

THE PAST IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

The first section of this paper argues that Homer's description of the world of Ithaca as it existed *before Odysseus ever left for Troy* (henceforth 'the pre-departure world') is largely Homeric invention. The second section of the paper brings in the world of Ithaca *during Odysseus' absence* (henceforth 'the intervening years'), which is also, for the most part, Homeric invention, and considers the literary function of this and the pre-departure world.

At *Poetics* 1451a, Aristotle argues that Homer is superior to all other epic poets in his method of constructing an epic. The reason he gives is that Homer does not tell everything there is to tell about his subject, but centres his epic round a single action (μία πράξις) and for the purpose of the telling selects only those incidents which make the other incidents 'necessary or probable' (cf. 1459a-b, where Aristotle gives examples of what he means from the *Iliad*).

We are fortunate in knowing what Aristotle thought the 'single action' of the *Odyssey* to consist of (*Poetics* 1455b): 'someone has been away from home for many years, with Poseidon on the watch for him, and he is alone. Moreover affairs at home are such that his wealth is being consumed by [his wife's] suitors, and his son is being plotted against [by them]. He arrives after much distress, makes himself known to some people, and attacks. He is rescued, his enemies annihilated'.¹

In describing the plot of the *Odyssey* in this way, it is clear that Aristotle has our version of the epic in mind. The first sentence refers to i 1-21, the second to i 22-iv 847, the third and fourth to the rest of the epic. In other words, Aristotle sees that, to compose a return epic as a 'single action', the poet has no option but to set it at the moment when the hero returns, and cast virtually everything prior to that moment as 'past'. This is where I make the assumption crucial to the first part of my thesis: *that it was Homer who first decided to compose the epic in this temporal sequence*. I base the assumption on Aristotle's evidence for the uniqueness of Homer in this respect: only Homer aimed to make his epic μία πράξις, only Homer therefore *needed* to construct it in this way. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the remains of the Cyclic epics do not suggest that such temporal inversions occurred in them (though Nestor, as a referee pointed out, does tell tales of the past in them).²

Homer's decision to invert the epic (i.e. begin at the end) opens up a larger range of possibilities for the poet than a telling in temporal order would allow: indeed, it almost *requires* him to consider the past in more detail than he would otherwise need to. The situation in Ithaca can be depicted to show why Odysseus' return is so urgently required. Telemachus and his relationship with Penelope and the suitors can be brought into prominence. But it is the potential for temporal complexity which particularly interests me. Such complexity is not ruled out by a temporally sequential telling, but is certainly less easy to exploit, and I wish to pay especial attention to the depiction of the pre-departure world of Ithaca. By my count there are 107

¹ Tr. R. Janko in *Aristotle Poetics* i (Indianapolis/Cambridge 1987) *ad loc.* All references are to the Oxford Text of the *Odyssey*, unless otherwise indicated. I am grateful to the two anonymous *JHS* referees for helping me clear out a lot of the clinker from this article and for other valuable suggestions. For a highly abbreviated version of some of the conclusions of this paper, see *Homer: The Odyssey*, tr. E.V. Rieu, revised by D. C. H. Rieu in consultation with P. V. Jones (Harmondsworth 1991), xii-xxii.

² R. Janko (*op. cit.*, n. 1) on [14]59a30 says 'Clearly none of the other early epics was at all like Homer's in the handling of the plot'. S. Reece in 'Homeric influence in Stesichorus' *Nostoi*' (*Bull. Amer. Soc. Pap.* xxv (1988) 1-8) points out (8) that if *PMG* fr. 209 comes from the story of Odysseus' return, it does not suggest Stesichorus adopted Homer's temporal ordering. For Nestor's tales of the past in the Cyclic epics, see M. Davies, *EGF, Procli Cypriorum enarratio*, ll. 36-39 (n. 9).

individual references to what Ithaca was like before Odysseus ever left it for Troy twenty years earlier, and I wish to ask first: where does this material come from? First, however, the evidence. I quote it in the order in which it occurs, numbered for ease of reference (A1, A45 etc.), and with the speaker quoted in brackets before the line-reference:

A. THE PRE-DEPARTURE WORLD: ITHACA BEFORE THE TROJAN WAR

Book i

1. (Homer) 128-9: the house held many of Odysseus' spears
2. (Telemachus) 175-8: Odysseus travelled widely (ἐπιστροφος)
3. (Athena-Mentes) 187-8: I and Odysseus were ξεινοι πατρώιοι (cf. 417)
4. (Athena-Mentes) 209-11: I and Odysseus used to meet frequently before he left for Troy
5. (Telemachus) 232-3: the house was in the way of being ἀφνειός and ἀμύμων when Odysseus at home
6. (Athena-Mentes) 260-4: Odysseus went to my house to seek poisoned arrows, and my father gave them to him because φιλέεσκε...αίνως
7. (Telemachus) 398: Odysseus won household slaves by force for me
8. (Homer) 430-4: Laertes purchased Eurycleia but treated her respectfully

Book ii

9. (Homer) 14: Odysseus had a special seat in the ἀγορή
10. (Homer) 17-20: Aegyptius' son Antiphus went with Odysseus to Troy
11. (Aegyptius) 26-7: Odysseus held ἀγοραί and θόωκοι
12. (Telemachus) 46-7: Odysseus ruled like a πατήρ...ἥπιος
13. (Telemachus) 131: my mother who bore and raised me
14. (Halitherses) 172-6: a prophecy which I uttered just before Odysseus left for Troy, about his return
15. (Homer) 225-7: Odysseus entrusted his house to his old friend Mentor (or Laertes?)
16. (Mentor) 233-4: Odysseus was like a πατήρ...ἥπιος to his people
17. (Leocritus) 253-4: Mentor and Halitherses are πατρώιοι...ἐταῖροι to Telemachus³
18. (Athena-Mentor) 286: I am a ἐταῖρος...πατρώιος to you, Telemachus³.
19. (Homer) 337-43: the chamber of Odysseus, full of gold, bronze, cloth and wine awaiting its master's return (cf. 350-2)

Book iii

20. (Telemachus) 95: Odysseus' mother bore him to misery

Book iv

21. (Menelaus) 112: Odysseus left the new-born Telemachus in the house
22. (Helen) 144: = A21
23. (Telemachus) 325: = A20
24. (Penelope) 687-93: suitors as children did not listen to their fathers saying how good a king Odysseus was, doing and saying nothing ἐξάσιον and committing nothing ἀτάσθαλον against anyone
25. (Penelope) 736-7: my father gave Dolius the gardener as a gift to me on my marriage to Odysseus
26. (Penelope) 763-4: Odysseus' sacrifices to Athena

Book v

27. (Athena) 11-12: = A16
28. (Odysseus) 215-7: Penelope is ἀκιδνοτέρη in form and body than you, Calypso³

Book x

29. (Odysseus) 417: Ithaca, where my men were born and raised
30. (Circe) 460-3: recover the spirit you had when you first left Ithaca

³ A number of references are couched in the present, but refer to or have implications for the pre-departure world.

