

WAS TELEMACHUS RUDE TO HIS MOTHER? *ODYSSEY* 1.356–59

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AT THE BEGINNING of Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, the goddess Athena, in disguise, comes down from Olympus to Ithaca and tells Telemachus that he should no longer cling to his childhood, that he should go on a trip to look for news of his father. After Athena leaves, Telemachus goes to sit with the suitors, whom the bard Phemius is entertaining with a song about the Achaeans' bitter homecoming. Penelope hears the song from upstairs; she comes down, and in tears she asks Phemius to choose another song, since this song afflicts her heart as it reminds her of Odysseus (*Od.* 1.337–44). Telemachus, however, defends Phemius and rebukes his mother (*Od.* 1.346–47, 356–59):

μητηρ ἐμή, τί τ' ἄρα φθονέεις ἐρίηρον ἀοιδὸν
 τέρπειν ὅππῃ οἱ νόος ὄρνυται;

 ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
 ἱστόν τ' ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· μῦθος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει
 πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

Why, my mother, do you begrudge this excellent singer
 giving pleasure as the thought drives him?

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 But go back into the house, and take up your own work,
 the loom and the distaff, and bid your handmaidens
 to ply their work also; but **speech** (*muthos*) will be a concern for men,
 all men, and for me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.

Stephanie West, in the recent Oxford commentary on the *Odyssey*, notes that lines 356–59 were absent from some ancient editions of the *Odyssey*; moreover, the Alexandrian scholar Aristarchus marked the passage as suspect.¹ West herself argues that the lines raise awkward questions, questions that she says are seldom squarely faced:

Recalling as they do one of the most memorable scenes of the *Iliad*, Hector's farewell to Andromache, [these lines] have for us the effect of a quotation, and their callousness

1. Dindorf 1962, ad loc: Ἀρίσταρχος δὲ ἀθετεῖ, ἄμεινον λέγων αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ἐν Ἰλιάδι καὶ ἐν τῇ τοξεΐᾳ τῶν μνηστήρων. . . ἐν δὲ ταῖς χαριεστέραις γραφαῖς οὐκ ἦσαν; see also Erbse 1971, ad *Il.* 6.490.

in this context is enhanced by the contrast with their earlier occurrence: there it is war which is said to be the concern of men, a view which no Homeric woman could question, and Hector is attempting to calm Andromache's fears, not telling her to mind her own business. If these lines are authentic here, are we to infer that the poet intended us to recognize an allusion to the *Iliad*, or are we misled by the scantiness of the epic material available to us? Did his original audience see in these lines simply a stock heroic response to women who pester their menfolk? (West 1990, 120)

West's argument here is consistent with her view of the origin and transmission of the text. In her opinion, "[o]ur starting point is a manuscript of the *Odyssey* produced by (or at least with the co-operation of) its author" (West 1990, 33). On this basis, West freely applies the poetics of written texts to the Homeric poems. But even if West is correct about the origin of the text, neither an author nor an audience of the time would have understood the concept of quotation as we do. Oral poetry, poetry composed within the oral tradition, must be understood in its own terms.² It is true that a very similar passage is found in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, when Hector tells Andromache to return to her work (490–93):

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰούσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
 ἰστόν τ' ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει
 πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοὶ Ἴλιῳ ἐγγεγάσιν.

But go back into the house, and take up your own work,
 the loom and the distaff, and bid your handmaidens
 to ply their work also; but **war** (*polemos*) will be a concern for men,
 all men, and for me most of all, of those who live in Ilion.

But another similar passage is found in Book 21 of the *Odyssey*, when Telemachus tells Penelope that he will take charge of the test of the bow (350–53):

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰούσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
 ἰστόν τ' ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· τόξον δ' ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει
 πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

But go back into the house, and take up your own work,
 the loom and the distaff, and bid your handmaidens
 to ply their work also; but **archery** (*toxon*) will be a concern for men,
 all men, and for me most of all, for mine is the power in the household.

And another somewhat similar passage appears in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*; Arete has urged the Phaeacians not to send Odysseus home too quickly, nor

2. There has been much debate about the interpretation of oral (or oral-based) poetry. Some scholars believe that oral poetry should be interpreted simply with the tools of ordinary literary analysis (see, for example, Griffin 1983, xiii–xiv). But some scholars (such as M. Parry, A. B. Lord, G. Nagy, J. N. Foley, R. Martin, and L. Slatkin, among others) have developed principles of oral poetics appropriate to the specific characteristics of oral poetry. Here I emphasize four aspects of oral poetics; first, the oral poem exists in performance, with all that this implies; second, the oral poem is not a fixed text, but varies as it is performed; third, repetition in formulaic verse is not necessarily quotation or allusion but may be the recurring deployment of material from a traditional repertoire; fourth, Homeric verse, at least, assumes a knowledge of a tradition of stories ("myths") that can be activated without explicit statement.

to begrudge him gifts; Alcinous agrees with his wife, but says that the conveyance of Odysseus is a concern for the men (350–53):

ξείνος δὲ τλήτω, μάλα περ νόστοιο χατίζων,
ἔμπης οὖν ἐπιμεῖναι ἐς αὔριον, εἰς ὃ κε πᾶσαν
δωτίνην τελέσω. **πομπή** δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ δῆμῳ.

But let our guest endure, though he longs much for his return,
to wait until morning, until I would accomplish
all the contribution; but the **convoy** (*pompe*) will be a care for men,
all men, and for me most of all; for mine is the power in the district.

The technique of Homeric poetry constantly reuses and recasts traditional phraseology; there are hundreds of recurring passages in the poems, and it is not possible that all of these were intended to have the effect of quotation. If the passage from Book 1 of the *Odyssey* is a quotation of the passage in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, then is the passage from Book 11 of the *Odyssey* a quotation of Book 6 of the *Iliad* or Book 1 of the *Odyssey*? And the passage from Book 23 of the *Odyssey*? Of course any particular instance of a recurring scene should not be left in isolation; we can learn much about the meaning and impact of any scene by looking at other instances that are more or less similar, but recurrence in oral traditional poetry is not the same as quotation or allusion in written literature.

The evidence available is sufficient to show that the passages in question reflect a traditional theme.³ Homeric culture divided many activities by gender, and the traditional poetic language included a formula expressing that division, a formula that could be adapted to various situations through the substitution of a word—in these passages, the words for war, speech, archery, and conveyance.

