotional journey that he must prove worthy of his name and reputation; it is for ours. Yet viewed only in terms of the needs of a Proving Narrative, Odysseus go either way when asked his identity by Arete. He might impress and intrigue the Phaeacians by claiming to

[15] Mattes 1958: 140, quoted and translated in Fenik 1974: 14-15.

[16] 1958: 123. Cf. Thornton 1970: 43.

[17] Mattes 1958: 140. Cf. Wilamowitz 1927: 37, quoted and translated in Fenik 1974: 41, on Odysseus's failure to reveal himself to Penelope because "[s]he sits facing him in fresh, chase beauty and royal dignity. He is a man grown old…and dressed in beggar's clothing. He is overcome by this."

be Odysseus at the outset, but doubts would likely remain.[18] Odysseus would, then, be forced to overcome their suspicions by proving himself through challenges that demonstrate his heroic qualities to his internal and his external audience. The goals of Recognition narratives demand otherwise. Odysseus must face challenges and demonstrates his desirable qualities prior to revealing himself here and on Ithaca. In this way, the narrative prolongs and heightens suspense and dramatic irony, as Fenik suggests. Often, and particularly in the case of Penelope, these delays also provide the opportunity for more and more difficult challenges and thus more satisfying displays. It achieves a coincidence of satisfaction and relief arising from Odysseus's success with the related satisfaction and relief of recognition.

NAUSICAA

On Ogygia, Odysseus was unable to act on his own initiative, and the gods intervened to save him. On Scheria, Odysseus is forced to prove his cleverness and understanding of human nature *before* the gods come to his aid. He "is at the lowest point of his fortunes…shipwrecked, naked, helpless, and covered in brine."[19] When roused by the girls' cries, he emerges, terrifying to behold (σμερδαλέος), and frightens all but Nausicaa (6.135-40). He must consider how best to approach her and decides upon a "sweet and cunning speech" (μειλίχιον καὶ κερδαλέον

[18] Besslich 1966: 61 points out that Arete is already suspicious of Odysseus when she asks for his name and would be unlikely to believe that he is the Trojan War hero Odysseus.

[19] Garvie 1994: 26.

μῦθον) from afar (6.141-44, 148).[20] Odysseus flatters Nausicaa profusely. He compares her to the goddess Artemis (6.149-52) and deems her parents, brothers, and future husband blessed to know her (6.154-59). He works to counteract his frightening appearance by expressing an almost holy reverence and fear of her (σέβας, ἄγαμαι, τέθηπα; δείδια),[21] likening her unsuggestively to a shoot that grew unexpectedly from the altar of Apollo, drew crowds, and fascinated him on the island of Delos (6.163-69). He repeatedly reminds Nausicaa of his suffering and troubles but acknowledges the gods' role in bringing them about (6.165, 169, 175; 6.174). He asks that Nausicaa pity him (6.175) and prays that she be rewarded with her heart's desire and, among other things, unity of thought, or "like-mindedness," with husband (ὁμοφροσύνη, 6.180-85).[22] Nausicaa's response suggests that Odysseus judged his approach correctly and spoke effectively: he does not seem like an evil or mindless man (6.187; cf. 199-200); though Zeus gave Odysseus these troubles to endure, Nausicaa will do everything in her power to help him (6.188-90, 191-93); after all, strangers and beggars are sent from Zeus, and one must take care of them (6.206-8). Odysseus has succeeded in convincing Nausicaa to give him clothing and to guide him to her parents' palace.

When Athena intervenes to make Odysseus look bigger and stronger, give him hair like hyacinth flowers, and pour grace over him like a craftsman pouring gold and silver (6.229-35),

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[20] See Stanford 1967: 313-14, Garvie 1994: 119-20 on Odysseus's decision.

[21] Cf. Hainsworth 1998: 304. Clay [1983] 1997: 196 describes Odysseus's need to persuade "the shaken young princess that this briny, naked stranger before her is decent, and can be trusted."

[22] See Bolmarcich 2001 on the term ὁμοφροσύνη and its significance in the *Odyssey*.

she is not helping Odysseus meet an external challenge or to overcome Nausciaa's doubts. Nausicaa is perfectly happy to take him as he is. Athena intervenes to reassure the *audience* at a moment of doubt. Odysseus has just displayed his cleverness and presence of mind to persuade Nausicaa to help him, but audience members are likely to be struck more by the incongruity of our hero, who recently refused the advances of a goddess, now playing the suppliant beggar. Though kind, Nausicaa's acceptance of his plea seems to confirm Odysseus's lowly status. Some may be concerned as to how he will possibly reemerge to impress Nausicaa as the hero he truly is. Athena's intervention is aimed at these audience members. Nausicaa, for her part, is rewarded with a prince instead of a pauper, but, more to the point, Athena's transformation of Odysseus and Nausicaa's positive response to it (6.240-43) remind us that Odysseus is more than a worn-down beggar. It encourages us to anticipate how he will prove as much in subsequent episodes.

Nausicaa is not simply a benefactor. An undercurrent in this scene, developed more fully during Odysseus's time in the palace of Arete and Alcinous, is the threat that he will end his quest prematurely by choosing to marry Nausicaa and remain in Scheria.[23] In this way, our hopes that Odysseus will prove himself and impress his hosts are turned against us. We are told that Athena embarks on a plan to return Odysseus to his home (6.14), but she tells Nausicaa

[23] Cf. Thornton 1970: 19; Nagler 1974: 45-47; Hainsworth 1998 *ad* 7.298-347; Most 1989: 27n60; Reece 1993: 120, though, according to Reece, "Odysseus' ultimate return home to Penelope is never really in doubt, the audience of the tale is able to suspend this knowledge and enjoy Nausicaa's performance in Odysseus' last temptation." Cf. Most 1989: 28.

that she must wash her clothes because her marriage is near (6.27). Nausicaa is ashamed to mention "bountiful marriage" (θαλερὸς γάμος) in her request to Alcinous, but her father understands (6.66-67). When Odysseus approaches her, he is naked. The poet describes his intentions with a verb (μίγνυμι) that can describe mingling, combat, or sex (6.135-36)[24] and compares him to a ravenous animal compelled by γαστήρ, a word that might denote the stomach or the womb (6.130-34). Odysseus refers to her future husband (6.158-59), attributes to her a desire for marriage (cf. 6.180), and describes in some detail the value of marriage between like-minded individuals (6.181-184).

What begins as a threat to Odysseus's mission becomes a test of his devotion to Penelope not unlike Calypso's offer of immortality.[25] Indications of Odysseus's interest quickly fall away as Nausicaa and her family's interest mount. After Odysseus is transformed, Nausicaa wishes that she might call a man like Odysseus her husband. Her interest in Odysseus is made clear when she wishes that he would be happy to remain in Scheria (ἐνθάδε ναιετάων, καὶ οἱ ἄδοι αὐτόθι μίμνειν, 6.245). The Phaeacians might suspect that he is already her husband if they return together (6.277) or, better yet, a god come down to be with her all her days (6.280-81). She disapproves of the idea of "mixing" (μίγνυμι) with men before marriage against her parents' will (6.286-88), but it is not long before her father is extending an offer to Odysseus to

[24] Garvie 1994: ad 6.136 acknowledges the possibility of "a further touch of humour in that the word often describes sexual intercourse."

[25] Garvie 1994: 229.

become his son-in-law, accept property, and stay in Scheria (6.312-15).[26] Odysseus resists, and the offer is set aside.[27] Upon parting, Nausicaa prays only that Odysseus remember her in his fatherland and how she saved his life (8.461-62).

ALCINOUS AND ARETE

After securing Nausicaa's help and making his way to the city, Odysseus follows the advice of Nausicaa and Athena in supplicating Arete rather than Alcinous in the palace (6.31-15, 7.53-77). As with Nausicaa, he is accepted almost without question as a suppliant. He is fed and honored, and Alcinous advises the other Phaeacians to return the next day to deliberate upon arranging an escort (7.188-96). Odysseus is forced to think quickly, however, when Arete asks him who he is and how he came upon his clothes, which she knows to be her handiwork (7.237-39; 234-35). Odysseus ably responds to Arete's implication of impropriety. He reveals that Nausicaa gave him the clothes and fed him after he supplicated her. Odysseus assures them of Nausicaa "good sense" (νόημα ἐσθλόν, 7.292-94), which may speak as much to her chastity as

[26] See van Nortwick 1979 for parallels between Nausicaa's and Penelope's response to Odysseus. Katz 1991: 136 notes ancient disapproval of Alcinous' offer of his daughter in marriage to a stranger, an offer that Katz views as preparation for "the homology between *xenia* and *gamos*" that she detects in Odysseus's interactions with Penelope (pp. 136-37).

[27] Gainsford 2003: 54 implies the continuation of the threat when he suggests that the "guest-gifts from the Phaiakians com[e] dangerously close to doubling as a dowry."

to her observance of the laws of *xenia*. When Alcinous questions her failure to escort him to the palace, Odysseus blames his own shame and fear of angering Alcinous (7.305-6) and shows a "high regard for propriety and the desire to avoid conflict."[28] Perhaps more important is how he describes the circumstances that brought him to Scheria. Odysseus speaks as an equal to Alcinous and the Phaeacians, who see the gods during sacrifices, eat with the gods, and to whom the gods reveal themselves when they travel "since we are close to them" (7.199-206). He recounts how he was detained by the goddess Calypso, who "loved him, nourished him, and claimed that she would make him immortal and ageless all his days but never persuaded the heart in my chest" (7.256-58). He mentions that she gave him his last, immortal set of clothes (7.259-60). The goddess eventually freed him, perhaps on the orders of Zeus himself (7.263). Odysseus rejoiced upon seeing Scheria, but Poseidon delayed him (7.270-74). He survives the ordeal and finally reaches the shore, where a god gave him sleep (7.286). Odysseus is the object of the gods' affections and enmities, and he is every bit as comfortable among them as Alcinous claims to be. His miraculous appearance in their midst when Athena removes the mist that concealed him (7.143-45) lends weight to his claims. He appears to convince Alcinous, who now firmly promises an escort home in addition to offering Nausicaa in marriage (7.312-15; 317-18). Again, Odysseus uses his wits to secure what he needs.

[28] Murnaghan [1987] 2011; 69 suggests that this is how Odysseus wins over Alcinous. Cf. Thornton 1970: 19.

DEMODOCUS AND THE GAMES

At the opening of *Odyssey* 8, Athena intervenes once more to improve Odysseus's appearance. We see in the constellation of Athena's concerns the elements of a Proving Sequence: she transforms Odysseus

> ὥς κεν Φαιήκεσσι φίλος πάντεσσι γένοιτο
> δεινός τ'αἰδοῖός τε καὶ ἐκτελέσειεν ἀέθλους
> πολλούς, τοὺς Φαίηκες ἐπειρήσαντ' Ὀδυσῆος.
> (8.21-23)
>
> so that he would be dear to all the Phaeacians,
> awe-inspiring, and revered, and so that he would accomplish the many contests
> with which the Phaeacians tested Odysseus.

Athena provides goals for Odysseus, to endear himself to and impress the Phaeacians, as well as the context in which he might achieve them by proving himself in their games. Her intervention suggests that Odysseus will be tested but reassures us that he will acquit himself admirably. Before the games begin, Demodocus's sings a song about the quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus (8.73-82). The song raises the stakes for Odysseus and heightens the irony of his situation. Most audience members would realize with a thrill that for all of their isolation, splendor, and communication with the gods, even the Phaeacians know who Odysseus is. And the song reveals that Odysseus is not simply a renowned hero but widely considered to be among the "best of the Achaeans" (8.78). How excited the Phaeacians would be to learn the identity of the man they are hosting, how disappointed if he fails to live up to their stories? Odysseus is quickly given the opportunity to prove himself when Alcinous notices his tears and suggests another pastime.

The lead up to the games offers the most detailed assessment yet of Odysseus's current condition. It confirms some of our suspicions from *Odyssey* 5 and tempers our expectations. Alcinous says that Odysseus looks to be in good shape (8.134-36). He is not old, but he has been broken by many evils (8.136-37); Alcinous tells us that "nothing else wears a man down worse than the sea, even if he is strong (8.138-39). Odysseus himself (8.180-83; cf. 184) affirms that

> ἐν πρώτοισιν ὀιω
> ἔμμεναι, ὄφρ' ἥβῃ τε πεποίθεα χερσι τ' ἐμῇσι.
> νῦν δ' ἔχομαι κακότητι καὶ ἄλγεσι· πολλὰ γὰρ ἔτλην
> ἀνδρῶν τε πτολέμους ἀλεγεινά τε κύματα πείρων.
>
> I think I was among first
> as long as I trusted in my youth and hands,
> but now I'm beset by evil and pains since I've endured many things
> cutting through the wars of men and painful waves.

Whereas Alcinous assesses sympathetically, Euryalus uncharitably suggests that Odysseus looks more like a merchant captain than an athlete (8.159-64). Fears regarding Odysseus's chances might be heightened by Alcinous's claims regarding the superiority of Phaeacian athletes (8.100-3), Euryalus's and Laodamas's successful performances in the games (8.127, 130), and Laodamas's suggestion that athletics are a preeminent source of *kleos* (8.147-48). Fears are unlikely to be assuaged when Odysseus chides Laodamas and underplays the value of athletic virtue while valorizing eloquence and cleverness over beauty and strength (8.167-73).[29] Is

[29] Odysseus suggests that he has more serious concerns (8.154-55).

Odysseus hedging his bets?[30] When Odysseus is nevertheless goaded into competing by Euryalus's reckless insults, we fear failure and the appearance of weakness, but hope to see Euryalus punished for his insolence and put in his place. This makes it all the more satisfying when Odysseus far outstrips his competitors in the discus throw and "shows off his heroic mettle."[31]

Odysseus's performance in the games proves that he still possesses the strength of his youth, but it is his tact, as much as his power, that wins him praise and prizes.[32] Alcinous quickly downplays Phaeacian athletic prowess in the face of Odysseus's obvious superiority and now claims the superiority of its sailors, singers, and dancers (8.246, 250-53). Odysseus graciously admits that he has seen proof that the Phaeacian dancers are the best he has seen (8.383-84). Alcinous rejoices at the complement, deems his guest "clever" (πενυμένος), and urges his fellow kings to give Odysseus a cloak, tunic, and a talent each, fourteen in total plus a chest, cloak and tunic from Arete and a golden chalice (8.383-85, 387-95, 424-25, 430-31). Alcinous asks for an apology from Euryalus, who gives Odysseus a bronze sword with a silver hilt in an ivory sheath and asks that his words be forgotten. He prays that Odysseus reaches his wife and fatherland (8.401-11).

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[30] Garvie 1994 275 notes that the scholiasts believed the Odysseus's reference to his suffering "is designed to provide an excuse for possible failure, and to increase the admiration that success will arouse."

[31] Crane 1987: 16.

[32] Cf. de Vries 1977: 118.

Demodocus's final song about the Trojan Horse confirms Odysseus's heroism and ensures that he will impress the Phaeacians when he reveals himself. Odysseus himself requests the song and does so in a way that makes it clear that he has intimate knowledge of the subject. He praises Demodocus for singing of the Greeks' suffering as if he had been there or heard the stories from someone who had and for singing λίην…κατὰ κόσμον, "very accurately," "in order" ((8.487-91). He promises to spread word of Demodocus's abilities if Demodocus sings of the Trojan Horse κατὰ μοῖραν, "as it happened," "correctly" (8.492-98). The implication is that Odysseus would be able to judge if he did.

The song itself addresses each of Odysseus's desirable qualities. The subject matter is a testament to Odysseus's facility for deception and represents his crowning achievement at Troy, in which, by sacking the city, he achieves what Achilles could not. The story begins with Odysseus and his men sitting inside the horse awaiting their fate but with the gods and destiny (αἶσα) on their side (8.502-13). We are likely to recall here Helen's story of how Odysseus resisted her temptations and acted to save his men. Demodocus describes how Odysseus approached the house of Deiphobus "like Ares" and "endured the most terrible war" (αἰνότατον πόλεμον…τολμήσαντα) and won with Athena's help (8.517-20). When he hears the song, Odysseus cries like a woman who weeps for her dead husband as she is being led into slavery (8.523-31). This metaphor may reflect Odysseus's essential humanity and ability to empathize with his victims,[33] but it also speaks to his devotion to Penelope. The woman whom Odysseus resembles, weeping for her lost husband and beset by men who would possess her, is

[33] Garvie 1994: 339.

not so different from Penelope. The metaphor suggests an understanding of and ability to empathize with the circumstances not only of his victims but also of his own wife.[34] The metaphor looks forward to other indications of "like-mindedness" and empathy between Odysseus and Penelope, including the famous "reverse simile" used to describe their reunion.[35]

When Alcinous notices Odysseus's tears once more and "understands" (8.532-33), it is clear that the game is up. We expect an identification similar to that of Telemachus by Helen: having suspected that the stranger was Odysseus since Demodocus's first song, Alcinous will now ask Odysseus directly, and Odysseus will reveal himself. We are likely to be surprised to learn that Alcinous does not truly grasp the situation and underestimates Odysseus one last time. Given his knowledge of the Trojan War, the stranger must be an in-law, or even a beloved comrade of a man who died at Troy (8.577-86). Alcinous cannot even fathom that he is in the presence of Odysseus himself. In light of Odysseus's performance in the games and Demodocus's songs, neither Alcinous nor we are left in any doubt as to the significance of Odysseus's self-identification at the beginning of *Odyssey* 9 before he embarks upon the story of his adventures: "I am Odysseus son of Laertes, who for all my deceptions am known to men, and my fame reaches heaven" (εἴμ' Ὀδυσεὺς Λαερτιάδης, ὅς πᾶσι δόλοισιν | ἀνθρώποισι μέλω καί μευ κλέος οὐρανὸν ἵκει, 9.19-20).

[34] Garvie 1994: 339.

[35] Garvie 1994: 339. See below.

UNFRIENDLY PHAEACIANS

In addition to the threat that Odysseus will marry Nausicaa, we find intimations of a threat at the other end of the spectrum.[36] Rose addresses indications that the Phaeacians may not be as friendly as they appear.[37] Although he attributes these signs to "unfriendliness," Rose recognizes that they heighten suspense and give Odysseus the opportunity to "apply every mental and physical resource to extricate himself from the dangers."[38] Although Nausicaa herself treats Odysseus kindly and takes him in without question, she describes her people as "arrogant" (ὑπερφίαλοι, 6.274) and likely to harass them if Odysseus and Nausicaa proceed to the palace together (6.273-84).[39] When Odysseus heads to the palace, Athena thinks it wise to conceal him in mist so that no Phaeacian mocks him or asks who he is (7.14-17), and she advises him not to address anyone, since the Phaeacians do not suffer strangers nor welcome

[36] Most 1989: 24-25 argues that keeping guests indefinitely and eating them are "two extreme versions of bad hospitality" (p. 25).

[37] 1969: 387-406. de Vries 1977 takes issue with some of Rose's more "extreme" positions regarding the threat posed by the Phaeacians. See also Most 1989: 27, Hopman 2012: 21-22.

[38] 1969: 398. Cf. Most 1989: 27 who speaks of "Homer's efforts to prolong and skillfully heighten the uncertainty as to whether the Phaeacians will show themselves to be good hosts…."

[39] Rose 1969: 390.

foreigners (7.31-33).[40] Odysseus has even greater cause for concern: Nausciaa previously mentioned a temple to Poseidon (6.266); now we learn that his tormentor, Poseidon, not only gave the Phaeacians their ships but is also the ancestor of Alcinous and Arete (7.34-35, 56).[41] When Odysseus first appears miraculously in their midst and asks for help, we are left in suspense when the Phaeacians are at first silent and must be prompted to observe the customs of *xenia* (7.154, 155-66).[42] Intimations of hostility such as these render Arete's intimation of impropriety more threatening and Alcinous's sudden offer of marriage more suspicious.[43] The opening of *Odyssey* 8 does little to alleviate these concerns. Athena's desire to make Odysseus beloved (φίλος), fearsome (δεινός), and revered (αἰδοῖος) through the many ἆθλοι with which the Phaeacians test him (8.21-23) suggests a potentially contentious relationship. ἆθλοι may refer to athletic contests of the sort Odysseus actually competes in, but they may also represent labors such as those imposed upon Heracles by Eurystheus (11.622, 624).[44] The need for Athena's assistance might lead some to expect the latter rather than former.[45] This would not be the first time a guest appeared to be welcomed only to face death-defying labors. Even

[40] Rose 1969: 390-91.

[41] Rose 1969: 391-92.

[42] Rose 1969: 394-95.

[43] Cf. Fenik 1974: 128.

[44] Rose 1969: 401 notes the same ambiguity in the use of ἆθλοι to describe the contest of the bow.

[45] Cf. Rose 1969: 399-400.

after Odysseus's successful demonstration in the discus throw, the reference to his skills with weapons of war such as archery and spear-throwing, along with the aside that the god Apollo killed the mortal who dared underestimate and challenge him (8.224-28), might be perceived as a veiled threat better suited a hostile audience. Odysseus's escort home appears to be certain before he reveals himself, though the Phaeacians might reconsider if they knew the consequences (cf. 8.567-71). The underlying threat posed by the Phaeacians might be thought to extend through the *Apologue* and end only when Odysseus is deposited on the shore of Ithaca.[46]

PROPHETIC INDICATIONS?

Audience members looking ahead to Odysseus's reunion with his wife and punishment of the suitors will find in these books tantalizing hints of how his story might proceed. Though ostensibly unrelated to Odysseus, Demodocus's second song, the story of Ares hopping into bed with Aphrodite as soon as Hephaestus leaves and of Hephaestus's revenge, speaks to Odysseus's situation with its themes of adultery, ambush, guilt, responsibility, and revenge.[47] The story describes the moment Aphrodite was first lavished with gifts in her husband's

[46] See Most 1989 who argues that the *Apologue* is an appeal to the Phaeacians to behave as proper hosts and escort him home.

[47] See Marg 1957: 14-15, Burkert 1960: 141-42, Braswell 1982, Olson 1989, Zeitlin 1995: 128-33, and Rinon 2006: 211-12.

absence and won over by her suitor (8.268-69). Though enraged when he learns of the affair, Hephaestus finds himself at a physical disadvantage (8.309-11) and so crafts a trap (δόλος; cf. 281) to ensnare Ares and Aphrodite with inescapable bonds (8.272-76). Hephaestus is beset by a combination of sorrow and anger when he finds them in bed together (8.303-5), demands recompense, and only agrees to free them when Poseidon speaks on their behalf (8.344-48). Demodocus's song raises fears about Penelope by showing how wives give way in the absence of their husbands and in the face of persuasive, gift-giving suitors.[48] It shows how a wronged husband might appeal to guile to defeat his enemies if, like Odysseus, he finds himself outmatched.[49] Implied parallels between Hephaestus and Odysseus reinforce the impression that Odysseus retains his famed cleverness but has been hobbled by suffering and time.[50] The model of the song of Ares and Aphrodite suggests a disappointing conclusion to our *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus fails to win back his wife but exacts revenge upon the suitors (and perhaps his

[48] Alden 1997: 515. Alden notes that "Odysseus and Hephaestus both return to households which have become disorderly in the absence of the kyrios" (pp. 514-15) and argues that the suitors' gifts in *Odyssey* 18 are the "counterpart" of Ares' gifts (p. 526).

[49] Burkert 1960: 142, Thornton 1970: 44-45, and Alden 1997: 516 for the implications for Odysseus's revenge on the suitors in Hephaestus's revenge on Ares and Aphrodite.

[50] See Newton 1987, Alden 1997: 514-15, Rinon 2003: 212 for further parallels between Odysseus and Hephaestus. This reading is in keeping with the view of Braswell 1982 that the song addresses the same themes as Odysseus's dispute with Euryalus, who similarly accused him of being incapable of competing because of his age and weakness

wife) while exercising his talent for ambush and deception. Poseidon's opposition to Hephaestus's revenge and efforts on behalf of his victims might lead some audience members to imagine a greater role for him in the *Odyssey*'s conclusion. The brief allusion in Demodocus's final song to Odysseus's and Menelaus's going to the house of Deiphobus to punish Helen's current husband and possibly Helen as well (8.517-18) affirms Odysseus's commitment to exacting revenge on adulterers even after the damage is done.[51] The emphasis on Odysseus's ability with a bow and spear looks forward to his defeat of the suitors.[52] Though little mention has been made of his bow or his plan thus far in the epic, the reference to Odysseus's seeking poison to rub on his arrows (1.262) might suggest that this is how he will vanquish them.

[51] Cf. Alden 1997: 519.

[52] Krischer1985: 16, Garvie 1994: 259.

CHAPTER 5: *ODYSSEY* 9-12—THE *APOLOGUE*

It is not surprising that when general audiences think about the *Odyssey*, they are often thinking about the *Apologue*.[1] In Odysseus's song of his voyage from Troy to Calypso's island, we experience the lure of the lotus-eaters, Sirens, and Circe, the distress of being close enough to home to see the smoke of its fires only to be jettisoned into another world, man-eating giants both Cyclopean and Laestrygonian, the choice between Scylla and Charybdis, and the bleak temptation of the cattle of Helios. Its themes of disguise, testing, hospitality, revenge, temptation, and wandering resonate throughout the epic. In addition to its novel setting and fantastic inhabitants, the *Apologue* satisfies almost all of our expectations for Odysseus. It fulfills the "promise of the premise" in telling us of Polyphemus and Helios, the two episodes to

[1] Lowe 2000: 134, echoed in Bowie 2013: 1.

which the proem, prologue, and divine counsel allude. It shows Odysseus at his most exceptional. Coming roughly in the middle of the epic, the *Apologue* offers highly satisfying demonstrations of Odysseus's desirable qualities and reassures us of his essential heroism after our worrisome introduction to him on Ogygia and in preparation for his impressive but often frustrating demonstration of endurance in the palace on Ithaca.

Odysseus's encounter with the Cyclops offers a paradigmatic demonstration of his *metis*.[2] We see his endurance, resistance to temptation, and penchant for survival at every turn in the *Apologue* but nowhere more clearly than on Thrinacia when his crew gives in to hunger and slaughters Helios' cattle. Though these qualities have been deemed "passive" and antithetical to his resourcefulness,[3] they are admirable nonetheless and essential to his identity as *polytlas* Odysseus.[4] To these virtues, I would add the loyalty that Odysseus demonstrates to Penelope and to his crew. The relationship between Odysseus and his crew is undeniably fraught,[5] but Odysseus's desire to help his men is one of the few details considered worthy of inclusion in the proem, and we find evidence of his concern for them throughout the *Apologue*.

The *Apologue* does not, however, provide a picture of perfect Odysseus. We see signs of Odysseus's faltering devotion both to his crew and to his wife. Odysseus is unable to brook Polyphemus's insults and insists, fatefully, on boasting of his victory and revealing his identity.

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[2] Cf. Friedrich 1987: 394, 1991: 23; Hopman 2012: 6.

[3] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 162.

[4] Friedrich 1987: 394, Rutherford [1986] 2009: 16, Cook [1999] 2009.

[5] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 165.

He seems unable to extricate himself from losing fights against the Ciconians and Scylla. Critics have seen in this behavior signs of a flawed, old-fashioned, Iliadic heroism that is ill suited to the world of the *Odyssey*.[6] Worse, Odysseus appears to lack the martial prowess that traditionally goes along with it: he consistently favors cunning over strength and convincing displays of martial prowess are entirely absent in his adventures. We might see Odysseus's lack of strength and failed attempts to embrace Iliadic virtues in terms of the traditional opposition between *metis* and *bie* and take them as evidence of the *Odyssey*'s privileging Odysseus's *metis*.[7] If it turned out that Odysseus defeated the suitors through a masterful display of *metis* that entirely averted open combat, one might whole-heartedly endorse this position. As it is, Odysseus first evens the odds against the suitors through clever planning but eventually stands in battle against a superior number of armed foes and wins. His strength is just as essential to his victory as his cunning.

Indications in the *Apologue* that Odysseus can no longer play the Iliadic hero do not establish Odysseus as a hero of *metis* rather than *bie*. They raise questions about his ability to deal with the suitors that generate suspense heading into the *Mnesterophonia*. Moments of doubt and suspense within the *Apologue* are tempered by the knowledge that Odysseus survives to tell the tale, but they invite hopes and fears regarding the more pressing issue of his ability to defeat the suitors. Odysseus's boast to Polyphemus suggests that he may not be able

[6] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 166, 168, Cook [1999] 2009: 119, 133, Hopman 2012: 14-16.

[7] See Nagy [1979] 1999: 42-58 for the traditional distinction between Odysseus's *metis* and Achilles' *bie*. Cf. Cook 1995: 150-51.

to endure silently the abuse of the suitors. His attempt to fight Scylla despite Circe's warning raises the possibility that he will rush into battle regardless of his chances. His reliance on cunning and failure to demonstrate martial prowess on the few occasions he attempts to make us wonder how he might fare in open combat against the suitors. Prior to the *Mnesterophonia*, the only evidence of Odysseus's strength is a discus throw and a fight against a beggar. His last convincing display as a warrior is twenty years behind him. Based solely on the evidence of the *Odyssey*, one even might wonder if Odysseus will be able to string his old bow. It is entirely unclear whether he is prepared to face the suitors in battle. Odysseus's performance against the Ciconians and Scylla suggests that he is not.

Even the qualities that Odysseus demonstrates convincingly in the *Apologue* may raise concerns going forward. Odysseus's performance amongst the Phaeacians in *Odyssey* 5-8 reassured us of his heroism and suggested that he might be capable of defeating the suitors. Odysseus's past confrontations with monsters, witches, and gods in the *Apologue* suggest that Odysseus's assuring a young girl and her parents of his intentions, winning an athletic competition, and securing an escort home were minor, mundane victories at best. They reveal the chasm between Odysseus's past and his present and renew fears regarding the likelihood of Odysseus's achieving his goals.

DESIRABLE QUALITIES

Odysseus's introduction to the *Apologue* offers a brief encapsulation of his cleverness and insight into the minds of his audience. It also reflects the familiar pattern of raising

expectations, introducing doubt, and offering proof. *Odyssey* 9 begins with Odysseus's asserting the significance of the act he is about to perform. He extols the virtues of the singer "whose voice is like the gods'" (θεοῖς ἐναλίγκιος αὐδήν, 9.4), ostensibly in praise of Demodocus. Nothing, he ventures, is finer nor more pleasurable than listening to a singer perform while feasting (9.5-11). Odysseus raises doubts and lowers expectations regarding his own performance when he suggests that Alcinous's request to hear Odysseus's troubles will elicit little more than groans (9.12-13). Odysseus then launches into a virtuoso performance that does not simply delight his listeners, as Demodocus did, but leaves them utterly speechless (11.333-34). He wins effusive praise and belief despite the unbelievable nature of his song (11.363-69) and, eventually, gifts above and beyond those promised earlier. Alcinous asks Odysseus to continue and would listen through the night till dawn (11.370-76).