Book xi

31. (Elpenor) 67-8: in the name of your father who raised you and the only son Telemachus whom you left at home
32. (Homer) 85-6: Odysseus left Anticleia alive when he went to Troy
33. (Odysseus) 174: the son whom I left behind
34. (Agamemnon) 447-50: Odysseus left a young wife Penelope with a child at her breast when he went to Troy, and the child must now be grown up

Book xiii

35. (Athena) 349-50: the cave where you offered many hecatombs to the nymphs
36. (Odysseus) 358: we will give gifts to the nymphs as we used to
37. (Athena) 403: the son whom you left in your house

Book xiv

38. (Homer) 4: slaves acquired by Odysseus
39. (Eumaeus) 96: Odysseus' ζῶη...ἄσπετος³
40. (Eumaeus) 138-9: I shall never meet again a master so ἥπιος as Odysseus
41. (Eumaeus) 174-7: the growth of Telemachus into a man no inferior to his father⁴

Book xv

42. (Odysseus-beggar) 348: Laertes was an old man when Odysseus left
43. (Eumaeus) 483: how Laertes purchased me

Book xvi

44. (Telemachus) 117-20: Zeus made Laertes, Odysseus and Telemachus only sons
45. (Odysseus-beggar) 288-90: my spears have become blackened since I left for Troy
46. (Penelope) 424-30: Odysseus once saved Antinous' father from death at the hands of an angry Ithacan mob
47. (Eurymachus) 442-4: Odysseus often sat me on his knee, feeding me meat and wine

Book xvii

48. (Homer) 68-9: Mentor, Antiphus and Halitherses are πατῶϊοι...ἑταῖροι of Odysseus
49. (Penelope) 102-4: my bed has been wet with tears since Odysseus left for Troy
50. (Homer) 206-7: the spring which Ithacus, Neritus and Polyctor made
51. (Eumaeus) 240-1: Odysseus used to sacrifice to fountain nymphs
52. (Homer) 292-4: Argus raised by Odysseus before he went to Troy
53. (Eumaeus) 313-7: Odysseus left a superb hunting dog behind
54. (Eumaeus) 318-9: in Odysseus' absence, no one looks after Argus³

Book xviii

55. (Penelope) 180-1: my ἀγλατή ruined since Odysseus left
56. (Penelope) 205: Odysseus was ἐξοχος... Ἀχαιῶν
57. (Penelope) 251-3: my ἀρετή, εἶδος and δέμας have been destroyed since Odysseus and the Greeks went to Troy
58. (Penelope) 253-71: Odysseus' instructions to me when he left for Troy
59. (Penelope) 268: her love for Odysseus' parents
60. (Penelope) 275-7: the suitors do not woo as men previously did

Book xix

61. (Odysseus-beggar) 7-9: = A45
62. (Penelope) 124-6: = A57
63. (Odysseus-beggar) 225-35: Odysseus' clothes when he left for Troy
64. (Odysseus-beggar) 239-40: Odysseus was a φίλος to many
65. (Odysseus-beggar) 244-8: Odysseus' herald at the time was Eurybates (described); Odysseus honoured him more than any other
66. (Penelope) 255-7: the clothes and pin I gave Odysseus

⁴ This could be placed on the B-list.

67. (Penelope) 259-60: Odysseus left for Troy κακή αἴση
68. (Penelope) 315-6: Odysseus was unique in welcoming and conveying ξείνοι
69. (Penelope) 354-5: Eurycleia raised Odysseus, taking him from his mother's hands
70. (Eurycleia) 365-8: the sacrifices (you) Odysseus made, praying that you would return
71. (Homer) 392-466: the tale of Odysseus' naming ceremony and the scar
72. (Odysseus) 482-3: you (Eurycleia) raised me as a baby
73. (Eurycleia) 493: you know my will is firm and unyielding³
74. (Penelope) 573-5: the bow-trick Odysseus used to do
75. (Penelope) 579-80: my house when I was a bride (μάλα καλόν, ἐνίπλειον βιότοιο)
76. (Penelope) 595-7: = A49

Book xx

77. (Penelope) 89: my vision of Odysseus as he was when he left with the army
78. (Homer) 106: the place where the Odysseus' grain-mills had been set up
79. (Philoetius) 209-12: Odysseus put me in charge of the cattle on Cephallenia: subsequent growth of the herds
80. (Telemachus) 265: Odysseus gained this house for me

Book xxi

81. (Homer) 9-12: Odysseus' storeroom, where treasure (bronze, gold, iron) lay, and the bow and arrows³
82. (Homer) 13-38: Odysseus got the bow from Iphitus while on a mission to Messene
83. (Homer) 38-41: Odysseus used the bow on hunting trips on Ithaca (he did not take it to Troy)
84. (Homer) 53: the bow taken from its peg where it hung
85. (Penelope) 77-8: = A75
86. (Antinous) 93-5: I remember as a child what Odysseus was like because I saw him
87. (Odysseus) 219-20: the scar (A71)

Book xxii

88. (Homer) 109-11: the θάλαμος where the weapons were stored
89. (Homer) 184-7: the shield Laertes carried as a young man, now mildewy and with its stitching gone
90. (Odysseus) 209: the good I used to do for you, Mentor
91. (Homer) 335-6: Laertes' and Odysseus' sacrifices in their home
92. (Homer) 501: Odysseus recognised the faithful maidservants (sc. he knew from old)³

Book xxiii

93. (Penelope) 18-19: I have not slept like this since Odysseus went to Troy
94. (Penelope) 61: the son whom we bore
95. (Eurycleia) 74: the scar (A71)
96. (Penelope) 110: my and Odysseus' secret signs
97. (Penelope) 175-6: I know well what Odysseus was like when he left Ithaca
98. (Penelope) 178: the bedroom Odysseus himself made
99. (Odysseus) 184-201: how I made our marriage chamber and bed
100. (Penelope) 227-9: Actoris, the maid given by my father on my marriage, who used to guard the bed chamber

Book xxiv

101. (Agamemnon) 115-19: Odysseus' reluctance to go to Troy
102. (Agamemnon) 193: you married a very virtuous wife, Odysseus
103. (Odysseus) 331-5: the scar
104. (Odysseus) 336-44: you (Laertes) taught me the names of the trees in the garden
105. (Laertes) 376-8: I remember when I took Nericus
106. (Eupieithes) 427-8: Odysseus took the best men of Ithaca to Troy and lost them
107. (Zeus) 485-6: the Ithacans must φιλεῖν each other, as (they did) before

It is my contention that most of this material is Homeric invention. The argument has three main props. First, this material, with one or two exceptions, does not occur in stories about Odysseus except in Homer's *Odyssey*. If there had been a rich oral tradition dealing with pre-

departure stories of Odysseus, Penelope, Laertes or Ithaca, I find it hard to believe that the importance and popularity of the *Odyssey* would not have ensured that some knowledge of them would have survived somewhere. But there is virtually nothing in Hyginus, Apollodorus, Pausanias or even the tragedians who drew so many of their plots from Cyclic epics.⁵

Second, given the material displayed in A above, it is pertinent to ask what an epic about Odysseus on Ithaca before he left for Troy could have consisted of. What tales would it tell of our great hero? Would it have told how he dandled Eurymachus on his knee (A47)? How he once saved Antinous' father Eupheithes from death (A46)? How he trained his dog Argus (A52)? His first meeting with Eurycleia and Eumaeus (A69, 72, 40, 43)? His views on Dolius, who came with Penelope's dowry (A25)? It seems most unlikely to me: this is epic, not *Neighbours*. But I assume that the story of Odysseus' scar—which has all the marks of a *rite de passage*—is traditional, and I do not discount the possibility that e.g. the marriage of Odysseus and Penelope was celebrated in epic (*cf.* Sappho's epic-style marriage of Hector and Andromache, *LP* 44).⁶ Other passages which may be adapted from other traditions are discussed below.