The question of interpretation remains. Granted that the form of the passage is traditional, we must still ask about the deployment of the formula here. Is it reasonable for Telemachus to rebuke his mother at this moment for these reasons? West (1990, 120) argues that it is not:

Certainly the favourable impression created by Telemachus' earlier observations is quite destroyed by this adolescent rudeness, culminating in the outrageous claim that speech

3. The term *theme* in traditional literary criticism usually means something like the underlying idea of a work: the theme of *Paradise Lost* is the justification of God's actions. But Lord (1960), following Milman Parry, uses the term to mean what others call a *type-scene*, that is, a recurrent action or series of actions, such as arming or setting sail (on type-scenes, see Arend 1933; also Fenik 1968; the bibliography on type-scenes is now large). As Martin (1989, 45) says, "Fenik has well shown how Homer builds his narrative of battle in the same way that he builds the poetic line, by reuse in new combinations of traditional stock elements. But I prefer to turn the issue around slightly: Homer would not have 'traditional scenes' if it were not traditional for actual Greek warriors to arm, fight, eat, sleep, and die." As Martin goes on to suggest, it is not only actions that form type-scenes, but also ways of speaking. Martin 1993, 236, calls such typical ways of speaking "speech type-scenes," with specific reference to the speech of Telemachus at *Od.* 1.358–59. Thus the separation of male and female spheres of action is a traditional speech type-scene. As Katz (1991, 36) notes, the passage at *Od.* 1.356–59 "is a demonstration of Telemachus's maturity." He "employs a traditional formulation that in the *Iliad* designates the separation of spheres between husband and wife. . . . In this way Telemachus signals his readiness to take on the role of *kyrios* of Odysseus's household." See also Katz 1991, 152; Murnaghan 1987, 165; and Foley 1995, 96–97.

(μῦθος) is not women's business, quite contrary to Homeric custom as we see it at the courts of Menelaus and Alcinous, where Helen (iv 121 ff.) and Arete (vii 141 ff.) play a full part in the conversation after dinner.

West notes that some scholars have praised the psychological realism by which Telemachus is made to go too far in his first attempt to assert his authority; she, however, is not convinced. West finds this speech callous, a piece of adolescent rudeness; she appeals, quite properly, to other passages in the *Odyssey*, where, as she says, women participate fully in after dinner conversation. Thus, in her view, the formula that is otherwise used to divide the male sphere of activity from the female sphere of activity is here misapplied, and the passage is suspect.

Perhaps, however, μῦθος designates not speech in general, but a particular kind of speech, a kind of speech not ordinarily used by women in heroic society. According to Richard Martin (1989), Homeric phraseology has two contrasting words for speech, *epos* (ἔπος) and *muthos* (μῦθος).⁴ Of this pair, ἔπος is unmarked, while μῦθος is marked—that is, ἔπος means speech in general, while μῦθος has a restricted range but greater semantic weight than ἔπος. In the *Iliad*, according to Martin, μῦθος designates:

a command, a boast or an insult, or the recitation of remembered events (47);

a speech-act indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention to every detail (21);

the full, exaggerated speech-act of a hero (21);

the speech of one in power, or of someone who is laying claim to power over his opponents (22);

an important speech of social control (66).

Thus the word μῦθος implies authority and power; ἔπος does not (Martin 1989, 22). 'Επος designates a short utterance, accompanying a physical act, the private and reciprocal speech that occurs between husbands and wives, companions, or kin (Martin 1989, 12 and 37–38); "Given the male, heroic in-group orientation of the word *muthos*, it would seem to be a social taboo for women to employ this kind of speech" (Martin 1989, 87).⁵

If the word μῦθος in Homeric epic always means a public and authoritative performance of speaking, then the words of Telemachus to his mother may not be so rude, at least given the social norms of the heroic society. He may not be telling his mother to refrain from speech in general, but only from the public performance of authoritative speech. He may be saying "public and authoritative speech will be a concern for men, all men, but for me most of all; for mine is the power in the household." The speech act just

4. Martin draws most of his examples from the *Iliad*, but he says that he has verified the system for the *Odyssey* as well; see Martin 1989, 14. Another word for speech, λόγος, is not a very important word in the Homeric epics; and Martin concentrates his study on μῦθος and ἔπος.

5. There are, however, a few μῦθοι spoken by women in the *Iliad*, three of which Martin (1989) discusses at some length; see my discussion of these passages below.

performed by Penelope was a command—she has commanded Phemius not to sing songs about Troy—and according to Martin commands are one of the three speech acts designated by the word $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ in the *Iliad*.

Penelope has been placed in an unusual position, left alone as the head of the household in the absence of her husband, while her son is still too young to speak with authority; therefore she has assumed the male role of command, at least until the return of her husband or the majority of her son. But Athena has just told Telemachus not to cling to his childhood; it is time for him to give commands. Thus Telemachus would be using the formula in just the way it is used elsewhere in the epics, to indicate a socially sanctioned gender distinction—men can give commands, but under ordinary circumstances, women cannot. The other word for speech in Homer, $\xi\pi\omicron\varsigma$, would not fit the passage—it is both metrically impossible and thematically inappropriate, since women were not excluded from speech in general. But they were excluded from the sort of speech indicated by the term $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$. What Telemachus says may still be offensive, but the offense would be located not in Telemachus as an individual, but in Homeric society generally.⁶

This interpretation is attractive. It excuses the behavior of Telemachus, a character we want to like; it makes his use of the formula fit a traditional thematic pattern; it is consistent with Martin's argument about the meaning of $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$; it extends Martin's argument about the meaning of $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*; and it also helps to explain the end of the passage, since the point about the power in the house would apply specifically to the power implied in the word $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$, and would refer to the new status Telemachus has been told to assume.

But we should not accept an interpretation merely because it is attractive. It is plausible that a word associated with power would exclude women, especially in a heroic society, but a plausible argument is not necessarily true. Martin argues that it would be a social taboo for a woman to speak a $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ in the *Iliad*, but he does cite a few exceptions, and we should examine these carefully. Furthermore, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are different poems, and perhaps they do not use the word $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ in the same way. As Martin (1989, 14) says, "Homeric discourse grammar should consist of three segments: a description for each poem, and a third comparing the two." We will need all three of these components to decide if Telemachus was rude to his mother.

In the *Iliad* there are, according to my count, 147 uses of the various forms of the word $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$. Of these, 5 refer to mortal women; 132 refer to male characters, both mortal and divine; and 11 refer to goddesses.⁷ I have

6. As Martin 1993, 236, notes, the words of Telemachus "sound like those of an authoritative character, or one who strives to be." Martin argues that this formulaic phraseology in its various uses "has overtones of being attached to one who is in fact still powerless." He cites the similar speeches of Alcinoüs at *Od.* 11.352–53 and Hector at *Il.* 6.490–93: "a traditional audience familiar with this speaking mode would hear irony in Telemachus' words. He *thinks* he can handle the situation on Ithaca, but he still has a lot to learn" (Martin 1993, 237). Martin's position here is consistent with my argument: a male character uses this formulaic phrasing when he wants to put a woman back in her place.