Odysseus's encounter with Polyphemus is a model of *metis* and repeatedly stresses his cunning in opposition to the Cyclops' strength. Odysseus overcomes the obvious disadvantage of his size and relative weakness, devises a plan to punish Polyphemus without simultaneously locking his men and himself in the cave to die. When, before any sign of violence, Polyphemus asks where Odysseus left his ship, Odysseus immediately sees the question for the test it is, because he "knows many things" (ἐμὲ δ' οὐ λάθεν εἰδότα πολλά, 9.281). He saves the rest of his fleet by persuading Polyphemus "with deceptive words" (δολίοις ἐπέσσι, 9.282) that he and his men were the lone survivors of a shipwreck (9.284-86). When Polyphemus takes advantage of the situation and begins eating Odysseus's companions, Odysseus suppresses the urge to kill

the Cyclops outright when he realizes that doing so would leave them trapped (9.299-305).[8] There seems little hope of escape until Odysseus embarks upon his plan. Odysseus's cunning in subduing Polyphemus with wine is contrasted with Cyclops' guzzling the wine down "thoughtlessly" (ἀφραδίῃσι, 9.361). When Polyphemus, blinded, appeals for help to his fellow Cyclopes, we discover that Odysseus also planned for this eventuality. Polyphemus ineffectual cry that "Noman is killing me by guile and not by force" (Οὖτίς με κτείνει δόλῳ οὐδὲ βίηφι, 9.408) reveals the significance of Odysseus's false name, and we marvel at his cleverness. Odysseus himself delights that his "name and cunning (*metis*) deceived [Polyphemus]" (9.414; cf. 363).[9] Polyphemus's impiety, lawlessness, victimization of the weak, and breach of *xenia*, with the insulting "gift" of eating Odysseus last, not only remind us of the suitors,[10] but also render Odysseus's victory all the more satisfying. Odysseus's last trick requires that he "weave together all his deceptions and *metis*" (πάντας δὲ δόλους καὶ μῆτιν ὕφαινον, 9.422).[11] To escape out from under Polyphemus's blind, grasping hands, he ties himself and his men to the bellies of sheep and a ram. Odysseus's defeat and survival of the man-eating giant who claimed

[8] See Hogan 1976: 202.

[9] Hopman 2012: 6 suggests that "the paronomasia μή τις/μῆτις, which functionally refers to the agent Odysseus, famously constructs him as *metis* personified." See also Cook 1995: 109.

[10] Cook 1995: 97, Saîd [1998] 2011: 252, Hopman 2012: 24.

[11] Odysseus demonstrates similar forethought and a penchant for escape when he alones moors his ship near the exit of the Laestrygonian harbor, thereby saving at the crew of his ship (10.95-97).

to be “much mightier” than the gods (9.273-78) may be evidence enough of his cunning and resourcefulness, but Polyphemus himself attests to the power of Odysseus’s *metis*. When Odysseus’s reveals his name, Polyphemus reveals that he had been warned that “Odysseus” would blind him; he expected a fine, large, and powerful opponent, not a small, weak “nobody” (οὐτιδανός, 507-16).

Building a Proving Narratives around a desirable quality such as endurance poses an interesting problem. The ability to endure emotional or physical suffering can be admirable. Under normal circumstances, it generates suspense: we fear that protagonists will succumb to unbearable suffering or temptation but hope that they will overcome. In many cases, such displays invite sympathy for the sufferer. But insofar as enduring requires submitting to something contrary to one’s desires, displays of endurance rarely coincide with victory or success. One can think of exceptions: enduring physical pain in an athletic event, withstanding temptation in an addiction narrative, working through the pain of losing a loved one, fighting through injury and winning. Odysseus, for instance, withstands fear to face storms, the Cyclops, and Scylla. More often, however, endurance is required when progress is impeded or is in danger of being derailed altogether. The only “success” is surviving to the next challenge. For audiences, then, these displays are often impressive but frustrating. In the *Apologue*, the effect of these displays is further impaired by the lack of suspense with regard to Odysseus’s survival.

The *Apologue* has its share of dismaying displays of endurance that invite pity more than they evoke satisfaction. Twice, Odysseus believes himself to be as good as home only to be set hopelessly off course. On the first occasion, Odysseus would have reached home if not for the unforeseen storm that drives his fleet to the Lotus-Eaters (9.79-81). On the second occasion,

Aeolus's bag of winds, the West Wind, and Odysseus's vigilance bring his ship in sight of Ithaca (10.30). When Odysseus takes a moment's rest, his crew opens the bag of winds and releases the storm that drives them back to sea (10.47-48). Odysseus is so devastated that he considers throwing himself into the sea. He chooses instead to "endure and persevere" (ἀλλ' ἔτλην καὶ ἔμεινα, 10.49-53).[12] In the Underworld, Odysseus sees his mother and realizes that she has died while he was away. Worse, she informs him that she and his father were afflicted by immeasurable grief in his absence. She died of it; Laertes still suffers and lives in squalor (11.187-203). Odysseus can do nothing to help them. Throughout the *Apologue* and despite Odysseus's efforts, he is forced to watch as his men die around him at the hands of the Ciconians, Polyphemus, Laestrygonians, Scylla, and in the storm sent by Zeus to destroy them.

Thrinacia offers the most extensive display of Odysseus's ineffectual suffering and of his ability to withstand hardships.[13] Odysseus does not lead his men to Thrinacia out of curiosity or desire for gain. He does everything he can to avoid the island, and desperately tries to prevent his friends from killing the cattle of Helios. He warns them (12.271-76, 320-23), suggests alternatives (12.301-2), and forces them to swear an oath (12.303). Odysseus's powers of endurance prove a liability in this effort. Eurylochus attests to Odysseus's super-human endurance: "your might is superior, your limbs never tire; you are entirely made of iron" (περί τοι μένος, οὐδέ τι γυῖα | κάμνεις· ἦ ῥά νυ σοί γε σιδήρεα πάντα τέτυκται, 12.279-80). Eurylochus faults Odysseus for losing sight of his crew's human frailties: he never allows them

[12] See Rutherford [1986] 2009: 166.

[13] Crane 1987: 28 (cf. 32). See also Friedrich 1987b: 394.

to rest or to eat in peace (12.12.281-83).[14] There may be truth in Eurylochus's words and we may even sympathize with the crew,[15] but his words do little to help the situation. They prove prophetic when the food gives way and, without Odysseus watching over them, the crew gives in to hunger and temptation.

This disappointing episode, in which Odysseus fails to save his men and succeeds only in abstaining from eating the cattle of Helios, [16] is offset by the impressive and satisfying display of endurance, intelligence, and will to survive that closes the *Apologue.* As Teiresias predicted, because Odysseus alone endures hunger and resists the temptation to eat the cattle, he alone is spared. When Zeus sends the storm to punish his crew, all of Odysseus's men are immediately washed from the ship to their death (12.417). Odysseus not only stays on board but also uses the battered remnants of his ship to fashion a raft to stay afloat (12.420-25). When he is driven to Charybdis, from which, Circe claimed, not even Poseidon could save him (12.107), Odysseus saves himself. He jumps to an overhanging branch as Charybdis swallows his raft and jumps back onto the raft when Charybdis regurgitates it (12.432, 442-44).

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[14] See Cook 1995: 116.

[15] Judgments of the crew's actions and punishment vary among critics. For the view that they ignored repeated warnings, broke their oath, and were rightly punished for it, see Reinhardt [1948] 1996: 97, Friedrich 1987b: 391-92, Cook 1995: 114-18. For the view that the gods put them in an impossible situation and then punished them for acting in they only way available to them, see Focke 1943: 248, Heubeck 1957: 72-78, and Fenik 1974: 215.

[16] Hogan 1976: 208; Friedrich 1987b: 394.

The *Apologue* frequently tempers the potential frustrations of Odysseus's demonstrations of endurance by combining them with thrilling discoveries; Odysseus's daring and fearlessness allows him to undergo otherworldly experiences no other human has witnessed and survive. Odysseus's curiosity and desire for gain led him to Polyphemus. His cunning helped him escape. But he could not have done it without his exceptional bravery. After Odysseus devises the plan to blind Polyphemus, he commands his men to draw lots to see "who would dare" to help him (ὅς τις τολμήσειεν, 9.331-33). Later, recalling the Cyclopes and the Laestrygonians, Odysseus's men are terrified to investigate Circe's island and break down in tears at the thought (10.198-202). They again draw lots to see who will go. Eurylochus shows Odyssean prudence in holding back and failing to be taken in when Circe charms and transforms the rest of his party. But when he alone returns and is too afraid to lead Odysseus back, Odysseus goes to face her alone.[17] Despite their despair, fears (cf. 11.5, 43) and the certainty of death, Odysseus leads his men to the Underworld. Achilles and the other denizens of Hades cannot believe that Odysseus dared to enter the Underworld while still alive and cannot imagine how he managed it (πῶς ἔτλης Ἄιδόσδε κατελθέμεν; 11.474-75; cf. 93-94, 155-56). Because of it, Odysseus meets heroes of old and learns from Teiresias how he should proceed to reach his goals. Odysseus's resistance to temptation also allows him to bear witness to unique experiences and survive. Odysseus avoids the temptation of the Lotus-Eaters and, with the help of Hermes, survives Circe. Circe is in awe that Odysseus is not charmed because

[17] For Hogan 1976: 195, "The first scouting party's enchantment leads to a test of Odysseus' loyalty to his men, a point effectively dramatized by Eurylochos' failure of nerve."

"no other man has endured these drugs" (οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδέ τις ἄλλος ἀνὴρ τάδε φάρμακ' ἀνέτλη, 10.327). In fact, it is on the basis of Odysseus' resistance to enchantment that Circe recognizes him and addresses him by his famous epithet: "so you must be Odysseus of many turns" (ἦ σύ γ' Ὀδυσσεύς πολύτροπος, 10.330; 329, 330-32). Heeding Hermes' warning, Odysseus also resists the temptation to sleep with Circe before he forces her to swear an oath not to harm him and despite her assurance that the act of lovemaking will make them trust one another (10.337-44; 334-35). Odysseus demonstrates his resistance to temptation most famously when he hears the song of the Sirens. We are told that the Sirens "charm all men" (πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλγουσιν, 12.39-40), and they appeal to the preeminent hero of experience and knowledge with the promise of imparting knowledge (12.184-91) since they "know all things" (12.189, 191).[18] They are particularly well versed in the events surrounding Troy that so fascinated Odysseus when he heard Demodocus sing of them (cf. 12.189-90). Odysseus alone hears the Sirens' song and lives.[19]

The *Apologue* frequently highlights Odysseus's devotion to his wife and to his crew. Odysseus implicitly affirms his desire to return home and to Penelope at the outset of his story when he claims that neither Calypso nor Circe could persuade him though both wanted him for

[18] Stanford 1954. Gresseth 1970: 206 rejects the promise of knowledge as an insufficient explanation for the Sirens' allure and suggests instead magical power on the basis of comparisons from folklore.

[19] As in the case of Odysseus's approach to Circe, he only survives the Sirens with the help of Circe and his men.

a husband (9.30, 32; 33). Nothing, he says, is sweeter than one's fatherland and parents (9.34-36). We can see subsequent demonstrations of Odysseus's perseverance and resistance to temptation as reflections of his desire to achieve his *nostos*. Odysseus's affection for his family, and theirs for him, is exemplified in the meeting with his mother and punctuated by the pathos of her dying of grief for him and his failed attempts to embrace her (11.206-7). Odysseus shows concern for the situation at home when he asks his mother whether Penelope remains with Telemachus and protects his property or has married "the best of the Achaeans" (11.177-79). He is presumably relieved to hear that Penelope still waits for him (11.181-83).

Odysseus's devotion to his crew is more complicated. "Odysseus' concern for saving his companions is immediately stressed at the beginning," and "has to grow all the more" as they to face ever-worsening threats.[20] At its best, Odysseus's treatment of his crew recalls his fatherly rule of Ithaca. Odysseus forcefully extracts his men from the Lotus-Eaters and orders the others to flee as quickly as possible so that they do not forget their *nostos* (9.98-102). The scene in which Odysseus kills the stag on Circe's island, hauls it with difficulty back to the ship, gives it to his men to their wonder and delight, and offers encouraging words (10.157-86) might be emblematic of how Odysseus cares and provides for his crew. That concern is particularly evident when Odysseus refuses to eat with Circe and cannot even fathom doing so until she has returned his men to their former state (10.383-87).[21] When his men do die, Odysseus expresses

[20] Reinhardt [1948] 1996: 91.

[21] Odysseus sleeps with Circe before she restores his men, though we can understood this as an essential step to nullify the threat she poses to him, as proscribed by Hermes.

sorrow for their fate. The Elpenor episode suggests that his grief is genuine. When he learns that Elpenor died unbeknownst to them and was left unburied, Odysseus not only pities his crewman but goes out of his way to provide a proper burial (12.9-15; 11.57-78).

ODYSSEUS' HEROISM

Odysseus's voyage to the brink of and into the Underworld not only furnishes evidence of Odysseus's daring and ability to stand witness to otherworldly experiences. It argues for his place in the canon of heroes of old and for his preeminence among the heroes of the Trojan War. The *katabasis* is "the heroic quest par excellence in that it represents the triumph of the vital principle over the forces of death as a successful descent into and return from Hades."[22] The *Odyssey* contextualizes Odysseus's journey to the Underworld with reference to Heracles' triumphant descent into Hades and emergence with its three-headed guardian in tow (11.617-26) and to the misadventures of Theseus and Perithous (11.630-31), which remind us of the perils of such a journey.

Odysseus first puts us in mind of some of the most famous heroes in the generations before the Trojan War. Immediately after speaking with his own mother, Odysseus meets the wives and daughters of "the best" (ἀριστῆες, 11.227), most of whom are the mothers, wives, or lovers of earlier heroes. He meets the mothers of Jason (Tyro), Amphion and Zethus (Antiope),

[22] Cook [1999] 2009: 126. See Dova 2012 for a wide-ranging discussion of *katabasis* in Greek literature.

Heracles (Alcmene), Nestor (Chloris), and Castor and Polydeuces (Leda). He meets the wives and lovers of Heracles (Megara), Theseus (Ariadne, Phaedra), and Amphiareus (Eriphyle). He meets the mother and wife of Oedipus (Epicaste). This heroic setting gives us a sense of the company in which Odysseus might find himself. His encounter with Heracles secures his position. Heracles recognizes Odysseus and imagines Odysseus's suffering a fate similar to his own[23]: "are you too leading the kind of evil life that I bore?" (ἦ τινὰ καὶ σὺ κακὸν μόρον ἡγηλάζεις, ὅν περ ἐγὼν ὀχέεσψον; 11.618-19). We are reminded of the parallels. Odysseus also faces tests (11.622), survives the Underworld, and benefits from the assistance of Hermes and Athena (11.626).

Alcinous's request to hear about Odysseus's Trojan War comrades (11.370-72) affords Odysseus the opportunity to assert his superiority over his contemporaries. This superiority emerges in three forms: his fate, his family, and his deeds. For all of his glory and power, Agamemnon was not killed in battle or even in a shipwreck. He was butchered like an animal by his wife and her lover and "died a pitiable death" (θάνον οἰκτίστῳ θανάτῳ, 11.406-11). The contrast between Clytemnestra and Penelope, about whom Agamemnon has only good things to say despite his low opinion of women, could not be clearer. Whereas Agamemnon was murdered before he could see his son (11.452-53), he predicts a happy reunion for Odysseus

[23] Schein 1996: 13.

and his son. He imagines Telemachus taking his place among men and well off (ὄλβιος)[24] and embracing his father when he sees him "as is right" (11.448-51). Odysseus, unaware of Orestes' success, can do nothing to reassure his old comrade (11.463-64).

Odysseus's encounter with Achilles argues that Odysseus is in fact the "best of the Achaeans." When praised by Odysseus for his vaunted place among the dead, Achilles famously renounces the decision that won him *kleos* and defined his heroism "as if he were now ready to trade an *Iliad* for an *Odyssey*."[25] He would rather be alive, like Odysseus, and submit to the lowest form of servitude than rule the dead (11.489-91). He fears for Peleus and, unlike Odysseus, can no longer defend his father from harm and protect his honor (11.494-503). Odysseus's news of Neoptolemus gives Achilles solace but subtly asserts Odysseus's superiority over both son and father. Neoptolemus was second in counsel only to Nestor and Odysseus (11.510-12). He always fought bravely (11.514-15) and was present at the sack of Troy where he won many prizes (11.533-37). But Odysseus suggests that he only did so through Odysseus's machinations: Odysseus illustrates Neoptolemus' bravery through his deportment in the Trojan Horse, the "ambush" that was Odysseus's "to open and to seal" (ἐμοὶ δ' ἐπὶ πάντ' ἐτέταλτο |

[24] Agamemnon is right to imagine Telemachus ὄλβιος in the sense that he is "prosperous" or "wealthy" if not "happy." His wealth is of course diminishing at the hands of the suitors. For Heubeck [1983] 1998: *ad loc.*, "Telemachus' ὄλβιος consists in what is described in 449-51."

[25] Nagy [1979] 1999: 35. As Nagy succinctly states, "[f]rom the retrospective vantage point of the *Odyssey*, Achilles would trade his **kléos** for a **nóstos**." See also Rüter 1969, 252-53, Edwards 1985: 226-27.

ἡμὲν ἀνακλῖναι πυκινὸν λόχον ἠδ' ἐπιθεῖναι, 11.523-32). Odysseus mentions both Neoptolemus' fearlessness and his eagerness to leave the horse before the trap was set (11.530-32). In this way, he reminds us of his own prudence and endurance and implies that, without Odysseus's help, Neoptolemus would have revealed the ruse and died long before he took Troy.[26]

Lastly, Odysseus's encounter with Ajax allows Odysseus to have it both ways: it reminds us of his conquest over the vaunted hero while simultaneously emphasizing Odysseus' graciousness in victory. Odysseus describes how he won the competition for Achilles' arms to determine the new "best of the Achaeans" (11.544-46), a competition perversely decided by the orphaned children of the Trojans and Athena (11.547). Yet Odysseus regrets his victory and praises Ajax (11.550-51, 556-58). Although Ajax is still too angry at his loss to speak to Odysseus, Odysseus suggests that they would have reconciled if Odysseus had stayed long enough and not been so eager to meet other famous dead (11.565-67).

STATE OF THE MISSION

Odysseus's convincing displays of desirable qualities and the affirmation of his heroism reassure us that his mission against the suitors is feasible. Odysseus's resistance to the temptations of the Lotus-Eaters and the Sirens demonstrates his commitment to returning

[26] Neoptolemus's eagerness to fight may also subtly allude to the atrocities he would commit during the fall of Troy.

home and reuniting with his wife. His careful handling of Circe suggests that he will not walk blindly into an ambush. His suffering shows the lengths to which he is willing to go to achieve his goals and suggests specifically that he will be able to endure the suitors' abuse in the palace. His devotion to his crew reassures us that he will do everything in his power to protect his son and servants. We see in Odysseus's encounter with Polyphemus the skill at disguise, deception, and ambush that will allow him to outmaneuver the suitors. His escape from the Cyclops, along with his survival of Charybdis, demonstrates his ability to prevail against impossible odds such as the ones he will face in the palace.[27] The intervention of Hermes and Zeus remind us of the gods' support for Odysseus and give us the impression that he prevail as long as they are on his side. If he manages to defeat the suitors, the offer of marriage by not one but two goddesses strongly argue in favor of Penelope's accepting him upon his return.

Other indications raise fears about Odysseus's chances of success and generate suspense going forward. They suggest that Odysseus may fall short of his goals because he will back down from the challenge, because he will be overconfident, because he will not work with his allies in the palace, or because he will be defeated in an open fight. Odysseus's relationship to his crew raises concerns on two fronts. To the degree that his crew resemble the suitors, particularly in age and intemperance,[28] Odysseus's inability to control them might lead some

[27] See Hopman 2012: 24 for "parallel between the *Cyclopeia* and Odysseus' revenge upon the suitors."

[28] Nagler 1990 finds extensive parallels between the crew and the suitors and argues that the portrayal of the crew is designed to mitigate Odysseus's guilt in killing the suitors, to "project

audience members to doubt his ability to deal effectively with the suitors when he reaches the palace. Dissention within the crew arises almost immediately in the *Apologue* when the men disobey Odysseus's command to leave after the defeat of the Ciconians (9.43-44), and they are routed by reinforcements as a result.[29] Their jealousy of Odysseus, perhaps justified by "his characteristic lack of trust, never telling his men more than is absolutely necessary, always taking delight in his superior knowledge,"[30] leads them to open Aeolus's bag of winds, put a halt to their progress, and erase any hope of an early homecoming (34-49). The crew's disobedience on Thrinacia brings the anger of the gods down upon them and almost kills Odysseus in the process. That these infractions twice occur when Odysseus is asleep may raise concerns that Odysseus will also lack the vigilance required to defend himself against the suitors' mischief.

Although the crew causes Odysseus innumerable problems and frequently opposes him, they are also his countrymen, allies, subordinates, and, in one case, his family by marriage (10.441). With this in mind, Odysseus's treatment of his crew and failure to save them may anticipate his relationship to his allies on Ithaca and treatment of Telemachus and Eumaeus even more than his handling of the suitors. On two occasions, Odysseus endangers his allies by

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the situation into mythic language and indirectly propose that he did not kill the suitors at all: *qua* crew members they undid themselves by their own ἀτασθαλίαι, their criminal folly" (p. 345). See also Louden 1999: 14-23.

[29] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 165 sees this as "the keynote of Odysseus' difficult relations with his followers."

[30] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 166.

prioritizing his curiosity, desire for gain, and pride over their safety.[31] Odysseus ignores his crew's entreaties to leave the cave before Polyphemus returns (9.224-229) and fails to restrain himself from boasting of his victory (9.492-93). This lack of concern for his men leads to Polyphemus's devouring Odysseus's men and almost destroying the entire fleet. When the Laestrygonians ambush Odysseus's fleet, Odysseus draws his sword not to join the fight and save them but to cut the cables and run (10.126-32).[32] Odysseus tells his men of the Sirens because "it is necessary that neither one man nor two alone know the things which Circe told me (οὐ γὰρ χρὴ ἕνα ἴδμεναι οὐδὲ δύ' οἵους | θέσφαθ' ἃ Κίρκη μυθήσατο); whether they live or die, they will at least "know" (εἰδότες, 12.154-57). Yet Odysseus shortly thereafter withholds information from the crew about Scylla so as not to scare them (12.223-25) and makes a decision that leads to the horrible death of six of his men. These actions understandably lead Odysseus's men to question his concern for their welfare (cf. 10.431-37, 12.279-283).[33] It might lead some audience members to wonder how well Odysseus will work alongside his allies in the palace. Odysseus's attempt to warn, cajole, and compel his men not to eat Helios' cattle may demonstrate his interest in their welfare, but it also attests to his inability to save his men under difficult circumstances. Should we fear how Telemachus and Eumaeus will fare under his command?

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[31] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 165-66. See Stanford 1954: 76, Friedrich 1991: 21 on Odysseus's motives.

[32] Cf. Cook [1999] 2009: 125.

[33] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 165-67.

We also find worrisome indications that Odysseus will be too confident in his approach to the suitors. Odysseus prepares for his meeting with Polyphemus "because my proud heart thought that I would soon come upon a large and savage man, endowed with might, that knew well neither justice nor laws" (γάρ μοι ὀίσατο θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ | ἄνδρ' ἐπελεύσεσθαι μεγάλην ἐπιειμένον ἀλκήν | ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας ἐὺ εἰδότα οὔτε θέμιστας, 9.213-15).[34] Despite these suspicions, Odysseus faces Polyphemus armed only with wine, and he and his men pay for it.[35] Though undeniably brave, his decision to save his men from Circe by himself would surely have resulted in his joining them in the pen had the gods not intervened to save him. Odysseus's misplaced confidence is most striking and most deleterious when he attempts to face Scylla and fails despite Circe's warning that there is no hope of success. He "has reached a situation where heroism is useless and obstructive, his courageous resistance pathetic."[36] We might recall this groundless overconfidence when Odysseus chides Telemachus for doubting that two men can stand against all of the suitors (16.259-61). Especially worrisome in this regard is Odysseus's

[34] Cook 1995: 99 suggests that given the nature of travel and commerce in the ancient world Odysseus's "premonition that he might be going to face a savage brute would not have appeared as arbitrary to an ancient Greek as it has to some modern scholars." See Page 1955: 8, Bona 1966: 82-85.

[35] Reinhardt [1948] 1996: 79-81. Cook 1995: 99 notes that Goat Island removes the need for food such that Odysseus's exploration of the land of the Cyclopes is "motivated solely by intellectual curiosity and a desire to establish guest-friendship, or *xenia*."

[36] Crane 1987: 32.

insistence upon boasting to Polyphemus over his victory and revealing his identity.[37] The boast raises two concerns. First, in undoing the work Odysseus did to conceal himself, it suggests that Odysseus may not be able to suppress his heroic identity while infiltrating the palace and be killed outright when he rises up in anger at the suitors' abuse. Friedrich characterizes this struggle as the "antagonism between Odysseus' *megaletor thymos* and his calculating *metis*."[38] Second, the boast shows Odysseus's wrongly believing himself to be safe from harm after a victory. Twice Odysseus underestimates Polyphemus and is almost killed because of it. We might recall these almost fatal miscalculations when the scene shifts to the suitors' family after Odysseus has succeeded in killing the suitors. Perhaps he will rejoice too early when he falsely believes that all the suitors and their servants have been killed. Particularly suspicious audience members might even wonder what Penelope has in store when Odysseus believes that he is safe and lets his guard down. Interesting, Odysseus's boast and reveal conforms to the pattern

[37] I am more interested in how the boast may or may not presage future actions than in how it reflects on Odysseus or what it says about the justice of the gods. Assessments of Odysseus's boast vary greatly. See Stanford 1954: 77-78, Kirk 1962: 364-65, Rutherford [1986] 2009: 166, Segal 1992: 494 for the view that Odysseus is wrong "to gloat over his victory." Reinhardt [1948] 1996: 83 and Friedrich 1991: 26 place Odysseus's *hybris* in his second claim to have executed divine justice (cf. Brown 1996). Cook [1999] 2009 considers Odysseus right to claim divine justice but wrong to assert that Poseidon cannot heal his son (on this point, see also Friedrich 1991: 21, 25; Segal 1992: 505).

[38] Friedrich 1987: 11.

of identification established in the previous books. As he did amongst the Phaeacians, Odysseus only reveals himself to Polyphemus after he has proven himself worthy of the name.

Finally, and perhaps most worrisome, is the lack of evidence in the *Apologue* of Odysseus's physical power. Few of his adventures require physical strength. Those that do are hardly reassuring. Odysseus and his men are soundly defeated in the pitched battle against the Ciconians because of superior numbers like those Odysseus and Telemachus will face against the suitors (9.54-61). Odysseus's encounter with Scylla shows an aborted attempt to face an enemy in heroic fashion. Hopman has shown how the Iliadic nature of Odysseus's preparations for the fight raises "high expectations from the audience" that he will battle against the monster and win.[39] His abject failure in spite of these expectations "may have raised, if only for a moment, the possibility of an un-traditional outcome for the poem—that Odysseus' cunning be not enough to triumph over the suitors, and that the hero be defeated by an enemy collectively stronger than he."[40] Circe also echoes Alcinous's assessment of Odysseus's weakened condition and affirms the possibility of the hero's strength being sapped by time and suffering. She offers Odysseus and his men food because "now you are withered and spiritless, always mindful of your difficult wandering, nor is your heart ever in good cheer since you have suffered so many things" (νῦν δ' ἀσκελέες καὶ ἄθυμοι | αἰὲν ἄλης χαλεπῆς μεμνημένοι, οὐδέ ποθ' ὑμῖν | θυμὸς ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ, ἐπεὶ ἦ μάλα πολλὰ πέποσθε, 10.463-65).

[39] 2012: 3.

[40] Hopman 2012: 24.

Both Athena and Teiresias suggest that an open fight against the suitors is possibile. Indications of Odysseus's weakness in battle and the absence of any evidence to the contrary in the *Apologue* suggest that Odysseus will not fare well in such an encounter and should avoid one at all costs. Agamemnon's death offers a problematic glimmer of hope. The story of Aegisthus' inviting Agamemnon to a banquet only to butcher him along with his men (11.409-15) suggests a pitiable fate that Odysseus should avoid. It also suggests a strategy through which Odysseus might vanquish the suitors without requiring combat. We have already seen that ambushes of this sort are associated in the *Odyssey* with Aegisthus and the suitors as much as with the Trojan Horse. This leaves us in an uncomfortable position. We might find ourselves simultaneously hoping and fearing that Odysseus will slaughter his enemies in an ambush and follow the example of a cowardly adulterer whose actions were punished by the gods. At the same time, we might fear but secretly hope that Odysseus will risk an open fight against armed men who vastly outnumber him and for which he seems unprepared. There is ample precedent in the *Apologue* for the deception, disguise, and endurance that Odysseus might employ against the suitors in an ambush. When Melanthus breaks through the lines to restore arms to the suitors and a fighting becomes inevitable, we would be hard pressed to find reassuring precedent for Odysseus's martial prowess. Agamemnon refers to it briefly (11.416-17); we last saw it in the *Iliad*, now twenty years past.

PENELOPE

What little we hear of Penelope in the *Apologue* suggests that she possesses devotion equal, if not superior to, Odysseus's. Anticleia confirms that Penelope waits for Odysseus "with an enduring heart" (τετληότι θυμῷ) and cries for him night and day (11.181-83). We may be more worried about Odysseus, who must be persuaded by his crew to leave Circe's side. Yet in spite of Agamemnon's insistence that Penelope is the exception to the rule of dangerous women, the sheer number of women who pose a threat to men in the *Apologue* is concerning.[41] Agamemnon denounces the woman who, like Clytemnestra, would murder her own husband (11.427-30). Odysseus's repeatedly refers to the destruction wrought by Helen (11.384, 438). As we have seen, Circe's intentions for Odysseus provide a disturbing precedent for those who believe that Odysseus's troubles are over after he and Penelope sleep with one another. Of the women Odysseus encountered in the Underworld, some are victims; others perpetrators. None of them suggest a storyline that would result in a happy ending for Odysseus. Alcmene and Tyro (11.241-52; cf. 2.219-20) were married women who were

[41] De Jong 2001: 281-82 argues that the poet has played down potentially worrisome indications: "it is remarkable that [Odysseus] omits or plays down all negative traits of the heroines." She suggests an alternate explanation for the women Odysseus mentions: it is not "inconceivable that Odysseus has inserted the Catalogue of heroines to please his female listener and hostess Arete."

deceived by gods and raped.[42] Tyro (11.237, 238-40), along with Phaedra, unsuccessfully pursued another while married. Tyro pursued the river god, Enipeus. Phaedra lusted after her son-in-law Hippolytus, whose father she convinced posthumously to kill him. Epicaste married the man who killed her husband and happened to be her son. Eriphyle is bribed by another man to betray her husband and leads him to his death. Like Clytemnestra, she is killed by her own son in revenge. Ariade helped Theseus but was killed shortly thereafter (11.321-25). Megara was killed by her Heracles in a fit of rage. This list of women evokes tales with disturbing parallels to Odysseus's and Penelope's situation and suggest disturbing alternate possibilities for their storyline.