Third, after reading through the major mythological handbooks, I can find nothing which substantially militates against the view that *myth gives its heroes a genealogy and some tales of youthful exploits but otherwise centres upon the exploits of its heroes at one time and one time only of their lives*. Typical youthful *rites de passage* would include, for example, the story of Odysseus' naming and scar and Achilles' upbringing by Cheiron. But young heroes—Telemachus, Neoptolemus, Orestes—remain young, Odysseus, Achilles, and Diomedes remain in their prime, and Nestor stays old. It is easy to phrase an appropriately pithy canon: 'In myth, apart from genealogy and *rites de passage*, the age of any hero is deemed to remain constant'.⁷

If these three arguments hold, the conclusion looks irresistible: the pre-departure Odysseus needed to be invented by the poet, for there was nothing for him to draw on other than his own imagination. Taken together with the first argument, the conclusion is that it was Homer who invented this pre-departure world. But what do we mean by 'invent'? There are three broad possibilities:

(i) actual innovation, the creation of brand new material entirely *de novo*, (ii) creative elaboration, the application of material typical of oral epic to new circumstances,⁸ and (iii) the adaptation of large-scale stories which exist in other traditions to fit the context of a new/different epic. I suspect most of the pre-departure world is creative elaboration, but I should like to look more closely at four passages where the third explanation may be in order.

Exhibit 1: xxiv 115-119

Agamemnon, who is in the underworld, has just recognised the ghost of the dead suitor Amphimedon, and asks him why he is there, for he (Agamemnon) was once his *xenos*. The passage explains how the bond of *xenia* arose between them: Agamemnon came to stay with Amphimedon when he was trying to persuade Odysseus to join the expedition against Troy.

⁵ *RE* s.v. 'Odysseus'.

⁶ This negative argument is not strong. The oral poet could elaborate or condense or omit a story at will. All one can say is that such stories do not appear elsewhere in the record.

⁷ Heracles and Hermes are possible exceptions, as is Theseus (his extensive 'middle-aged' exploits probably arise from his position as founder of Athens). Oedipus has a striking old age. Perhaps Cadmus makes an exception too. Popular contemporary heroes like James Bond tend to remain of fixed age. A referee points out that Diomedes is a veteran of the Theban wars, yet in the *Iliad* seems junior to Agamemnon, Menelaus and Ajax. All myth, of course, runs together famous people and places from quite different periods.

⁸ E.g. the story of Odysseus' embassy to the Messenians to demand compensation for a raid. Embassies and raids are both common in epic: any oral poet could elaborate one to fit any person. Odysseus' false tales show the technique clearly at work.

Now the tale of Odysseus' refusal to join the Trojan expedition is not a Homeric invention. It occurs in Cyclic epic⁹ and in Hyginus and Apollodorus¹⁰ in slightly differing versions. But traditional though this tale is, Homer still manipulates it to fit his purposes. In other versions, those who came to persuade Odysseus to join the expedition were Palamedes, Agamemnon, Menelaus and Nestor (the suppressed 'we' of 118). In one version, Odysseus feigned madness, and Palamedes tricked him into revealing that he was in fact sane (whence Odysseus' hostility to him). Amphimedon plays no part in that story. Why should he? He is only a suitor of Penelope, with no heroic connections at all. The poet has clearly invented the connection between Amphimedon and this group so that Agamemnon has a reason for addressing him.

This, then, is a clear case where Homer has taken a pre-existing story and manipulated it to fit this new context.¹¹

Exhibit 2: i 252-267

Telemachus has just described how the suitors are eating him out of house and home: his mother dithers over a decision over whether to remarry or not. Very soon the suitors will destroy him too. Athene wishes that Odysseus would return fully armed, the sort of man he had been when she saw him at her house long ago on a quest for poison for his arrows. She now tells the story: Odysseus had returned from Ilus, son of Mermerus, in Ephyre. He had gone there to fetch poison with which to anoint his arrows. Ilus refused to give him any (ἐπεὶ ῥα θεοὺς νεμεσίζετο αἰὲν ἐδόντας), but Athene-Mentes' father gave him some instead (φιλέεσκε γὰρ αἰνῶς).¹²

The purpose of the story of the poisoned arrows is to demonstrate the closeness of the relationship between Odysseus and Athene-Mentes' father (264). The problem is that the closeness is expressed in terms which strongly suggest that Odysseus is a criminal. Ilus, whose father Mermerus was said to be son of Jason and Medea,¹³ would not give Odysseus the poison because he feared the everlasting gods (263: note νεμεσίζετο, a word expressing powerful sanction). Yet Athene-Mentes' father breaks this powerful sanction to give it to him.

Now it is not clear whether Athene-Mentes' story is supposed to be taken as an 'invention' by Athene herself. But I find it hard to believe that, given a free hand, Homer would have constructed *this* of all stories to demonstrate how close the families were. But since I am sympathetic to the view that Homer needs to prepare for the trial of the bow in xxi, it may well be that Homer has taken it from some other source and adapted it for its new context here.¹⁴ Menelaus expresses a similar sentiment with considerably more success at iv 341-46 (= xvii 132-7), where he hopes that Odysseus will return like the man he was when he defeated Philomeleides at wrestling.

Exhibit 3: xvi 417-432

Antinous has just proposed murdering Telemachus, but Amphinomus has advised the suitors to go carefully and check with the gods before they do. The herald Medon, however, has overheard

⁹ M. Davies, *Epicorum Graecorum fragmenta* (Göttingen 1988), *Procli Cypriorum enarratio* 11.40-43.

¹⁰ Hyginus *Fab.* 95, Apollodorus *Epitome* iii 6-9.

¹¹ See M. M. Willcock, 'Mythological paradeigma in the Iliad', *CQ* xiv (1964), 141-154 for the general principle involved.

¹² See generally West *ad loc.* (*op. cit.* n. 13) on i 257.

¹³ Eustathius 1416 on i 260; *cf.* West *ad loc.* in A. Heubeck, S. West, and J. B. Hainsworth (eds.) *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, i (Oxford 1988).

¹⁴ There is also a Thesprotian connection: Ephyre is claimed to be in Thesprotia (other guesses are that Ephyre is in Elis or is Corinth). See further on note 16. West *ad loc.* (see n. 12) wonders whether this whole story is *ad hoc* invention.

the plan and reports it to Penelope. Penelope comes down from her room and rounds on Antinous: you were supposed to be the best man in Ithaca but are not. Why do you plot death and destruction for Telemachus, οὐδ' ἰκέτας ἐμπάζεαι, οἷσιν ἄρα Ζεὺς/μάρτυρος; οὐδ' ὅσιν κακὰ ράπτειν ἀλλήλοισιν. Do you not know your father (Eupeithes) once came here (ἴκετο) in flight, fearing the people? For they were very angry with him because, going along with Taphian pirates (ληϊστῆρσιν), he had harried the Thesprotians who were our friends. They wanted to waste him and break his heart and eat up his abundant livelihood. But Odysseus restrained them. And now it is this man's house you are eating up, etc.