7. In each instance of the word $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$, I determined which character was responsible for the speech act mentioned, or would be responsible, in the case of hypothetical speech acts; sometimes the gender is not the gender of the character who says the word $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$, but the gender of the character who is or would be responsible

separated the figures for mortal women from those for goddesses because the gender roles of goddesses in the *Iliad* are not the same as the gender roles of mortal women: goddesses, for example, may fight, while mortal women may not.⁸ Thus, in the *Iliad*, the overwhelming number of μῦθοι are the responsibility of male characters, a few are the responsibility of goddesses, and very few are the responsibility of mortal women. Out of 147 instances of the word μῦθος in the *Iliad*, only five can be attributed to women. Of course men dominate the *Iliad*, and so we would not expect an equal distribution, but there are a number of important mortal women in the story, and they almost never make a speech characterized as μῦθος. Examination of specific passages reinforces the point.

In Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Helen rebukes Paris, and the narrator labels this speech with the word μῦθος. This passage occurs after Paris has fought Menelaus in single combat. At the moment when he is about to lose the duel, Aphrodite snatches him away and takes him back to his house in Troy. She then goes to fetch Helen, who has been watching the fight from the battlements. It is when Helen sees Paris again that she speaks her μῦθος (*Il.* 3.424–36):

τῇ δ' ἄρα δίφρον ἐλοῦσα φιλομειδῆς Ἀφροδίτη
 ἀντί' Ἀλεξάνδροιο θεὰ κατέθηκε φέρουσα·
 ἔνθα κάθιζ' Ἑλένη κούρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 ὅσσε πάλιν κλίνασα, πόσιν δ' ἠνίπαπε μῦθῳ·
 ἥλυθες ἐκ πολέμου· ὥς ὤφελες αὐτόθ' ὀλέσθαι
 ἀνδρὶ δαμείς κρατερῷ, ὃς ἐμὸς πρότερος πόσις ἦεν.
 ἦ μὲν δὴ πρίν γ' εὖχε' ἀρηιφίλου Μενελάου
 σῇ τε βίῃ καὶ χερσὶ καὶ ἔγχεϊ φέρτερος εἶναι·
 ἀλλ' ἴθι νῦν προκάλεσσαι ἀρηιφίλον Μενέλαον
 ἔξαιτις μαχέσασθαι ἐναντίον. ἀλλὰ σ' ἔγωγε
 παύεσθαι κέλομαι μηδὲ ξανθῷ Μενελάῳ
 ἀντίβιον πόλεμον πολεμίζειν ἥδὲ μάχεσθαι
 ἀφραδέως, μὴ πως τάχ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δουρὶ δαμήῃς.

Aphrodite the sweetly laughing drew up an armchair for her [Helen], carrying it, she, a goddess, and set it before Alexander [i.e., Paris], and there sat Helen, daughter of Zeus of the aegis, turning her eyes away, and she rebuked her husband with a *muthos*:
 “So you came back from fighting. Oh, how I wish you had died there beaten down by the stronger man, who was once my husband.

for the μῦθος. A few cases were difficult to determine: a goddess, for instance, will sometimes take on the form of a mortal man and deliver a μῦθος—should such a speech be counted as the μῦθος of the goddess or of the impersonated man (as the characters listening would interpret it)? I have attributed such μῦθοι to the goddess, but without great confidence that this is the right choice; a different decision would not significantly change the argument.

8. Kearns 1998, 96: “In the Greek tradition, a male, in the shape of Zeus, gives birth, to be sure; but with this important exception, where the male gods differ from their human counterparts is not in respect of their roles *as males*, whereas the positions and functions of, say, Athena, Artemis, and Aphrodite differ quite considerably from those ordinarily assigned to human women *as females*. ‘War will be the concern of men’ says Hector to Andromache, but Athena seems not to have heard this.”

There was a time before now you boasted that you were better than warlike Menelaus, in spear and hand and your own strength. Go forth now and challenge warlike Menelaus once again to fight you in combat. But no: I advise you rather to let it be, and fight no longer with fair-haired Menelaus, strength against strength in single combat, recklessly. You might very well go down before his spear."

Clearly this speech does not reflect the normal power relationship between a husband and wife in Homeric society. Paris is at a disadvantage, and Helen is taking advantage of his disadvantage to express her own power against his evident lack of power. To do so she uses a *muthos*, an insult, a speech act usually reserved for men; it is part of the point of the passage that Helen's speech is characterized with the marked term *muthos*. Under this interpretation, Helen's insult does not violate the principle that *muthos* is a gendered type of speech, since it depends on the principle in order to make its point.

A second example occurs in the last book of the *Iliad*; Priam has announced that he will go to fetch Hector's body from Achilles, but Hecuba tries to prevent him (*Il.* 24.200–202):

ὥς φάτο, κώκυσεν δὲ γυνὴ καὶ ἀμείβετο μύθῳ·
ὦ μοι πῇ δὴ τοι φρένες οἴχονθ', ἧς τὸ πάρος περ
ἔκλε' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους ξείνους ἦδ' οἴσιν ἀνάσσεις;

So he spoke, and his wife cried out aloud and answered with a *muthos*:
"O me, where have your wits gone, for which formerly
you were famous among outlanders and those you rule over?"

Once again the word *muthos* uses the gender distinction in order to make a point; Hecuba is trying to assert herself, to stop her husband from what she sees as a mad scheme. In neither of these two instances does the woman win her point. Helen, under the influence of Aphrodite, goes to bed with Paris, and Hecuba is unable to stop Priam from going to get Hector's body.

Martin (1989) presents a somewhat different interpretation of this passage, and also of another passage, *Iliad* 3.171, where Helen addresses Priam with a *muthos* (see below). In his view these speeches are laments.⁹ According to Martin (1989, 44), lament is one of the major rhetorical genres available for the heroic performers (the others are prayer, supplication, commanding, insulting, and narrating from memory). But for men in the *Iliad*, laments do not seem to be marked as *muthoi* (as prayers and supplications also are not *muthoi*). Thus, if these speeches by Hecuba and Helen are *muthoi* because they

9. According to Martin 1989, 87: "The address that Hekabe makes to Priam as he leaves for Achilles' tent is explicitly presented in the language of lament ('she wailed [*kokusen*], and answered with a *muthos*.' 24.200). The speech starts with desperate rebukes of Priam's folly in going—we can compare the tone of Andromakhe's lament at 24.743–45, chiding Hektor for not consoling her. Even more explicit is the call for others to join in her mourning. . . . Hekabe concludes with a dramatization of her anger and grief: she could eat the liver of Achilles; only such violence would offer requital. In sum, the speech laments both her son, now dead, and her husband, whom she does not expect to see alive again." Martin does not define lament, but I take the term to designate specifically the expression of grief for someone who has died or who is as good as dead. My usage is consistent with the usage of Alexiou 1963, *passim*.