Agamemnon assures Odysseus that he has nothing to fear from Penelope, but his reasoning does not inspire confidence. Penelope would never murder Odysseus because she is "excessively prudent" (λίην πινυτή), "knows plans" (εὖ φρεσὶ μήδεα οἶδε), and is "very thoughtful" (περίφρων). Agamemnon captures qualities that are among Penelope's most impressive but do not preclude her working against Odysseus's interests; presumably Agamemnon did not suspect Clytemnestra either before she killed him. Despite Agamemnon's glowing assessment of Penelope, he nevertheless advises Odysseus to avoid being "gentle"

[42] Doherty 2008: 69, 73-74 views Tyro and Alcmene and their affairs with gods in connection with Nausicaa's approach to "god-like" Odysseus and suggests that they have their origin in a female-focused genre of "courtship idyll." We might include Leda among the married women deceived by gods and raped, though there is no mention here of her affair with Zeus (11.298-304).

(ἤπιος) with his wife and to keep things hidden from her (11.441-43). Odysseus must return to Ithaca secretly, “since women no longer possess faithfulness” (ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι πιστὰ γυναιξίν, 11.455-56). As we will see, Odysseus does put his faith in Penelope’s virtue, choosing instead to take Agamemnon’s advice.

CHAPTER 6: *ODYSSEY* 13-16—RETURN TO ITHACA

Odysseus's time on the shore and in the Hut of Eumaeus furthers his goals in establishing Athena and Eumaeus as loyal allies and in bringing Odysseus and Telemachus, the two prime movers of the plot against the suitors, together for the first time. Odysseus's meeting with Athena addresses the potential distance between the Odysseus of the past and present Odysseus and reassures us of that he is a hero whose cunning is able to win the admiration of Athena and who is fit to deliberate with her as an equal. Ironically, the disguise she chooses for Odysseus and the time he spends in the company of men who have suffered at the hands of fate renew fears regarding Odysseus's weakened state. The tension between the reassurance of Athena's admiration and the visual evocation of the ravages of time culminates in Odysseus's meeting with Telemachus, who is in the prime of life, fresh from his demonstrations of cleverness and his establishment of his aristocratic ties. Negative accounts of the suitors and the unflattering comparison between the suitors and Eumaeus, the man who is

forced to serve them, encourage us to anticipate their punishment. At the same time, the Poseidon's punishment of the Phaeacians and Odysseus's wrong-headed prayer that they be punished for betraying him raise fundamental questions about the justice of the kind of revenge Odysseus is pursuing.

ATHENA

Odysseus's encounter with Athena initially raises fears that he will fall short of the goddess's, and our, expectations. By the end of the scene, Athena has affirmed that Odysseus possesses the cleverness and endurance that made him famous and has offered support that reassures us of Odysseus's ability to face the suitors. The lead-in to Athena's appearance suggests that she will either be a savior or a source of danger. The Phaeacians' conveyance of Odysseus to Ithaca hints at the possibility of yet another threat. On the ship Odysseus immediately falls asleep, a development that consistently proceeds disaster in the *Apologue*. Here his sleep is "the closest thing to death" (θανάτῳ ἄγχιστα ἐοικώς, 13. 79-80). The Phaeacians lead the ship into a harbor that may remind us of previous threats such as Scylla and Charybdis, Polyphemus, or the Laestrygoinans.[1] The Phaeacians place Odysseus's treasure away from the road so that no one harms him before he wakes (13.122-24). Odysseus expects the worst. He is thrilled to meet Athena disguised as a young shepherd (13.226), though previous encounters with seemingly harmless locals have not always turned out well. We are

[1] Segal 1962: 48, Bowie 2013: 113.

told at the outset that Athena prevents Odysseus from recognizing Ithaca so that she is can explain the situation to him and so that he is not recognized by his wife, fellow Ithacans, or those dear to him before the suitors pay for their transgressions (13.189-93). Odysseus later admits that he would have died in the palace like Agamemnon if Athena had not intervened (13.284-85). Athena appears to have Odysseus's best interests in mind. Yet when Athena calls Odysseus a fool for failing to recognize Ithaca (13.237-49), we are likely to conclude that she is testing Odysseus and just as likely to fear that he will not pass her test. Odysseus is clever enough to conceal his happiness when he learns that he has returned home and prudent enough not to reveal himself.[2] We may nevertheless be concerned when he then attempts not only to deceive the goddess but also to threaten her with a story that demonstrates his willingness to defend his property through ambush and murder.[3] This scene comes shortly after Zeus defended Helios' honor by murdering Odysseus's entire crew and moments after Poseidon demanded recompense for being dishonored (13.128-30). Athena surprisingly rewards Odysseus's presumption. She reveals herself and praises his deceptive nature. Odysseus opposes the goddess even more directly when she chides him for failing to recognize the goddess "who always stands beside and guards you amidst every labor and made you dear to all of the Phaeacians" (ἥ τέ τοι αἰεὶ | ἐν πάτεσσι πόνοισι παρίσταμαι ἠδὲ φυλάσσω, | καὶ δέ σε

[2] Clay [1983] 1997: 195 argues that "Athena's trap is calculated to make Odysseus give himself away" but concludes that "the first round goes to Odysseus."

[3] Trahman 1952: 35-36, Clay [1983] 1997: 197. See also Emyln-Jones 1986: 4-5, Roisman 1994: 11, Reece 1994: 162, Bowie 2013 ad loc.

Φαιήκεσσι φίλον πάντεσσιν ἔθηκα, 13.299-302). Odysseus takes issue with the claim that he should have recognized her because she "always" stands by his side: she was absent from the time he left Troy and throughout his wanderings until he reached the Phaeacians (13.318-22).[4] He accuses her of mocking him by telling him that he has reached Ithaca (13.326-28).[5] Although Odysseus appears somewhat brazen in his response to Athena, he has already been praised for holding Calypso, Ino, and Circe to task. We may be less surprised, then, when Athena praises Odysseus for his prudence (13.330-36). She explains him that she did not intervene because she did not want to anger Poseidon, but assures him that she was confident that he would survive without her (13.339-49).

In addition to demonstrating Odysseus's presence of mind and prudent skepticism, the encounter with Athena reassures us by praising the particular desirable qualities that he will require to succeed in his mission. In response to Odysseus's lying tale, Athena tells Odysseus

> κερδαλέος κ' εἴη καὶ ἐπίκλοπος ὅς σε παρέλθοι
> ἐν πάντεσσι δόλοισι, καὶ εἰ θεὸς ἀντιάσειε.
> σχέτλιε, ποικιλομῆτα, δόλων ἆτ', οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλες,
> οὐδ' ἐν σῇ περ ἐὼν γαίῃ, λήξειν ἀπατάων
> μύθων τε κλοπίων, οἵ τοι πεδόθεν φίλοι εἰσίν.
> ἀλλ' ἄγε, μηκέτι ταῦτα λεγώμεθα, εἰδότες ἄμφω
> κέρδ', ἐπει σὺ μέν ἐσσι βροτῶν ὄχ' ἄριστος ἀπάντων
> βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισιν, ἐγὼ δ' ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι

[4] Clay [1983] 1997: 201.

[5] Rutherford [1986] 2009: 171 questions the value of Odysseus's "negative and unprofitable suspicion" and "gloomy pessimism" despite Athena's approval. According to Rutherford, the fact that Odysseus is actually on Ithaca "makes still clearer the unfairness of this suspicion and creates a poignant irony."

μήτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν
(13.291-299)

> He would be resourceful and thievish whoever surpassed you
> In all deceptions, even if a god met you.
> Wretched man, of variegated plans, insatiable of deceptions, you were not about,
> not even in your own land, to cease your schemes
> and thievish words, which are dear to you from the bottom up.
> But come, let us no longer speak of these things seeing as we both know
> wiles, since you are by far the best of all mortals
> at deliberation and speeches, and I among all gods
> am famous for my cleverness and my wiles.

Athena asserts that Odysseus's resourcefulness and "thievishness" rival the gods'. She alludes to his past suffering (σχέτλιε) and to his skill in planning (ποικιλομῆτα). She suggests that he is incapable of setting aside schemes and "thievish words." Athena supports this claim by subsequently attributing Odysseus' hesitation to walk blindly into the palace before testing his wife not to her intervention,[6] but to Odysseus's own prudence (13.333-36). This observation gives added force to the suggestion that his schemes may be as dear to him as his own family (13.295). Insofar as she views Odysseus as a kindred spirit, Athena not only raises his status in our eyes, but also lends his potentially ambiguous qualities of deception, suspicion, and skepticism an "unqualified positive valence."[7] Athena does not need to elaborate upon her praise for Odysseus because they "both know wiles" (εἰδότες ἄμφω κέρδε[α]). She implies that his cunning is comparable to her own, though she makes it clear that while he is preeminent in

[6] Cf. Bowie 2013: 152.

[7] Katz 1991: 24. Katz goes on to argue that this move highlights the epics' otherwise ambiguous portrayal of Odysseus's *kleos*.

the persuasive arts among mortals, she is preeminent among the gods. Odysseus seems to know his place. He asks that Athena weave a plan (*metis*) for him to punish the suitors (13.386). Athena shows her faith in his ability to plan and deceive when she announces that she has come to "weave a metis" with Odysseus (13.303) and works alongside him to devise an approach to the suitors (13.372-73, 439). In addition to praising Odysseus for his intelligence, Athena also attests indirectly to his endurance and devotion. Athena informs Odysseus that as part of the plan he will be forced to "bear many troubles" (κήδε' ἀνασχέσθαι), to "endure them by necessity" (τετλάμεναι καὶ ἀνάγκῃ), and to "silently suffer many pains as you submit to the violence of men" (σιωπῇ πάσχειν ἄλγεα πολλά, βίας ὑποδέγμενος ἀνδρῶν); he must do so without revealing himself to anyone (13.306-10).

As in the *Apologue*, these books begin with an affirmation of Odysseus's desire to return home. In spite of the Phaeacians' hospitality and the lovely surroundings, Odysseus longs to return home and prays to find his wife at home "blameless" (ἀμύμονα) and with their loved ones safe (13.42-43).[8] When Athena explains why she cannot abandon Odysseus, she says that

[8] See Bowie 2013: on the effect of the comparison of Odysseus' longing to go home amidst ease, splendor, and abundance to a plowman wanting dinner after a tiring day of work.

he is ἐπητής,[9] ἀγχίνοος, "quick-witted,"[10] and ἐχέφρων (13.332). The term ἐχέφρων may refer to Odysseus's prudence or discretion,[11] but it may also allude to his devotion to Penelope. In the *Odyssey*, the term is used elsewhere predominantly of Penelope and denotes her self-possession specifically with regard to her faithfulness to Odysseus.[12] Applied to Odysseus, the term may reflect a similar faithfulness to Penelope. It may also subtly remind us of the underlying similarity of Odysseus and Penelope that makes them well suited to be husband and wife.[13]

Odysseus's encounter with Athena affirms that he possesses the qualities necessary to punish the suitors and to reunite with his wife. Odysseus is devoted to Penelope and eager to return home, but he will not let his guard down simply because he is among loved ones.

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[9] The meaning of ἐπητής is uncertain. Odysseus says that Amphinomus seems like an ἐπητής man when he offers Odysseus bread and prays for his good fortune (18.128; 18.119-23). Antinous later warns that Odysseus will not find any ἐπητύς if he strings the bow (21.306). Cf. Hoekstra [1984] 1989 and Bowie 2013 ad loc. Stanford 1958: 31 suggests "civilized."

[10] Cf. Hoekstra [1984] 1989 ad loc. Stanford 1958: 32 notes Aristotle's definition (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1142b) as "'skill in hitting the mark' which is quick in action and not dependent on logical thought," and suggests "the gift of instantaneous insight into the essence of a complex matter, which both ignores and baffles logical analysis."

[11] Cf. Bowie 2013 ad loc.

[12] Stanford 1958: 33.

[13] Cf. Stanford 1958: 33.

Odysseus's possesses cunning to rival the gods' and should be more than capable of deceiving the suitors. Athena expects that he will be able to conceal his mission and endure the abuse of the suitors in order to carry out the mission. Perhaps most importantly, Athena's commitment to help Odysseus assures us, as it does Odysseus (cf. 13.389-91), that he will be able to defeat the suitors with the gods on his side.

BEGGAR IN DISGUISE

Athena's praise of Odysseus reassures us that Odysseus is every bit as clever as he was at Troy and in the *Apologue* and that he is capable of utilizing his intelligence to defeat the suitors. Ironically, her decision to disguise Odysseus as a weak, old beggar worn down by time and circumstances renews fears as to whether Odysseus possesses the strength that he may be called upon to demonstrate against the suitors. The disparity between Odysseus's mind and his physical power is signaled early in *Odyssey* 13. Odysseus wins countless gifts and achieves his *nostos*, at least the first stage of it, not through daring, physical power, or endurance, but through his powers of speech. We are told that his masterful performance wins him more gifts than he could have won fighting at Troy (13.135-38). Odysseus will later claim that he did in fact win them at Troy (13.262-64). Odysseus's reward is a testament to his ability to persuade and craft a song. One cannot help but think that it may also reflect his inability to match that talent for speech with strength and martial prowess.

Athena's choice of disguise recalls Alcinous and Circe's observations regarding the ravages of time and hard experience. It underlines the disparity between Odysseus of the past

and the present and suggests a kind of "worst-case scenario" of an Odysseus battered by his time in war and wandering on the sea. The arrival of Odysseus in his beggar disguise prompts Eumaeus to imagine Odysseus starving and wandering abroad—if he is even still alive (14.42-43). Odysseus himself in his first lying tale crafts a convincing account of how a hero of the Trojan War like himself might be reduced to a beggar through questionable decisions and adverse circumstances. Odysseus claims that he was once a famed and fearless warrior who was skilled at ambushes and fought alongside kings at Troy (cf. 14.216-21; 14.237-38)—he adds in his second tale that he was once considered fit to lead an ambush alongside Odysseus and Menelaus (14.468-71). After the war, he felt compelled to travel and led troops abroad. As in the case of Odysseus's crew among the Ciconians, his companions disobeyed his commands and attacked the locals but were soon routed, killed, and imprisoned by reinforcements (14.216-72). Odysseus claims that he did not stand up to them but rather dropped his arms and supplicated their king, who pitied and protected him (14.276-84), and with whom he stayed for seven years (14.285). When Odysseus is convinced to board a ship bound for Libya, Zeus sends a storm to punish the crew that intended to enslave him, killed everyone but him, and "took away their *nostos"* (14.300-13). With the help of Zeus he reached a kingdom where the prince, not the princess, discovers him and leads him to his father (14.317-20). The king ordered men to take him home who instead attempted to enslave him (14.339-40). Again, with the help of the gods, he escaped and now finds himself at Eumaeus's farmhouse (14.348-59). The obvious resemblance between elements in this story and in Odysseus's, particularly his encounter with the Ciconians, but including his approach to the Phaeacians and in general, brings the lesson

even closer to home.[14] It illustrates how easily Odysseus's story could have turned out very differently. Particularly worrisome for Odysseus's story moving forward is the thought of a once great warrior forced to capitulate to and at the mercy of an enemy after a failed attack.

Rendering Odysseus's transformation even more feasible are the stories of other men brought low by fate that are juxtaposed with his own. Eumaeus tells how he went from being the son of a king to a slave through a combination of others' greed and bad luck (14.403-84). Even his current circumstances would be better if Odysseus had not left for Troy: Odysseus would have given him a property, a house, and a wife with many suitors; as it is, he lives alone in a hut surrounded by hundreds of pigs (14.62-66). Theoclymenos describes how he was reduced from the noble scion of a lauded hero to a hunted, wandering exile for killing a kinsman (15.272-76). The causes of Eumaeus misfortune and suffering also seem ominous for Odysseus: Eumaeus's caretaker was convinced to kidnap him after being seduced despite being, most likely, an "upright" (ἐυεργός) woman like Penelope (15.419-22). Eumaeus also reminds us that Odysseus left for Troy to recover Helen, whom Eumaeus wishes had died because her adultery and who brought about the death of many men (14.68-70).

Even the time Odysseus's spends receiving hospitality from and exchanging stories as an equal with Eumaeus is potentially troubling. Critics have admired the *Odyssey*'s noble portrayal of Eumaeus and other characters of "lower-status."[15] These scenes emphasize the permeability

[14] See Fenik 1974: 159-68, Emlyn-Jones 1986: 5-7, King 1999: 76-77. See Tsagalis 2012: 321-44 for potential points of comparison.

[15] Bowie 2013: 16-23.

between the lives of wealthy, aristocratic heroes and their servants. Despite all of his achievements, and love of the gods, Odysseus is not so different from Eumaeus and perhaps only a trick of fate from occupying a situation like his or worse. Though we are told that Odysseus acts intentionally and with cunning (κερδοσύνῃ), some audience members might worry that Odysseus plays the part of a helpless old man too convincingly when he sits before the attacking dogs and places himself in Eumaeus's power (14.29-36). They may also be concerned when Odysseus swears by Hermes that no one can compete with him in service doing "the sorts of things that worse men do for fine men" (οἷά τε τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς παραδρωωσι χέρηες, 15.321-24).

EUMAEUS

Despite the potentially worrisome implications of Odysseus's disguise and his time with Eumaeus, in other respects, these books show him advancing toward his goals. Eumaeus's loyalty to Odysseus is clear from the outset and elicits sympathy for both servant and master. Even before we meet Eumaeus, we are told that of all Odysseus's servants, he cared most for Odysseus's livelihood (ὅ βιότοιο μάλιστα κήδετο οἰκήων, 14.3-4) and loves Odysseus and his family (13.404-6). He speaks of his grief for Odysseus without prompting (14.40) and describes Odysseus as an ideal lord, generous (14.61-67), wealthy (14.96-104) and kind (14.139). Eumaeus prefers Odysseus's rule to his parents and misses him more (14.139-40, 142-44). We may think here of Odysseus's rule over Ithaca. When Eumaeus wakes up early to go to work, Odysseus is thrilled to see that he is so concerned about Odysseus's property even though he

thinks that his master is far away (14.526-27). His devotion to Odysseus and his hatred of the suitors, about which more below, suggests that he will do whatever he can to help Odysseus achieve his goals.

The encounter with Eumaeus also gives Odysseus an opportunity to demonstrate his cleverness, though under circumstances much less impressive than in the *Apologue* or even on Scheria and with much lower stakes. Irony suffuses the meeting, in which the man whom Eumaeus believes would give him a better life comes to him as a beggar and in which Odysseus attempts to convince Eumaeus that his master will soon return. Oddly, the scene centers on a battle of wits in which Odysseus's attempt to persuade Eumaeus that Odysseus is coming home and to wrangle a cloak out of his protective host. Odysseus is only partially successful. When Odysseus asks after Eumaeus' lord in case he has news of him, Eumaeus speaks derisively of the wandering men who lie to Penelope to win a reward (14.122-28). In an accusation that would be insulting if it were not so apt, Eumaeus suggests that the beggar would likewise craft a speech (ἔπος παρατεκτήναιο) if it would win him a cloak and a tunic (14.131-32). Odysseus counters by swearing an oath that Odysseus is coming home. He asks for a cloak and tunic only upon his safe return (14.151-55). He concludes his speech with a strong denunciation of the liar: "this man is as hateful to me as the gates of Hades" (ἐχθρὸς γὰρ μοι κεῖνος ὁμῶς Ἀίδαο πύλῃσι, 14.156). Observant audience members familiar with the *Iliad* would be struck by the poet's audacity of having Odysseus quote the denunciation of liars that Achilles once aimed in

Odysseus's direction in that epic.[16] Eumaeus remains unconvinced though hopeful (14.171-72). Odysseus's false biography, in which he reports the Thesprotian king's claim to have Odysseus's treasure in safe keeping and his oath that he would soon he would soon escort Odysseus home, seems calculated to appeal to Eumaeus.[17] Like Eumaeus's own story, it includes a wealthy upbringing, evil Phoenicians, and the threat of enslavement. Odysseus also casually mentions that the Thesprotian prince gave him a cloak and tunic (14.320).[18] Eumaeus acknowledges Odysseus's powerful story-telling but still is not convinced. The story of Odysseus's suffering "rouses his heart greatly" (ἦ μοι μάλα θυμὸν ὄρινας), but the talk about Odysseus does not persuade him (14.361-64). Eumaeus then reveals that Odysseus's attempt at persuasion is an even more uphill climb than it at first appeared: he still smarts from the time when he was deceived by an Aetolian exile who claimed that he saw Odysseus in Crete with Idomeneus (14.378-85). Eumaeus rejects Odysseus next bid for belief for different reasons. Odysseus reiterates the proposal that he receive a cloak and tunic only when Odysseus returns but adds that Eumaeus can kill him as a warning to liars if Odysseus does not (14.402-5; 393-400), an

[16] See Bowie 2013: 188, who argues that this speech "fits the powerful speaker Od. Has shown himself in *Il.* and earlier in *Od.*

[17] Trahman 1952: 37-39; Haft 1984, Emlyn-Jones 1986: 6-7; Roisman 1994: 11; King 1999: 75, 78; Tsagalis 2012; Bowie 2013: 193-94. Trahman 1952: 37-38 points out that it is only when Eumaeus tells his own story in *Odyssey* 15 that the audience could appreciate how well Odysseus has crafted his story.

[18] See de Jong 2001: 350, Tsagalis 2012: 339.

action Eumaeus understandably considers unbecoming a proper host. Odysseus final attempt to obtain a cloak is designed explicitly to test Eumaeus' concern for him (14.459-61). Layers of irony fold in upon themselves as Odysseus attempts to win a cloak on a cold night prior to a planned ambush by recounting a time when Odysseus acquired a cloak for him on a cold night leading up to an ambush by sending a messenger who quickly shed the cloak he would not need on the journey (14.495-502).[19] This time, Odysseus implies that Eumaeus will not give Odysseus a cloak because of Odysseus's low status (14.503-6). Eumaeus calls Odysseus's story "blameless" (ἀμύμων) and tells him that he has spoken not "out of order" (παρὰ μοῖραν) nor "unprofitably" (νηκερδές, 14.508-9).[20] Odysseus has won this hard-fought battle against an opponent almost as skeptical as himself. Eumaeus gives him a bed with skins and covers him in a cloak (14.518-22), though he shows characteristic concern for Odysseus's property when he informs Odysseus that he will have to go without a cloak in the morning because they have none to spare (14.512-17).[21] Odysseus once again wins a reward through the power of his speech.[22]

[19] See Newton 1998, Lowe 2000: 145-47, Bowie 2013: 223. Kirk 1962: 360 considers the story unnecessary and "one of the poorest digressions in the whole poem."

[20] Stanford 1965: ad loc. speaks of Eumaeus's "mildly bantering tones."

[21] Newton 1998: 152-3 stresses the fact that Odysseus does not fool Eumaeus and fails to win a cloak for himself.

[22] Bowie 2013: 223.

THE SUITORS

Athena reveals to Odysseus that the suitors have ruled his halls for three years and woo his wife with gifts (13.377-78). She tells him of their attempt to murder Telemachus but predicts that the men who are consuming Odysseus's livelihood will splatter the ground with their blood and brains (13.394-97). Eumaeus offers a more detailed and personal account of the suitors' crimes and their victims. The suitors are not worried about facing punishment from the gods or showing respect to those beneath them (οὐκ ὄπιδα φρονέοντες ἐνὶ φρεσὶν οὐδ' ἐλεητύν, 14.82). Eumaeus contrasts the meager food available to slaves with the lavish meals of the suitors (14.80-81); they take more than they need of Odysseus's possessions including the best goats and the best pigs (14.89-95, 105-6, 108). They never sacrifice (14.94). As in the case of Nestor and Menelaus, Eumaeus's observance of *xenia* and his piety offers implicit and damning criticism of the suitors' behavior. Eumaeus comes immediately to Odysseus's aid and offers him food as befits a guest (14.56-58). He makes it clear that he entertains Odysseus not because Odysseus has information to offer but because of his respect for beggars (14.386-9). Eumaeus eventually sacrifices one of the best pigs for Odysseus and offers him an honorable portion (14.414-17, 437-40). In contrast to the suitors, Eumaeus professes respect for *xenia* and the gods (14.56-58, 386-89, 39) and honors them exhaustively (cf. 14.420-4). Eumaeus's concern for Odysseus's property offers a stark contrast to the suitors' wastefulness.

The behavior of the suitors themselves continues to feed our desire to see them punished by Odysseus and Telemachus. The suitors shamelessly admit to their crimes even as they acknowledge their faltering position in the eyes of the people of Ithaca. They are dismayed

at Telemachus's safe arrival (16.342). Antinous is both angered at and impressed with Telemachus's achievement (16.346; 347). He acknowledges that Telemachus must have the gods on his side and has proven himself "wise in thought and counsel" (αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐπιστήμων βουλῇ τε νόῳ τε, 16.374; 364, 370). He admits that the people are losing respect for the suitors and would denounce them in a public assembly (16.376-79, 380). So, in a private meeting that mocks of the public process, the suitors redouble their efforts to murder Telemachus so that they can divide up his property. Marriage to Penelope now appears an afterthought (cf. 16.371-72, 383-86). As if to establish the guilt of all the suitors present, Antinous offers them a superior course of action: they could allow Telemachus to live, return to their homes, and woo Penelope separately with their own gifts (16.387-92). Only Amphinomus takes up the proposal, expressing distaste at the notion of killing Telemachus. He suggests that they let the gods decide Telemachus's fate. He does escape the meeting entirely unblemished: he would kill Telemachus with their say so (16.400-5). Whatever sympathy audience members had for the suitors in light of Odysseus's long absence and Penelope's ambiguous behavior is likely to disappear.

TELEMACHUS

Odyssey 15 introduces us to a Telemachus who has fulfilled many of the expectations set out for him in the *Telemachy* as a responsible adult, as a potential ruler, and as a viable member of the aristocracy. The gifts of Menelaus and Helen offer material evidence of Telemachus's newfound status as an aristocratic adult. As promised in response to

Telemachus's clever request in *Odyssey* 4, Menelaus gives Telemachus his most treasured possession, the bowl crafted by Hephaestus. At the beginning of the book, Athena alluded to an impending marriage for Telemachus (15.24-26). Helen's gift of her finest *peplos* that is intended for Telemachus's future his future wife (15.125-29) reinforces the impression that Telemachus, like Neoptolemus, is on the verge of adulthood.[23] It also shows that Helen considers Telemachus worthy of an aristocratic union. Peisistratus is suitably impressed by the magnificence of these gifts (15.113-24, 131-32). Telemachus's place within the *xenia* network is further signaled when Menelaus asks him to relay a message to Nestor and makes a passing reference to Telemachus's receiving hospitality from yet another king on his way back to Pylos (15.151-53; 186-8). Telemachus only wishes that he could tell his father how he "obtained complete friendship" from Menelaus (τυχὼν φιλότητος ἀπάσης, 15.156-58).

On two occasions, once in Sparta and once in Pylos, Telemachus shows his maturity and presence of mind by ably navigating potentially awkward encounters that arise within the *xenia* system. When Telemachus asks Menelaus to send him off, Menelaus generously offers to accompany him on an extended tour of Greece to accumulate even more gifts from hosts on the way (15.82-85). Such a trip would mean more treasure and greater *kleos*, but Telemachus is not blinded by greed or self-satisfaction.[24] He recognizes not only that he must hurry home in

[23] Katz 1991: 71 notes that Helen's advice to first entrust the robe to his mother indicates that she "does not envision, then, Telemachus's assumption of *kyreia* and Penelope's departure from the *oikos*."

[24] See Apthorp 1980 on the temptation for Telemachus to stay with Menelaus.

accordance with Athena's advice, but also that he has responsibilities there: he must return to take care the property he already has at home, which he now considers his own (ἐπὶ κτεάσσιν ἐμοῖσι) and over which he failed to leave a guardian when he left (15.88-89). Menelaus shows his approval for this sentiment by beginning preparations for a final meal and collecting Telemachus's gifts. Telemachus later demonstrates a similar concern for his property when he asks Peiraeus to keep his prizes rather than sending them to the palace in case Telemachus's mission fails (17.78-83). Telemachus's failure to return to Nestor and pass on Menelaus's message may represent a minor breach of etiquette,[25] but it also reflects Telemachus's concern for Athena's command and his ability "to think cleverly and to act promptly."[26] Telemachus requests Peisistratus's help in the matter on the basis of a "like-mindedness" (ὁμοφροσύνη) built upon *xenia*, age, shared travels (15.196-98). Peisistratus's willingness to consider Telemachus's unorthodox request and his attempt to fulfill it in a "proper" way (κατὰ μοῖραν, 15.203) shows that Telemachus has forged a strong bond of friendship with a loyal contemporary. Peisistratus' subsequent admission that Nestor's "heart is overbearing" (ἐκείνου θυμὸς ὑπέρβιος) and that he would call upon Telemachus and would not let him go (15.212-13) goes some way toward justifying Telemachus's decision.

Telemachus's handling of his crew and dealings with Theoclymenos point not only to his independence but also to his fitness to rule Ithaca. Whereas Telemachus previously followed Athena's lead, he now issues orders to his crew; they listen and obey without question (15.218-

[25] See Miller and Carmichael 1954: 62, Stanford 1965: 247.

[26] Scott 1918: 424

287-91)[27] and easily evade the suitors' ambush. Scheid-Tissinier argues that Telemachus's relationship to his crew, sealed through the aristocratic offer of a feast as reward for their assistance (15.506-7), shows that he is preparing "to assume with respect to the men of his generation the role that Odysseus…once filled with respect to his contemporaries."[28] Theoclymenus likewise treats Telemachus as an authority with the power to help him, and Telemachus accepts him as a suppliant.[29] When Theoclymenus asks Telemachus where to stay once they reach Ithaca (15.509-11), Telemachus's response reflects a realistic assessment of the situation: he vetoes his own palace not because he fears that he will be unable to protect Theoclymenus from the suitors, but because he will be absent and because Penelope will be in her room and unlikely to see Theoclymenus arrive (15.513-17).[30] Telemachus's first suggestion, that Theoclymenos stay with Eurymachus, the suitor most likely to win Penelope's hand, seems an even less appropriate alternative and has received some criticism.[31] Perhaps he would like to see Eurymachus play the host for a change. Or perhaps he is suggesting ruefully that

[27] See Miller and Carmichael 1954: 61.

[28] 1993: 16-17, my translation.

[29] Theoclymenos addresses Telemachus as "dear child" (φίλε τέκνον) at 15.509 as if Telemachus were a trusted son and guide rather than a respected adult.

[30] Hoekstra [1984] 1989: ad 15.513-22.

[31] See Page 1955: 98 on the "absurdity" of this decision. Hoekstra [1984] 1989: ad 15.513-22 argues in favor of Telemachus's suggestion: Theoclymenos "has no quarrel" with Eurymachus and is of similarly noble birth, so "why not?"

Eurymachus would make a fitting host if he is to be Ithaca's next ruler. This would explain Telemachus's change of mind when Theoclymenos interprets a falcon holding a dove to mean that Odysseus's family will always rule Ithaca (15.533-34). In answer to this omen, Telemachus asks his faithful companion Peiraeus to welcome and honor Theoclymenos. Peiraeus assures Telemachus that he will do so as long as it takes (15.545-46).[32] Telemachus has gathered around him loyal men who are ready to follow his commands. It is not difficult to imagine this Telemachus assuming Odysseus's position in Ithaca after the suitors are vanquished.