Three arguments suggest to me that this tale had been adapted from elsewhere to fit this context. First, there is a vagueness and imprecision about the story of Antinous' father - why was he following with the Taphians? How did he harm the Thesprotians - by piracy, or what (426-7)? Why was he so stupid as to return to Ithaca? - which may suggest that there is a story behind this, well-known to Homer's listeners.

Second, there is a genuine problem at 422, the point where Penelope tries to make the connection between Antinous' present behaviour and Odysseus' past behaviour to his father Eupeithes: you do not, she says, respect suppliants. Now it is clear that Eupeithes came as a suppliant to Odysseus when the people were pursuing him (ἴκετο φεύγων 424: a ἰκέτης is someone who comes (ἰκνέομαι) before you). But equally, it is obvious that what Penelope *means* is that Antinous does not respect the obligation he owes to the son of the man who saved his own suppliant father from destruction. But it is very awkward to express this by saying 'You do not respect suppliants': for Telemachus is *not* a suppliant, let alone a plurality of suppliants, nor is anyone else she is addressing at that moment.¹⁵

Third, there is an awkwardness in the connection which Penelope draws between Eupeithes' plight and Antinous. The Ithacans, she says, were pursuing Eupeithes because they wished to kill him (428) and κατὰ ζῶην φαγέειν μενεοικέα πολλήν (429). Clearly the reason why Penelope makes this odd claim is to create a link between the Ithacans and the suitors: the Ithacans wishing to kill Eupeithes and consume *his* property = the suitors wishing to kill Telemachus and consume his property (431-2). But this is to make the Ithacans the moral counterparts of the suitors, which can hardly be the intention.

After Willcock (n. 11), this story looks as if it is either *ad hoc* invention, or, since Pausanias knows of an epic cycle *Thesprotis* (he thinks the underworld episode is set in Thesprotia), adapted from another story to fit the different context.¹⁶

Exhibit 4: xxi 11-41

Penelope has gone to fetch the bow from her storeroom, and Homer tells the story of how it came to be in Odysseus' possession. Odysseus was at Ortilochus' palace in Messene to claim compensation for the flocks which the Messenians had lifted from Ithaca (15-21). Iphitus was there because he was looking for some stolen mares (22, 31). So it came about that Iphitus gave Odysseus the bow, which he (Iphitus) had inherited from Eurytus (32), and which Eurytus had, of course, received from Apollo himself (viii 227-8 tells how Eurytus was killed by Apollo for challenging him to an archery contest; other traditions say that Eurytus got the bow from Apollo).¹⁷ But Iphitus died when he arrived as a *xenos* at Heracles' house: for Heracles killed

¹⁵ Hoekstra's defence *ad loc.* in A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra (eds.) *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, ii (Oxford 1989) is laboured.

¹⁶ G. L. Huxley, *Greek epic poetry* (London 1969), discusses Pausanias 8.12. 5-6, where a *Thesprotis* is attested, with possible connections with the underworld in *Odyssey* xi and Eugam(m)on's *Telegoneia*. In fact there is a consistent Thesprotian connection with a king Pheidon in Odysseus' false tales: xiv 315 ff., xix 287 ff., cf. xvi 65, xvii 526.

¹⁷ See J. S. Clay, *The wrath of Athena* (Princeton 1983) 89-96.

Iphitus, *xenos* though he was, οὐδὲ θεῶν ὄπιν αἰδέσασα' οὐδὲ τράπεζαν, so that he could keep the mares.

It is the detail of Iphitus' story which is odd. First, it is hard to see the point of its expansion: why should we be interested in Heracles' wicked behaviour and refusal to fear the wrath of the gods? Possibly the poet is trying to draw some sort of comparison between Heracles and the suitors, but if he is, it is ill-judged. I even wonder whether the poet did not originally mean to compare Iphitus' bow with Heracles' even more famous one. On the other hand, it is commonplace for Homer to extend comparisons and digressions beyond immediate needs (in similes, for example). But there is still something very odd about this passage. For in it, Iphitus and Odysseus and *Heracles* are all made out to be contemporaries. Now this is difficult. Heracles, according to *Iliad* xi 690, was doing battle before even Nestor was of an age to fight, and seems in general to be connected with a quite different 'generation' of mythical heroes. He does not fit easily as a contemporary of Odysseus. The poet is manipulating the myth to form some sort of link between the bow and Odysseus' past, but, again, the strain shows.¹⁸

This too, then, looks like either an *ad hoc* invention or a passage lifted from somewhere else and adapted to fit the new context, whose purpose is to give a glorious ancestry to the bow with which Odysseus will finally kill the suitors.

It seems to me that the Amphimedon-Agamemnon and Iphitus-Heracles passages above are certainly imports from another tradition, while the poisoned arrows and Eupheithes passages may well be, possibly derived from a *Thesprotis*. Most of the other references to the pre-departure world, however, are so brief, and arise so naturally from context, that they are surely Homeric invention. Nevertheless, I do not think they are *entirely* random invention (Homer taking the chance to slip in a pre-departure reference whenever he can). I think, as I shall argue, that there is a number of fixed points to which the poet constantly recurs: he has some consistent vision of pre-departure Ithaca, as of the intervening years (see note 26). Nor do I wish to argue that this pre-departure world is 'untypical', as if created *entirely de novo*. It certainly is not. Lacking a fixed tradition of stories about Odysseus in his youth, the poet uses his imagination in harness with the skills of an oral poet to generate one. As I suggested above, this sort of activity may better be called 'creative elaboration' than 'invention'. But it is now time to turn to the intervening years and present the evidence for them. These are listed in the same way as A above, and in the subsequent discussion reference will be made to them with the prefix B.

B. THE INTERVENING YEARS: ITHACA DURING ODYSSEUS' ABSENCE

The most important *event* that has taken place in the intervening years during Odysseus' absence is the incursion of the suitors, about four years before Odysseus returned (ii 9, xiii 377). In fact Homer tells us nothing precise about when, how or exactly why this happened—its occurrence is accepted as a datum of the plot—but the *effects* of their incursion are felt constantly throughout the story. This is why Odysseus' return is so urgently needed. Since the event and its consequences are too common to be worth listing, I have omitted *all* references to the arrival of the suitors and their depredations.

The most important *fact* about Ithaca is that Odysseus has not been there for twenty years.

¹⁸ M. L. West reckons Odysseus is an ancient epic hero ('The rise of the Greek Epic', *JHS* cviii (1988) 151-172, 159), but Odysseus' lack of connections with other mythic cycles, and the sheer obscurity of Laertes and his father Arceisius, suggest he may be a young hero (see G. S. Kirk, *The nature of Greek myths* [Penguin 1974] 167-9). In his *Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962) 370, Kirk argues that the convoluted style of the Odysseus-Iphitus story hints at 'a more extensive poetic model'. A referee points out that, by careful juggling with the ages, one could just about link Heracles to Odysseus.