are laments, the implication must be that the word *μῦθοι* has one meaning for men in the *Iliad* (commands, boasts and insults, the recitation of remembered events) and another meaning for women (lament). I am not convinced, however, that Hecuba's speech is best considered a lament.¹⁰ It is true that she speaks of lamenting Hector, and indeed she urges Priam to stay in Troy so that they can lament together. But overall the speech is an act of persuasion addressed to Priam. Hecuba's true lament for Hector does not come until the end of Book 24 (*Il.* 24.747–59). Nor is the speech a lament for Priam. It may well be true that she does not expect Priam to return alive, if he should go, but in this speech she hopes to persuade him to stay in Troy. A lament, properly speaking, occurs when there is no possibility of change—the person lamented is dead or as good as dead. But here, Hecuba has not yet given up on Priam, as his reply suggests (*Il.* 24.218–19):

μή μ' ἐθέλοντ' ἰέναι κατερύκανε, μηδέ μοι αὐτὴ
ὄρνις ἐνὶ μεγάροισι κακὸς πέλευ· οὐδέ με πείσεις.

Do not hold me back when I would be going, neither yourself be
a bird of bad omen in my palace. You will not persuade me.

Hecuba certainly talks about lament in the passage—she wants Priam to stay at home so that together they can lament Hector. But in this speech she is not yet lamenting Priam.

In a third example, at *Iliad* 3.171 Helen addresses a *μῦθος* to Priam, as she begins to identify for him the Achaean leaders; Martin (1989, 88) argues that this speech, too, is a lament. Certainly in this passage Helen is very unhappy, and she wishes she were dead, but she does not in fact lament. Nor is it true that “she refers to Menalaos as if he were no longer alive (3.180)” (Martin 1989, 88). In this line Helen says that Agamemnon was once her kinsman; the implication is not that Menelaus is dead, but that she is no longer married to him, and so Agamemnon is no longer her brother-in-law. The point of the passage is that Helen can hardly imagine that her former life really happened. Why, then, is this passage a *μῦθος*? Probably because the passage, part of a long description of various Achaean leaders, is a public speech, performed at length, based on memory, with a focus on attention to detail.¹¹

In a fourth example, at *Iliad* 6.343, Helen addresses a long *μῦθος* speech to Hector. First she wishes that she had died on the day of her birth, or else that she had been the wife of someone braver than Paris; then she urges Hector to come in and rest. Why is this speech a *μῦθος*? It would be rash to characterize such a complex speech by only one of its elements, but once

10. Priam, of course is still alive, but this is no objection, since anticipatory lament is possible in the *Iliad*, such as the lament for Achilles at the beginning of Book 18.

11. As Martin 1989, 88, remarks, “Priam on the wall asks her [Helen] for an exact declaration concerning the name of a hero below (3.166, *exonomênêis*). That this sort of a speech requires a *muthos* on the part of Helen is confirmed by the formula she uses later (*ounoma muthêsaimên*, 3.235) in making the statement Priam wants.” Since Martin seems to interpret Helen's *μῦθος* here in a way consistent with his general definition of the term, it is more economical to apply the same interpretation for the term at *Il.* 3.171.

again the speaker is attempting to persuade someone to do something, and it is this aspect of the speech to which Hector responds (*Il.* 6.359–60):

τὴν δ' ἡμείβετ' ἔπειτα μέγας κορυθαίολος Ἔκτωρ·
μή με κάθιζ', Ἑλένη, φιλέουσά περ' οὐδέ με πείσεις.

Then tall Hector of the shining helm answered her:

"Do not, Helen, sit me down, though you love me. You will not persuade me."

His language here is reminiscent of Priam's answer to Hecuba, quoted above.

In one other passage in the *Iliad* a mortal woman is responsible for a speech that is called a μῦθος: at *Iliad* 6.381, a housekeeper tells Hector where he can find Andromache. In this passage, so far as I can see, the word μῦθος does not seem to be used for any particular point: it is neither lament nor command nor insult nor narration from memory.

My interpretation of these passages maintains Martin's definition of μῦθος in the *Iliad*, that is, as a speech of command, boast or insult, or narration from memory, expressing authority. Four of the five instances in which a mortal woman speaks a μῦθος can be understood as a woman's pointed use of a type of speech ordinarily reserved for men. Thus the overwhelming evidence in the *Iliad* would suggest that under normal circumstances μῦθος speech is reserved for men, and most of what might seem to be counter-examples in fact support the point.

Does this rule also hold for the *Odyssey*? Many instances of μῦθος in the *Odyssey* do indeed conform to the pattern Martin finds in the *Iliad*. An important example is found in Book 1, when Athena, disguised as Mentès, visits Telemachus and urges him to call a public assembly to present his case against the suitors (*Od.* 1.271–73):

εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν ξυνίει καὶ ἐμῶν ἐμπάξεο μύθων.
αὔριον εἰς ἀγορὴν καλέσας ἥρωας Ἀχαιοὺς
μῦθον πέφραδε πᾶσι, θεοὶ δ' ἐπὶ μάρτυροι ἔστων·

Come now, listen and pay attention to my *muthoi*.

Tomorrow, summon the Achaean warriors into assembly

and make known a *muthos* to all, and let the gods be your witnesses.

The words of the disguised Athena are μῦθοι because they are an authoritative command, and the words of Telemachus will be a μῦθος because they will be a public declaration claiming authority.

It is easy to find instances of men in the *Odyssey* making speeches that are μῦθοι because they are commands, boasts or insults, the recitation of remembered events, public speeches of men claiming some kind of authority. But what about the speeches of women in the *Odyssey*?

In the *Odyssey*, according to my count, there are 134 instances of various forms of the word μῦθος; of these, male characters are responsible for 101; goddesses are responsible for 6, and mortal women are responsible for 27. The difference is clear. In the *Iliad*, 5 out of 147 total instances of μῦθος

were attributed to mortal women; in the *Odyssey*, out of 134 total instances, 27 are attributed to mortal women. Of these speeches, Helen is responsible for 3;¹² Arete, the queen of the Phaeacians, for 2;¹³ the housekeeper Eurycleia, 6;¹⁴ Eurynome, another housekeeper, 2;¹⁵ the nurse of the swineherd Eumaeus, 3;¹⁶ and Penelope, 11.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that a number of these speeches are made by slaves. It is one thing for Helen and Arete and Penelope to give such speeches—each, after all, is the queen of her city—but it is another thing altogether for a slave to give such a speech. These speeches are not detailed public speeches made by a person of power and authority. If a slave woman in the *Odyssey* can give a μῦθος speech, then how can Telemachus deny this right to his mother?

The attribution of a few of these speeches is open to question. *Odyssey* 17.57, 19.29, 21.386, and 22.398 are identical:

ὥς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν, τῇ δ' ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος.