THE REUNION OF TELEMACHUS AND ODYSSEUS

Prior to their meeting, both father and son have each other in mind. Odysseus promises offerings to the Naiads if Athena allows him to live and "nourishes my dear son" (μοι φίλον υἱὸν ἀέξῃ, 13.356-60). He is incensed that Athena needlessly endangered Telemachus's life by sending him in search of news of his father when she could have told Telemachus everything he needed to know (13.417-19). When *Odyssey* 15 opens, we find Telemachus lying awake thinking of his father (15.7-8). Helen later interprets the omen of an eagle holding a goose to mean that Odysseus will return to take revenge on the suitors or may already be home making preparations (15.172-78). Telemachus prays that she is right (15.180).

These thoughts point us in the direction of a reunion that is close at hand when Telemachus walks toward Eumaeus's hut at the end of *Odyssey* 15. It is easy to suppose,

[32] See Miller and Carmichael 1954: 61, 63; N. Austin 1969: 60.

particularly knowing how the epic proceeds, that a tearful reunion and plan to defeat the suitors will ensue. But the outcome of the reunion may not be as obvious as it at first appears. Apart from the twin eagles that flew over the assembly on Ithaca fourteen books ago,[33] we have heard nothing about how they might work in tandem. They have never met as adults. Both men have been encouraged independently and have worked independently toward the goal of defeating the suitors. The *Odyssey* has made a case for each man as the protagonist best able to demonstrate his desirable qualities in overcoming the suitors. Both have carried out Proving Sequences over the course of four books, overcoming initially worrisome indications and using their powers of discernment and persuasion to navigate potentially difficult social situations and win recognition in the form of gifts. Neither man has been tested on the field of battle. Odysseus has the advantage of the storied past described in the *Apologue* and of a more intimate relationship with Athena, though both men have received her help and guidance. Based on what we know of him up to this point, few would be shocked to see Odysseus employ cunning, and perhaps poison, to ambush the suitors and take his place alongside Penelope. Nor is it outside the realm of possibility that Telemachus will take his place as the head of the household after removing the suitors through the force of his newfound authority or, as the suitors fear, after gathering men to face the suitors in battle.[34] Odysseus and Telemachus share common goals, but it remains to be seen how their stories and their approaches to the suitors will be reconciled. Both men still have something to prove.

[33] See de Jong 2001: 53

[34] See Marks 2008: ch.4 for indications that Odysseus might lead armed men against the suitors.

With this in mind, the account of Theoclymenus and his ancestry, addressed in *Odyssey* 11 and recounted at the meeting of Theoclymenus and Telemachus,[35] offers some intriguing hints as to how Odysseus's and Telemachus's stories might proceed.[36] The story of Theoclymenus's most famous ancestor, Melampus (15.226-57), includes a number of parallels to Odysseus's experiences. Like Odysseus, Melampus lived in exile while his wealth was seized by force (15.228-31). His quest also centered on a women wooed by all (11.288). Melampus alone was willing to face the trial required to win her (11.291-92) but initially failed in the attempt. He was detained because of the gods (χαλεπὴ δὲ θεοῦ κατὰ μοῖρ' ἐπέδησε) in a foreign land where he "suffered mighty pains" (κρατέρ' ἄλγεα πάσχων, 15.231-32). Eventually he was freed in accordance with the will of Zeus (Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή, 11.292-97). Once free, Melampus returned home triumphantly with prizes and took his revenge on the man who took advantage of his situation and took possession of his property (15.235-37). Odysseus also suffered in a foreign land and was detained after a failed first attempt to return home and win (back) a wife until he was freed in accordance with the will of Zeus. If his story were to follow

[35] See Stanford 1965: ad 225, Thornton 1970: 58-62, and De Jong 2001: ad 11.287-97, 15.226-40, 15.272-78 on Theoclymenus and Melampus in *Odyssey* 11 and 15. Thornton sees the story of Melampus as intended primarily to explain Theoclymenus's presence in the *Odyssey*.

[36] De Jong 2001: ad 272-78, Gray 2012: 167-68. Danek 1998. De Jong suggests that Theoclymenos argues in favor of Telemachus's accepting him as a suppliant and "corroborate[s] his request by stressing the similaritiy between his own fate and that of Telemachs and Odysseus.

the pattern set by Melampus, Odysseus too would take revenge on the men who have claimed his property as their own, and he would succeed in winning Penelope. Yet Theoclymenus's words also remind us of potential pitfalls for Odysseus. Theoclymenos notes that Melampus suffered because of the influence of a woman, Neleus's daughter, and because of deep blindness (ἄτη βαρείη, 15.233-34). Theoclymenos includes among his ancestors Amphiareus, whose wife famously betrayed him after being seduced by gifts (cf. 15.247). This network of signs, a woman pursued by many men, seduction through gifts, betrayal, and blindness that leads to suffering puts us in mind of the dangers that Penelope might pose Odysseus and the implied warnings of Agamemnon and Athena.

We might also be struck by parallels between the stories of Melampus and Telemachus. Telemachus's story also centers on a much-wooed woman and appropriated wealth. He too must face a trial. Like Melampus (cf. 15.237-38), Telemachus is not striving to secure a woman for himself but for a relative. Will Telemachus be called upon to "win" Penelope for his father through trial? This possibility arises when Telemachus is on the verge of stringing the bow, which would allow his mother to stay in the palace, dismiss the suitors, and make possible a reunion between Odysseus and Penelope. Will he, like Melampus, subsequently win a wife of his own and found a new kingdom (cf. 15.238-42)?[37] The fate of Amphiaraus suggests a darker turn not only for Odysseus, but also for Telemachus. After Amphiaraus is killed due to the

[37] Cf. later versions of the story in which Telemachus relocates to marry Circe (Proclus 101.1-103.20 Bernabé, 109.5-7 Allen) or Nausicaa (Hellanicus 4 FGrH F 170 b-c). See Marks ch. 3 n21, and ch. 4 n12.

machinations of his wife, his son, Alcmaeon, avenges him by killing his own mother. This would be a surprising development quite unlike the *Odyssey* as we have it, but it would hardly be unheralded: this course would follow closely the story pattern established through the *Odyssey*'s previous allusions to the fate of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes. Other indications point to a happier outcome but have little to say about the supremacy of son over father or father over son. Theoclymenus's tells Telemachus that no family is better suited to rule Ithaca than yours' and that you (plural) will always be powerful (ὑμετέρου' οὐκ ἔστι γένευς βασιλεύτερον ἄλλο | ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς καρτεροὶ αἰεί, 15.533-34). This implies that father and son will succeed against the suitors to retain rule of Ithaca, but who will prove superior? Will Telemachus rule Ithaca presently or only after Odysseus willingly steps down from the throne? Teiresias's prophecy in *Odyssey* 11 similarly suggests that Odysseus will survive the encounter with the suitors, that he will die of old age after completing his inland journey, and that "the people around you will be prosperous (ἀμφὶ δὲ λαοὶ ὄλβιοι ἔσσονται, 11.134-37). It leaves unspecified, however, whether Odysseus will die as king or whether he will long since have surrendered the kingdom to his son, under whom Odysseus's people will nevertheless prosper. Is Theoclymenus's reference to a rift between a father and son significant?[38] Does it portend a similar rift between Odysseus and Telemachus?

As Telemachus walks toward Eumaeus's hut and Odysseus hears the approaching feet of his son, we may hope for a joyful reunion but fear something less heartwarming. The disparity

[38] Theoclymenos explains that his father Polypheides left Argos because he was angry with his own father (15.252-54).

in their appearance contributes to our sense of foreboding. Telemachus comes fresh from securing his place as an adult within the aristocratic *xenia* network. We have already heard that he is "admirable in form and appearance" (δέμας καὶ εἶδος ἀγητός) and "will be no worse than his beloved father Odysseus" (καί μιν ἔφην ἔσσεσθαι ἐν ἀνδράσιν οὔ τι χερείω | πατρὸς ἑοῖο φίλοιο, 14.176-77). Odysseus, on the other hand, little resembles the man about whom his son has heard so much. He has been stripped of his aristocratic trappings and brags of his ability to serve. He has been rendered prematurely old by his wanderings. Whatever reality Odysseus's disguise conceals, one could hardly fault Telemachus for failing to be impressed or reassured to learn that this man is his father and potential ally in the fight against the suitors. The brief mention of Laertes, relegated to the country and unable to offer any assistance (16.137-53), and Odysseus's subsequent remarks about how easy it if for the gods to glorify and to debase mortals (16.211-12) reminds us just how quickly great men can be brought low and suggests that Telemachus's disappointment would not necessarily be unjustified.

For audience members anxiously awaiting a reunion, the meeting of Eumaeus and Telemachus offers a surprising, suspense-inducing, and irony-filled delay that is simultaneously reassuring and worrisome. When Telemachus appears in the doorway, we are treated to a reunion of father and son enacted not by Odysseus and Telemachus but by Eumaeus and Telemachus. Eumaeus is amazed to see Telemachus, drops what he is doing, kisses him, cries, and embraces him like an only son he has not seen for decades (16.12-21). There is a hint of competition here, as we realize that Eumaeus is in some sense more of a father to Telemachus than Odysseus has ever been. On the other hand, Telemachus's respect and affection for Eumaeus reassure us that Telemachus, unlike the suitors, will not mistreat Odysseus based on

his appearance and status. This impression is confirmed when Odysseus offers up his seat and Telemachus insists that he keep it (16.42-45).[39] This introduction seems to prepare us for an underwhelming reunion in which Telemachus is forced to overcome doubt and disappointment and to reconcile the heroic image of his father with the wandering beggar before him. We might look forward to a subsequent reveal in which Telemachus, like Alcinous, realizes that he has grossly underestimated his father and learns that he is much more than he appears to be. But how will Odysseus prove his identity to the son who has never met him, and how will he impress Telemachus in a swineherd's hut? Odysseus's appearance and circumstances place him at a disadvantage.

Though surprising in light of what we saw in *Odyssey* 15, the reemergence of Telemachus's insecurities and Odysseus's reproaches help to balance the disparity of their appearance and suggest that Telemachus still needs Odysseus's help. Having recently handled the issue of another suppliant's housing, we might expect Telemachus to do the same when it comes to the stranger. Yet Telemachus is distressed when Eumaeus presents the stranger to him as a potential suppliant (16.66-67). Telemachus cites his youth and inability to defend himself with his hands when a "superior man" (τις πρότερος) is angry (16.71-72). He fears that the suitors will mock the stranger and suggests that he stay with Eumaeus instead. Telemachus softens the admission of weakness by pointing out that it would be hard for any man to act when grossly outnumbered (16.88-89). Odysseus does not let his son off so lightly and takes a

[39] Kearns 1982: 4 includes this among the qualities in this scene unwittingly exhibited by Telemachus "which a father would look for in his son."

particularly aggressive stance in challenging him. Though he claims to sympathize with Telemachus's situation (16.91-94), Odysseus poses Nestor's insulting question, implying that if Telemachus is not opposed by the people or by the gods he must subject himself to the suitors willingly (16.95-96). Odysseus claims that if *he* were younger, a son of Odysseus like Telemachus, or even Odysseus himself returned from his wanderings, there would be hope (16.99-100). He asserts that even if outnumbered *he* would rather die than witness the disgraceful deeds being committed in the palace (16.105-111). The stranger's assertion that he would die rather than submit to the suitors would put Telemachus to shame even if it were the empty boast of an old beggar. Coming from Odysseus, these claims reveal just how far short of his father Telemachus falls.

Despite indications that Telemachus still needs his father's help to face the suitors, some members might nevertheless remain doubtful about Odysseus's ability to convince Telemachus not only that he is his father but also that he remains the hero of myth. Fears might increase when Athena tells Odysseus to reveal himself despite having done little to impress Telemachus thus far. They would be relieved, however, when she once again intervenes to improve Odysseus's appearance.[40] As Erbse points out, Telemachus only knows his father from heroic stories. So Odysseus must appear in idealized form: Athena gives him a new cloak, improves his form and jawline, gives him the appearance of youth, and gives color to his skin

[40] Athena's decision to appear to Odysseus rather than Telemachus or even to them both also reassures us of Odysseus's preeminence in this scene. Kearns 1982: 4 notes "Odysseus's superiority to his son in the knowledge and perception" here.

and beard (16.173-76).[41] Odysseus's new appearance and the very fact of his transformation leave Telemachus not merely impressed but afraid.[42] He believes Odysseus is a god and offers sacrifices in order to be spared (16.184-85). Odysseus assures his son that he is not a god. He kisses Telemachus and no longer holds back his tears (16.190-91): his "[c]aution and guile have given way to emotion."[43] After Odysseus explains that it was Athena who changed his appearance (16.207-12), Telemachus is convinced. The two embrace and cry like the birds of prey to which they are frequently compared in omens (16.116-19). That they wail like vultures whose children have been stolen away reminds us Odysseus's and Telemachus's state prior to the reunion and underscores just how momentous this develop is in the emotional life of both father and son. Odysseus tells the truth about himself for the first time (16.226-32), and the pair begins to plot against the suitors. Though Odysseus takes the lead and has the advantage of the superior knowledge imparted to him by Athena, the two men plan together as accomplices.[44]

Odysseus's and Telemachus's plans define the nature of the challenge before them and the desirable qualities required to face it. The persistence of Telemachus's insecurities and fears during the planning sequence may suggest Odyssean prudence, but they also allow the

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[41] Erbse 1972: 160.

[42] See Kearns 1982 and Cook 2012 for echoes of theoxeny and divine epiphany in Odysseus's return.

[43] Kearns 1982: 4.

[44] Scott 1918: 425.

poet to play up the threat posed by the suitors. When Odysseus asks the number of suitors so that he can decide whether he and Telemachus can face them alone or if they need allies (16.235-39), Telemachus is impressed by Odysseus's audacity but suggests that such a feat is too great (λίην μέγα), even if the stories of Odysseus's great glory, ability as a warrior, and wisdom in council are true. Two men cannot face so many (16.241-44). He offers an extensive list of all the suitors in the palace (16.245-53), and fears that Odysseus's mission would end bitterly if Odysseus and Telemachus faced them alone. Most audience members would be likely to agree. Telemachus remains unconvinced even when Odysseus assures him that they have as their allies Athena and Zeus (16.259-61). Their prospects would only worsen when Odysseus responds that the gods will be on their side "when Ares' might is decided for the suitors and for us in my halls" (ὁπότε μνηστῆρσι καὶ ἡμῖν | ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμοῖσι μένος κρίνηται Ἄρηος, 16.268-69) and it becomes clear for the first time that Odysseus plans to face the suitors in battle. As he himself has observed, Telemachus has yet to prove himself as a warrior. Odysseus's soldiering days lie far behind him, and attempts in the *Odyssey* to demonstrate his military prowess have ranged from nonexistent to merely unsuccessful. The challenge appears all but impossible.

The planning nevertheless proceeds, and Odysseus lays out exactly how the challenge will call upon both Odysseus and Telemachus to demonstrate their desirable qualities. In addition to military prowess, they must also display endurance, cunning, and prudence. Odysseus must endure the suitors' dishonoring him and physical abuse. Telemachus must "let your dear heart in your chest endure" (σὸν δὲ φίλον κῆρ τετλάτω ἐν στήθεσσι) and check himself (ἀνέχεσθαι) as he watches his father suffer at the suitors' hands (16.274-77). He may

urge them to stop, but they will not obey; their destiny is at hand (16.278-80). Odysseus then lays out the plan to remove the suitors' weapons on the pretense that they are dirty and could exacerbate a drunken brawl between suitors and to leave armor and weapons for Odysseus and Telemachus alone (16.283-97). Finally, Odysseus instructs Telemachus to keep the news of his return secret from Laertes, Eumaeus, and even Penelope. He plans to test the slaves' loyalty before they proceed (16.300-7). They must not walk into a trap.

PENELOPE

Athena admires that Odysseus did not hurry home to his family "before you test your wife" (13.336, πρίν γ' ἔτι σῆς ἀλόχου πειρήσεαι) but assures him that Penelope weeps for him day and night (13.336-38). Penelope mourns Odysseus's failed homecoming and forestalls the suitors by giving all of them hope and making promises to each of them though "her mind intends other things" (νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾷ, 13.379-81).[45] Though Athena's account of Penelope's behavior would appear positive, Odysseus seems to cast Penelope as another Clytemnestra when he says that he would have suffered "the evil fate of Agamemnon" if

[45] These are the same words with which Antinous criticizes Penelope in the assembly (2.91) and appear again (18. 283) in reference to Penelope's winning gifts from the suitors in *Odyssey* 18. See Katz 1991: 90 for a discussion of previous interpretations of this phrase.

Athena had not warned him (13.383-85).[46] The words Athena speaks to rouse Telemachus from the court of Menelaus raise more specific concerns. Athena first echoes Nestor's warning that Telemachus has left his possessions among arrogant men who would consume them (15.10-13). She then explains that Penelope's father and brothers are urging her to marry Eurymachus because he woos her with better gifts and offers a larger bride price than the other suitors (15.16-18). She warns Telemachus of women's fickle nature (cf. 15.20) and tells him to protect his property; Penelope would use it to enrich the house of new husband since she no longer thinks of the children from her previous marriage or about her dead husband (15.19, 21-23). If what Athena says is true, there will be nothing left for Odysseus to come home to or for Telemachus to inherit. The situation appears dire. In *Odyssey* 16, we find that the situation has not yet reached a crisis point. Telemachus tells his father that Penelope is sincerely torn between staying faithful to Odysseus and marrying the best of her suitors (16.73-77; 126-27).

Penelope's actions are much less ambiguous than others' accounts of them. She still waits for Odysseus "with enduring heart" (τετληότι θυμῷ, 16.37-39) and, as in *Odyssey* 4, she is unequivocal in her opposition to the suitors. She informs them that she knows of their plans to kill her son (16.410-11). She reproaches Antinous with his reputation as the "best among his contemporaries in counsel and words" (καὶ δέ σέ φασιν | ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης μεθ' ὁμήλικας ἔμμεν

[46] Katz 1991: 55-57 notes that "[t]hese lines…like most of those in which suspicion attaches to to Penelope, were athetized by Aristarchus, and suspected by the older editors." She argues against previous critics' attempts "to palliate the obvious force of the implied comparison between Penelope and Clytemnestra."

ἄριστον | βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισι, 16.418-20). She reminds him that his father was once a helpless suppliant (16.423-429) and that Antinous is now consuming the property, pursuing the wife, and attempting to kill the son of the man who saved him (16.423-29; 430-32). She orders them to stop (16.333). The "false, hypocritical and ungrateful" response by Eurymachus, the suitor Athena deemed most likely to win Penelope, only heightens our distaste for the suitors as a whole.[47] Eurymachus reassures Penelope that the man does not exist who "will lay hands" (χεῖρας ἐποίσει) on Telemachus; rather, Eurymachus declares, "his blood" (οἱ αἷμα) will flow "around our spear" (περὶ δουρὶ ἡμετέρῳ, 16.437-41). The implication is that Eurymachus will kill the man (who is said not to exist) if he somehow lays hands on Telemachus. Yet his wording allows the interpretation that, while Telemachus will fall victim to no one's *hands*, he is in fact the referent of the unspecified οἱ ("his") and will fall victim to Eurymachus's *spear*. Eurymachus's suggestion that one cannot avoid death from the gods despite his advice that Telemachus need not fear death from the suitors (16.446-47) is less than reassuring. Lest we forget, we are reminded that "he himself planned destruction for [Telemachus]" (16.448). To hypocrisy we can add "depravity," as Eurymachus acknowledges in the same breath as his veiled threat his own debt to Odysseus, who treated him kindly when he was a child (16.442-44).[48]

[47] Stanford 1965: ad loc. See also de Jong 2001: ad 434-47, Said [1998] 2011: 253.

[48] Stanford 1961-1965: *ad loc*. refers to "the utter depravity of [Eurymachus's] heart."

PROBLEMATIC VENGEANCE

Odyssey 16 ends with all three of its heroes united in their opposition to the suitors if not yet united in their missions. Athena has reaffirmed Odysseus's heroism and promised to help him. She has orchestrated a reunion between father and son and brought their goals into alignment. Insight into the suitors plans has increased our desire to see them punished even as our heroes move closer to exacting their revenge. And yet, a nagging issue introduced early in *Odyssey* 13 may leave us with reservations. That book began with the Phaeacians' being punished merely for offering safe transport to all, including Odysseus (13.172-77). They were warned repeatedly,[49] but

> [i]t is possible to feel uncomfortable that the genial Phaeacians are made to suffer by Poseidon, since they seem different from the more obvious villains, such as the Cyclops or the Suitors; one could think that Poseidon's actions are petulantly vindictive.[50]

Shortly thereafter, Odysseus wakes up and looks around at what appears to be yet another foreign land. He concludes that the Phaeacians are neither thoughtful (νοήμονες) nor just (δίκαιοι) and that they did not bring him home as they said they would (13.209-12). As a result, Odysseus prays that Zeus punish the Phaeacians in his role as protector of suppliants (13.213-14). We know, and Odysseus will soon discover, that the Phaeacians were true to their word.

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[49] Bowie 2013: 119, 124-25. Bowie notes that "[t]he Phaeacian episode as a whole is part of *Od.*'s demonstration of the importance of correct hospitality, but it also makes clear how fulfilling one's duties to a guest can involve displeasing powerful forces."

[50] Bowie 2013: 119.

Why does the poet show our hero behaving so rashly, and why are the Phaeacians being victimized unjustly?[51]

Poseidon's punishment and Odysseus's prayer reveal that acts of revenge may be predicated on false assumptions and may lack sufficient justification. Odysseus's misjudgment reveals that he in particular is capable of jumping to conclusions and of desiring excessive punishment on false grounds. By the end of *Odyssey* 16, with the crimes of the suitors lying before us, these concerns are not likely to carry much weight. Yet they lay the groundwork for the argument that Odysseus's punishment of the suitors is excessive and perhaps misguided.[52] Concerns such as these would only increase if we suppose that he will resort to poison or other unheroic means of dispatching the suitors. Fears that the punishment of the suitors exceeds their crimes in fact reemerge during the fighting when Odysseus denies the suitors' offer of monetary compensation for their crimes after the murder of Antinous, when he rejects the supplication of Amphinomus, and when the female slaves are punished. Such a conclusion regarding Odysseus's revenge might alienate our sympathies and threaten our ability to derive pleasure from his display of martial prowess and cleverness against them.

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[51] Bowie 2013: ad 213 merely notes that "it is ironic that Od. Curses his benefactors the Phaeacians to Zeus's punishment, at the very moment when Poseidon is contemplating punishing them for another reason, with Zeus's encouragement; and it is all the more ironic that Poseidon's reason is that the Phaeacinas have been too happy and willing to help suppliants like Od. Get home."

[52] See Buchan 2004, Allan 2006: 23-25, Burgess 2014.

CHAPTER 7: *ODYSSEY* 17-20—THE PALACE

In *Odyssey* 17-20, Odysseus suffers the taunts and attacks of the suitors and their parasites both to test them and to avoid detection before he is ready to exact his revenge. The suitors give him numerous opportunities to demonstrate his endurance.[1] Though impressive, however, this endurance threatens to be as trying for the audience as it is for Odysseus. Frequent misbehavior on the part of the suitors heightens our desire to see Odysseus punish them and raises fears that Odysseus will act prematurely and be struck down as a result. The longer Odysseus remains a beggar, the more the disguise itself becomes a threat: we wonder whether Odysseus will ever prove more powerful than the beggar he appears to be. Omens, prophecies, and narrative cues help to ease these fears and invite anticipation of the successful

[1] Steiner 2010: 153.

punishment of the suitors and of Odysseus's regaining his heroic status. We must nevertheless look elsewhere for satisfaction in these books and find it in Proving Sequences for Penelope and Telemachus. Penelope's desire to appear before the suitors raises questions about her loyalty to Odysseus but provides an opportunity to best the suitors on her own terms. Telemachus continues to assert his authority within the household and begins to win the begrudging respect of the suitors. These developments offer competing sources of emotional investment for audience members that offset their concerns regarding Odysseus but also cast doubts on the prospect of his success. Without Penelope, defeating the suitors is an empty gesture for Odysseus. If Telemachus succeeds in asserting his authority over the household, he might persuade the suitors to leave the palace of their own accord or at least mitigate their misbehavior. The first possibility would rob Odysseus of the chance to demonstrate his strength and cunning and render his return unnecessary. The second might endanger our sympathy for Odysseus by leading to reformed suitors whose actions fall short of the threshold required to justify the punishment of death.

SUFFERING ABUSE

Even before Odysseus reaches the palace, and until the moment he takes revenge, Odysseus repeatedly suffers abuse at the hands of social inferiors including the goat herder Melanthius and his sister Melantho and Antinous, and Eurymachus. In each case, the victimizer takes advantage of a falsely perceived power difference to insult the stranger, sometimes on their own initiative, sometimes after being goaded on by Odysseus. Their actions range from

accusations of inferiority and laziness to overt acts of violence such as kicks and thrown stools. Odysseus is never debased by these actions, however. At first, he merely remains unaffected by physical attacks, belying his fragile appearance. Eventually, he takes evasive action and highlights the suitors' impotence, as when Eurymachus misses him and accidentally strikes a wine-bearer with a stool (18.394-98).[2] Odysseus is repeatedly tempted to respond to insults or attacks with violence but never succumbs to temptation. Lest we underestimate the significance of Odysseus's self control or the consequences should he give in, Odysseus considers whether to kill the serving women sleeping with the suitors or let them live only to rebuke himself. He tells his heart to endure (τέτλαθι δή, κραδίη) and puts these acts of will on par with the endurance he showed when he was forced to watch Polyphemus eat his comrades: "you endured it until *metis* led you from the cave" (σὺ δ' ἐτόλμας, ὅφρα σε μῆτις | ἐξάγαγ' ἐξ ἄντροιο, 20.5-23). Again and again, Odysseus is given the opportunity to display the *tlemosyne* for which he is famous and which the audience expects him to demonstrate.

Yet Odysseus's ability to endure may be more impressive than it is satisfying. We have been told that it is all part of Odysseus's plan (16.274-77) but are likely to be tested alongside Odysseus by the increasingly insulting behavior of the suitors and their followers. The worse the suitors' behavior, the more we come to share Odysseus's desire to see them punished. Yet we, like Odysseus, know that premature action will inevitably result in the death of Odysseus and his son. As our desire for the satisfaction of seeing the suitors punished increases, so too does

[2] Steiner 2010: ad 18.396-7 notes that "[t]he action follows the common Iliadic sequence" in which a warrior misses his target and "hits an inferior or subordinate man."

our fear that Odysseus will give in to his own desires and be killed. At the same time, Odysseus's sustained inaction suggests an even more insidious source of anxiety. Odysseus's beggar disguise points to the uncomfortable truth touched upon by Alcinous in Phaeacia. Odysseus is no longer a young man and has been "broken down by many evils" (κακοῖσι συνέρρηκται πολέεσσιν, 8.137) beyond the endurance of most. These books address directly the possibility that Odysseus is in fact an ineffectual old man too weak to face the suitors.[3] Odysseus plays his part exceedingly well. The poet tells us that he held out his hand to beg "as if he had been a beggar for a long time" (ὡς εἰ πτωχὸς πάλαι εἴη, 17.366). Odysseus reassures Eumaeus that he will be able to endure the abuse of the suitors, "since I have suffered many evils amidst waves and war" (ἐπεὶ κακὰ πολλὰ πέπονθα | κύμασι καὶ πολέμῳ, 17.284-85). Odysseus might be speaking in his own voice.[4] Though the tales differ in detail, the life story he tells Antinous bears a striking resemblance to his own: once Odysseus too had a home, was blessed with wealth, had countless slaves, and gave hospitality to strangers (17.419-20; 420-23). Odysseus was also ruined by the whim of Zeus and suffered because his crew disobeyed his commands and "yielded to *hybris*" (17.424; 428-34). For the benefit of those who have done the math and conclude that Odysseus cannot be *that* old and broken down, Penelope supposes that Odysseus has aged prematurely "because mortals age quickly amid misfortunes" (αἶψα γὰρ ἐν κακότητι βροτοὶ καταγηράσκουσιν, 19.357-60). The story of Odysseus' hunting dog, Argos, offers a moving yet off-putting example of how greatness fades over time: when

[3] Cf. Murhaghan [1987] 2011: 61.

[4] Odysseus has in fact spoken some of these words in his own voice (cf. 5.224).

Odysseus left for Troy, Argos was in his prime. He was fast and strong; he could track and catch anything he chased (17.313-17). Now, though Argos still resembles his former self (17.307-10), he lacks the strength even to approach his master because of age, neglect, and parasites (17.296-300, 302-3).[5] Might the something similar be said of Odysseus?[6] Philoetius observes elsewhere that "the gods make much-wandering men miserable whenever they spin suffering, even for kings" (θεοὶ δυόωσι πολυπλάγκτους ἀνθρώπους | ὁππότε καὶ βασιλεῦσιν ἐπικλώσωνται ὀιζύν, 20.195-96). Odysseus is both a man who has wandered much and a king. We know that Odysseus will not rise up prematurely to punish the suitors and their parasites through the force of his will. But is it possible that, without the intervention of Athena, he would be too weak to do so even if he wanted to?

These concerns make Odysseus's encounter with the suitors in the palace not only unsatisfying but also discomfiting. They are, however, offset by a handful of reassuring indications. Odysseus's cleverness is still in evidence in his plotting against the suitors and in his encounters with Penelope. If Odysseus is to face a superior force, they must be unarmed. At the beginning of *Odyssey* 19, he sets out on the plan first mentioned in *Odyssey* 16 to disarm them. He tells Telemachus to move the weapons and to offer as pretense their condition and the suitors' safety (19.4-13). In his first meeting with Penelope, Odysseus initially skirts the issue of his identity by telling her that it would be too painful to speak of it (19.115-22). When pressed

[5] See Segal 1962: 52, Steiner 2010: ad 17.291-327e.

[6] Rose 1979: 222-23 notes similarities between the description of Argos and Odysseus and concludes that the description of Argos "is being assimilated to the Odyssean ideal of heroism."

again, he claims that he was a guest-friend of Odysseus (19.185-202). As proof, he describes the brooch Odysseus wore. Although he knows that Penelope will recognize the brooch, he plays the part of an honest dealer: the clothes Odysseus wore years later in Crete might not be the same clothes Penelope saw when he left Ithaca (19.237-40). Falling somewhere between cleverness and endurance is Odysseus's holding back tears "through deception" (δόλῳ) despite the pity he feels for Penelope when she cries at the mention of his name (19.209-212).

Odysseus's request for an old servant woman "who has suffered as many things using her mind as I have" (ἥ τις δὴ τέτληκε τόσα φρεσὶν ὅσσα τ' ἐγώ περ, 19.346-48) almost reveals his identity to Penelope.[7] But it also elicits from his wife the praise that of all the strangers who have come to her house, no man has been as wise (πεπνυμένος) as he (19.350-52). Eurycleia's memories of Odysseus offer another source of reassurance, reminding the audience of the kind of man Odysseus once was and keeping hope alive that he will prove to be that man once again. She first draws attention to Odysseus's unassailable piety and desire to live to raise his son (19.363-68). The story of Odysseus's scar, how he was the first to rush the boar and killed it despite being seriously wounded (19.447-54), offers evidence of Odysseus's bravery, strength, and resilience. Earlier in these books, Telemachus quotes Menelaus's indignant denunciation of the "unwarlike" suitors, who pursue Odysseus's wife like fawns left in a lion's den, and his prediction that Odysseus will destroy them (17.124-31).