This stark absence dominates the thoughts of the characters, and is so common that I have, again, omitted *all* references to characters' grief, hopes and longing for Odysseus and the pain his absence has caused, unless they are glossed with a specific reference to the moment of Odysseus' departure (as is frequently done by Penelope).

Book i

1. (Athena-Mentes) 189-93: Laertes never comes to the city, but lives and works the ground but in the country with an old serving woman who feeds him
2. (Telemachus) 414-6: I believe no messages, nor any prophecies which my mother receives from prophets whom she summons into the house
3. (Homer) 434-5: Eurycleia's affection for Telemachus, whom she reared when he was little

Book ii

4. (Homer) 21-2: one son of Aegyptius has joined the suitors, two work his fields
5. (Antinous) 89-110: Penelope's web-trick
6. (Antinous) 305: Telemachus should eat and drink with me, as in the past
7. (Telemachus) 312-5: the suitors were consuming my property when I was young, but now I am grown up

Book iv

8. (Penelope) 810-11: Iphthime, you live far away and have not come here before

Book x

9. (Homer) 29-30: Odysseus saw his native land, and people tending fires there

Book xi

10. (Anticleia) 181-203: Penelope weeps and longs for you (181-3); Telemachus administers your lands and is invited by all (184-7); Laertes stays on his estate, sleeping by the fire in winter and on the ground in summer, grieving for you (187-96); I died through my longing for you (197-203)

Book xiii

11. (Athena) 377-81: the suitors have been in your house for three years, wooing Penelope: she makes promises to everyone, but without sincerity
12. (Athena) 404-6: the loyalty of Eumaeus to you, Telemachus and Penelope

Book xiv

13. (Homer) 3-4: Eumaeus cared about Odysseus' property more than anyone else
14. (Homer) 7-22: Eumaeus had built a pig-pen (7-17). Eumaeus also raised dogs (21-2)
15. (Eumaeus) 66: my work here prospers
16. (Eumaeus) 100-108: my good housekeeping of Odysseus' abundant flocks
17. (Eumaeus) 122-30: every beggar who comes here with a tale to tell of Odysseus gets a hearing from the credulous Penelope
18. (Eumaeus) 372-8: I no longer go into the city unless Penelope summons me to hear a message from somewhere: some (of those who enquire after the message) grieve for their absent lord, others rejoice in it, but it gives me no pleasure
19. (Eumaeus) 378-85: how I was once deceived by an Aetolian who said Odysseus would return that summer or autumn
20. (Homer) 449-52: Eumaeus had bought Mesaulius from the Taphians

Book xv

21. (Eumaeus) 329-44: suitors' ὑβρις and βίη, their smooth young servants, and tables loaded with food and drink
22. (Eumaeus) 352-70: Laertes' mourning for Odysseus and Anticleia; Anticleia's death; I was brought up with Ctimene, but she was married off to Same; I was then sent into the country
23. (Eumaeus) 371-3: my work prospers, and I live off it and give to others
24. (Eumaeus) 374-9: I miss intimate conversations with Penelope - such talks and gifts which arise from them are precious to slaves - but the presence of the suitors has stopped all that
25. (Telemachus) 516-7: Penelope does not appear among the suitors, but stays up in her room weaving

Book xvi

26. (Eumaeus) 27-9: Telemachus does not come to the estates very much
27. (Eumaeus) 139-41: Laertes, who watches over his fields in grief with his servants
28. (Telemachus) 247-53: the list of suitors in the house, and where they came from
29. (Antinous) 375: the people no longer favour us

Book xvii

30. (Homer) 257: the friendship of Melanthios and Eurymachus

Book xviii

31. (Homer) 1-7: the beggar Irus, who went on missions for everyone (his mother called him Arnaeus)
32. (Antinous) 36-7: no such pleasure has ever come our way (as beggar vs. Irus)
33. (Homer) 160-2: Athena increases the value of Penelope in the eyes of her husband and son (μᾶλλον...ἢ πάρος ἦεν)
34. (Penelope) 164-5: I desire, for the first time, to appear to the suitors
35. (Eurynome) 175-6: your son is of an age, whom you prayed to see with a beard
36. (Penelope) 215-20: Telemachus was wiser as a child than he is now: for all his beauty and size, he has no intelligence in him
37. (Telemachus) 228-9: = 20.309-10 (B48)
38. (Penelope) 275-80: the suitors do not woo as men of old did
39. (Homer) 321-5: Penelope had looked after Melanthe as a child, but she was now Eurymachus' mistress

Book xix

40. (beggar-Odysseus) 86-8: Telemachus is no longer of an age to be insulted by maidservants
41. (Penelope) 134-6: I pay attention to neither ξείνος, ἰκέτης nor κήρυξ
42. (Penelope) 137-56: Penelope's web
43. (Penelope) 350-2: no stranger so πεπνυμένος has ever come here
44. (Eurycleia) 379-81: many strangers have come here, but none so like Odysseus
45. (Eurycleia) 496-8: the women who have been faithless in the house
46. (Penelope) 530-4: Telemachus when young did not want me to leave; now grown up, he does because of the suitors' depredations

Book xx

47. (Serving-maid) 118-9: the suitors have exhausted me with work
48. (Telemachus) 309-13: I now know right and wrong—previously I was young and foolish

Book xxi

49. (Suitors) 363-4: the dogs which Eumaeus raised
50. (Homer) 395: Odysseus fears insects may have eaten into the bow

Book xxii

51. (Odysseus) 321-4: Leodes, you must have prayed for my death, and marriage to Penelope and children from her
52. (Homer) 331: Phemius sang for the suitors under compulsion
53. (Phemius) 350-3: Telemachus will witness to the fact that I never sang willingly for the suitors, but they forced me
54. (Telemachus) 357-8: Medon looked after me as a child in the house
55. (Eurycleia) 421-27: of the fifty maids we taught to endure slavery, twelve were unfaithful. Penelope did not allow the youthful Telemachus to order them about
56. (Odysseus) 431-2: tell the women to come out who previously acted shamelessly
57. (Telemachus) 463-4: the maidservants who abused my mother and myself and slept with the suitors

Book xxiii

58. (Penelope) 14: Eurycleia, you used to be φρένας αἰσίμη
59. (Eurycleia) 72: your heart, Penelope, is always untrusting
60. (Telemachus) 103: your heart, mother, is always harder than stone
61. (Odysseus) 166-7: the gods have made you, Penelope, more obstinate than any other woman
62. (Penelope) 215-7: I was afraid that someone would deceive me

Book xiv

63. (Amphimedon) 125-50: Penelope's web
 64. (Homer) 206-12: Laertes' house in the country, over which he has worked so hard: his servants
 65. (Odysseus) 244-7: you, Laertes, care for your garden
 66. (Odysseus) 249-50: you, Laertes, have not cared for yourself

AN ANALYSIS OF THE A- AND B- LISTS

General findings

If the A-list is largely a result of invention or 'creative elaboration', I should judge that most of the B-list is too, since the same criteria apply. The major exception must be Penelope's web, and it is possible that stories had accreted around Laertes and Anticleia, though if Homer was responsible for the insertion of *Odyssey* xi, the early death of Anticleia was probably his invention (and see note 18). But my main purpose now is to consider the literary function of these two worlds. To begin with, I take the material of the two lists and put them into a tentative *temporal* sequence.