(?) So he spoke, but her *muthos* was without wings.

This formulaic line never occurs in the *Iliad*. If the translation given here is correct, then the word ἄπτερος, “without wings,” means something like “ineffective.” In each instance of this formula, either Telemachus, or else the swineherd Eumaeus speaking on behalf of Telemachus, has given an order to a mortal woman. In Book 17, the two people involved in the conversation are Telemachus and Penelope; in Book 19, Telemachus and Eurycleia, the faithful housekeeper; in Book 21, they are Eumaeus and Eurycleia, and in Book 22, Telemachus and Eurycleia again. In each instance the mortal woman does not in fact answer, but simply obeys the command.¹⁸ So it would seem that these passages do not attribute the power of a μῦθος to a mortal woman; they seem, on the contrary, to deny it.

This reading, however, depends on an interpretation of ἄπτερος that has not found universal acceptance.¹⁹ The word is composed of two parts—a root, πτερος, meaning “wing” or “feather,” and the alpha prefix. The frequently used formula “winged words” probably means that the words hit their mark, perhaps as a feathered arrow hits its mark. If the alpha prefix is negative, then ἄπτερος means “without wings.” If a winged word is effective, then a word without wings would be ineffective, or perhaps unspoken. This is the usual interpretation of these passages; Cunliffe’s Homeric lexicon, for example, gives no other meaning for the word ἄπτερος; LSJ also gives

12. *Od.* 4.234, 4.239, 15.171.

13. *Od.* 7.233, 11.335.

14. *Od.* 19.29 (?), 19.502, 21.386 (?), 22.398 (?), 23.4, 23.62.

15. *Od.* 17.495, 18.169.

16. *Od.* 15.434, 15.439, 15.445.

17. *Od.* 1.358, 17.57 (?), 17.100, 17.551, 19.96, 19.103, 19.252, 19.508, 21.67, 23.99, 23.301.

18. For other instances where someone obeys a command without speaking, see *Il.* 1.33–34, where Chryses silently obeys Agamemnon; *Il.* 24.571, where Priam silently obeys Achilles; and *Od.* 1.360, where Penelope silently obeys Telemachus.

19. For discussion of the meaning of the phrase ἄπτερος μῦθος, see Fraenkel 1950, ad 276, and Latacz 1968. A final determination of the question is not necessary for my argument.

this meaning for the Homeric passages; moreover, the word is used with this meaning by later Greek writers.²⁰

But some scholars would disagree. They would take the ἄπτερος μῦθος to be the just completed command given by Telemachus or by Eumaeus; if so, the alpha is intensive, so that the word would mean something like "very winged," that is, "very effective," and the whole line would mean, "So he spoke, and his command was very effective for her." If this interpretation is correct, if these passages should be attributed to male speakers, then I have counted these four instances in the wrong column; they belong to males, not to mortal women, the number of μῦθος speeches attributed to a mortal woman drops from 27 to 23; but this is still a large number, compared to the 5 instances in the *Iliad*. But in neither interpretation do these passages attribute the power of μῦθος speech to a mortal woman.

In some passages, however, the word μῦθος applied to a woman's speech does seem to carry something of the meaning that Martin has found in the *Iliad*. In Book 7 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus arrives at the palace of the Phaeacians and appeals for conveyance to his home; the assembled leaders of the Phaeacians agree to his request and then depart, leaving Odysseus with Alcinous and Arete. Arete recognizes the clothing that Nausicaa has given to Odysseus (*Od.* 7.233–36):

τοῖσιν δ' Ἀρήτη λευκώλενος ἤρχετο μύθων·
ἔγνω γάρ φάρός τε χιτῶνά τε εἶματ' ἰδοῦσα
καλά, τά ῥ' αὐτῇ τεύξε σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξί·
καί μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·

Now white-armed Arete began their *muthoi*,
for she recognized the mantle and tunic when she saw them,
fine things, which she herself had made, with her serving women.
And she addressed him and spoke winged words.

She then questions him about the clothing and about his identity.

The status of Arete in Phaeacia remains controversial; it is possible, however, that this speech shows her using a μῦθος to command an answer; and command is one of the types of speech designated by μῦθος in the *Iliad*. Arete's command is effective: her words have wings.

Also on another occasion Arete speaks a μῦθος. In Book 11, after Odysseus has been narrating his adventures for some time, he suggests that it is time to go to sleep (*Od.* 11.333–35):

ὣς ἔφαθ'· οἳ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῇ·
κηληθμῶ δ' ἔσχοντο κατὰ μέγαρα σκιόεντα.
τοῖσιν δ' Ἀρήτη λευκώλενος ἤρχετο μύθων·

So he spoke, and all of them stayed stricken to silence,
held in thrall by the story all through the shadowy chambers.
Now white armed Arete began the *muthoi*:

20. See, for example, Aesch. *Ag.* 278; Eur. *IT* 1095; Pl. *Phdr.* 256d.

Arete praises the appearance and mind of their guest, and she suggests that they should all contribute to give him a gift. It is shortly after this speech that Alcinous feels he must remind Arete that he is the one who has the power in the district (*Od.* 11.353). It is easy to see Arete's speech here as an assertion of power, and her husband's answer as an attempt to put her back in her place.²¹

Another instance of a woman using a *mũthos* to express her power occurs in Book 15. As Telemachus is about to leave Sparta on his way back home, there is a portent: an eagle flies by on the right carrying a goose in its talons. Peisistratus, the travelling companion of Telemachus, asks Menelaus for an interpretation, but before Menelaus can answer, Helen begins to speak (*Od.* 15.169–73):

ὦς φάτο, μερμήριξε δ' ἀρηίφιλος Μενέλαος,
ὅπως οἱ κατὰ μοῖραν ὑποκρίναιτο νοήσας.
τὸν δ' Ἑλένη τανύπεπλος ὑποφθαμένη φάτο μῦθον·
κλῦτέ μευ· αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μαντεύσομαι, ὥς ἐνὶ θυμῷ
ἀθάνατοι βάλλουσι καὶ ὥς τελέεσθαι οἶω.

So he [Peisistratus] spoke, and Menelaus, dear to Ares, was pondering
how to consider and answer the right way;
but Helen of the trailing robes anticipated and spoke a *muthos*:
“Hear me! I shall be your prophet, as in my heart
the immortals put it, and as I think it will be accomplished.”

Peisistratus evidently expects that Menelaus is the proper interpreter of the portent, but Helen takes the power right out of his mouth.