Frequent prophecies, omens, and dreams, and Athena's unabating attention reassure the audience of Odysseus's continued worthiness and of his ability to defeat the suitors. From

[7] Cf. Rutherford 1992: ad 361-507.

the words of the seers Theoclymenos and Amphinomous (17.157-59, 160-61; 20.241-49) to felicitous prayers (18.112-13; 20.112-19), omens from the gods (20.98-104; 20.241-49), and Penelope's dream (19.535-53), each book includes reassurances from above that Odysseus will, despite any fears about his current condition or the odds against him, succeed in punishing the suitors.[8] Athena's interventions are particularly reassuring. She chides Odysseus, and perhaps the audience, for doubting her and assures him that, with her help, he could easily fight off fifty men (20.30-53). Her intervention is tangible in Odysseus's encounter with Irus.

Though Odysseus faces abuse from social inferiors throughout these books, it is only with Irus, under highly controlled circumstances, that we have the satisfaction of seeing him fight back. Odysseus does nothing to incite Irus. At first, Odysseus ignores the rival beggar's attempts to drive him out and even shows him kindness: he suggests that there is room enough for both men in the hall and identifies with Irus as a fellow wanderer (δοκέεις δέ μοι εἶναι ἀλήτης ὥς περ ἐγών, 18.18-19). He warns Irus that he will suffer if he angers Odysseus (18.20-24). Irus clearly brings his fate upon himself. Even though Irus is bigger than he is strong (18.3-4),[9] it is not clear how Odysseus will fare against him. Odysseus has demonstrated his physical prowess in the discus throw, but we have not yet seen him in combat. The fight is, as Murnaghan observes, "a test of whether Odysseus' strength is what it was in his youth."[10]

[8] See Podlecki 1967, Saïd [1998] 2011: 333-41.

[9] See Steiner 2010: ad 17.3-4 on "the disjuncture between outward appearance and inner essence, a critical motif in the poem."

[10] [1987] 2011: 61.

Odysseus gives voice to these concerns when he tells the suitors that it is not possible for an old man "worn out by misery" (δύῃ ἀρημένος) to fight against a young man (18.52-53). Odysseus, of course, is not what Irus, the suitors, and even some audience members might believe him to be. Prior to the fight, he displays his fine, muscular thighs, his broad shoulders, his chest and bulky arms, seemingly unaffected by the disguise (18.67-69). When Athena intervenes to fill him out even more, the suitors are appropriately impressed (18.69-71; 73-74). We are likely to be reassured. The now trembling Irus becomes a pitiable figure as Antinous threatens to have him mutilated should he lose (18.76-87). Odysseus, now firmly in control of the situation, chooses not to draw too much attention by hitting Irus softly rather than killing him with one blow (18.90-94). Even so, he breaks Irus's bones and drops him to the ground screaming (18.96-99). This victory is a promising one. It offers the audience the momentarily satisfaction of seeing Odysseus fight back and looks forward to Odysseus's defeat of the suitors without alerting them to his identity prematurely.[11] Our doubts about Odysseus are unlikely to be entirely assuaged, however. Despite his impressive size, Irus is a single, pathetic beggar.

[11] Irus's fate presages the suitors', who ironically laugh at Irus's failed attempt to usurp Odysseus's position and at his comeuppance (18.99-100). See Levine 1982, Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 62, Nagler 1990: 349, Steiner 2010: 16. For Scodel 2004: 49, the Irus episode "offers almost a parody of Odysseus' final battle with the suitors." Telemachus later prays that the suitors be undone as Irus was (18.235-42). See Steiner 2010: 16, 153 for similarities between Odysseus's encounter with Irus and with Euryalus in Odyssey 8.

Melantho warns Odysseus that the suitors are much better men (18.333-36; cf. Eurymachus at 18.393).

TELEMACHUS

Odysseus's most serious threats come not from Irus or the suitors, but from Telemachus and Penelope. Telemachus's burgeoning authority and the suitors' growing respect for him pose a direct threat to Odysseus and Athena's project. As Odysseus embodies the role of an old, wandering beggar and exhibits his storied endurance to impressive if unsatisfying effect, Telemachus continues to test and prove his status as an aristocratic man. His "interventions follow an ascending scale, each more forceful and effective than its predecessor."[12] Telemachus's growing authority is often seen as a part of the *Odyssey*'s coming-of-age subplot, interesting if secondary, a complement, not a threat, to Odysseus's plan.[13] Katz argues that Telemachus is *only* able to assert his authority because Odysseus is present: the "Orestes paradigm," that is, "the son's assertion of his claim to his father's property...has been

[12] Steiner 2010: ad 18.410-11. Telemachus's heroism may also be signaled by his ability to sense the presence of Athena (19.36-40), though this awareness falls short of the face-to-face conversations between Odysseus and Athena (cf. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 50n14). See Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 50-51, Clay [1983] 1997: 198-202, Detienne 75, Redfield : 130-31 on the importance of a hero's ability to recognize gods.

[13] Cf. Jones 1988: 506, Austin 1969, Thalmann 1998: 207.

effectively eliminated."[14] To the degree that Telemachus's assertions of authority seem to run contrary to Odysseus's commands or endanger his plan, one might view them as missteps rather than rather than signs of "intergenerational conflict."[15] One might attribute them to Telemachush's "youthful tendency[ies]," such that he "tries to be helpful in making [the confrontation with the suitors] come soon and fast."[16] Or they may result from his lack of social grace.[17] In fact, Telemachus's self assertion poses a threat to Odysseus's project and storyline just as dire as the death of Odysseus because he is recognized prematurely by the suitors. If Telemachus succeeds in laying a claim to the household, asserting his authority over the suitors,

[14] Katz 1991: 127 (cf. 115, 157). Cf. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 37, Thalmann 1998: 207.

[15] Steiner 2010: 29 argues that "[i]ntergenerational conflict between 'king' and heir is not a theme that the poet wishes to pursue…the prince shows himself willing to postpone his claims and to work wholeheartedly towards his father's restoration." We might be wary when Steiner observes that the poet "imagines the *uniquely* harmonious relations between Odysseus and Telemachus" (my emphasis).

[16] Roisman 1984: 21. Roisman views this as an indication of "[h]is youthful tendency to lack patience, wish to speed up events, and seek immediate solutions" (p. 21n32). Steiner 2010: 29 sees Telemachus's "passage from boyhood to manhood" as "still incomplete."

[17] Steiner 2010: 29 suggests that in these books "[t]here are many moments when he appears as gauche and ineffective as before." Katz 1991: 122 cites Telemachus's treatment of Eumaeus at 17.10-11, 12-15 as possible evidence of "haughtiness."

and dismissing them of their own volition, Odysseus will be unable to prove himself and will find himself as superfluous to the household as Laertes.

Upon returning to the palace, Telemachus acts the man of the house when he tells his mother to wash herself, to sacrifice to Zeus for vengeance, and to care for and honor his new guest, who will arrive shortly (17.48-56).[18] He chooses what to reveal and what to conceal, thereby "demonstrat[ing] his new-found ability to exercise the caution and circumspection that make him resemble his father."[19] Though he does not tell Penelope of Odysseus's arrival, he uses the words of Menelaus (17.124-47) to reassure her that Odysseus will return to punish the suitors and that they will come to regret their actions (17.131; 137). Telemachus's real test comes when he enters the palace hall, when we can "compare the youth as he now appears with the individual featured in the poem's opening two books."[20] Telemachus left the palace a child and object of the suitors' ridicule. In the meantime, fear of Telemachus's potential has elevated disdain to attempted murder. This leads to a familiar if still complicated disposition. We look forward to a showdown between the suitors and the man they failed to kill. We hope to see evidence that the suitors recognize that they are in the presence of a changed man. Yet Telemachus must tread lightly. What will stop the suitors from trying to kill Telemachus again if

[18] See Katz 1991: 122-23 on Telemachus's newfound sense of authority.

[19] Steiner 2010: ad 46-56 (cf. pp. 28-30). Telemachus's ability to manipulate language is signaled by his assurance to Penelope that he will tell her the truth (17.108).

[20] Steiner 2010: 29.

he pushes them too far? Partisans of Odysseus might fear in the back of their minds that Telemachus will be too effective in cowing the suitors and will steal his father's glory.

Concerns for Telemachus's welfare and success are quickly addressed when Athena intervenes to signal his success. As Telemachus approaches the suitors looking the part of a proper adult with spear in hand and attended by hunting dogs, Athena pours grace upon him. Everyone in the hall looks upon him with wonder (17.63-64). Telemachus coolly walks among the men who would kill him and whose fawning does little to conceal their ill intent (17.66). So calm is Telemachus that he suggests Peiraeus put off bringing his gifts to the palace to prevent them from falling into the hands of the suitors if they kill him (17.78-83).[21] From this point forward, we find a number of indications that Telemachus holds authority over the household and is unwilling to stand by while the suitors flout his authority by abusing his guest.

Odysseus tells Telemachus to allow him to suffer at the suitors' hands and to try to stop the suitors though his interventions will have no effect. On occasion, Telemachus obediently endures while the suitors insult and abuse his father. When Antinous strikes Odysseus, for instance, Telemachus holds back his tears and, like his father moments earlier, silently considers how he will exact his revenge (κακὰ βυσσοομεύων, 17.489-91; cf. 17.465).[22] Telemachus restrains himself again when a suitors attempts to goad Telemachus by suggesting

[21] Steiner 2010: ad 79-80 notes that Telemachus's recognition of the suitors' intentions is all the more impressive because "he has been told nothing of the plot devised at 16.383-6."

[22] See Steiner 2010: ad 489-91 on how "Telemachus's conduct…mirrors that of his father." Telemachus behaves similarly at 20.384-86.

that they sell his guests to Sicilians as slaves (20.385-86). More often, Telemachus does not sit by passively; he engages the suitors directly, asserts his authority, and dares them to challenge him. When Antinous insults Eumaeus for bringing Odysseus to the palace, Telemachus accuses him of always starting quarrels and spurring others to do the same (17.394-95). He asks Antinous to feed the beggar but quickly dismisses the possibility because Antinous "would much prefer to eat much himself than give to another" (17.404). When Eurymachus misses Odysseus with a footstool and the suitors wish that the stranger had not lived to cause trouble among them (18.394-404), Telemachus accuses them of madness. He suggests that they finish eating and then leave of their own accord: "*I* won't drive anyone away (διώκω δ' οὔ τιν' ἔγωγε, 18.406-9). His courage excites wonder in the suitors (18.410-11). When Ctesippus misses Odysseus with an ox foot, Telemachus assures him that if he had hit Odysseus, Telemachus would have stabbed and killed him on the spot. He informs the suitors that he is no longer a child and knows everything that is going on in his house. They should avoid unseemly behavior (20.304-10). He has endured (τέτλαμεν) their squandering his property till now but would rather the suitors killed him on the spot than watch them disgrace his guests and servants indefinitely (20.311-19).

We find signs in these books not only that Telemachus is asserting his authority but also that the suitors are coming to obey him. Telemachus assures Odysseus that he will enforce the suitors' oath not to intervene in the fight against Irus and wins the approval of all of those around him (18.61-65, 66). The suitors do not take Telemachus up on his offer after he accuses them of madness and invites them to leave, but Amphinomous acknowledges that Telemachus has spoken fittingly. He tells the other suitors to stop abusing Telemachus's guest and his slaves

(18.414-21). On the day of the contest, Telemachus commands the suitors not to abuse Odysseus on pain of violence and confidently assures Odysseus that he will keep him safe as Odysseus's rightful inheritor and as the private owner of the household (20.266; cf. 20.263-65). This is, arguably, the "strongest assertion thus far of his personal authority in the face of the Suitors."[23] Roisman concludes that Telemachus must be attempting "to enrage the suitors, reminding them that he is in charge and depriving them of honor by allotting a strange, roaming beggar the same treatment as a nobleman."[24] The suitors are not enraged but amazed at Telemachus's courage (20.268-69). Antinous advises them to acquiesce to his "harsh" words and suggests that their failure to destroy him signals divine approval (20.270-74). The servants follow suit by acknowledging Telemachus's authority over them and giving Odysseus a portion equal to the suitors (20.282-83). When Telemachus threatens Ctesippus and denounces the suitors' behavior, the suitors dare not respond (20.320). The suitor Agelaus finally advises the suitors not to abuse the stranger and suggests that Telemachus persuade his mother to choose a suitor now that there is no hope of Odysseus's return (20.322-37). Telemachus handles the proposition deftly. He demonstrates his powers of deception not only by accepting that Odysseus will not return,[25] but also by showing his support for the suitors' cause with the promise of additional gifts for the successful suitor (20.339-44). One gets the feeling that, given more time, Telemachus might be able to control the suitors without the help of his father and

[23] Russo [1985] 1992: ad 262-74.

[24] 1994: 20-21.

[25] Cf. Heath 2001: 150.

without violence. The brief allusion to Amphinomus's death at the hands of Telemachus (18.155-56), strongly suggests that Telemachus will not succeed in dispersing the suitors through the force of his authority and that he will follow his father's plan. At the same time, by attributing the only certain reference to the death of a suitor (thus far) to Telemachus, it implies that it will be Telemachus, not Odysseus, who takes the lead in punishing the suitors.[26]

SYMPATHETIC SUITORS?

Even if Telemachus merely tames the suitors, breaking them of their most problematic habits, Odysseus's project may be in danger. Through its emphasis on the suitors' crimes and the support of Athena, the *Odyssey* portrays its hero's plan to punish the suitors as understandable and largely sympathetic.[27] But, as Eurymachus argues after Odysseus kills Antinous, there are signs that the suitors are not as unified a group of sinners as they appear and that their worst crimes can be attributed to the influence of one or two ringleaders.[28] Athena told Odysseus to beg from the suitors to test whether they are ἐναίσιμοι or ἀθέμιστοι, "righteous or lawless." When he first attempts to do so, the majority of them pity the beggar, give him food, and wish to know more about his situation (13.367-68; cf. 17.411-12). Only Antinous, prompted by Melanthius, ridicules Eumaeus for bringing yet another parasite to the

[26] Telemachus does in fact kill Amphinomus, thereby saving Odysseus before Amphinomus is able to strike him (22.89-94).

[27] Cf. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 46, 55-56; Steiner 2010: 18-19.

[28] Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 48.

palace (17.375-79), rejects Telemachus's request that he feed the stranger (17.406-8). He remains unmoved by the lessons of Odysseus's tale and its message of "the importance of liberality, the dangers of *hybris*, and the unpredictability of fate" (17.419-44; 446-52),[29] and he attacks Odysseus with a footstool (17.462-63). One of the suitors even accuses Antinous of acting ignobly (οὐ κάλα) and worries that Odysseus is a god in disguise sent to test them (17.483-87).[30] If the suitors prove less horrible than we have been led to believe, or if Telemachus is successful in curbing their most disturbing tendencies, Odysseus runs the risk of alienating our sympathies when if he attempts to kill them all without discrimination.

Athena's interventions to spur the suitors on and prevent them from leaving underline the dangers for Odysseus should the suitors come to their senses. When Amphinomus offers Odysseus food and toasts his future prosperity, Odysseus recognizes that he is different from the others and warns him to leave before it is too late (18.119-20; 125-50).[31] Although Amphinomus senses the coming evil and even gets up to leave, "Athena bound even him" (πέδησε δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἀθήνη, 18.153-56). When the suitor Agelaus reasonably suggests that if Odysseus is dead, as he believes him to be, Telemachus should wed Penelope to the best

[29] Emlyn-Jones 1986: 3.

[30] See Kearns 1982: 5, 7; Steiner 2010: 18-19. Steiner argues that the suitors' acknowledgement that Odysseus might be a god "sharpens the irony and makes their folly and ignorance the more culpable: if they know such things can happen, all the more instantly should they mend their ways."

[31] See Steiner 2010: ad 125-51 and 125-8.

man,[32] Telemachus can only say that he would be ashamed to drive his mother from the house against her will (20.343-5; cf. 2.132-37). Athena, however, forestalls rational argument by infecting the suitors with laughter, tears and disturbing visions (20.345-49).[33] Were it not for these interventions by Athena, the suitors might listen to reason or at least consider the full significance of their actions. As it happens, Athena forces them to remain to undergo Odysseus's punishment. In doing so, she risks inviting sympathy for the suitors as "victims of a divine plot that they can hardly be expected to discern" on the grounds that "they seem to represent the perpetual disadvantage of all mortals in a world controlled by gods capable of deceiving them."[34] Audience members who identify with the suitors' inability to recognize the will of the gods and act accordingly are unlikely to revel wholeheartedly in their comeuppance or derive uncomplicated pleasure from Odysseus's heroic display as he slaughters them to a man.

PENELOPE

In the first half of the *Odyssey*, Penelope is a more or less a fixed point in the narrative, a loyal wife who will continue to use her remarkable cleverness to stave off the suitors and remain faithful to Odysseus as long as possible. When the second half of the epic begins,

[32] See Fenik 1974: 86-88, Rutherford 1992: ad 322-44.

[33] See Rutherford 1992: ad 345-86.

[34] Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 65.

Athena assures Odysseus of Penelope's fidelity (13.333) but warns Telemachus that she will not hold out much longer (15.16-18). We find a number of indications in *Odyssey* 17-20 that she continues to be devoted to her husband's memory. Penelope is eager to hear what Telemachus has learned of Odysseus and criticizes him for withholding the information, especially since she has been crying over Odysseus every night since he left from Troy (17.101-6; cf. 19.594-97). She prays that Theoclymenus's prophecy of Odysseus' return is true and promises to reward Theoclymenus if it is (17.163-65). Her affection for Odysseus is matched by her hatred for the suitors, whom she hopes to see punished. She hates Antinous and the other suitors for their mistreatment of the stranger and prays that they suffer a similar fate (17.483-87; 17.494). She complains of how the suitors treat her household (17.534-36; cf. 19.130-33) and suggests that if Odysseus (or a man like he used to be)[35] were in the palace, he would take revenge upon them (17.537-40). She is delighted when Telemachus's sneeze points to the fulfillment of her words (17.541-47).[36] Penelope complains that the suitors pursue her though she is unwilling and that she has done everything in her power to resist them (19. 130-33; cf. 138-56). Elsewhere, she observes that her "fame would be greater and finer" (μεῖζόν κε κλέος εἴη ἐμον καὶ κάλλιον) if Odysseus returned to care for her (18.254-55; 19.124-28). She is eager to hear what the stranger knows of Odysseus. Her tears flow when her guest claims to have met Odysseus on Crete (19.204-9; 251) and again when she retires to bed (19.603-4). In *Odyssey* 20, Penelope's prayer to die so that she can see Odysseus "and not delight the mind of a worse man" (μηδέ τι

[35] Penelope's formulation here seems to leave the door open for an adult Telemachus.

[36] See Steiner 2010: ad 17.541.

χείρονος ἀνδρὸς ἐυφραίνομαι νόημα, 20.61-82) and her joy when she believes a man like Odysseus (εἴκελος αὐτῷ) sleeps beside her (20.88-90) reassure us of her devotion to Odysseus going into the contest of the bow and the *mnesterophonia*. Despite these assurances, Penelope emerges in these books as a multidimensional character with her own, often inscrutable, motivations and desires.[37] Her independence and cleverness render her, like Telemachus, both an obstacle and an asset to Odysseus's quest and allow her to evince signs of her own Proving Sequence. We hope that Penelope resists remarriage and proves an exemplary wife by successfully demonstrating her cleverness, endurance, and loyalty to Odysseus yet fear that she will fail to outsmart the suitors, give way in the face of threats to her son and household, or prove unfaithful before Odysseus reveals himself.[38]

Most troubling in these books are Penelope's decisions to appear before the suitors to inflame their desire and, after an intimate conversation with Odysseus in disguise, to hold the contest of the bow despite assurances that Odysseus will, but has yet to, return home. These actions further Odysseus's plot against the suitors but seem incompatible with a wife who

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[37] Cf. Katz 1991: 119. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 37 observes that "the poem is silent about her thoughts and feelings at crucial junctures in the narrative." See Foley 1995 and 2001: 123-43 on Penelope as a "moral agent."

[38] Cf. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 94-96. Katz 1991: 80 suggests that "Penelope composes for herself in the course of Books 18-21 a revisionary *mythos* like that of Odysseus and Telemachus, which is defined, like theirs, against the existing paradigms in the tradition—in Penelope's case, the paradigms for women's behavior are at issue."

possesses the endurance and cunning required to remain faithful to her husband for twenty years. Critical response to these scenes can be divided into four groups[39]: 1) Analysts complained that this Penelope is too fickle and unfaithful to reconcile with earlier characterizations of Penelope and must be the work of another poet[40]; 2) Unitarians and other critics who reject the Analysts' position often acknowledge that the poet has sacrificed consistency of character in these scenes but argue that this is for the sake of the plot or for dramatic effects such as suspense-inducing "indeterminacy"[41]; 3) Viewing Penelope's erratic behavior through the lens of her renowned cunning and evident concern for the stranger, Harsh, Amory, and others conclude that Penelope must be aware of the stranger's identity and in on the plot[42]; 4) a final group of critics view Penelope's actions as largely comprehensible and

[39] See Steiner 2010: 27-28 for a brief but useful overview of the portrayal of Penelope in these books.

[40] See, for instance, Kirk 1962: 246-47, Merkelbach 1969: 5, 9-13; Page 1955: 124-26. Cf. Woodhouse 1930: 80-91

[41] See Woodhouse 1930: 87-89, Allen 1939: 119, Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 132, Felson-Rubin 1988: 64 for the view that the poet sacrifices consistency of character for the sake of plot. See Katz 1991: 92-93 and Felson-Rubin 1994 for the view that the poet strives to maintain "indeterminacy" regarding Penelope's motives.

[42] See Harsh 1950 for the view that Penelope actually recognizes Odysseus prior to *Odyssey* 23. For the more nuanced view that she unconsciously recognizes Odysseus and acts accordingly,

justifiable on the basis of evidence in the text.[43] These divergent positions are based on valid observations of the text. The concept of Proving Narratives allows us to see that these scenes are directed at audience members who are eager to see Odysseus and Penelope reunited *and* to see Odysseus and Penelope prove themselves. We eagerly anticipate Odysseus's success *because* of our fears that he might fail. With this in mind, we will see that the divergent responses to the portrayal of Penelope can, at least to an extent, be reconciled with one another. Penelope's decision to appear before the suitors and to hold the contest before Odysseus's return, along with her fondness for and virtual recognition of the stranger, are intended to raise fears regarding Penelope's faithfulness while heightening both our anticipation of seeing Odysseus and Penelope reunited and our sense of irony so long as they remain separate. The scenes that occur prior to the recognition provide Odysseus and Penelope an opportunity to demonstrate their cleverness and loyalty and further the plot. Plausible motivations allow the poet to achieve these effects without rendering the events or the characterizations distracting or ridiculous in light of subsequent developments.

Penelope's actions in these scenes are, as ancient audiences and the Analysts observed, out of keeping with the portrayal of her as a preternaturally loyal wife.[44] They build on earlier

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see Whitman 1958: 303-4; Amory 1963; Austin 1975: 216-18, 231-38; Russo 1982; Winkler 1990: 143.

[43] See, for instance, Winkler 1990: 147, Foley 2001, Heitman 2005: 10.

[44] See Katz 1991: 77 for early intimations of a less than chaste Penelope in Pindar (fr. 100 Snell), the scholia of the *Odyssey* (ad 13.556-57), and Servius (*Aen*. 2.44).

intimations of disloyalty including implicit comparisons to Clytemnestra, Helen, and other adulterous women, and they raise legitimate fears about her loyalties. Penelope's decision to appear before the suitors is likely to come as a surprise. It generates suspense by raising the slim possibility of her burgeoning affection for the suitors and the more likely possibility that the gods might drive her to betray her husband as they appear to done in the case of Clytemnestra and Helen. The dismay Penelope professes at the death of the pet geese who represent the suitors in her dream plays on similar fears that she may harbor feelings for the suitors. One can think of forces both external and internal that make Penelope's decision to hold the contest of the bow both understandable and sympathetic, but the fact remains that she says little to explain or justify holding the contest immediately rather than confirming the news of Odysseus's return or at least delaying the contest until she can learn more.[45]

Much evidence can be martialled in favor of Penelope's early recognition of Odysseus. She is greatly concerned for the stranger's welfare and holds an "intimate"[46] conversation with him (19.96-348, 505-604) that is filled with signs of "like-mindedness." We find possible indications of Penelope's growing attraction to the stranger (cf. 17.537-40, 20.88-90).[47] Penelope's dream of Odysseus's return could not be any clearer and has been taken as a signal

[45] See Katz 1991: 100-3 for previous critics' complaints regarding the illogicality of Penelope's decision to hold the contest.

[46] Russo 1982: 7.

[47] Russo 1982: 14.

to Odysseus (19.535-50; 20.88-90).[48] Both Penelope and Eurycleia comment upon the stranger's resemblance to Odysseus (19.357-60, 380-81). Odysseus even believes for a moment that Penelope recognizes him (20.92-94).[49] These indications do not prove, however, that Penelope's decisions are prefaced on the conscious or unconscious knowledge that the stranger is Odysseus. They suggest instead that Penelope might recognize Odysseus at any moment and that a reunion is imminent, thereby "increase[ing] dramatic tension by foreshadowing climactic events."[50] They make it clear that Odysseus and Penelope are well suited to one another and so explain why Odysseus would risk his life to reunite with his wife and enlist our support for his goal. They heighten the irony that Odysseus and Penelope continue to remain apart and that Penelope might marry another despite their close proximity and "like-mindedness."[51] In a word, these indications build anticipation and suspense surrounding Odysseus's and Penelope's reunion.

The scenes in the palace prior to the reunion of husband and wife do not simply delay the reunion. They provide an opportunity for Penelope and Odysseus to win our admiration and sympathy through demonstrations of their Desirable Qualities. In her appearance before the suitors, Penelope "prov[es] herself a loyal, desirable, worthy and fitting wife by virtue of her

[48] See Amory 1963: 105-6, Austin 1979: 228-29, Winkler 1990: 153.

[49] Russo 1982: 15 suggests that these lines describe Odysseus's wishing that Penelope recognized him.

[50] Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009: 214.

[51] Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009: 215.

beauty, her declarations of fidelity and her cleverness in extracting gifts from the suitors."[52] In conversation with Odysseus, she recounts to Odysseus previous stratagems against the suitors, shows evidence of admirable caution, and shows not only loyalty to the husband who left her twenty years ago, but also appreciation and affection for Odysseus as he is now. These scenes provide Odysseus the opportunity to impress us through his clever navigation of the encounter with Penelope and through his restraint and endurance in keeping his identity a secret from her despite his sympathy for her situation. He will earn our admiration and Penelope's through right thinking with regard to servants and suitors, through ample demonstrations of strength and cunning, and through signs of unflagging devotion leading up to Penelope's recognition of him in *Odyssey* 23.

Reasonable explanations for Penelope's and Odysseus's actions allow the poet to raise suspense-inducing fears about Penelope's faithfulness without frustrating audience members or leaving them feeling manipulated by unbelievable plot twists and unmotivated actions. Odysseus conceals his identity not because he strongly suspects that Penelope is unfaithful but because he is a cautious man, a quality for which Athena has already praised him.[53] Although

[52] Steiner 2010: 180.

[53] Büchner 1940: 155 suggests that he is more wary of treacherous servants revealing his identity to the suitors than of Penelope herself.

Athena's plans may be thought to reflect Penelope's unconscious desires,[54] we might also interpret the text literally: Penelope appears before the suitors because Athena instills in her the desire to do so.[55] Penelope chooses this particular moment to announce the contest either because Odysseus commanded her to marry when Telemachus came of age, as is now clearly the case, or because she knows that the suitors will not succeed and hopes to delay them further.[56] Although we might expect Penelope to delay the contest on the basis of assurances that Odysseus will soon return, it is at least believable that, given years of disappointment and indications of her own cautiousness, she would be wary of strangers' assurances, omens, and dreams.[57] Because Odysseus has not revealed himself, Penelope must face the tragic reality of

[54] See Amory 1963: 113, Allione 1963: 71-72, van Nortwick 1979: 272, Levine 1983: 175-76, Edwards 1987: 129 for the view that Homeric gods did not inspire ideas, emotions, or actions that were entirely foreign to the human recipient.

[55] So Thornton 1979: 97, Erbse 1972: 81.

[56] See Heitman 2005: 10 for the view that Penelope's explanation should be taken at face value. Marquardt 1983: 41 argues that Penelope proposes the contest to delay the suitors: "[t]he plot against Telemachus has shown her the urgency of the situation, and the assurances of Odysseus' imminent arrival from Theoclymneus and the beggar have given her the courage to make a move."

[57] Cf. Van der Valk 1966: 37-40, Besslich 1966: 21, Thornton 1970: 105, Heitman 2005: 10.

choosing a husband from amongst the suitors in order to save her household and her son.[58] This "common-sense reading and accumulation of observations taken from the surface of the text" regarding Penelope and her motivations do not argue for a work "having no sub-text" or disinterested in "multiple levels of representation."[59] This reading establishes a plausible alternative to indications that Penelope is no longer loyal to Odysseus without dismissing our fears entirely. It ensures that Odysseus's continued faith in Penelope and the subsequent reunion of husband and wife are believable but not inevitable.

BEFORE THE SUITORS

Painted against the backdrop of wifely devotion, Penelope's decision to appear before the suitors in *Odyssey* 18 offers the first indication of her complicated agency. Penelope initially appears both as a victim of the gods and as a pawn in a game of gods and men. She seems little more than a plot device and an object of beauty to be won by the highest bidder. This portrayal heightens fears that she will be driven by the gods, by her circumstances, or by a woman's fickleness into the arms of a suitor such Eurymachus. Yet when Penelope speaks before the suitors and cajoles them into regaling her with gifts, it becomes clear that Penelope is not a

[58] See Foley 1991: 126-43, Murnaghan [1986] 2009, and Steiner 2010: 28 for accounts of the social pressures and other concerns that have driven Penelope to this position. See also Fenik 1974: 46. Winkler 1990: 147 emphasizes Penelope's desire to protect Telemachus.

[59] Russo [1985] 1992: 8-9.

passive victim. She possesses cunning enough to manipulate the suitors and win prizes comparable to those of her son and husband.

After Odysseus establishes his place in the palace by defeating the previous resident beggar Irus, Athena plants in Penelope's mind the idea to appear to the suitors "to open up their hearts" (πέτασειε θυμόν)[60] and to become more esteemed than before in the view of her husband and son" (τιμήεσσα γένοιτο | μᾶλλον πρὸς πόσιός τε καὶ υἱέος ἢ πάρος ἦεν, 18.158-63). Penelope appears to be uncomfortable. She laughs "without purpose" or "helplessly" (ἀχρεῖον δ' ἐγέλασσεν, 18.163)[61] and observes the irony of wishing to appear before the suitors for the first time despite their being hateful to her (θυμός μοι ἐέλδεται, οὔ τι πάρος γε, | μνηστήρεσσι φανῆναι, ἀπεχθομένοισί περ ἔμπης, 18.164-65).[62] Penelope's discomfort raises concerns about the propriety of her decision and about her loyalty to Odysseus. Previous references to women manipulated by the gods into betraying their husbands raise concerns on a different front. Is Penelope interested in the suitors' affections, or will external forces drive her to impropriety? Eurynome infers only that the Penelope has finally decided to marry a suitor and advises her to wipe away her tears "since it is rather bad to grieve endlessly" (ἐπεὶ

[60] See Steiner 2010: ad 160. Büchner 1940: 82 suggests the possibility that this phrase already reflects Penelope's desire to deceive the suitors rather than simply instill them with desire.