Laertes, an only son (A44), after youthful exploits at places like Nerikos (A105), marries Anticleia and purchases a slave-boy Eumaeus (A43) and a slave-girl Eurycleia (A8), who takes the baby Odysseus from his mother's arms and raises him strictly (A69, 72, 73). The baby is named (A71), learns about gardening from his father (A104), raises a hunting-dog Argus and hunts with him (A52-4), but is badly scarred on a boar-hunt organised by his grandfather (A71, 87, 95, 103). He is sent on a mission to Messene, where he receives a bow from Iphitus which he takes on local hunting expeditions (A81-3) and uses for trick-shots in the hall (A74), replacing it in his store-room afterwards (A84). He travels widely (A2), develops close friendships (A3, 4, 6, 17, 18, 48, 64, 68, of which Telemachus can later make use), especially with Mentor (A90), and woos (A60) and weds the beautiful (A28, 55, 57, 62) Penelope (A25, 75, 85, 100, 102), first constructing their bedroom and bed (A98, 99) and generally organising the palace (e.g. the grain-mills, A78). As king of Ithaca, he respects his people as a father would (A12, 16, 27), does them no wrong (A24), holds regular assemblies along with the people (he has a special seat) (A9, 11), and generates a feeling of unity among them (A107). Meanwhile, Odysseus continues to increase the wealth of his house by winning slaves and property (A5, 7, 19, 38, 80, 81, 92). He looks after Eumaeus (A40), hires Philoetius (A79), and sees his lands increase (A39). He does not forget his duties to the gods (Athena A26, local nymphs A35-6, 51, and with Laertes in his house A91). He saves a local aristocrat Eupheithes from death (A46) and is loving to their children (the suitors-to-be) (A47), one of whom remembers him (A86).

The call comes for Odysseus to join the Trojan expedition. He is very loath to go (A101), and his son Telemachus has just been born (A13, 20-3, 31, 33-4, 37, 41, 94). He leaves re-marriage instructions to Penelope (A58) and puts Mentor (or Laertes) in charge of the house (A15). Odysseus offers many sacrifices for a safe return (A70) and an omen accompanies his departure (A14). He wears special clothes given him by Penelope (A63, 66), takes with him the best men of Ithaca (A29, 106), including his favourite herald Eurybates (A65) and Antiphus (A10): they are, presumably, full of confidence (A30). His mother is alive and father old and retired from battle (A89) when he leaves (A32, 42): both are loved by Penelope (A59). Odysseus' palace is still full of spears (A1, 45, 61). For Penelope, who has a clear memory of him at that moment of departure (A77, 97), his departure is a disaster (A67), leaving her with tearful, miserable nights (A49, 76, 93).

During Odysseus' absence, Anticleia dies (B10, 22) and Laertes retreats, mourning, into the country (B1, 10, 22, 27, 64-6). Odysseus almost reaches home (B9). Penelope longs for his return (B10) and, though she makes continual enquiries of all the strangers who came her way

(B2, 17, 43, 44)—though she denies it (B41)—her heart seems to harden as the years go by (B59-62). Her sister does not visit her (B8), but Penelope continues to care for the servants (B39). Telemachus is reared under Eurycleia's and Medon's care (B3, 54). He clings to his mother when young (B46), but changes as he grows up (B7, 35-7, 40, 46, 48) and though early on he administers the estate and is held in esteem (B10—a famous problem, see p. 87), Penelope's doubts about him continue (B36, 55). Eumaeus, meanwhile, loyal to Odysseus' family (B12), flourishes on the farm (B15) to which he was sent after Ctimene was married off (B22), caring for Odysseus' property (B13), building, raising dogs (B14, 49), watching the flocks increase (B16, 23), buying a slave (B20).

The arrival of the suitors, with their evil ways of wooing and their destruction (B38, 21)—though they were at one time popular (B29) and Telemachus ate willingly with them (B6)—changes everything (even the son of loyal Aegyptius has joined them (B4, 28)). Penelope retreats into the house, making promises to them all (B11), cutting her links with faithful servants (B24), staying in her bedroom (B25), never wishing even to see the suitors (B34). Eumaeus now rarely goes to town (B18), and does not believe stories about Odysseus' return because he has been deceived in the past (B19). Telemachus rarely comes to the country (B26). Penelope delays marriage with the web-trick but is discovered (B5, 42, 63). Meanwhile, the suitors have formed friendships with and corrupted the servants (B30, 45, 55-7), making life intolerable for others (B47) and forcing Phemius to serve them (B52-3). They pray for Odysseus' death and marriage to Penelope (B51).

This summary makes it fairly clear, I think, that Homer is not presenting us with a *rounded* vision of the pre-departure world or the intervening years. But piecemeal as the vision is, there are moments and events of high importance, to which he returns again and again. One has a sense of a poet constructing these worlds, in other words, not entirely at random, but to some purpose, with some conception of how these worlds could fit *his* version of the *Odyssey*.

The A-list, for example, is dominated by the *moment that Odysseus left Ithaca* (and especially, the moment he left Penelope and Telemachus). Particular emphasis is placed upon Penelope's sense of abandonment and the fact that Odysseus left Telemachus when he was just born, to be reared by Penelope and Eurycleia. Both points, the latter especially central to our version of the *Odyssey*, are fully developed in the B-list, i.e. Penelope's attitude to the absence of Odysseus—her eagerness to hear news and her delaying of the suitors—and the development and growth of Telemachus during the intervening years.¹⁹

The family and its property also bulk large in the A and B lists. There are frequent references to Penelope and Odysseus' marriage and the wealth which came with it, and to the size and importance of Odysseus' property and lands. The care with which Homer constructs a life for Eumaeus, and to a lesser extent Philoetius, is especially noteworthy in this respect. There are constant references to Eumaeus' good housekeeping, which stand—as all these references are meant to—in strong contrast to the suitors' depredations. Homer sets out to contrast what the house was once like, with what is happening to it now.

The suitors themselves have very little 'history'. Indeed, one might have expected the B-list to contain many detailed and explicit references to that moment when they first entered the palace and started their disgraceful wooing of Penelope and destruction of Odysseus' property (cf. e.g. Homer's emphasis on the moment when Odysseus left Ithaca). I suspect Homer did not know, or could not imagine, precisely how it came about (I certainly cannot). Consequently,

¹⁹ The sheer number of irremovably entrenched references to the youth and growth of Telemachus argues strongly that this is a major theme of the *Odyssey*, not randomly tacked on by a post-Homeric *Telemachy*. See P. V. Jones *Homer's Odyssey: a companion* (Bristol 1988) 18-19, and P.V. Jones 'The ΚΑΕΟΞ of Telemachus', *AJPh* civ (1988), 496-506.

Homer ignores that moment and concentrates on something far more important: the effect they are having *now*, in the poetic present, upon the palace and its family. In fact the suitors have little by way of pre-history at all. They appear briefly as children in arms before Odysseus ever left for Troy, and during the intervening years there are a few scattered references to their activities.

Other minor figures have their exits and their entrances, but one gets the same impression with them as one does with the suitors: as much of their past is admitted as is needful to explain their present role in the *Odyssey* at the moment when Odysseus is about to return. Eurycleia, Laertes, Anticleia, the faithless maids, Phemius and so on all fall into this category.