One other *mũthos* speech is attributed to Helen; the meaning of the two uses of the word in the following passage seems close to one of the meanings established by Martin for the *Iliad*: a story narrated from memory and in detail. In Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, Menelaus tells Telemachus a story about Odysseus, and then Helen (after putting a drug in the wine) counters with a story of her own (*Od.* 4.233–39):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' ἐνέηκε κέλευσέ τε οἶνοχοῆσαι,
ἐξαῦτις μύθοισιν ἀμειβομένη προσέειπεν·
Ἄτρεϊδε Μενέλαε διοτρεφεὺς ἦδ' οἱ καὶ οἶδε
ἀνδρῶν ἐσθλῶν παῖδες, ἀτὰρ θεὸς ἄλλοτε ἄλλω
Ζεὺς ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε διδοί· δύναται γὰρ ἅπαντα·
ἦτοι νῦν δαίνυσθε καθήμενοι ἐν μεγάροισι
καὶ μύθοις τέρπεσθε· εὐκότα γὰρ καταλέξω.

Now when she had put the medicine in, and told them to pour it,
she in turn answering with *muthoi* addressed them:
“Son of Atreus, dear to Zeus, Menelaus; and you who
are here, children of noble fathers; yet divine Zeus sometimes
gives out good, or sometimes evil; he can do anything.
Sit here now in the palace and take your dinner
and delight in *muthoi*; for I will recount fitting things.”

21. See below for discussion of the related formula τοῖσι δὲ μύθων ἥρχε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια.

Once again Helen seems to be laying claim to an Iliadic speech genre.²²

In another passage, the word *μῦθος* seems to mean a story, but not the sort of story designated by *μῦθος* in the *Iliad*. At the beginning of Book 23 of the *Odyssey*, the servant Eurycleia goes to Penelope to tell her that Odysseus has returned and has killed all of the suitors; this speech is labelled a *μῦθος* by the narrator (*Od.* 23.4):

στή δ' ἄρ' ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς καί μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν.

She stood above Penelope's head and spoke a *muthos* to her.

But Penelope does not believe Eurycleia's story (*Od.* 23.59–64):

μαῖα φίλη, μή πω μέγ' ἐπεύχεο καγχαλώσα.
οἶσθα γὰρ ὥς κ' ἄσπαστος ἐνὶ μεγάροισι φανείη
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί τε καὶ υἱέϊ, τὸν τεκόμεσθα·
ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅδε μῦθος ἐτήτυμος, ὥς ἀγορεύεις,
ἀλλὰ τις ἀθανάτων κτείνει μνηστήρας ἀγαυούς,
ὕβριν ἀγασσάμενος θυμαλγέα καὶ κακὰ ἔργα.

Dear nurse, do not yet laugh aloud in triumph.

You know how welcome he would appear in the palace:

to all, but especially to me and the son we gave birth to.

But this *muthos* is not true as you tell it;

but some one of the immortals has killed the haughty suitors
in anger over their heart-hurting violence and wicked deeds.

The word *μῦθος* in these passages partly fulfills Martin's criteria; it designates a story told at length and in detail, but this is not a public occasion, and Eurycleia is not a person of power or authority. The speech is not a command, it is not a boast or an insult, and I do not think it can count as the recitation of a remembered event; nor is it a lament. In this passage I think we may see something like the later meaning of the word already becoming active—*μῦθος* meaning story, and in this case a false story.

In another passage the word *μῦθος* is attributed to something that Eurycleia might say. In Book 19, after Eurycleia has washed Odysseus' feet, she realizes who he is. He catches her by the throat and threatens to kill her if she tells Penelope; she assures him that she will not tell, but if he should kill the suitors, she will tell him the names of the faithless women of the household. Odysseus rejects this favor (19.500–502):

μαῖα, τίη δὲ σὺ τὰς μυθήσῃαι; οὐδὲ τί σε χρή.
εὖ νυ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ φράσσομαι καὶ εἴσομ' ἐκάστην.
ἀλλ' ἔχε σιγῇ μῦθον, ἐπίτρεψον δὲ θεοῖσιν.

Nurse, why should you tell me of them? Nor in any way do you need to.

I myself will consider and know each one.

But hold your *muthos* in silence, and entrust it to the gods.

22. See below for discussion of this line applied to Penelope.

Although Eurycleia never makes this promised speech, if she had, it would have been a *muthos*, perhaps because it would be a detailed account based on memory. Still, this instance seems peripheral to the meanings Martin suggests for the word in the *Iliad*, since it would not be a public speech delivered by a person claiming authority.

In Book 17 of the *Odyssey*, after Antinous has struck the disguised Odysseus with a footstool, Penelope wishes that Apollo would punish this inhospitable aggression; the servant Eurynome agrees (*Od.* 17.495–97):

τὴν δ' αὖτ' Εὐρυνόμη ταμίη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
εἰ γὰρ ἐπ' ἀρῇσιν τέλος ἡμετέρησι γένοιτο·
οὐκ ἂν τις τούτων γε εὐθρονον Ἥῳ ἴκοιτο.

Then the housekeeper Eurynome addressed a *muthos* to her:

“If only there would be fulfillment of your prayers:

Not one of these men would reach the well-throned dawn.”

And the same formula is applied to Eurynome a little later, when Penelope decides to show herself to the suitors, and to tell Telemachus not to associate so closely with them. Eurynome agrees, and tells her to wash the tears from her face (*Od.* 18.169–70):

τὴν δ' αὖτ' Εὐρυνόμη ταμίη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
ναὶ δὴ ταῦτά γε πάντα, τέκος, κατὰ μοῖραν ἔειπες.

Then the housekeeper Eurynome addressed a *muthos* to her:

“Yes indeed, child, all this you have said in good order.”

Neither of these passages seems to fit Martin’s account of *muthos* in the *Iliad*. They are private speeches by a person who has no authority; they are not commands, boasts, insults, narration—or lament. In these passages the word seems unmarked.

This formula also occurs, with a slight variation, in a passage attributing a *muthos* to Penelope, who orders her servant Eurynome to bring a chair for the disguised Odysseus (*Od.* 19.96–99):

ἦ ῥα, καὶ Εὐρυνόμην ταμίην πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
Εὐρυνόμη, φέρε δὴ δίφρον καὶ κῶας ἐπ' αὐτοῦ,
ὄφρα καθεζόμενος εἴπῃ ἔπος ἥδ' ἐπακούσῃ
ὁ ξείνος ἐμέθεν· ἐθέλω δέ μιν ἐξερέεσθαι.

So she [Penelope] spoke and addressed a *muthos* to her housekeeper Eurynome:

“Eurynome, bring up a chair and put a fleece on it,

so that the stranger can be seated and tell me his story,

and listen also to what I have to say. I wish to question him.”

One might consider this speech a *muthos* because it is a command, but since the formula is twice used in unmarked contexts, I think it is unlikely to be marked here.