[61] See Steiner 2010: ad 163. Cf. Byre 1988: 159-60, 163. See Büchner 1940: 143, Allione 1963: 71-74 and Levine 1983: 174 for the possibility that Penelope laughs "sardonically" at the prospect of deceiving the suitors.

[62] See Russo [1985] 1992: 59, Steiner 2010: ad 164-8.

κάκιον πενθήμεναι ἄκριτον αἰεί, 18.173-74). Penelope resists Eurynome's advice but does little to contradict her. Penelope appears to register her dissatisfaction with the situation by refusing to bathe and anoint herself in preparation for the appearance and when she protests that she has lost her beauty (18.178-79; 180-81). She is ashamed to appear before the suitors unaccompanied and asks that her handmaidens join her (18.182-84). Yet these signs of resistance draw attention to her decision to appear to the suitors despite her reservations. They seem to emphasize her powerlessness.

Athena's plan and Penelope's response to it sets up a scene of complicated expectations and emotions. Athena's plan raises the expectation that Penelope's beauty—at this point the issue appears to be restricted to her beauty—will inflame the suitors with desire and impress Odysseus and her son. We might find ourselves hoping that Penelope's beauty will rival that of Calypso and Nausicaa and that she will prove a worthy object of desire for Odysseus, even as we acknowledge that her beauty will only drive the suitors to fight that much harder for her affections.[63] Some audience members might consider the possibility that she has lost her beauty just as Odysseus may have lost his strength, a disappointing possibility that would nevertheless simplify Odysseus's mission immensely. Penelope herself raises this concern when she observes that the passage of time has destroyed her beauty (18.180-81) and puts herself at a disadvantage by doing nothing to improve her appearance (18.178-79). We are not in a position to judge Penelope's appearance, but further doubts may arise from Odysseus's earlier,

[63] Cf. our conflicting emotions surrounding Telemachus's demonstrations of desirable qualities in these books.

unflattering admission that Penelope's beauty is inferior to the immortal and ageless beauty of Calypso (5.215-18). By now, this pattern of expectations and suspense-inducing doubts should be familiar. We are likely to respond with a mixed sense of relief, satisfaction, and concern when Athena intervenes to ensure that Penelope inspires the suitors with wonder. She gives Penelope "immortal gifts" (18.190-91), makes her taller, more substantial, and whiter than ivory (18.195-96). When they get a glimpse of her, the suitors' knees give out, their hearts are bewitched, and they pray to sleep with her (18.212-14). As if to undercut our satisfaction at Penelope's success and confirm their worst fears, Eurylochus suggests that even more Greeks would join the suitors if they could see her, a worrisome prospect that would do little to help Odysseus (18.245-49).

It is only after the suitors behold Penelope that we realize that the virtues she will display here extend beyond beauty. After inflaming the suitors with desire and upbraiding Telemachus for allowing her guest to be abused, Penelope informs the suitors that she is ready to remarry: Odysseus told her to find a new husband if he did not return by the time Telemachus grew a beard, and that time has come (18.259-71; 18.217-18). But, she tells them, the Suitors have thus far proved unworthy of her: suitors generally compete with one another and supply their own feasts rather than exhausting the resources of the woman they are wooing (18.275-80). The Suitors recognize the virtue of her words and gladly turn over their most precious possessions (18.284-301). Odysseus is delighted "because she coaxed gifts from and charmed them with persuasive words, though her mind desired other things" (γήθησεν δὲ

πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς, | οὕνεκα τῶν μὲν δῶρα παρέλκετο, θέλγε δὲ θυμὸν | μειλιχίοις ἐπέεσσι, νοός δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοίνα, 18.281-83).[64]

Penelope's beauty impresses the suitors, but it is her cunning that wins the day. She has already demonstrated her capacity for deception through the weaving and nightly unweaving of the shroud. Here, Penelope not only "attempts to renew Odysseus' wealth by extracting bridal gifts from the suitors"[65] and driving the suitors to replenish the resources they themselves have used up, but also further delays marriage by encouraging competition between them.[66] Like Odysseus among the Phaeacians and Telemachus in the company of Nestor, Menelaus, and Helen, Penelope works within and manipulates social expectations to excite admiration in both internal and external audience. Her beauty is one thing. With the suitors are under her sway, it is her unfavorable comparison of them to other suitors and the timely deployment of Odysseus' command to remarry that achieves the effect she desires. This command lends plausibility to a change of heart that might otherwise make the suitors suspicious. That the audience has heard nothing of it until now may also lend the assertion an

[64] Katz 1991: 89 (cf. 118-19) argues that Odysseus's interpretation may not reflect the underlying reality but helps bring Penelope's actions in line "with the overall narrative action."

[65] Foley [1978] 2009: 193.

[66] See Woodhouse 1930: 82-83, Harsh 1950: 13 Amory 1960: 116, Allione 1963: 77, Marquart 1985: 36-37, Peradotto 1990: 85.

air of fabrication that would only heighten the impression of Penelope's cleverness.[67] The suitors do not have a chance. At this point, Odysseus's delight appears to be justified. Like Odysseus and Telemachus before her, Penelope wins gifts in recognition of her virtues.[68]

PARTIAL REUNION

It has taken sixteen books for Odysseus to reach home. The meeting with Penelope has already been delayed once in *Odyssey* 17, when Odysseus wisely suggested that it would be safer to meet after the suitors have left for the night (17.564-73). Despite her appearance before the suitors, there seems little question of where Penelope's allegiances lie. Penelope has professed her hatred of the suitors and loyalty to Odysseus. She has shown admiration for the stranger's cleverness in delaying the meeting (17.586-88) and concern for him in rebuking Telemachus for allowing him to be abused (18.220-25). Circumstances seem fit for Odysseus to reveal himself in *Odyssey* 19, and we are primed for a joyful reunion between Odysseus and his wife. A recognition at the end of the encounter would be in keeping with the pattern of other

[67] See Wilamowitz 1927: 24, Büchner 1942: 137-46, Winkler 1990: 147, for the view that Penelope invented the command *contra* Allione 1963: 66, Hölscher 1967: 28. See also Steiner 2010: ad 259-70.

[68] Foley [1978] 2009: 193 observes that "[t]he Homeric king makes such gift-getting a primary object." See also Winkler 1990: 147, who suggests that Odysseus might be impressed because he too extracted gifts from the Phaeacians and sees this commonality as "an important case of that mental similarity or *homophrosunê* which characterizes their marriage."

recognition scenes in the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus answers questions about his identity with a false story, tests the interlocutor, reveals his identity, and then convinces his disbelieving audience with a sign. It also seems "the dramatically the obvious thing to do."[69] Together, we imagine, they will use their already demonstrated cleverness to punish suitors. So much the more so if we are already familiar with a version of the story in which the reunion occurs upon their first meeting.

When Penelope first appears before Odysseus "like Artemis or golden Aphrodite" (19.54), we appear to be on course for the reunion we desire. Melantho's coarse accusations against Odysseus (19.66-67) put a momentary damper on things but provide Penelope an opportunity to demonstrate the sensibility she shares with Odysseus when she echoes his reproaches of the wayward servant (19.91-95). In the encounter that follows, Penelope provides opportunities for Odysseus to reveal his identity (cf. 19.105, 162-63) interspersed with frequent assertions of her longing for him and of her refusal to remarry (cf. 19.91-95, 19.127-28, 136; 19.133, 19.257-58). Nevertheless, when Penelope describes the stratagem through which she previously delayed the suitors (19.137-56) and reveals that she has run out of options and is in desperate straits (19.157-58, 158-61), Odysseus fails to reveal himself. When Penelope breaks down in response to Odysseus's fabricated tale of meeting and exchanging gifts with her husband at Troy, Odysseus "pitied his lamenting wife in his heart" (θυμῷ μὲν γοόσαν ἐὴν ἐλέαιρε γυναῖκα, 19.210), but he "hid his tears through deception" (δόλῳ δ' ὅ γε

[69] See Emlyn-Jones [1984] 2009: 217, 218 on patterns of recognition here and elsewhere. See also Richardson 2006: 344.

δάκρυα κεῦθεν, 19.212). He does not betray himself as he did among the Phaeacians. When Penelope mourns for Odysseus a second time (19.253-60), Odysseus assures her that he "will speak to you truthfully and will not conceal…" (νημερτέως γὰρ τοι μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ἐπικεύσω…, 19.268-69).[70] We are on the edge of our seats. Odysseus continues: ὡς ἤδη Ὀδυσῆος ἐγώ… (19.270), a phrase that, in performance, and with audience members willing it to be so, might easily be mistaken for ὡς ἤδη Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐγώ… "that now I, Odysseus, …."[71] This impression is dispelled immediately when Odysseus goes on to explain "how I have now heard about Odysseus's return." Odysseus never reveals himself to Penelope in this scene. He does, however, win both her trust and respect over the course of the conversation. His "proof" that he met Odysseus wins him an esteemed position in Penelope's household (19.253-54). Penelope does not appear to believe (cf. 19.313, 257-58) her husband's more or less faithful description of his actual journey, including how he lost his crew because they ate Helios' cattle and how he was honored among the Phaeacians.[72] Nor does she appears to accept his

[70] Odysseus uses the same line to reveal to Penelope Teiresias' prophecy regarding the inland journey (23.265). Elsewhere, Odysseus's claim to tell the truth introduces a lying tale (14.192; cf. Todorov 1977: 61).

[71] Cf. 9.366 when the similarity between the sound of *oûtis* and Odyss- may have made it seem momentarily as if Odysseus were going to reveal his true name to Polyphemus.

[72] Odysseus passes over his stay with Calypso and adds a stay among the Thesprotians, who, he says, will soon convey Odysseus to Ithaca (19.271-302).

assurance that her husband will return with the year (19.303-7).[73] She does, however, show her appreciation by instructing her handmaids to prepare a bed, bathe, clothe, and feed Odysseus so that he might learn "if I surpass other women in any way with respect to my mind and my thoughtful *metis*" (εἴ τι γυναικῶν | ἀλλάων περίειμι νόον καὶ ἐπίφρονα μῆτιν, 19.325-26).

EURYCLEIA

In *Odyssey* 16, Odysseus's seemingly inevitable reunion with Telemachus is delayed by the faint echo of a reunion with the father figure Eumaeus. In *Odyssey* 19, a climactic reunion between husband and wife is replaced by a reunion with another representative of home, the servant Eurycleia, who cared for Odysseus as a child, prompted his grandfather to name him, favored him, and still pines for him.[74] As we have seen, and unlike the earlier scene, the actual reunion does not take place here, though irony and manipulated expectations abound.[75] Odysseus accepts Penelope's offer of a foot wash but stipulates that the washer must be "an old woman…whose mind has endured as much as mine" (τις γρηῦς…ἥ τις δὴ τέτληκε τόσα

[73] It is unclear just how quickly Penelope can expect her husband. The date, "this very λυκάβας" (19.306) has been translated as "year," "month," and "day." See Stanford 1961-1965: ad loc., Focke 1943: 320, Merkelbach 1951: 3, Page 1955: 134-35n28, N. Austin 1975: 244-45, Russo [1985] 1992: ad loc., Rutherford 1992: ad loc.

[74] See Katz 1991: 133, 174.

[75] See N. Austin 1975: 219 on the poet's playing with expectations in *Odyssey* 19 and on the risks that attend such an approach.

φρεσὶν ὅσσα τ’ ἐγώ περ, 19.346-47). Penelope praises him as the wisest of the strangers who have come to her home (19.350-52). Odysseus and Penelope once more appear to be in agreement. When Penelope observes the stranger’s resemblance to Odysseus (19.358-60), and when, upon seeing the stranger, Eurycleia bursts into tears and addresses him as Odysseus (19.363-69),[76] it seems clear that this is finally the moment we have been awaiting.[77] It takes us a moment to grasp that this is not in fact a recognition: the stranger’s resemblance to Odysseus (cf. 19.379-81) and current condition have prompted Eurycleia to imagine a similar plight for Odysseus and to apostrophize him as if he were present (19.370-75).[78] As soon as Eurycleia begins to wash his feet and recognizes his scar (19.392-94), however, the game is up.

The intervening description of the hunt in which Odysseus received the scar delays the action at a crucial moment,[79] but also offers reassurance with regard to Odysseus’s encounter with the suitors.[80] Odysseus’s descent from Autolycus hints at the cunning he will require to vanquish the suitors. Autolycus was also a man who was outstanding in thievery and in oaths (κλεπτοσύνῃ θ’ ὅρκῳ, 19.395-96) and, like Odysseus, esteemed by the gods (19.396-98). And the name Odysseus, given him by Autolycus because Autolycus was hated by and hated those

[76] Cf. Harsh 1950: 14.

[77] Harsh 1950: 14 notes that [t]he noting of similarity of age and in hands and feet…are standard items for establishing identity.”

[78] Cf. N. Austin 1975: 222, Rutherford 1992: ad 363.

[79] Köhnen [1976] 2009: 53.

[80] See Rutherford 1992: ad 19.390-1 for previous explanations of the imbedded tale.

around him (ὀδυσσάμενος, 19.401-12), seems particularly suited to Odysseus in situation among the suitors.[81] Likewise, Odysseus's deportment in the boar hunt: Odysseus is the first to attack and, despite being grievously wounded, manages to take the boar down and lives to tell about it (19.449-54; 464-66). The inset tale reminds us that Odysseus has, or at least had, the courage, strength, endurance,[82] and, as the descendant of Autolycus, the cleverness, to face the suitors. Though he might suffer at their hands, he will, if history is any indication, survive to inflict worse suffering upon them. Everything appears to be in place. We have seen that Penelope and Odysseus are well matched. We have seen that Penelope is as capable as Odysseus of manipulating the suitors. Only the two of them and their most faithful servant are present. A reunion between Odysseus and Penelope must be imminent.[83] When Eurycleia feels the scar, she feels a mixture of pain and joy. She cries, addresses Odysseus by name, and turns to show Penelope (19.467-77). Only the intervention of Athena, who "turned away" Penelope's mind (νόον ἔτραπεν, 19.478-79), and of Odysseus, who grabs Eurycleia's throat and threatens her to ensure her silence (19.479-90)[84] prevents the reunion from taking place. We must wait a little longer before Odysseus reveals himself to his wife.

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[81] Köhnken [1976] 2009: 57-58. See Austin [1972] 2009, Dimock 1956: 53, Clay [1983] 1997: 54-66, Goldhill 1991: 24-26, Rutherford 1992: ad 19.406-9 on the naming of Odysseus.

[82] Köhnken [1976] 2009: 54 describes it as Odysseus's "first *aristeia*."

[83] Cf. Page 1955: 126, Fenik 1974: 42.

[84] Critics have worried about the violence Odysseus shows his loyal nurse. Saïd [1998] 2011: 146 suggests that Odysseus putting his hand on Anticlus's mouth to prevent him from responding to

GEESE

Penelope does not recognize Odysseus, but their relationship appears to progress as she nevertheless precedes to share with him her deepest fears and thoughts (19.509-81),[85] including the dream in which her twenty pet geese are slaughtered by an eagle that reveals itself to be Odysseus and confirms that he has come home to kill the suitors whom the geese represent (19.536-50).[86] The dream offers reassurance insofar as it spells out a positive outcome for Odysseus's struggle against the suitors, but it also suggests a disturbing reason for Odysseus's and Athena's hesitation to bring Penelope in on the plot. Penelope wishes that this dream were true (19.569) but also describes how she cried and lamented the death of the geese (19.541-43). This detail that may reflect a more conflicted position regarding the suitors than we have seen so far and raises the possibility that she will likewise regret their murder and lament them.[87] Penelope's announcement of a contest to choose a new husband raises similar questions.

Helen at *Odyssey* 4.268-8 "prefigures" this gesture. Eurycleia later characterizes Odysseus' grabbing her throat as an indication of his cleverness (23.76-77).

[85] N. Austin 1975: 228, 231; Russo 1982: 7-8

[86] See Rutherford 1992: ad 353-58.

[87] Cf. Rankin 1962; Marquardt 1985: 44, Peradotto 1990: 84. Russo 1982: 9 follows Devereux 1957: 382 in suggesting that the appeal the suitors hold for Penelope's has more to do with her reputation than attraction to the suitors: "[o]n a level that she cannot acknowledge, she enjoys

Despite Odysseus's assurance that her husband will soon return, and despite confirmation through the clearest possible vision of Odysseus's return and vanquishing of the suitors,[88] Penelope announces a competition the next day to choose her new husband. Only after the fact does Odysseus reassure her that her husband will return before the contest begins (19.583-87). After all these years, Penelope might realistically doubt the stranger and dismiss her dream as wishful thinking. She may be giving way under the pressure of the threat the suitors pose to her property and to her son. Perhaps she intuits that Odysseus is near and hopes to give him the opportunity he needs to strike. Perhaps this is her final ruse to delay marriage.[89] Yet, taken in conjunction with her dream, Penelope's decision to hold the contest so soon might lead the same audience members who a moment ago were expecting a joyful reunion between husband and wife to entertain the possibility that Penelope would willingly enter into a marriage with one of the suitors and, worse, that she no longer looks upon the prospect with the distaste she once felt. In other words, we are back on the hook, anticipating the reunion while harboring doubts about its feasibility.

(ἰλαίνομαι, 19.537) being courted, and thereby renowned throughout Greece for her loyalty and cleverness (for her *kleos* cf. 1.125f., 19.108)." Pratt 1994 notes that the twenty geese may represent at least in part the twenty years that Penelope has waited for Odysseus and thus have a more positive connotation. See also Levaniouk 2010: ch. 13.

[88] Penelope's extended discussion of the deceptiveness of dreams helps to justify her persistent doubts despite the clarity of her vision (19.559-67; cf. 568-69).

[89] Marquart 1985: 41.

CHAPTER 8: *ODYSSEY* 21-24—*MNESTEROPHONIA*, REUNION, AND LAERTES

The final grouping of books that comprise the *Odyssey* opens with the striking juxtaposition of Penelope's and Telemachus's nostalgia for Odysseus with their growing independence. Their newfound confidence culminates in a final threat to Odysseus's project when Telemachus attempts to string his father's bow. Questions of superiority give way to concerns for survival in *Odyssey* 22 when Odysseus reveals himself to the suitors, mounts his attack against them, and eventually achieves a feat of martial glory arguably greater than anything performed at Troy. Two men face over a hundred and live to tell of it. Athena's decision to test Odysseus rather than intervene directly highlights the magnitude of this achievement. Once the tide of battle has swayed firmly in Odysseus's direction and doubts regarding his success subside, new fears arise to keep suspense alive. The killing of the suitor

Leodes, who claims that he did not abuse Odysseus's servants and even tried to stop the other suitors, and the image of Odysseus as a ravening lion covered in his victims' blood introduce the possibility that Odysseus's revenge far exceeds the suitors' crimes. These fears are, however, quickly answered when Odysseus spares Phemius and Medon, when he censures Eurycleia's impious victory cry, and when he asserts that the punishment was meted out by the gods, an assertion later taken up by Penelope. The ferocity of Telemachus's treatment of the guilty serving women and Melanthius prevent these concerns from dying away entirely.

After Odysseus's foes have been vanquished, he must still prove worthy of Penelope. He requires one last intervention on the part of Athena to reach this final objective. Penelope's Odyssean endurance and prudence initially call the possibility of a reunion into question, but they elicit Telemachus's praise for Odysseus and allow Odysseus to demonstrate his cleverness in deceiving passersby as to the fate of the suitors. With the trick of the bed, Penelope draws Odysseus out and deceives one final suitor. In doing so, she demonstrates her own cleverness and proves a worthy spouse of Odysseus. The conclusion of the *Odyssey* directly addresses two fundamental issues raised in the text: the justice of Odysseus's revenge and the competition between Odysseus and Telemachus. The Second *Nekuia* presents another argument in favor Odysseus's actions from a source whom one might expect to sympathize with the victims of an ambush and highlights Odysseus's, and Penelope's, vaunted place among the heroes of Troy. The finale redeems Laertes, the only remaining family member yet to emerge from his "beggar disguise," and narrowly averts a final showdown between father and son that would prove once and for all whether Telemachus deserves to succeed his father and when. Critics both

ancient and modern have dismissed much of *Odyssey* 24 as late interpellation,[1] but the Second *nekuia*, redemption of Laertes, and fight against the suitors' family treats in provocative ways essential questions at the heart of the epic about the relative status of Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus. While studiously avoiding an answer, *Odyssey* 24 addresses head-on the question of who is the real hero of the *Odyssey*.

PENELOPE AND TELEMACHUS

Odysseus's absence is felt strongly as *Odyssey* 21 begins. We repeatedly hear characters longing for Odysseus to return or reflecting on how much worse Ithaca is without him. The mere sight and touch of her husband's bow drives Penelope to an extended bout of crying (21.56, 57). Though Penelope will marry the man who is able to string the bow and hit the target and will leave behind her home, she knows that she "will remember it forever, even if only in dreams" (τοῦ ποτὲ μεμνήσεσθαι ὀίμαι ἐν περ ὀνείρῳ, 21.79). After she is dismissed by Telemachus, Penelope again weeps for Odysseus until Athena induces sleep (21.356-58). Odysseus's slaves, Eumaeus and Philoetius, join Penelope in crying at the sight of his bow; the suitors scold them for encouraging her (21.82-92). Eumaeus and Philoetius are thrilled at the thought that Odysseus has returned and so overjoyed when Odysseus shows them his scar that

[1] For discussions of the provenance of the *Odyssey*'s conclusion, see Stanford 1965: ad 296ff., Moulton 1974, Wender 1978, Galiano-Fernández 1992: ad 23.297, Scodel 1998, Saïd [1998] 2011: 217, Marks 2008: ch. 3.

he must stop them before they accidently reveal him to the suitors (21.200-29). Even Antinous and Eurymachus admit that they are vastly inferior to Odysseus and that no one among them can measure up to Odysseus as he once was (οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκεν, 21.93-95; cf. 253-55).[2]

Paradoxically, although Odysseus's family longs for his return, they continue to demonstrate levels of independence that argue in favor of their ability to thrive without him.[3] Prior to the contest, Penelope accuses the suitors of taking advantage of the household under the thin pretense of seeking her hand in marriage (21.68-72). She makes no secret of her belief that none of them will measure up to Odysseus and that, no matter whom she marries, she will never forget the home had with Odysseus (21.77-79). To Eurymachus's protests regarding the suitors' reputation were they to compete with and be bested by a beggar (21.324-29),[4] Penelope bluntly responds that it is not possible to bring further disgrace down upon men who are already dishonoring the household of another (21.331-33). Even as Penelope speaks of leaving the house of Odysseus, she appears, at least initially, to be its mistress and the mistress of all it contains. It is Penelope who literally holds the keys to Odysseus's property (21.6) and who removes the bow and axes from his treasure room (21.57-62). When the suitors attempt

[2] Olson 1994: 369 notes that Antinous "secrectly expects to accomplish the task himself and thus win Penelope" (21.96-97).

[3] Katz 1991: 140-41 attributes Penelope's newfound independence and freedom within the household to Telemachus's coming of age and her "abandon[ing] hope of Odysseus's return.

[4] See Thalmann 1998: 228-29 on the implications of upper class men entertaining competition with men of lower status.

to prevent Odysseus from trying the bow, Penelope insists that he be given the bow and fully expects her words to be accomplished (21.336-37). She asserts even greater control of the household property when she promises Odysseus gifts should he succeed in stringing the bow and hitting the target (21.338-42). In other words, "she is sounding like a host… or at any rate someone who can dispose of the house's goods."[5]

Signs of Telemachus's independence are even more striking—it is only Telemachus's intervention that prevents Penelope from continuing to oversee the contest and witnessing Odysseus in action. In these and previous books, Telemachus is, as Olson observes, "outspokenly eager to inform his enemies that he is no longer a thoughtless child of whom they can take advantage…and [is] consistently provocative to them."[6] Telemachus handling of the bow goes one step further in establishing his authority over the suitors and within the household. Under the standard interpretation, according to which Telemachus is simply carrying out his father's orders, Telemachus's attempt to string the bow suffers from a "lack of clear motivation."[7] Viewed in terms of the ongoing struggle for supremacy between Odysseus and Telemachus, this and subsequent scenes take on greater significance. Before Telemachus attempts to string the bow himself, he tells the suitors that, if he succeeds, he will win possession of his father's property and his mother "would not to my dismay leave this house"

[5] Thalmann 1998: 234. See Foley [1978] 2009: 193 for examples of Penelope's authority elsewhere in the epic.

[6] 1994: 370.

[7] Thalmann 1998: 213.

(οὔ κέ μοι ἀχνυμένῳ τάδε δώματα πότνια μήτηρ | λείποι, 21.114-17). This line might be understood to mean that the acquisition of his father's property will offset the dismay Telemachus might feel when his mother leaves the house. More portentously, it would suggest that Penelope will not have to leave the house at all if he is successful.[8] Both interpretations would lead to successful outcomes for Telemachus.[9] The latter possibility would allow for a reunion between Odysseus and Penelope, but it would strip Odysseus of the chance to prove himself. As Thalmann observes, "Odysseus would be shunted aside in favor of Telemakhos, restored to his house as a Laertes rather than as a still powerful father."[10] This is, then, not simply a chance for Telemachus to impress us and "prove himself a worthy ally and successor to his father."[11] It is a decisive moment in the epic that might spell disaster for Odysseus.

The moment is delayed and the suspense heightened when Telemachus impresses his internal audience by setting up the axes perfectly in preparation for the contest without having seen it done (21.118-23). Telemachus's confidence appears to grow when, in response to Penelope's claim over the bow in the face of the suitors, he tells her that the bow is the concern of men and that she, a woman, should go to the loom (21.350-52). Telemachus asserts his

[8] See Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 21.115-16 for the ambiguity. Cf. Thalmann 1998: 215.

[9] It is difficult to determine whether Telemachus is being serious about these assertions or merely acting for the sake of suitors. His laughter at the thought of his mother leaving to marry another man (21.102-5) might represent a similar ambiguity. See Levine 1982 and Olson 1994.

[10] 1998: 217.

[11] Thalmann 1998: 214.

rightful claim upon the bow as his property and all but dares the suitors to challenge him when he states that "no one will constrain me against my will" (οὔ τίς μ' ἀέκοντα βιήσεται) if he wants to give Odysseus the bow (21.348-49). With these words, it seems that "Telemachus here realizes fully the position of authority toward which he had gestured in Book 1."[12] Tension builds as Telemachus picks up the bow and makes three unsuccessful attempts. We recognize this pattern from the *Iliad*, when Diomedes and Patroclus attempt to challenge fate and the will of the gods (*Il.* 5.438, 16.705, 786).[13] Here, it is not a god but Odysseus that stops Telemachus, not, however, before we learn that Telemachus would have succeeded on his fourth attempt. For the moment, the question of superiority is left unanswered. Telemachus's explanation for his apparent failure sounds much like Telemachus of the early books of the *Telemachy*: he is "younger" (νεώτερός εἰμι) and does not yet trust his hands to defend him whenever a better man (πρότερος) gives him trouble (21.132-33). Yet it is in Telemachus's deference to his father and in his excuse, which is patently false, that we can see clear proof of the self-restraint and ability to deceive that mark him as a worthy successor of Odysseus.[14] Despite Telemachus's this attempt to diffuse the situation, tension between Telemachus's independence and the suitors' patience are reaching a boiling point when he makes it clear that he would drive them from his home by force if only he were stronger (21.372-75). The suitors are less aware of the danger

[12] Katz 1991: 152.

[13] Cf. also *Il.* 21.177.

[14] Cf. Austin 1969: 61-63.

they face the larger it looms: they merely laugh at what they believe to be an empty threat (21.376).

In three instances, Telemachus's newfound sense of authority may seem excessive to some members of the audience. First, critics have considered Telemachus's treatment of his mother, with his rejection of her claim upon the bow and swift dismissal, "even more insulting than Eurymachus's"[15] and "so abrasive that Penelope…cries herself to sleep."[16] Shortly thereafter, Telemachus asserts his authority over Eumaeus, his surrogate father, by threatening to stone him unless he ignores the suitors and gives the bow to Odysseus (21.369-75).[17] Yet both of these assertions are essential to the working of Odysseus's and Telemachus's plan. Telemachus's words shock his mother and resemble his rebuke of Penelope when she requested that Phemius perform a different song (1.356-59). But they have the effect of sending Penelope to her room before the assault upon the suitors begins.[18] Telemachus's

[15] Ahl and Roisman 1996: 253. Cf. Katz 1991: 152: "Telemachus's assertion of authority over Penelope here marks the point at which she relinquishes her own claims to preeminence, which had similarly extended to encompass the role of male head of the household."

[16] Nagler 1993: 249.

[17] Ahl and Roisman 1996: 254 suggest that our sense of "ambivalence" surrounding Telemachus and the conclusion of the *Odyssey* "is rarely more graphically illustrated" than it is in this passage. Katz 1991: 128 ventures that this is the only way for Telemachus's to exert his authority because he is being restrained by Odysseus with regard to the suitors.

[18] Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 350-3. Cf. Thalmann 1998: 218.

treatment of Eumaeus likewise has a practical result: it causes the suitors to laugh and momentarily forget their anger against Telemachus (cf. 21.375-77). It gives Eumaeus the opportunity to give Odysseus the bow in accordance with Odysseus's commands (21.234-35).[19] Telemachus's treatment of Penelope and Eumaeus may be more indicative of how he intends to carry out the plan he devised with his father than of how he views himself within the hierarchy of the household.

A final example of Telemachus's exerting his authority over the household takes place after the suitors have been killed and raises more questions about Telemachus and, by extension, the handling of the suitors. When the last suitor has fallen, Odysseus instructs Eurycleia to collect the twelve female servants who consorted with them. He tells Telemachus, Philoetius, and Eumaeus to have the women remove the corpses and clean the house, after which they should kill them with swords (22.435-44). Telemachus takes it upon himself to amend his father's orders to ensure that these women, "the very ones who poured reproaches upon my head and upon my mother's and slept beside the suitors" (αἵ δὴ ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ κατ' ὀνείδεα χεῦαν | μητέρι θ' ἡμετέρῃ παρά τε μνηστῆρσιν ἴαυον), are hanged and do not die a "clean death" (καθαρὸς θάνατος, 22.462-64).[20] "They"—it is not clear which of the three men are involved[21]—then grab Melanthus, cut off his nose and ears, tear out his genitals and feed

[19] Cf. Nagler 1993: 247.

[20] See Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 22.462.

[21] Stanford 1965: ad 22.474-77 hopes that Telemachus is not involved and observes that "Odysseus himself had no part in the barbarities, which are best excused as the revenge of

them to the dogs, and cut of his hands and feet (22.474-77). Both punishments have seemed excessively bloodthirsty and repulsive to modern audiences.[22] What does it mean for Telemachus to take part in them, especially after Odysseus has just warned Eurycleia against excessive rejoicing in the death of the suitors?[23] Memories of Antinous's threatening Irus with a similar punishment (18.86-87) might lead some to associate the action with the overweening behavior of the suitors. On the other hand, the hero Peirithous was said by Odysseus to have visited a similar punishment upon the centaur Eurytion. We might conclude along with some critics that, though not in line with modern notions, the treatment of Melanthius would have seemed a fitting punishment for "the unclean and subhuman"[24] or at least "lower-class figures"[25] in response to threats against the welfare of the household.[26] It is notable that the

servants on a traitorous servant." See, however, Newton 1997: 6. Davies 1994: 536 suggests that Melanthius may be "too despicable for giving such details to be justified."