The one figure who does need a rich past is the hero himself, Odysseus: and he duly receives it. He is the constant point of reference when Homer comes to describe the pre-departure world—everything hangs on his presence then, as it hangs on his absence now—and the sort of person he was then echoes faithfully the image we receive of him in the present (his piety, travels, wide range of acquaintances, excellence as king, care for his property and so on).

These, then, are examples of the way in which Homer exploits the pre-departure world and the intervening years of his *Odyssey*: there are a number of fixed points to which he constantly returns, but there are equally a number of incidents and characters elaborated just enough to enable them to fulfil their role in this *Odyssey*. These uses of the past account for most of the references to it in the A- and B-lists.

But there is another observation to make. We can, I think, see a general, consistent thread running from the A-list *through* the B-list *and into the present*. The three worlds, in other words, (A-list, B-list and poetic present) are not treated as separate entities. Homer binds them together as one. He has his attention fixed on certain key moments (e.g. the departure of Odysseus), certain key themes (e.g. the growth of Telemachus), certain key people (e.g. Penelope) and it is these that he fleshes out consistently over the time-spans so that the poetic *present*, the moment at which Odysseus returns, can be fully served. To elaborate this point, I would like now to turn attention to some of the detail.

Some particular features of the A- and B-lists

The pre-departure world of Odysseus does not, as I have said, present a rounded picture, but it does present a fairly detailed one of particular relevance to Homer's depiction of his characters. First, a general point which would be more forceful had I included all the references in the *Odyssey* to the depredations of the suitors over the years and the characters' grief at the absence of Odysseus: that is, some characters are more locked into the past world than others. Mere statistics can, in this case, tell us something about a character's mental 'set'. Penelope refers more frequently to this world of the past than any other character (37 times, A=27, B=10), then Odysseus (22 times, A=16, B=6), Telemachus (18 times, A=9, B=9) and Eumaeus (18 times, A=7, B=11). Between them, their 95 references cover well over one half of the total (173). Of the other characters, only Athena (10 times, A=7, B=3) and Eurycleia (7 times, A=3, B=4) are worth a mention. The suitors *between them* conjure up a total of 8 references (A=2, B=6): the past means little to them. For Penelope, the pre-departure world is dominated by the memory of a public and private all-good, all-wise Odysseus, marriage to whom meant wealth and happiness, whose departure for Troy, which has destroyed her life, is her recurring nightmare. The intervening years are dominated by her concern for Telemachus, her desire for news and her determination to outwit the suitors. For Telemachus, the central issues are what the house used to be like when Odysseus was at home, especially the way in which Odysseus won it for him (Telemachus has a strong sense of his responsibility for his father's possessions), and his relationship with his mother now that he is growing up. For Eumaeus, what is important is the trust Odysseus invested in him, and his own desire not to let his absent master down. This

expresses itself most strongly in his concern for his master's property (*cf.* Philoetius).

Where does the poet stand in all this? Homer himself constructs the past in his own voice 34 times (A=21, B=13). On the whole, he restricts his comments largely to physical possessions (e.g. details of Odysseus' store-rooms, his slaves, the bow, the armoury) or bald narrative. This is interestingly very much in keeping with what we should expect of our famously 'objective' poet. Emotional issues are left for the characters to grapple with themselves. It is here that character is most tellingly depicted. On the whole, the poet keeps himself out of such matters.²⁰

The second point to make is the *ad hoc* feel to so many of the references to the past.²¹ Whether such references were actually *ad hoc* is impossible to tell, but given my thesis in the first section of this paper I am inclined to believe they were. Besides, I cannot find any that are untypical of the extant *corpus* of oral poetry: they are, in other words, the sort of elaboration that would come naturally to an oral poet who wanted to exploit the past for whatever poetic purposes came to mind. Consider, too, some of the small inconsistencies, to which Willcock rightly draws attention - the precise role of Dolius, for example (A25);²² the strange references to Telemachus' activities in Book 11 (B10); Medon's part (!) in Telemachus' childhood (B54); Telemachus' apparent early friendship with the suitors (B6); the suitors' apparent early popularity with the people (B29).

But if they are *ad hoc*, it does not mean that they are not imaginative and effective. Here is a poet of great skill at work, improvising little moments of connection between the present and the past. Athena enters Odysseus' palace, and there are Odysseus' spears still in their holder (A1). An *ἀγορή* is called, and here is the chair Odysseus sat in at *ἀγορά* in the past, when they had such things regularly (A9). Here the friendly prophet Halitherses, foreseeing death and destruction for the suitors, remembers the prophecy he uttered when Odysseus departed (A14). Here Penelope, learning of the departure of Telemachus to Sparta, decides to send Dolius to tell Laertes what has happened, and the poet recalls the moment when Odysseus and Penelope were married and Dolius was given to Penelope as a gift (A25). Here is the cave where Odysseus made so many sacrifices when he was a young man (A35, 36), and where he will now make another sacrifice to thank the nymphs for his return home. Here a hunting dog recognises Odysseus: of course, it must be Argus, the faithful hound that Odysseus raised as a young man (A52-4). Here is the place where Odysseus had constructed his grain-mills (A78), not to mention his bed (A99), here is Laertes' shield, old and mildewy from long disuse (A89), here the very trees whose names Laertes taught Odysseus when he was a child (A104)—and so on. These delightful *ad hoc* touches construct for us a world of domestic joy, now past, but soon to be restored: not rounded, as I have said, but detailed, each detail imaginatively tied into the poetic present, and the whole generating a powerful sense of a world which, in Odysseus' absence and the suitors' presence, has been lost: but not, as we know, for long. Above all, this tying-in of past with present enables the poet to exploit that pathos and irony which (as Fenik has shown), are so wonderfully typical of the *Odyssey*.²³ Time and time again, one is struck by the way in which these references to the past generate those feelings.

Before looking at four longer passages which illustrate how central to the structure and understanding of the *Odyssey* these two points are (i.e. the past in the present and the pathos

²⁰ 'Focalisers' may find this a fruitful harvest to pick. See e.g. I. J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and focalisers* (Amsterdam 1987).

²¹ The term is M. M. Willcock's, in another important paper, 'Ad hoc invention in the Iliad', *HSCP* lxxxi (1977) 41-53. Willcock argues that local inconsistencies illustrate this sort of invention: I deploy this argument in part here.

²² See West *op.cit.* (n. 13) on 4.735 ff.

²³ See B. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey*, *Hermes Einzelschriften* xxx (Wiesbaden 1974), *passim*.

and irony subsequently generated), I should like to say a word about the *Odyssey* in comparison with the *Iliad* in this respect.