In Book 15, the swineherd Eumaeus three times uses the word *muthos* to refer to the speech of a woman, the Phoenician slave who kidnaps him. A Phoenician sailor offers to help her escape back to her home and her parents, in hopes of a reward (*Od.* 15.434–45):

τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε γυνὴ καὶ ἀμείβετο μῦθῳ·
 εἶη κεν καὶ τοῦτ', εἴ μοι ἐθέλοιτέ γε, ναῦται,
 ὄρκῳ πιστωθῆναι ἀπήμονά μ' οἴκαδ' ἀπάξειν.
 ὡς ἔφαθ'· οἳ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἀάμυνον, ὡς ἐκέλευεν.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' ὅμοσάν τε τελευτήσαν τε τὸν ὅρκον,
 τοῖς δ' αὖτις μετέειπε γυνὴ καὶ ἀμείβετο μῦθῳ·
 σιγῇ νῦν· μή τις με προσαιδάτω ἐπέεσσιν
 ὑμετέρων ἐτάρων ζυμβλήμενος ἢ ἐν ἀγυίῃ
 ἢ που ἐπὶ κρήνῃ· μή τις ποτὶ δῶμα γέροντι
 ἔλθων ἐξείπῃ, ὃ δ' οἰσάμενος καταδήσῃ
 δεσμῶ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ, ὅμιν δ' ἐπιφράσσειτ' ὄλεθρον.
 ἀλλ' ἔχετ' ἐν φρεσὶ μῦθον, ἐπείγετε δ' ὄνον ὁδαίων.

And in turn the woman addressed him and answered with a *muthos*:

"That also could be, if you were willing, sailors,
 to promise with an oath and take me home safe."

So she spoke; and then all swore, as she desired.

But when they swore and accomplished their oath,
 again the woman spoke to them and answered with a *muthos*.

"Silence, now. Let no one address with words
 of your companions who meets me in the street
 or perhaps at the spring: lest someone should go into
 the house and tell the old man, who would suspect and bind me
 in painful bonds, and plan death for you.

But hold my *muthos* in your hearts, and hurry your purchase of cargo."

Interpretation of the word in this passage is difficult. This woman, according to Eumaeus' story, claims that she was the child of a wealthy man, but it is not clear that now she is in a position to give orders; here she is certainly urging a course of action, but the strength of her imperatives is hard to judge.

The most interesting group, for our purposes, is the group of μῦθος speeches attributed to Penelope. There are either ten or eleven of these, depending on the attribution of *Odyssey* 17.57. Penelope makes the largest number of μῦθος speeches in the *Odyssey*, and by herself she is responsible for twice as many μῦθος speeches as all of the mortal women together in the *Iliad*.

Several passages that attribute a μῦθος speech to Penelope are formulas. At *Odyssey* 17.551, Penelope orders the swineherd Eumaeus to bring the disguised Odysseus to her, and Eumaeus obeys:

ὡς φάτο, βῆ δὲ συφορβός, ἐπεὶ τὸν μῦθον ἄκουσεν,

So [Penelope] spoke, and the swineherd went, when he heard her *muthos*.

The same line is found at *Odyssey* 17.348, *Odyssey* 17.574, and it is almost the same as *Iliad* 2.16, although these passages refer to other speakers:

ὡς φάτο, βῆ δὲ συφορβός, ἐπεὶ τὸν μῦθον ἄκουσεν,

So [Telemachus] spoke, and the swineherd went, when he heard his *muthos*.

ὡς φάτο, βῆ δὲ συφορβός, ἐπεὶ τὸν μῦθον ἄκουσε.

So [Odysseus] spoke, and the swineherd went, when he heard his *muthos*.

ὧς φάτο, βῆ δ' ἄρ' ὄνειρος ἐπεὶ τὸν μῦθον ἄκουσε·

So [Zeus] spoke, and Dream went, when he heard his *muthos*.

In three of these passages, a superior is giving an order to a subordinate; when Odysseus speaks to Eumaeus, however, Eumaeus thinks he is just a wandering beggar. Still, it is possible that when this line is applied to Penelope, its effect is to assimilate her speech to the speech of men in authority.

The word μῦθος also is found in another formula, applied three times to Penelope (*Od.* 17.100 = 19.103 = 19.508):

τοῖσι δὲ μύθων ἦρχε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·

And wise Penelope began their *muthos*.

This line, with only a change of name to indicate the various speakers, is also found eight times in the *Iliad* and sixteen times in the *Odyssey*.

At *Odyssey* 17.100, Penelope is speaking to Telemachus. He has returned to the palace from his trip; after he bathes and eats, his mother addresses him (*Od.* 17.99–106):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο,
τοῖσι δὲ μύθων ἦρχε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
Τηλέμαχ', ἦτοι ἐγὼν ὑπερώιον εἰσαναβᾶσα
λέξομαι εἰς εὐνήν, ἣ μοι στονόεσσα τέτυκται,
αἰεὶ δάκρυσ' ἐμοῖσι πεφυρμένη, ἐξ οὗ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ᾤχεθ' ἅμ' Ἀτρεΐδῃσιν ἐς Ἴλιον· οὐδέ μοι ἔτλης,
πρὶν ἐλθεῖν μνηστῆρας ἀγήμενός ἐς τόδε δῶμα,
νόστον σοῦ πατρὸς σάφα εἰπέμεν, εἴ που ἀκουσας.

But when they had put away their desire for drink and food,
prudent Penelope began their *muthoi*:

"Telemachus, I will go to my upper chamber
and I will lie on my bed, which is made sorrowful for me,
always stained by my tears since Odysseus
went with the sons of Atreus to Ilium; nor did you endure,
before the haughty suitors came to this house,
to tell me clearly your father's homecoming, if you have heard anything."

Telemachus takes the hint and tells Penelope about his journey. One might be tempted to count Penelope's speech as a lament; certainly she talks about her continual lamenting. This speech, however, though it refers to lament, is not itself a lament; rather, it is an indirect request for information.

At *Odyssey* 19.103, the same line is used to introduce Penelope's questioning of the disguised Odysseus, and at *Odyssey* 19.508, this line is used as Penelope resumes her conversation with Odysseus, after Eurycleia has washed his feet. Neither of these passages fits the Iliadic pattern for the word.

At *Odyssey* 19.252 another formulaic speech introduction is applied to Penelope. The disguised Odysseus has just given false proofs that he has seen the wandering hero, by describing his clothing, his jewelry, and his companions. Penelope is moved by this account, and she begins to weep (*Od.* 19.251–52):

ἦ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν τάρφθη πολυδακρύτοιο γόοιο,
καὶ τότε μιν μύθοισιν ἀμειβομένη προσέειπε·

But when she had taken her pleasure of tearful lamentation,
then again answering with *muthoi* she [Penelope] addressed him.