[22] Cf. Stanford 1965: ad 474-77, Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 474-77, Newton 1993, Davies 1994.

[23] Cf. Newton 1997: 5.

[24] Nagler 1993: 243.

[25] Thalmann 1998: 227.

[26] Newton 1997: 7n6 suggests that this punishment might be associated with hosts' "restoring decorum to [a] gathering" in their home. Cf. Davies 1994: 536. Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 474-77 notes that "[s]uch practices were apotropaic, designed to ward off the posthumous

violence in Odysseus's household should end with such a striking scene of brutality that receives so little comment in the text. It is especially surprising because the justification of acts of undeniable violence is a running theme in the *mnesterophonia*.

MNESTEROPHONIA

Concerns about Penelope's and Telemachus's independence are likely to fall away as Odysseus's final reveal and the implementation of his plan become imminent. Odysseus's superiority over the suitors is signaled as soon as he puts his hands to the bow. For the suitors, the bow is an impossibly powerful weapon that embodies their inferiority to Odysseus. No amount of heating or greasing will allow them to string it. Odysseus, on the other hand, worries that the bow is no longer as powerful as it was when he held it last (21.393-395). Unlike the suitors or even Telemachus, Odysseus strings the bow as easily as a musician stringing a lyre in preparation for a beautiful performance; a pluck of his instrument makes a song like a bird's (21.406-9; 410-11). Our satisfaction and the appropriateness of the event are signaled by an omen sent by Zeus (21.413-15). Odysseus shoots through the axes without even bothering to stand up (21.420-23). We are likely to feel a sense of relief as our doubts regarding Odysseus's abilities prove groundless. Odysseus himself expresses relief that he has refuted the suitors' insults and has proven that "my might still remains" (21.426, ἔτι μοι μένος ἔμπεδον). In what

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vengeance of the victim." Heath 2001: 151, 152n40 views Telemachus's treatment of the servants as entirely appropriate and evidence of his maturity and independence.

follows, Odysseus puts on a masterful display of martial prowess that comes close to surpassing anything seen in the *Iliad*.

Yet for those who have been paying close attention to Odysseus's exploits both past and present, a victory in battle against a superior force, even with the element of surprise, might not appear to be a foregone conclusion. Prior to the *mnesterophonia*, the *Odyssey* offers little evidence that Odysseus is still the warrior he once was in the *Iliad*. Odysseus not only fails to engage in battle with any frequency in the *Odyssey*, but also is defeated on the few occasions that he attempts to play the part of an Iliadic hero. He and his men are routed after an initial victory against the Ciconians. His desire to arm himself and fight openly against Scylla despite Circe's warning is fruitless and only manages to further endanger his allies. We have seen limited displays of Odysseus's strength. Odysseus's performance against the Phaeacian athletes and his fight against Irus suggested that he was at least stronger than the older man and beggar he appeared to be, though games and brawls are, as Melantho insultingly suggested, very different from battles against overwhelming odds with the best of the younger generation. The triumphant stringing of the bow offers incontrovertible evidence that Odysseus is stronger than any one of the suitors. It does not prove that he is strong enough to face all of them at the same time. Odysseus's encounters with the Phaeacians and Irus also differ from his fight against the suitors in another crucial way. In Phaeacia and against the local beggar, Athena intervenes to improve Odysseus's appearance, signaling a moment in which the hero must prove himself and overcome doubts but also looking forward to his inevitable and satisfying victory. In the *mnesterophonia*, Athena does not intervene, at least not in the way we have come to expect.

We find indications in the text that this is a moment fraught with doubt. Antinous does not expect Odysseus to shoot him because such an act would be tantamount to suicide:

> τίς κ’ οἴοιτο μετ’ ἀνράσι δαιτυμόνεσσι
> μοῦνον ἐνὶ πλεόνεσσι, καὶ εἰ μάλα καρτερὸς εἴη
> οἷ τεύξειν θάνατόν τε κακὸν καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν
>
> who in the midst of feasting men would think
> that a single man far outnumbered, even if he were very strong,
> would bring about his evil death and dark doom?[27]

What begins as a surprise attack with the death of Antinous quickly gives way to a battle against armed men when Eurymachus calls to the suitors to draw their swords (22.74-78). Odysseus and Telemachus kill a number of suitors and stay alive. When Melanthius makes his way to the storeroom and distributes armor and spears to the suitors, Odysseus feels real fear for his life and the life of his allies (22.147-49).[28] After Eumaeus and Philoetius deal with Melanthius at Odysseus’s behest and arm themselves, Athena also appears at Odysseus’s side as Mentor. But when the suitors threaten her in order to prevent her from helping Odysseus, Athena does not attack them directly. Nor does she intervene to alter and improve Odysseus. Instead, she provokes Odysseus to act (22.226-32):

> οὐκέτι σοί γ’, Ὀδυσεῦ, μένος ἔμπεδον οὐδέ τις ἀλκή
> οἵη ὅτ’ ἀμφ’ Ἑλένῃ λευκωλένῳ εὐπατερείῃ
> εἰνάετες Τρώεσσιν ἐμαρναο νωλεμὲς αἰεί
> πολλοὺς δ’ ἄνδρας ἔπεφνες ἐν αἰνῇ δηιοτῆτι
> σῇ δ’ ἥλω βουλῇ Πριάμου πόλις εὐρυάγυια.
> πῶς δὴ νῦν, ὅτε σόν γε δόμον καὶ κτήμαθ’ ἱκάνεις
> ἄντα μνηστήρων ὀλοφύρεαι ἄλκμος εἶναι;

[27] 22.12-14.

[28] Cf. Scodel 1998: 7.

> No longer does your might nor any strength still abide
> as when for white-armed, well-born Helen
> for nine years straight you fought
> and killed many men in terrible battle
> and by your counsel Priam's city of wide ways was captured.
> How is it that now, when you come to your home and property,
> against the suitors you lament that you must be strong?

Athena's attempt to spur on Odysseus's encapsulates his Proving Sequence in the battle against the suitors, addressing both our hopes and our fears for Odysseus. Her initial rebuke establishes that Odysseus is capable of demonstrating martial glory as he did at Troy and challenges Odysseus to live up to his reputation in his current fight against the suitors. At the same time, Athena raises the possibility that Odysseus no longer possesses the strength he demonstrated against the Trojans and will fall at the suitors' hands. Athena then implies that she will set a rousing example in her performance against the suitors as Mentor (22.233-35) but still fails to intervene. She chooses instead to test Odysseus and his son so as not to grant Odysseus a ἐτεραλκέα νίκην, "a victory that results from the strength of another" (22.236-57).[29] Rather than enter the fray, Athena transforms into a sparrow and watches over Odysseus and his allies. The extent of her participation from this point forward is unclear. When the suitors redouble their efforts in light of Mentor's apparent defection (22.241-54), we are told that

[29] Calhoun 1934: 161 notes that Athena wants Odysseus to vanquish the suitors but does not, for instance, destroy them with a lightning bolt. Cf. Fernandez-Galiano 1992: 262 on the epithet ἐτεραλκής, which "is used in the *Iliad* to refer to a reverse in the fortune of battle which switches the advantage to the side which has been losing up to that moment."

Athena deflects the suitors' spears (22.256, 273). Yet both Telemachus and Eumaeus are subsequently hit (22.277; 279). Only after Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius have survived a series of volleys and inflicted a number of deaths does Athena finally intervene by displaying the aegis and routing the suitors (22.297-301).

What is the significance of Athena's test? Athena's refusal to intervene directly until Odysseus and his allies have proven themselves allows for the possibility of suspense. Athena does not ensure that they succeed but rather allows them to win or lose on their own merits. The *Apologue* offers a useful parallel. There, Odysseus fulfilled many of the expectations set out for him in the proem and preface and did so without Athena's assistance.[30] Speaking of the *Apologue*, Bassett suggests that Athena's absence served "to deepen the impression of the guile and prowess of Odysseus."[31] Murnaghan suggests that, insofar as Odysseus was "deprived of divine assistance, … the credit for his successes really does belong largely to him."[32] This view of the relationship between humans and gods seems to fly in the face of the Iliadic portrayal of

[30] In the case of the *Apologue*, suspense is lessened to the degree that Odysseus is telling the tale: his presence among the living makes it clear that he survives even the most impossible situations. Odysseus also receives assistance from other gods.

[31] 1923: 345. Cf. Clay 1976: 319 who attribues Athena's absence in 9-12 to her anger at Odysseus in response to the atrocities committed at Troy, anger that only subsides when our *Odyssey* begins (p. 324).

[32] [1987] 2011: 125.

divine intervention, according to which divine inspiration and human achievement are closely linked, if not quite coincident. As Edwards observes primarily in the *Iliad*,

> to the gods' gift are attributed the size, strength, and good sense of Ajax (7.288-89), the prophetic power of Calchas (1.72), the technical skill of the craftsman Phereclus (5.61), the inspiration of the poet (*Odyssey* 22.347), and many more distinctions.

Later, he suggests that "[f]or the heroes of the epics, any successful shot, any victory in a race is due to the favor of a deity."[33] Odysseus himself advises Euryalus that it is the gods who distribute the graces (χαρίεντα) with which humans win the adoration of the mortals around them (8.167-77).[34] In the *Mnesterophonia*, the poet seems to go to great lengths to show that it is not Athena but Odysseus and Telemachus themselves who are responsible for the victory against the suitors. In this way the *Odyssey* appears to address head on complaints such as Agamemnon's when he argues that Achilles cannot take credit for his strength because it was given to him by the gods (*Il.* 1.178).[35] As Scodel observes, "[i]f Odysseus succeeds because the gods directly help him, the implications of the tale are very different from those of a version in which his own courage and cleverness are decisive."[36] In *Odyssey* 22, Athena's failure to intervene to save Odysseus initially removes any assurance that Odysseus will be able to prove

[33] Edwards 1987: 129.

[34] Edwards 1987: 129 calls this the "most detailed statement" of the principal that the gods are responsible for human success.

[35] Cf. Edwards 1987: 129.

[36] 1998: 3.

himself as he did in his first meeting with Nausicaa, in the games against the Phaeacian, or in his fight against Irus. In the end, it gives Odysseus the opportunity to prove that he is every bit the hero he was at Troy and in the *Apologue*. It suggests that, to the degree that he does not require the assistance of the gods, his victory surpasses even those of the other heroes whose stories were recounted in the *Iliad*.

In addition to the very real threat that Odysseus and Telemachus will be overwhelmed by superior numbers of armed suitors, we find other threats to Odysseus's fulfilling the expectations set forth for him as the epic's hero. Eurymachus's response to the killing of Antinous offers a brief threat not to Odysseus's physical power but to his powers of discernment. Eurymachus suggests, somewhat plausibly, that Antinous is the real cause of the mistreatment of Odysseus and his property. With Antinous dead, Eurymachus promises that the suitors will repay Odysseus for the property they have consumed. With his call for Odysseus to "spare his own people" (σὺ δὲ φείδεο λαῶν σῶν), he implicitly argues that Odysseus might be considered responsible for the welfare of many of his potential victims to the degree that he aspires to resume his place as ruler of Ithaca (22.54-59).[37] Knowing Eurymachus's penchant for double-speak from his earlier encounter with Penelope (cf. 16.435-47), we are more likely to fear that Odysseus will be deceived than that Eurymachus's claim might be justified.[38] Those who recall the song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8 and Hephaestus's willingness, despite his outrage, to be pacified by an offer of compensation (316-18; 347-48 355-58), might consider

[37] See Haubold 2000: 119-23.

[38] Marks 2008: ch. 3.

this a "real choice" for Odysseus.[39] Of course, Odysseus's acquiescence would bring his actions in line with those of the least well-respected of the gods and a cuckold,[40] hardly a satisfying conclusion to his story. Odysseus might simply be taken in by Eurymachus's offer and killed unawares. Either way, he will have failed to demonstrate his prudence, cunning, and power. We are, then, likely to feel relief at Odysseus's resounding rejection of the offer. No amount of property, he informs Eurymachus, would prevent him from making the suitors pay with their lives (22.61-64).[41] Despite the satisfaction we feel, intimations of justice in Eurymachus's argument and the impropriety of Odysseus's response might nevertheless echo through the violence that follows.

Antinous's comparison of Odysseus to a drunk centaur running amok among the Lapiths in *Odyssey* 21 suggested a relatively straightforward distribution of justice and guilt in Odysseus's halls. Antinous suggests that Odysseus must be drunk to think he, a beggar, could compete in the contest of the bow. He compares Odysseus to the intoxicated centaur Eurytion who did evil (κάκ' ἔρεξε) in Peirithous's home and was mutilated by the Lapiths as a result (21.295-310). The comparison is unlikely to rest easily with most audience members. It is the suitors, not Odysseus, who drink excessively and have designs on another man's wife. With its

[39] See Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 48, Crotty 1994: 155, Haubold 2000: 119-23, Burgess 2014: 345-46 for arguments in favor of Eurymachus's proposal.

[40] Cf. Zeiltin 1995: 131.

[41] Odysseus later informs Penelope (23.356-58) that he will replace the animals that were consumed through raids and through contributions from Ithacans.

easy parallels to the overindulgent suitors' encroaching on Odysseus's wife in his own home and to the prospect of the offended party punishing them heroically, Antinous's comparison of Odysseus to the centaurs and the suitors to Peirithous and the Lapiths seems better reversed.[42] When Antinous's miscasting is resolved, his story suggests that the suitors are monstrous sexual predators in need of punishment.[43] His inability to recognize his situation or to take responsibility for his misdeeds is indicative of the suitors' presumption and cluelessness in these books.

Not all prefatory indications point to such a simple distribution of guilt. *Odyssey* 21 begins with a description of how Odysseus received his bow as a gift from Iphitus.[44] The story initially reflects well on Odysseus and echoes, at least indirectly, his current situation. Odysseus met Iphitus in Messene while collecting payment for the sheep that Messenians stole from him (21.16-19). We learn from this aside that Odysseus is the kind of man who pursues legal paths to justice when possible. The story might suggest that the suitors' crimes against Odysseus are as straightforward as the theft of sheep and that the payment Odysseus will exact from the suitors is similarly in keeping with the crime committed against him. It is also fitting that Odysseus will use a gift given him as a guest to punish the suitors, who overstep their role as

[42] Nagler 1993: 243-44. Cf. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 252.

[43] Nagler 1993: 243-44. Cf. Thalmann 1998: 226.

[44] See Thalmann 1998: 174, Steiner 2010: 18 on the significance of the bow as a symbol of *xenia*.

guests and who abuse other guests in the palace.[45] Yet the story of Odysseus's meeting with Iphitus gives way to the story of Heracles' murdering Iphitus while Iphitus was a guest in his home (21.24-29).[46] For the crime of killing his guest, Hercules is described as "merciless" (σχέτλιος) and as a man who revered "neither the vengeance of the gods nor the table he set [for his guest]" (οὐδὲ θεῶν ὅπιν ᾐδέσατ' οὐδὲ τράπεζαν | τὴν ἧν οἱ παρέθηκεν, 21.28-29). Does the *Odyssey* cast the suitors as Heracles, men intent on killing a *xenios*?[47] Or does the *Odyssey* imply that when Odysseus kills the suitors he will be killing guests and thus breaking the laws of *xenia* like Heracles?[48] Whether the suitors are truly Odysseus's or Telemachus's guests is up for debate. Yet the question is sufficiently vexed to raise questions about the justice of Odysseus's revenge.[49] The narration of Heracles' violation of *xenia* attached to the instrument with which Odysseus will vanquish the suitors brings this question to the fore.

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[45] Cf. Thalmann 1998: 174.

[46] See Thalmann 1998: 174-75.

[47] Galinsky 1972: 11-12 and Clay [1983]: 95 argue that Heracles serves as a foil to Odysseus here and throughout the *Odyssey*.

[48] Crissy 1997, Thalmann 1998: 175, 177.

[49] See Nagler 1990 on the problem of Odysseus's "killing members of his own social group" (p. 341) and "his own retainers" (p. 345), "the most illegitimate kind of violence" (p. 351). Haubold 2000: 110-42 addresses the evidence for the identification of the suitors and the Ithacan *laoi* and its implications throughout the *Odyssey*. See also Buchan 2004.

So long as Odysseus's survival hangs in the balance, the issue is moot. But as Odysseus's success becomes more assured, fears may reemerge that his revenge outstrips the suitors' crimes. Nowhere is this fear greater than when Leodes supplicates Odysseus and begs for mercy on the grounds that he kept his distance from the other suitors, never took advantage of Odysseus's servants, and even tried to dissuade his fellow suitors from doing the same (22.310-19; cf. 21.246-47). Odysseus suggests that Leodes deserves to die merely for wishing Odysseus dead and hoping to take his place, and he kills him (22.321-29). This reasoning might seem to stretch the definition of guilt to an untenable position beyond what most audience would accept.[50] Yet this scene, which heightens fears of that Odysseus is indulging in overzealous savagery, quickly gives way to an exchange that demonstrates Odysseus' discernment. Despite seeing what befell Leodes, Phemius also supplicates Odysseus, pleading that he came to the palace and sang for the suitors against his will. This time, Telemachus vouches for Phemius and adds Medon to the list of those who did Odysseus no wrong (22.356-70). Odysseus willingly spares them both (22.372-27) and shows that he is not acting out of an irrational desire to punish all who cross his path. The poet achieves a similar effect when Eurycleia finds Odysseus standing over the corpses of the men he has slain, covered in their blood, and looking like a wild lion fresh from the kill. The pleasure Eurycleia takes in the suitors' fate only adds to our discomfort at the spectacle. Yet Eurycleia's joy at this seemingly indiscriminate savagery

[50] Cf. Hölscher 1988: 268, Allan 2006: 24. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 48 argues that with the justification that Leodes hoped with the rest of the suitors that Odysseus would never return, Odysseus "absolves himself of any obligation to discriminate among the suitors."

committed against enemies prompts Odysseus to defend his actions. Eurycleia's celebration is not righteous (οὐκ ὁσίη) because it was the gods and the suitors' own misdeeds that brought about their punishment as much as Odysseus: they honored no one and met an unseemly fate because of their own recklessness (22.413-16).[51] After the fact, Penelope's belief that it was a god, not Odysseus, who punished the suitors for their *hybris* and evil deeds (23.62-68) supports Odysseus's assertion and strengthens the impression that Odysseus acted justly. The Ithacan public's disgust at the (misguided) thought that Penelope has chosen a new suitor or that she would ever give up hope of her husband's return (23.149-51) strongly implies that the public disapproves of the suitors' actions and would, with the obvious exception those closely connected to the suitors, support Odysseus if they knew what he had done.

THE REUNION OF ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

When *Odyssey* 23 begins, Odyssey has proven himself a hero worthy of his reputation. He has distinguished between allies and enemies and insinuated himself into the palace unbeknownst to the suitors through his cleverness and endured the taunts of suitors and servants through a combination of intelligence, restraint, and the help of Athena. He has almost single-handedly defeated the suitors, an unbelievable feat, if Penelope's response is any indication (23.37-38). He has arguably surpassed the achievements for which he was previously

[51] Friedrich 1981: 130-31 argues that Odysseus's assertion of divine support draws even more attention to the problematical nature of his ἀριστεία.

lauded. Of the initial expectations set out for him, only a reunion with Penelope remains. We have been looking forward to this reunion since the *Odyssey* began. Encounters with other women in the *Odyssey* reassured us of Odysseus's suitability as a potential husband. He charmed the goddesses Circe and Calypso and was quickly deemed a worthy suitor by Nausicaa and her father. But Penelope is—for the best, one imagines—unaware of these achievements. As far as she knows, Odysseus remains a kind older man to whom the world has been unkind. Odysseus first deferred a meeting with Penelope and impressed her with his prudence in *Odyssey* 17. Penelope then impressed him in turn by appearing before the suitors and winning gifts. In *Odyssey* 19, Odysseus and Penelope meet for the first time, and Odysseus avoids detection only with the help of Athena. In their discussion, Penelope demonstrates her love for Odysseus and shares with the stranger the dream in which Odysseus returns to kill the suitors. Despite this dream and Odysseus's assurances that he is near and will soon return, Penelope decides to hold the contest for her hand in marriage the very next day. In *Odyssey* 21, Penelope ensures that Odysseus is given the opportunity to string the bow but assures the suitors that the idea that this man might win her as his bride is unseemly (21.314-19). Those convinced that Penelope has already recognized Odysseus would likely appreciate the irony.[52] Those still hoping that she *will* recognize Odysseus but afraid either that she might not or that she will no longer love the man he has become might be disturbed by Penelope's casual yet definitive

[52] See Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 21. 311-53. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 254 suggest that these words are "designed to overcome any resistance on the part of the suitors."

dismissal of her husband's suit.[53] The phrase, αἴ χ' ὁ Ὀδυσσῆος μέγα τόξον ἐντανύσῃ, "even if he strings the great bow of Odysseus," might, if only for a moment, be mistaken for αἴ χ' ὁ Ὀδυσσεύς μέγα τόξον ἐντανύσῃ, and suggest, worrisomely, that Penelope would not marry Odysseus himself even if he strings his bow.[54] *Odyssey* 23 seems designed to test this very possibility.

Ironically, the primary obstacle to a reunion between Odysseus and Penelope is Penelope's embodiment of the desirable qualities of endurance, prudence, and cunning that were set forth for her husband at the beginning of the *Odyssey*.[55] Nowhere does she more closely resemble Odysseus than here, in the moments leading up to the recognition. The decision to present the scene largely from Penelope's perspective highlights this role reversal even as it emphasizes Odysseus's powerlessness. It is clear that Penelope wants to believe that Odysseus is in the palace and has vanquished the suitors. When Eurycleia assures her that Odysseus has returned, Penelope rejoices and jumps out of bed to embrace Eurycleia and cry (23.32-33). She acknowledges how welcome Odysseus's return would be (23.60) but cannot believe it is true. Like her husband, Penelope advocates caution in the face of Eurycleia's

[53] Cf. Thalmann 1998: 228.

[54] Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 21. 311-53

[55] Holmberg 1995: 114 observes that "Penelope's cunning and her ability to create plots contribute to her marital ὁμοφροσύνη with Odysseus, at the same time that they paradoxically are presented as endowing Penelope with the potential to disrupt the reestablishment of that ὁμοφροσύνη."

boasting and delight (23.60). She is willing to admit that the suitors have been killed but attributes their fate to divine punishment (23.63-68). Neither the proof of the scar nor Eurycleia's willingness to stake her life on Odysseus's return is able to convince Penelope. Though wise, Eurycleia does not understand how clever the gods can be in their deceptions (23.81-82).

When Penelope finally descends to confirm that the suitors are dead and sees her husband, she is amazed. Like Odysseus when he approached Nausicaa, she considers whether to keep her distance from her "dear husband" (φίλος πόσις) or make physical contact (23.85-87).[56] Odysseus sits passively while Penelope vacillates between recognition and denial (23.90-95). Only the intrusion of Telemachus breaks the impasse. Telemachus expects Penelope to give into her desire to reunite with her husband precisely because she has waited so long for him, and he is finally here. But it is Penelope's "enduring heart" (τετληὼς θυμός, 23.100) that prevents her from doing so. Like Odysseus, Penelope takes nothing for granted, does not give in to her desires too quickly, and carefully tests the man before her.[57] She assures Telemachus that if this is Odysseus, they will recognize one another through signs they alone know (23.107-10).

Penelope's and Odysseus's shared traits of prudence, endurance, and cunning prevent an easy reunion. A number of critics have argued that these qualities are evidence of

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[56] Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 86-87 emphasizes her indecision rather than her perspicacity. See Foley 2001: 136.

[57] Katz 1994: 164 compares Penelope's endurance to Odysseus's. Cf. Zeitlin 1995: 126-27.

Odysseus's and Penelope's essential *homophrosyne*. This "like-mindedness" of husband and wife strengthens the impression that these two people are particularly suited to one another and share a unique bond. It heightens our desire to see them reunited. That the qualities evinced by Penelope that delay the reunion are the same qualities for which we admire Odysseus and that drew us to the *Odyssey* puts us in a delightfully uncomfortable position: we can only applaud Penelope for frustrating the reunion that both Odysseus and we desire. Penelope's hesitation also tests Odysseus (cf. 23.113-14) and provides both spouses the opportunity to prove themselves further prior to the reunion.

Odysseus accurately assesses another barrier to recognition. The poet tells us that Penelope "did not recognize him because he had base clothing on his skin" (ἀγνώσασκε κακὰ χροὶ εἵματ' ἔχοντα, 23.95); Odysseus himself quickly realizes that this is why Penelope does not honor him and "does not yet say that I am he" (οὔ πω φησὶ τὸν εἶναι, 23.115-16).[58] Penelope longs for Odysseus as he once was (cf. 20.87-89). Foley importantly notes that in *Odyssey* 20 "while Odysseus dreams of a mature Penelope supporting him with full recognition of his identity, Penelope dreams of the young Odysseus before he went to Troy."[59] Ahl and Roisman suggest that "the test of the bow she proposes (and he accepts) is not so much to see if he is Odysseus, but whether Odysseus is the man he was twenty years ago."[60] Despite his success

[58] See Ahl and Roisman 1996: 257 on "how important clothes and appearances are to Penelope."

[59] [1978] 2009: 202.

[60] 1996: 37.

there, Odysseus still looks like filthy, itinerant beggar. The potential disconnect between Odysseus's renowned past and current appearance plagues him now as it did in Phaeacia.[61] As in Phaeacia, Odysseus must prove himself worthy of his reputation and overcome Penelope's doubts before he reveals himself to her.[62] A brief interlude provides ample evidence that the real Odysseus has returned to Ithaca.

When Odysseus steps away from Penelope to confer with Telemachus about how they should proceed, Telemachus attests to Odysseus's reputation as the best among men at *metis* and affirms that he is willing to follow Odysseus wherever he leads (23.124-28). Odysseus quickly takes control and demonstrates his cleverness by devising the ploy to avert suspicion by staging a celebration that makes it appear as though Penelope has chosen one of the suitors for marriage (23.131-40).[63] Telemachus and their allies listen and obey (23.141). We are reminded once more of Penelope's endurance and loyalty through the aforementioned, ironic reproaches of the passers-by who mistakenly criticize Penelope for failing to remain faithful until Odysseus returned (οὐδ' ἔτλη) and indirectly praise Penelope's Odysseus-like endurance (23.149-51). Finally, Odysseus's essential worthiness is signaled through the intervention of Athena. After Eurynome has bathed away the filth and clothed Odysseus in fine clothing, Athenapours beauty

[61] Cf. Thalmann 1998: 224.

[62] Cf. Katz 1991: 177, who argues that Odysseus's and Penelope's relationship requires "a reconstitution of intimacy rather than…[a] simple resumption."

[63] Besslich 1966: 89-90 sees this passage as evidence of Odysseus's newly reestablished authority within the household. Cf. Katz 1991: 168.

and grace upon Odysseus for the last time, like a fine craftsman, making him more impressive to look upon and making his hair fall like hyacinths blossoms (23.156-62). We can now be confident that Penelope will not only acknowledge that Odysseus is her husband but that she will be happy to do so.

We are likely to be somewhat disappointed, then, when Penelope fails to recognize Odysseus immediately upon his return. She does not even react with wonder, as often happens after Athena's interventions. Odysseus echoes our frustrations. He reiterates Telemachus's earlier complaint about Penelope's coldness and gives up for the night (23.166-72). Penelope's response to Odysseus is often understood as reassuring consolation (23.174-76):

> οὐ γάρ τι μεγαλίζομαι οὐδ' ἀθερίζω
> οὐδὲ λίην ἄγαμαι, μάλα δ' εὖ οἶδ' οἷος ἔησθα
> ἐξ Ἰθάκης ἐπὶ νηὸς ἰὼν δολιχηρέτμοιο.
>
> I am not at all puffing myself up nor am I taking this lightly
> nor am I too in awe, but I know very well how you were
> when you went from Ithaca on the long-oared ship.

Penelope's is not *so* surprised that the stranger is Odysseus. After all, she knows what Odysseus looked like then and can see the resemblance now.[64] Yet the same lines admit a less promising interpretation. Penelope may not be explaining her lack of surprise so much as justifying her lack of enthusiasm. She assures Odysseus that her hesitation is not because she thinks herself too good for him nor that he is not good enough. Nor, however, is she overly impressed. Her memory of what Odysseus once looked like, what sort he *used to be* when he left Ithaca, is not

[64] Cf. Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 174-76.

the solution but rather the source of the problem. Odysseus is no longer the man he once was.[65] Such an interpretation suggests that Odysseus has a long way to go in Penelope's eyes. We might take it as a promising sign that she at least allows Odysseus to sleep in the bed that he built, though she asks Eurycleia to move it outside of the bedroom. Perhaps she wants to proceed slowly. Of course, Odysseus's anger at the thought of moving the bed and his description of the tree around which he constructed both the bedchamber and the bed itself makes it clear that Penelope's orders would be impossible to fulfill (23.187-204).

This is the sign Penelope required. She runs to Odysseus, embraces and kisses him, and begs forgiveness. With this final test, in addition to demonstrating endurance and prudence, Penelope "has thoroughly taken over the character of Odysseus: she is the cautious, the suspicious, the devious one."[66] This role reversal further emphasizes Penelope's and Odysseus's *homophrosyne*, as does the famous "reverse simile" in which at the reunion the joy of Penelope, not Odysseus, is compared to that of shipwrecked sailors finally touching land (23.233-39).[67] Although Penelope outmaneuvers Odysseus, their goals are no longer at odds. Penelope's conquest signals a victory for Odysseus as well. As if to reassure Odysseus and the audience that husband and wife are not in competition, Penelope reassures Odysseus that "in other things you are the wisest of men" (23.209-10) and thereby "reaffirms the limits of her

[65] Cf. Katz 1994: 176.

[66] Hölscher 1939: 74, quoted and translated in Katz 1991: 159.

[67] See, Podlecki 1971: 90, Arthur 1973: 15-16, Foley [1978] 2009: 190. Segal 1962: 43 suggests that this simile also signals an end to Odysseus's wandering upon the sea.

own power and the particular forms necessary for social reproduction."[68] They make love and exchange stories about their experiences while Odysseus was absent. In light of Hermes' warning that Circe would attempt to "unman" Odysseus if he acceded to sex before making her swear an oath (10.299-301), particularly suspicious audience members might feel relief regarding Penelope's intentions only at this point in the narrative.[69] Penelope's explanation that she did not embrace Odysseus immediately because she feared being deceived is both understandable and in character. Skeptical audience members might feel their suspicions well up once more when she then compares her situation to that of Homer's most famous adulteress, Helen. Penelope argues that even Helen would not have committed adultery had she known that the Greeks would come to retrieve her. Helen was driven to her "shameful deed" (ἔργον ἀεικές) by a god and, prior to that intervention, did not have in her heart "the painful delusion…from which suffering first came even to us" (τὴν δ' ἄτην…λυγρήν, ἐξ πρῶτα καὶ ἡμέας ἵκετο πένθος, 23.223-24). If Penelope's interactions with the suitors are limited to what we have been told, her defense of adultery appears to overshoot the mark. The mere suggestion that her misdeeds are comparable to Helen's raises the possibility that we are missing something.[70] Is Penelope hinting at her own troubling indiscretions, as some critics

[68] Foley [1978] 2009: 196-97 (cf. 197). Foley discusses elsewhere (pp. 202-4) the nature of Penelope's and Odysseus's relationship and sees positive models for it in the figure of Arete and in Odysseus's interactions with Arete and Nausicaa.