First, in the *Iliad* the past is frequently used as a paradigm (a famous story from the past, sometimes the hero's own experience, sometimes another hero's, sometimes a god's, is recounted to illustrate that this is how things were, and that this, therefore, is how things are or should be);²⁴ and, again, it often stands for everything that the heroes yearn for: the world of peace to which they will return (or not) when the fighting is over. In the *Odyssey*, the paradigmatic usage is extremely restricted. There is the major paradigm of Orestes–Aegisthus–Clytaemestra = Telemachus–the suitors—but *not* Penelope, constantly evoked and central to the meaning of the epic. Apart from that, I can find only Orion and Iasion (v 121-8), Eurytion (xxi 293-304), Pandareus (xx 66-78) and *perhaps* Ares and Aphrodite (viii 266-366: this clearly has paradigmatic force, but is not specifically introduced as a paradigm). The point is that paradigms from the distant (or divine) past are irrelevant to the needs of any characters of the *Odyssey* except Telemachus. Their paradigm is a living (they desperately hope not dead) contemporary hero: Odysseus. He is the person to whom they look back as the great exemplar of heroic behaviour. Indeed, even the Orestes paradigm is scarcely 'distant past': he is, after all, son of Agamemnon who is frequently encountered as a 'historical' figure in the *Odyssey*. This dependence on contemporary humans for paradigms of excellence (rather than on distant heroes or even more distant divinities) is in keeping with the generally human dimensions of the story.²⁵

Second, it is in this sense of the past that the *Odyssey* frequently generates the sort of pathos which we find so notably in those passages in the *Iliad* where war and peace (the Iliadic present and past) are contrasted (especially the similes). The pathos may not be so intense (death in battle being a more emotional matter than long drawn-out family loss), but the difference of the register should not blind us to the similarity of purpose.

Four important passages

Now I do not wish to argue that this past world is more important than the poetic present, nor that it looms larger than it does. But it seems to me that, at most of the high points of the *Odyssey*, there is a critical conjunction between past and present which could not be as effective as it is if Homer had not put particular care into constructing a past with which the present could, at those climactic moments, interact. Some of these references to the past are *ad hoc*, and they play their part in giving us an emotional sense of that past. Others are tied in more integrally with the action and character of the *Odyssey*, and it is with some of these that I end. I have selected four for particular comment with a view to drawing attention to what one could call the 'imaginative landscape' of the poem. Now 'landscape' sounds inert, and I wish to argue that this landscape is far from inert. The point is that the poetic 'present' is played out against a receding perspective of *different* times and locations: Ithaca as it was during Odysseus' 20-year absence, Odysseus' achievements during his ten years at Troy, and Ithaca as it was before Odysseus ever left. These background landscapes continually push their way into the forefront of the poem, and add greatly to its richness, depth and complexity. It is this conscious intrusion of the past into the present which makes the temporal landscape of the *Odyssey* so

²⁴ See Norman Austin, 'The function of digressions in the *Iliad*', *GRBS* vii (1966), 295-312 for a discussion of *Iliadic* paradigms.

²⁵ See, for example, Norman Austin, *Archery at the dark of the moon* (California 1975) 166-168 for Eumaeus as a humble paradigm of order. A referee points out that while Nestor's exploits in the *Iliad* are all taken from his 'youth', in the *Odyssey* they concentrate on Troy and its aftermath.

important a feature of the epic.²⁶

And it is surely intentional. Homer *could* have begun his *Odyssey* with Odysseus' departure from Troy and followed his adventures in a temporally linear (and wholly third-person) sequence from Troy, through his travels on the high seas and home to a suitor-infested Ithaca (though would he have needed Calypso, Nausicaa and the Phaeacians, particularly the Phaeacians, whose major purpose in our *Odyssey* is to furnish the setting in which Odysseus can recount his adventures?). But by beginning the *Odyssey* almost at the end of Odysseus' story 20 years after he left Ithaca for Troy, Homer creates the potential for a rich temporal complexity.

Exhibit 1: xviii 257-271

It is in Book xviii that the past leaps into the foreground of the action for the first time in a brilliantly imaginative stroke central to the understanding of the action from now on: Penelope reports Odysseus' last words to her as he departs for Troy. Their significance cannot be underestimated: for it is on the strength of them that Penelope now announces her decision to remarry.²⁷ In other words, it is because of her faithfulness to Odysseus' final instructions that she now prepares to take the step so hateful to her. But, though she does not know it yet, this loyalty will, in fact, be rewarded by the result all hope of which she has finally abandoned—her husband's return. That moment of departure has been a constant theme of Penelope's. Here its central importance for the plot emerges for the first time.

The passage is also important for another reason. One of the themes of the *Odyssey* has been the growth and development of Telemachus. Here we are told that, in Penelope's view, he has now grown up, and this is why she can take the action she proposes to: it was only when Telemachus had reached a certain point of maturity that Odysseus gave Penelope permission to marry again. The constant exploitation of the issue of Telemachus' development over twenty years here receives its pay-off (see also n. 19).

Exhibit 2: xix 213-260

In xix 225 ff., Penelope challenges the beggar-Odysseus to describe what 'Odysseus' was wearing when twenty years ago he left for Troy. The intimate details of that moment are as etched in Odysseus' memory as they are in Penelope's. The pathos of the moment is Iliadic in intensity, not merely because Odysseus' descriptions of his clothes is in such stark contrast with his beggars' clothes now or because of the exquisite irony (the *truth* of his response causes such distress to Penelope that she is convinced that he will never return) but because of the loving detail and affection with which Penelope remembers and describes how she did indeed take out the cloak, fold it and fix the pin to it (255-7): she almost seems to be re-living it.

Exhibit 3: xix 570-581

The axes which Odysseus once used to set up and shoot through (574-5) will now become the test the suitors have to pass to prove themselves worthy of Penelope's hand. We have already looked at the story of how Odysseus got the bow in the first place (xxi 11-41): it is the use to which this emblem of the past will be put now, in the present, that is so important for the story.

²⁶ In 'The making of the past in the *Iliad*' (*HSCPh* xciii [1990] 25-45), O. Andersen persuasively argues that, in referring to the past, Homer's characters in the *Iliad* 'make assertions which are neither inherently probable nor consistent with what we seem to know already...the characters say what is called for at the moment' (25). The *Odyssey* shows similar sorts of awkwardness, and I agree that the poet probably does not have a 'definitive version of the past' (42). But Homer's handling of the past in the *Odyssey* seems to me to be considerably more coherent than in the *Iliad*, and I would, as a result, want to modify (though not dramatically) Andersen's claim that 'there cannot really be exploration nor even exposition of the past in an oral culture, only exploitation' (42).

²⁷ See C. Emlyn-Jones' fine article in *G&R* xxxi (1984), 'The re-union of Penelope and Odysseus'.

Again, the irony is exquisite: the bow which Penelope imagines will be instrumental in selecting her another husband will in fact be the means by which her real husband kills the pretenders and is reunited with his wife. At xxi 55-6, Homer also exploits the pathos of the situation: here Penelope puts Odysseus' bow on her knees and weeps, as if she is saying a final goodbye to her husband.

Exhibit 4: xxiii 177-204

The means by which Penelope finally acknowledges that the stranger in front of her is not deceiving her but is in fact her husband is perhaps the most thrilling and evocative use of the past in the present. Everything Odysseus has achieved in the past twenty years—everything that makes him a hero—is forgotten. The sign which will reunite Odysseus and Penelope can only come from the pre-departure world, before Troy and the Trojan War were even dreamed of. It has been waiting there, patiently, since the day of their marriage. It is, of course, the marriage-bed which Odysseus constructed inside their chamber for the day of their wedding, over twenty years ago.

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