She now tells the stranger that he has described her own gifts to Odysseus, and she despairs of seeing her husband again. Again it is tempting to count this passage as a lament; certainly the word γόοιο favors this interpretation. But the μῦθος here seems to follow the lamentation; and since the word *muthos* is applied to lament in only a few passages in either of the epics, this passage does not belong to any clear pattern of μῦθος as a marker of women's lament. A very similar line is found earlier in Book 19, with ἔπεσσιν instead of μύθοισιν (*Od.* 19.213–14):

ἦ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν τάρφθη πολυδακρύτοιο γόοιο,
ἐξαυτίς μιν ἔπεσσιν ἀμειβομένη προσέειπε·

But when she had taken her pleasure of tearful lamentation,
then again answering with *epea* she [Penelope] addressed him.

We have already seen the line used by Helen at *Odyssey* 4.234, when she drugs the drinks before telling her story about Odysseus; and versions of the line occur elsewhere.

Three remaining passages deserve special examination. In the first of these, Penelope suggests the test of the bow to the suitors (*Od.* 21.67–70):

αὐτίκα δὲ μνηστῆρσι μετηύδα καὶ φάτο μῦθον·
κέκλυτέ μευ, μνηστῆρες ἀγῆνορες, οἳ τόδε δῶμα
ἐχράετ' ἐσθιέμεν καὶ πινέμεν ἐμμενὲς αἰεὶ
ἀνδρὸς ἀποιχομένου πολὺν χρόνον·

Now at once she addressed the suitors and spoke a *muthos*:
“Hear me now, haughty suitors, who have been troubling
this house to eat and drink incessantly,
though it belongs to a man gone for a long time.”

Here for the last time Penelope acts in her role of authority in the absence of her husband, and the word μῦθος marks this public command. It is not long after this speech that Telemachus once again uses the formula he used in Book 1, this time to tell his mother that he is the one to take over the conduct of the test (*Od.* 21.350–53):

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,
ἴστόν τ' ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· τόξον δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἔμοι· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

But go back into the house, and take up your own work,
the loom and the distaff, and bid your handmaidens
to ply their work also; but **archery** (*toxon*) will be a concern for men,
all men, and for me most of all, for mine is the power in the household.

At the beginning of Book 23, after all the suitors have been killed, Eurycleia goes to tell Penelope that Odysseus has indeed come home. When Penelope comes down to face Odysseus and Telemachus, she is not quite sure what to believe, and not sure what to do: should she believe that this beggar really is her husband after all these years? For a long time she sits in silence looking at him, until Telemachus finally breaks the silence (*Od.* 23.97–99):

μη̄τερ ἐμή, δύσμητερ, ἀπηνέα θυμὸν ἔχουσα,
τίφθ' οὐτῶ πατρὸς νοσφίζεαι, οὐδὲ παρ' αὐτὸν
ἔζομένη μύθοισιν ἀνείρεαι οὐδὲ μεταλλᾷς;

My mother, harsh mother, having an unbending spirit,
why thus do you keep away from my father, nor beside him
sitting do you question him with *muthoi* nor make inquiries?

Of course everything works out happily; through the test of the bed, Penelope becomes certain that this man really is Odysseus; the sequel is told at *Odyssey* 23.300–301:

τῷ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν φιλότιτος ἐταρπήτην ἐρατεινῆς,
τερπέσθην μύθοισι, πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐνέποντες,

And so when the two had enjoyed their delightful lovemaking,
they took their pleasure in *muthoi*, talking with each other

Clearly *μῦθος* in these passages does not mean the formal public speech of a person exercising power; on the contrary, it must mean exactly the private and reciprocal speech, such as that between husbands and wives, that Martin says is designated by *ἔπος* in the *Iliad*, and never by *μῦθος*. But here, at two crucial moments at the climax of the *Odyssey*, this kind of intimate reciprocal speech is designated *μῦθος*.

It seems, therefore, that the semantics of the word *μῦθος* in the two epics cannot be the same. In the *Iliad*, a *μῦθος* speech is ascribed to a woman just five times, and in four of these instances the woman is attempting to assert her authority over a man or to speak in a genre normally reserved for men. These passages thus indirectly support the gendered use of the word. In the *Odyssey*, however, there are many more instances of a *μῦθος* ascribed to a woman. In some of these, a woman seems to be claiming a masculine speech genre—as when Penelope tries to give commands in the house (*Od.* 21.67), or when Helen interprets an omen (*Od.* 15.171). In other passages, however, there seems to be no particular point made by the woman's *μῦθος*—as when Eurynome tells Penelope to wash away her tears (*Od.* 18.169–70). And finally, on two occasions the word seems to refer to the private and intimate speech of a husband and wife—as Odysseus and Penelope become reacquainted (*Od.* 23.97–99 and 23.300–301).

Must we then conclude that the meaning of *μῦθος* in the *Iliad* is irrelevant to its meaning in the *Odyssey*? If so, we would have to agree with Stephanie West that in Book 1 Telemachus was being rude to his mother. Perhaps, however, we can establish a more nuanced reading of *μῦθος* in the *Odyssey*,

a position that takes into account Martin's analysis but accommodates a more complex reading of the word. A word, after all, can be a complex of different meanings, which are called out by different contexts, and these different meanings can be fought over, like pieces of ideological territory.²³ I propose, then, that the word *μῦθος* was complex; in heroic contexts, as throughout the *Iliad*, it meant a speech act indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention to every detail. Certainly the heroic ideal is also expressed in the *Odyssey*; it is this ideal to which Telemachus aspires, as he seeks to become a hero like his father. It is no surprise, therefore, that the word *μῦθος* in his mouth can express the heroic side of the word, especially at the beginning of the story, when he is attempting to cast aside his childhood. If he is rude to his mother, this is because he is trying to enter a world and a word that would have no place for her as a woman.

But the *Odyssey* is in some ways more complex than the *Iliad*; it has more room for the domestic side of life, and in this world the word *μῦθος* is available to designate the speech of women as well as the speech of men.²⁴ By the end of the story, when Telemachus urges his mother to speak to her husband, he has learned to value something more than the heroic ideal, and he has learned that the word *μῦθος* can be applied not only to heroic speeches of command, but also to the private words of a husband and wife.²⁵

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23. For a detailed examination of semantic complexity in the interpretation of literary texts, see Empson 1967; also Lewis 1967. Examples of ideologically contested use of vocabulary in Classical literature include *δίκη* in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *σωφροσύνη* in Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

24. Schein 1996, 27: "It is characteristic of the *Odyssey* and its genre that having a harmonious marriage and an *oikos* can generate the kind of glory that in the *Iliad* and the Iliadic tradition comes only from heroic warfare." See Pucci 1987 for discussion of the complex interconnections of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. But where Pucci is ready to see direct quotation or allusion in the Homeric poems, I am more inclined to see a common use of phrases taken from the stock of epic formula.

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