[69] See Foley [1978] 2009: 201 for a comparison between Penelope and Circe.

[70] Zeitlin 1995: 144.

have suggested?[71] Or is she simply acknowledging how close she came to marrying another man?[72] As Katz observes, with this comparison Penelope "both consolidates her own *kleos* by differentiating herself from Helen and undermines the fixity of its meaning at the same time."[73] Though potentially troubling, these questions are likely to fall away in light of the joyful reunion of husband and wife. The satisfaction we feel at the achievement of Odysseus's and Penelope's shared goals may even overshadow Odysseus's admission that his travels must continue on the inland journey foreseen by Teiresias (23.248-84), though more sensitive audience members might feel along with Peradotto that "it intrudes to embitter pleasure at its peak, to skew the trajectory drawn by the folktale between desire and its object."[74]

[71] Cf. Devereux 1957: 384. Marquardt 1983: 42-46 argues that Penelope is defending the fact that she attracted the suitors in the first place.

[72] Doherty 1991: 41-42 suggests that Penelope "implicitly acknowledges" through her comparison of herself to Helen "her susceptibility to sexual feelings." Cf. Murnaghan [1987] 2011: 141-43.

[73] Katz 1991: 183-87. Katz (p. 183) notes that "[t]hese lines have been widely rejected since antiquity on account of the *non sequitur* that they appear to embody."

[74] 1990: 88.

THE SECOND *NEKYIA*

The opening of *Odyssey* 24 works hard to mitigate Odysseus's guilt for killing the suitors and to praise his accomplishments as a hero. When we see the suitors for the first time after their death, they are not presented as noble men brought low in the prime of their life through a deceitful stratagem. They seem barely human as they squeak (τίζουσαι, τετριγυῖαι) like bats and blindly follow Hermes through the Underworld. When they reach the Underworld, they are introduced to a potentially sympathetic audience given the circumstances under which they died: Agamemnon not only died prematurely in an ambush and met a "most pitiable death" (οἰκτίστος θανάτος) like the suitors (24.28; 34; 21-22), but also claims to share a guest-host relationship with Amphimedon (24.102-4, 114-19). We might expect, then, that Agamemnon will see past his distaste for men who woo other men's wife and at least pity these men. Instead, Agamememnon congratulates Odysseus heartily, particularly in his choice of wife (24.192-98) so different from his own (24.199-202). In his attempt to defend himself, Amphimedon only manages to extol the virtues of the family who brought about his death. He recounts in detail how Penelope wove and unwove Laertes' shroud to delay marriage, how Telemachus led Odysseus to the city, how Odysseus endured the suitors' abuse in disguise, and how he killed the suitors with the help of Penelope and Telemachus (24.125-85).

Whereas Agamemnon explicitly praises the accomplishments of Penelope and Odysseus, the panoply of Trojan War heroes including Achilles, Ajax, Patroclus, Antilochus and Agamemnon implicitly lends weight to Odysseus's victory. We hear of Agamemnon's pitiable death at the hands of his wife and her lover (24.28-29, 96-97). Achilles' funeral and the funeral

games held for him receive extended treatment (24.37-94). Spoken and unspoken, fate of these and the other heroes who died young, were murdered in their prime, and killed themselves reverberate. These figures and their deaths highlight the superior fate of Odysseus, who survived the war, returned home, found a wife still faithful to him, and defeated those who stood in his way. Ajax offers a particularly poignant reminder of Odysseus's ability to survive, his superiority over his rivals, and his magnanimity in victory. Nagy has pointed to the importance of *nostos* as an avenue for *kleos* in the *Odyssey*: "we see in the *Second Nekuia* a triadic assignment of *kléos* to Agamemnon, Achilles, and Odysseus. Odysseus gets the best *kléos*, through his wife. Through Penelope, he has a genuine *nóstos*, while Agamemnon gets a false one and Achilles, none at all."[75] For Nagy, this scene offers evidence that Odysseus is "the best of the Achaeans" insofar as "he has won both *kléos* and *nóstos*."[76]

Only one hero remains whose virtues might surpass Odysseus's. Penelope has also survived hardships, recovered her lost spouse, and won fame for her actions. She has also, in a sense, won both *kleos* and *nostos*. Amphimedon attributes Penelope's actions in the palace to Odysseus's guidance (24.167-69) and would thereby rob her of her agency.[77] We know better.

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[75] 1979: 38-39.

[76] 1979: 38-39. Cf. Wender 1978: 40-44, Edwards 1985: 89. See also Heubeck [1987] 1992: 357-58, 380, who observes the poet's emphasis on Odysseus' s superior ὅλβος, "happiness."

[77] See Moulton 1974: 162, Wender 1978: 35-37, Goldhill 1988: 1-9, Fernández-Galiano 1992: ad 167-77, Rutherford 1992: 35-36 for a discussion of Amphimedon's mischaracterization of Penelope's role in the deception.

Agamemnon seems to attribute Odysseus's success to his wife as much as to Odysseus himself. In response to Amphimedon's account of Odysseus's successful plot to kill the suitors, Agamemnon praises Odysseus above all for his choice of wife. He lauds her virtue (σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ, κλέος…ἧς ἀρετῆς), but emphasizes in particular her desirable qualities, her cunning (ἀγαθαὶ φρένες, ἐχέφρων) and her loyalty and endurance (ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος). The *kleos* of these virtues will never die, and even the gods will sing Penelope's praises (24.193-98).

LAERTES

When the action resumes in the upper world, Odysseus is making his way to his father to complete the final step of his *nostos*. We recall here that Achilles in the *Iliad* never sees his father again, a fact underlined by the emphasis on the appearance of his mother and her shocking divinity in the description of his funeral in *Odyssey* 24. Achilles must settle for a symbolic union in *Iliad* 24 with the father of the man whose son he has killed and attempted to mutilate. Odysseus's reunion with Laertes goes one more step in emphasizing the superiority of Odysseus's fate over that of Achilles. The particular way in which Odysseus approaches his father has raised questions, however. Odysseus's decision to test his father rather than reveal himself immediately and embrace him may be "utterly characteristic" and in keeping with previous reunions,[78] but has been deemed "aimless and heartless,"[79] particularly in light of

[78] Wender 1978: 56.

[79] Page 1955: 112. See also Stanford 1961-1965: *ad* 24.216-18, and the discussion of Heubeck

Laertes' pitiable state—so pitiable that Odysseus cannot help but weep when he sees him (24.232-34). Yet, as in previous cases, Odysseus's disguise and lying tale cleverly skirt the truth to achieve the effect he desires. Odysseus's "mocking words" (24.239-40) help Laertes "step by step, to emerge from his self-inflicted isolation and apathy"[80] and to jar him out of his current condition when they "rouse the old king to anger."[81] Odysseus's words inform Laertes in the harshest possible way that he is not acting in accordance with his station: he looks like a neglected slave even though, with a bath, food and sleep, he might look like a king once more (24.253-55). Through Odysseus's claim that he hosted Odysseus and a tale that resembles the experiences of both Odysseus and Telemachus—he claims to have been an aristocratic driven to wander against his will by gods (24.304-7)—Odysseus elicits Laertes' opinion of the suitors, admiration for Odysseus, and respect social norms (24.281-86). We witness firsthand Laertes' extreme grief at the absence of his son (24.290-96, 315-17). When Laertes mourns for Odysseus as if he were dead and most likely the victim of a terrible fate, we are reminded of the enormity of Odysseus's achievement in surviving both his wanderings and his encounter with the suitors. Like Penelope's trick, Laertes' emotional display pushes Odysseus too far. Despite his storied endurance, he can stand no more.[82] He reveals himself to Laertes and tells his father how he slayed the suitors. He attempts to prove his identity by revealing his scar and recounting the

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[1987] 1992: 384.

[80] Heubeck [1987] 1992: 390, 393, 396-97.

[81] Thornton 1970: 116-18.

[82] See Heath 2001: 156, 157n43, Moulton 1974: 164.

circumstances under which he received it (24.331-35). He is able to convince his father only when he "reconstitutes" their father-son relationship,[83] describing how Laertes once led him through the orchard in which they now find themselves, bequeathing the trees to Odysseus and naming them for his son (24.336-44). Father and son embrace and share a meal with Telemachus, the three generations of Odysseus's family reunited for the first time in twenty years.

The scene then shifts from this heartening reunion of fathers and sons to a less joyous reunion, as fathers claim and bury slaughtered suitors. An assembly is convened for the families to voice their accusations against Odysseus. Even here, the epic reasserts the justice of his deed. Eupeithes, the father of Antinous, asserts the not entirely groundless claim that Odysseus is the bane of Ithaca: first he brought about the death of the Ithacan men he sailed with and then returned home only to kill the next generation (24.427-29). His denunciation is impassioned and tearful and elicits pity from his audience (24.438). Then Medon speaks out to defend Odysseus's actions. Insofar as he was spared during the *Mnesterophonia*, Medon stands as a symbol of Odysseus's restraint. He informs the family members that a god disguised as Mentor stood at Odysseus's side, encouraged him, and drove the suitors through the halls (24.443-49), implying that the suitors' punishment was in accordance with the will of the gods. The seer Halitherses confirms that the suitors died because of their own foolishness (ἀφροσύναι) and evil recklessness (ἀτασθαλίαι κακαί). They wasted the property and dishonored the wife of a noble man because they did not think he would return. They did not

[83] Katz 1991: 179. See also Moulton 1974: 164, Wender 1978: 60-62.

heed the warnings of Halitherses or of Mentor (24.454-61). Many of the Ithacans in attendance are persuaded by the words of Medon and Halitherses. More than half of them, however, follow Eupeithes in pursuit of Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS VERSUS TELEMACHUS

In the first half of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and Telemachus worked independently and competed indirectly for the audience's emotional investment as protagonists of their stories. They meet in *Odyssey* 16 after both men have navigated complex social situations and used cunning to win prizes, completed dangerous sea voyages, and averted death with the help of the gods. Their goals brought into alignment, Odysseus and Telemachus devise and launch a plan to vanquish the suitors. Odysseus disguises himself and endures the abuse of the suitors. Telemachus is left to watch and restrain himself from intervening. Though his attempts to oppose the suitors are, as Odysseus predicted, largely unsuccessful, he nevertheless attempts to assert his authority to a greater extent as the final reckoning approaches. In *Odyssey* 21, Telemachus puts the bow in Odysseus's hands, and, after retrieving their weapons, fights alongside his father in *Odyssey* 22 and even saves him from a potentially life-threatening blow. Though impressive, his deeds consistently fall short of his father's. He plays an essential but fundamentally subordinate role, nowhere more clearly than when he defers to his father rather

than string the bow. In *Odyssey* 23, Telemachus seemingly "acknowledges and accepts his place by telling his father that he will follow him anywhere under any circumstances."[84]

Despite what appears to be a final pronouncement regarding the struggle between father and son, Eupeithes and the other family members of the suitors provide Odysseus and Telemachus one last opportunity to fight alongside one another and to test themselves against one another in combat. Odysseus explicitly challenges his son, telling him that "you will now know when you yourself are on the attack, where the best fighting men are judged" (24.506-7, ἤδη μὲν τόδε γ' εἴσεαι αὐτὸς ἐπελθών, ἀνδρῶν μαρναμένων ἵνα τε κρίνονται ἄριστοι). He warns Telemachus not to disgrace his family, a family that has, at least up to now, excelled in strength throughout the land (24.508-9). Telemachus assures his father that *he* will not bring shame to the family (24.511-12), and Laertes rejoices that his son and grandson are competing in virtue (24.514-15). Murnaghan argues that this "generational competition is depicted as a welcome rivalry."[85] Katz observes Telemachus's elevated position in the scene: "Telemachus fights alongside his father as the equal in strength to him that he had earlier pretended not to be" in the stringing of the bow.[86] It is easy to dismiss this display. *We* know that the final confrontation with the families of the suitors will end almost before it begins. But, prior to the discussion of Athena and Zeus, there is every reason to believe that this battle *could* provide an opportunity to determine once and for all whether Telemachus measures up to his father and

[84] Heath 2001: 153.

[85] [1987] 2011: 38

[86] 1991: 71; 158.

whether Odysseus can maintain his superiority in the face of competition from his son. The intervention of Athena and Zeus does not mere prevent needless bloodshed; it ends the epic before "depicting any tension from having two masters for one household" and providing a definitive answer to the question of superiority.[87]

This may also explain why Athena does not intervene to improve Odysseus's or Telemachus's appearance prior to the fight. Of course, she does not need to, as this is not truly a moment of suspense as far as Odysseus and Telemachus are concerned: Zeus has already agreed to prevent the battle from becoming too bloody and to ensure that it ends in kingship for Odysseus and love and peace from his people (24.473-76; 478-86). But an intervention on the part of Athena would lend credence to the idea that Odysseus and Telemachus are truly competing against one another and would signal to us which one of them will prove worthy to be king. Athena's intervention is instead offset to an unthreatening figure who is desperately in need of redemption. Like Telemachus's youth and inexperience, Laertes' weakened and pitiable state invites expectations that he might undergo a Proving Sequence and prove the opposite. Odysseus's provocations provide an initial test to prove that Laertes still cares about Odysseus and the welfare of his family. Laertes' current condition suggests that he will be little help in the impending battle with the families of the suitors. Athena's intervention encourages us to hope otherwise. Odysseus cried when he first saw Laertes; now, after Athena intervenes to make Laertes stronger, more substantial, and similar to the gods in appearance, Odysseus is struck

[87] Felson-Rubin 1994: 89. Cf. Thalmann 1998: 209.

with wonder (24.367-71).[88] Laertes wishes that he had been in the palace on the previous day as his younger self and promises that he would have killed many suitors and delighted his son (24.375-82). With the help of Athena's transformation, urging, and the might she breathes into him (24.516-19; 520), Laertes has another opportunity to prove himself. He demonstrates his strength of old with a spear throw that pierces Eupeithes' helmet and kills him with one blow. In doing so, Laertes replaces the pitiable image of a king reduced to a slave-like farmworker with heroic spectacle.[89] These events do not simply provide an abbreviated but satisfying Proving Sequence and redeem a character who previously exemplified the worst possible outcome of Odysseus's story. The focus on Laertes shifts attention away from the potentially destabilizing competition between Odysseus and Telemachus. We can imagine the two of them living in harmony alongside Penelope, at least until Odysseus sets out once more on his inland journey.

[88] That Odysseus wins the admiration of Dolios and his sons without the help of Athena (24.391-92) may be another nod to his ability to succeed without the help of the gods.

[89] See Thornton 1970: 118-19 on Laertes' restoration to heroic status.

CONCLUSION

The idea of Proving Narratives places the *Odyssey* in the larger context of a pervasive narrative structure that highlights and demonstrates qualities we value through challenges that naturally elicit suspense and provide satisfaction. Our *Odyssey* is built upon sequences that put desirable qualities such as intelligence, cunning, endurance, loyalty, and strength on display. These qualities are signaled early in the epic and influence the kind of challenges required to highlight them to best effect. We hope that the protagonist will prevail and prove that they possess these qualities. The magnitude of these challenges raises fears about their chances of success but also provide satisfaction when challenges are overcome against all odds. The *Odyssey* entices us with the promise of heroes whose trials will provide this experience. We must be sure, and are frequently reassured, that the heroes possess sufficient promise to succeed. But there are no guarantees here. It is heroes' promise that draws us to the narrative, but it is the precarious nature of heroes' success that holds our attention to the end. We

frequently find ourselves in the paradoxical position of hoping a protagonist will succeed while simultaneously, perhaps without even realizing it, hoping that the protagonist will face challenges that will satisfy our desires and lend weight to their victories. Few would clamor to read the story of hero who has vanquished every challenge and lives happily with his loyal wife and son. He has nothing left to prove. It is the prospect of failure, even if we "know" that the hero will ultimately succeed, that determines how much we value heroes and their qualities and how much pleasure we derive from their victories. We feel compelled to see whether heroes prove themselves or finally succumb to the overwhelming odds against them. Is Odysseus the man he once was? He is still clever and capable of enduring suffering, but does he possess the strength required to vanquish the suitors? Should he step aside in favor of his son, a younger and more vital successor? Will he be able to win the affections of his wife in his beleaguered state? Odysseus's insinuation into the palace, dispatching of the suitors and reunion with his wife offer resounding and satisfying answers to these questions. Telemachus and Penelope go through similar if less extensive sequences. Is Telemachus capable of taking his father's place? Will he ever by the man Odysseus was? Early indications suggest that he will not stand up to the suitors and has no place among aristocratic men in proper society. Subsequent indications suggest otherwise. Few doubts remain when Telemachus rebukes the suitors, proves capable of stringing his father's bow, and fights at Odysseus's side. In the case of Penelope, it is only after her reunion with Odysseus that can we breath a sigh of relief, confident in the knowledge that she has succeeded in using her cleverness to stave off the threat of remarriage and in remaining loyal to her husband after twenty years. Only then can we stop worrying that she no longer loves Odysseus or that she will be disappointed by his

current condition. Our concern over the answers to these questions and the fate of these characters is a testament to our emotional investment in the promise the *Odyssey* and its heroes hold for us.

Proving Sequences and Narratives are most evident in quest narratives, in which heroes' goals lead to challenges designed to highlight desirable qualities while simultaneously raising suspense-inducing doubts as to feasibility of the hero's ability to do so. But we find Proving Narratives across genres and in literature both high and low. As the desirable quality in question shifts, so too do the challenges and thus the kind of narrative required to display them. Whereas quest narratives often focus on courage and strength, romantic comedies, for instance, frequently focus on desirability and unlikely compatibility. To the degree that "serious" literature evinces Proving Narratives, it tends to focus on devotion to family, establishing independence, and self-discovery. One of the larger claims stemming from the concept of Proving Narrative is that many of the narrative clichés associated with particularly genres exist for a reason and are not simply a function of authorial laziness. They exist because of the effects they achieve, the itches they scratch, so to speak.[1] It is no accident that an incredible number of narratives introduce characters who have something to prove, present them with goals that lead to fundamental challenges interspersed with periodic reassurance that success is possible, and orchestrate climactic scenes in which characters attain their goals

[1] Those, such as professional critics, who are overly familiar with literary and narrative precursors might justifiably fault a narrative for depending overmuch on previous models or failing to find a new approach to old narrative problems.

in satisfying displays of the qualities that needed proving. Nor should we be surprised when we find ourselves eager to engage with a narrative of this sort even when we are all but certain of its outcome or when we literally return to the same story to re-experience the pleasures it provides.

Proving Narratives help us account for a number striking and often-observed features of structure and characterization in the *Odyssey* that have often been addressed independently. An awareness of Proving Narratives and their constitutive elements offers a complement to these explanations and rarely replaces them entirely. Why do we find significant echoes throughout Odysseus's time among the Phaeacians, in the *Apologue* and with Calypso, and in Ithaca?[2] Are these patterns simply an outgrowth of oral poetic technique or habit that has "resisted serious alteration" by subsequent performers and editors, as Louden and others suggest?[3] I would emphasize their function over their form. All of these episodes are designed to construct a Proving Narrative around Odysseus's particular set of desirable qualities. They either raise expectations and hopes that Odysseus will demonstrate these qualities or introduce fears that he will not. They provide opportunities for Odysseus to demonstrate these qualities or fail to demonstrate these qualities. It follows that episodes designed to highlight a limited number of qualities would come to resemble one another in fundamental ways. Louden himself

[2] See Fenik 1974, Louden 1993 and 1999, Cook 2014.

[3] Louden 1999: 133.

observes that many of these repetitions serve the purpose of "emphasiz[ing] the qualities essential to Odysseus: his cunning, perseverance, and piety."[4]

Odysseus's cunning is tested and demonstrated through difficult situations from which he must extricate himself, most obviously in the Cyclops' den, but also among the Phaeacians and while infiltrating Troy and his own palace in a beggar disguise; his endurance is tested through under unbearable circumstances and through tests of will such as when he resists the temptation to partake in the meal of Helios's slaughtered cattle with his crew, but also in the Trojan Horse, when he suffers the abuse of the suitors, and when he keeps his identity secret from his wife; his loyalty, which we might see as a subset of his endurance, is tested in his encounters with powerful and desirable women such as Calypso but also including Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa; his martial prowess is evident in impressive displays of strength against foes such as the Phaeacian athletes and Irus but is otherwise absent in the epic prior to Odysseus's final encounter with the suitors. One can imagine a poet recognizing these thematic parallels and highlighting them through more specific echoes such as foes with names beginning in "Eury-."[5] But the idea of a Proving Narratives helps us understand the function of these repetitions within their episodes and helps us explain why they might have occurred naturally in an extended story about a hero such as Odysseus with a well-defined set of desirable qualities.

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[4] Louden 1993: 33. Louden argues that this is for the purpose of "setting him apart from the young men, making him attractive to the females."

[5] See Louden 1999: 2.

Why does Odysseus demonstrate such different qualities, qualities that occasionally run contrary to one another as well as less admirable qualities that call into question those desirable qualities set out for him in the proem and prologue? He is a hero who can escape even the most impossible situation one moment but who is forced to endure the unendurable situations the next. He is an expert at secrecy and cunning who is also able to defeat a veritable army of suitors in open battle. His feats appear now unassailably heroic, now disturbingly flawed. The range of qualities demonstrated by Odysseus requires a twofold explanation. On the one hand, as is clear from the above discussion, tradition appears to have attributed to Odysseus a range of desirable qualities. As the *Odyssey* presents him, he is not merely the preeminent hero of *metis* or of *tlemosyne,* but also of loyalty, intelligence, and strength. These qualities come into conflict most famously in the case of his active cunning and passive endurance. We may have the name "Odysseus" to thank for an early accretion of stories around a hero who both invites ire by inflicting pain on those around him and who hates those around him for the pain they force him to undergo. But this would explain only the problematic pairing of cunning and endurance attributed to Odysseus. How do we explain qualities that appear to conflict with the desirable qualities set out for Odysseus?

The answer to this broader question lies in the function of Proving Narratives, which are designed not only to raise expectations of and demonstrate Odysseus's desirable qualities but also to generate suspense-inducing doubts as to whether he will succeed. Conflicting qualities such as cunning (*metis*) and force (*bie*) are particularly well-suited for this purpose. Odysseus's failure to achieve martial glory through much of the *Odyssey* is often explained through "an epic tradition that contrasted the heroic worth of Odysseus with that of Achilles in terms of a

contrast between *mêtis* and *bíē* [that]… apparently took the form of a quarrel between the two heroes over whether Troy would be taken by might or by artifice."[6] Others suggest that Odysseus must learn that qualities such as heroic boasting, which marked success in an *Iliadic* context, are not only unsuitable but potentially lethal in his narrative of return.[7] Yet Odysseus's initial lack of convincing displays of strength is not simply an indication of a hero who has been stripped of *bie* and is thus incapable of proving himself an able warrior on the battlefield. Such a hero would be likely to resort to the poison he is said to have acquired early in the *Odyssey*, to attempt to follow Aegisthus's example of slaughtering his victims at a feast with more than his son and a handful of slaves at his side, or at least to lead an army of Greeks against the suitors. Rather, hints of strength in Odysseus's performance in the Phaeacian athletic contest and against Irus raise the hope that Odysseus will defeat the suitors in a fashion befitting an epic hero rather than display his cunning against the suitors through tactics that more closely resemble those of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra or the suitors.[8] At the same time, the absence of convincing displays of strength elsewhere in the epic raise the fear that he will be defeated by the suitors if he engages them in open combat. Signs of a warrior's strength and disposition also introduce the possibility that, despite the cunning that allows Odysseus to infiltrate the palace

[6] Nagy [1979] 1999: 45.

[7] Rutherford [1986] 2009, Friedrich 1991. See also Segal [1983] 1996: on apparent contradictions with regard to Odysseus's *kleos*: "this hero of *mêtis*, *mechanê*, and *polukerdeiai* is also capable of heroic battle against great odds" (p. 220).

[8] See Segal [1983] 1996: 208.

and the endurance that allows him to bear the suitors' abuse, he will nevertheless rise up in anger, reveal himself, and be struck down by the remaining the suitors before he has a chance to employ poison or strength against the suitors. We likewise find signs that Odysseus will remain loyal to his wife regardless of the obstacles that he must face, as well as indications that he is susceptible to the temptation of figures like Nausicaa and Circe.

We can understand hints of Odysseus's ethical ambiguity in a similar fashion. It is undeniable that the *Odyssey* "seems to invite us to mull over the slaughter's ethical implications, even as it insists on vindicating its hero," and that its "expansiveness contains space for ambiguity."[9] These may be, but are not simply, signs of sophisticated nuance or sympathies that extend beyond the heroes of the epic. Like indications that Odysseus will be incapable of displaying physical power in battle, signs that Odysseus is over-proud and that his revenge is overzealous are not the last word on our hero. Rather, they are indications designed to generate suspense through questions about the legitimacy of his project that challenge our sympathies. In order to be effective in raising concerns, these challenges must be sufficiently convincing to give us pause. Some audience members may find them so convincing that they are unable to see past them. They may be left unconvinced by competing assurances regarding the hero's virtues and find themselves unable to appreciate the hero's final demonstration of desirable qualities. Even those who are satisfied by the final display might find themselves dwelling upon the hero's less savory qualities long after the performance is over. It is probable, however, that these indications reflect an attempt to generate suspense by momentarily calling

[9] Burgess 2014: 339; 352. See also Cook [1999] 2009: 130, Buchan 2004, Allan 2006: 23-25.

into question the prospect of our hero's eventual success rather than an attempt to undermine it altogether.

Why does a story about the return of Odysseus begin with a *Telemachy* and devote so much time to the experience of Telemachus, and why is its portrayal of Penelope in later books so opaque? Does the *Telemachy* merely set the stage and heighten anticipation of Odysseus's return? Is Penelope's characterization sacrificed at every turn to make her now a source of delay and an obstacle to Odysseus's goal, now a reliable source of actions and decisions that will move his story forward? The larger answer to these questions lies in the *Odyssey* poet's decision to use Odysseus's wife and son not only as obstacles and assets to the achievement of Odysseus's goals, but also as subjects of their own Proving Sequences. Both Telemachus and Penelope possess their own goals that sometimes coincide and sometimes conflict with Odysseus's. They too face challenges that give them opportunities to demonstrate their desirable qualities. The threats and expectations of their stories often complement Odysseus's, providing satisfaction when his success is most precarious and introducing new threats when he appears to be moving smoothly toward his goal. Indications that Telemachus might succeed in dismissing the suitors and ruling Ithaca through the force of his authority or the stringing of the bow and that Odysseus might go the way of Laertes are not simply subverted carryovers from other stories or versions of the *Odyssey*; nor are the indications that Penelope might continue to manipulate the suitors and provide Telemachus a path to rule. These are very real threats to Odysseus's mission that nevertheless offer their own potential satisfactions of seeing a young man come into his own and of seeing a wife demonstrate endurance and cleverness capable of surpassing the heroic qualities of her more famous husband. An understanding of the

importance of Telemachus and Penelope and the threat they pose to Odysseus better explains the inclusion and significance of moments often thought to be merely playful and charming such as Penelope's trick of the bed and Telemachus's stringing of the bow and competition against Odysseus in the final battle against the families of the suitors.

This brings us to another peculiarity in the composition of the *Odyssey* that has received much attention. Why do Odysseus's son and wife come to resemble him, particularly in their cleverness and endurance?[10] Is it merely family resemblance or the result of a son's attempt to emulate his father's example in the case of Telemachus, or persistent indications of the "like-mindedness" possessed by spouses ideally suited to one another in the case of Penelope? The logic of Proving Narratives suggests a more economical explanation. Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope demonstrate similar desirable qualities because these are the qualities set out for Odysseus at the beginning of his story. They are the qualities that we expect to see demonstrated on the basis of what we know of Odysseus and what we learn of him in the proem and prologue. It is, at least in part, the promise of seeing these qualities displayed that drew us to the performance in the first place. It makes sense, then, that we would be drawn the promise of seeing the same qualities demonstrated in other potential protagonists as well.

Finally, why does Athena intervene to improve characters' appearance, and why does she improve the appearance of Telemachus, Odysseus, Penelope, and Laertes in particular? Is this merely an overt signal of Athena's affection for Odysseus's family or a traditional

[10] Rose 1979: 223 observes that "the poet allows Odysseus' own traits to be shared by his closest relatives, Penelope and Telemachus."

explanation for their preeminence among mortals with religious overtones? These are not isolated incidents nor mere adornments, physical or textual. Athena's interventions intersect with crucial moments in Proving Narratives and Sequences for each of these characters. They occur at moments of doubt in which characters are on the verge of demonstrating a desirable quality: Telemachus before the suitors, Odysseus before the Phaeacian games and his fight with Irus, Penelope before she appears before the suitors, Laertes before his battle with the suitors' families. Athena's appearances come in answer to our doubts even as her transformations look forward to a character's success in the endeavor. The narrative function of these interventions also explains Athena's failure to transform Odysseus in the *Mnesterophonia*. Her appearance disguised as Mentor signals a moment of doubt for our hero. Her lack of intervention signals a true moment of suspense unlike any other in the *Odyssey,* when Odysseus's success, which depends on his largely untested strength in combat, hangs in the balance.

An awareness of Proving Sequences and Proving Narratives in the *Odyssey* sheds light on the process through which the poet introduces expectations, raises doubts, and offers satisfying demonstration of those expectations. In the absence of a unifying approach of this sort, we are in danger of placing too much weight on indications intended to raise transient fears and hopes over the course of story. How responsible is Odysseus for the death of his crew? Do Penelope's conflicted feelings really reflect unexpressed affection for the suitors? Do early intimations of a recognition scene show that Penelope recognized Odysseus prior to *Odyssey* 23? Does Odysseus' stay with Circe reflect ambivalence about returning home? Does his treatment of Amphinomus and Telemachus's part in the punishment of the servants reveal their revenge to be excessive? These questions are worth asking. They signal crucial moments

in the narrative. They raise ethical and philosophical questions and touch upon fundamental elements of Greek culture, without an knowledge of which we are doomed to misunderstand much of what we encounter in the epic. These questions and the complexity of the themes and issues they address are undoubtedly responsible at least in part for the *Odyssey*'s endless history of re-performances and re-readings and for its lasting place in the cultural canon and as the subject of academic debate. Yet if we attempt to address these questions without a firm understanding of the narrative concerns that give rise to them, we run the risk of duplicating the efforts of Schliemann, who unearthed undeniable treasures but failed to recognize their value in context when he ignored the reality of successive settlements on the site of Troy. Moments of doubt, rousing displays, conflicting indications, and disturbing developments undoubtedly have independent value both for readers and scholars of the *Odyssey*, but it is in the context of the epic's Proving Sequences and overall Proving Narrative that we are able to recognize their true value and function.

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