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TAKING HER SERIOUSLY:
PENELOPE AND THE PLOT OF HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL THOUGHT

BY

RICHARD DONALD HEITMAN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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for Heidi

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Introduction

The *Odyssey* opens upon a fortuitous event. Poseidon, the sole god preventing the hero's return to his homeland, has gone to the far off country of the Ethiopians to savor the sacrificial feast that they have prepared in his honor. The sea-god's absence affords Athene a rare opportunity to secure Odysseus's release from Ogygia where the hero has been languishing for seven years, in and out of the arms of the nymph. She urges Zeus to dispatch Hermes "in all haste" to the island and command Calypso to release the captive. Haste is well warranted since Poseidon's absence is temporary. In fact, because Zeus neglects to dispatch Hermes for a whole six days, Poseidon does indeed return before Odysseus has sailed to safety, and the angered god calls down a violent storm that all but drowns the hero. For her part, Athene could easily have prevented the nearly disastrous delay. She might have stayed on Olympus to keep watch on Zeus or even gone herself to Ogygia. Instead, she makes a beeline for Ithaca where apparently something even more important than Odysseus's life is at stake.

Like Athene, this dissertation will head straight for Ithaca where it will find Penelope to whom Odysseus said when he departed for Troy:

σοὶ δ' ἐνθάδε πάντα μελόντων.
Here let everything be in your charge. (18.266)

This dissertation will then attempt to take Penelope seriously as the one responsible for the welfare of the household that Odysseus left behind and that is now so oppressed with trouble.

Of course many scholars have taken Penelope seriously. Traditionally, she has been accorded great respect for her proverbial faithfulness. More recently, there have been a great many serious and successful attempts to renew interest in various aspects of her place in the *Odyssey*. For example, John Winkler and many others emphasize her similarity to Odysseus; Nancy Felson-Rubin and Marilyn Katz explore the complexity and indeterminacy of her character and motivations; Lydia Allione, Agathe Thornton, and Uvo Hölscher argue for her greater role in the plot; and Froma Zeitlin and Helene Foley champion Penelope's importance for the epic's philosophy and theme. John Finley recognized the importance of Penelope in his 1978 book *Homer's Odyssey* which he opened with a chapter on her. To Finley the central theme of the *Odyssey* is "life brought home, therefore, finally shared," and he further argues that "Penelope is the central figure of home [since] she both kept it in existence and makes it recoverable" (4). Finley cites Agamemnon's encomiastic praise of Penelope's virtue and his prediction of her great future κλέος.

ὄλβιε Λαέρταο πάϊ, πολυμήχαν' Οδυσσεῦ·
ἦ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτήσω ἄκοιτιν.
ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
κούρῃ Ικαρίου· ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Οδυσῆος,
ἀνδρὸς κουριδίου· τῷ οἱ κλέος οὔ ποτ' ὀλεῖται
ἧς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσι δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδὴν
ἀθάνατοι χαρίεσσαν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ
O fortunate son of Laertes, Odysseus of many devices,
surely you won yourself a wife endowed with great virtue.
How good was proved the heart that is in blameless Penelope,
Ikarios' daughter, and how well she remembered Odysseus,
her wedded husband. Thereby the fame of her virtue shall never
die away, but the immortals will make for the people
of earth a thing of grace in the song for prudent Penelope (24.192-98)[1]

"That," Finley says, "comes near making our *Odysseia* a *Penelopeia*" (3-4).

I doubt that the *Odyssey* needs to be renamed in order to justify my approach to the it, though I intend to make the strongest case possible for Penelope's centrality to the plot. Indeed, the subject of this dissertation will be the structure of the *Odyssey* as it emerges from the domestic concerns of Odysseus's family, and its major assumption will be that Penelope is the principal agent of a plot so conceived. In addition, taking her seriously means for me also accepting Penelope as a reliable reporter of her own mind, of her own concerns, motivations, and intentions.

If this sort of approach to the *Odyssey* is a neglected one, it is for several powerful reasons, many of which underpin the dominant critical approaches to the *Odyssey* to date. First, the critics of the Analytic School in their concern to find the authentic core of the Homeric poems— that which was supposed to have come directly from the hand or mind

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[1]The Greek text is from the Bibliotheca Weidmanniana edition, 1991, prepared by H. van Thiel. The English translation, unless otherwise noted, is by Richmond Lattimore.

of Homer— have tended to discount the importance of whatever smacks of post-Homeric influence.[2] Whole sections of the *Odyssey* like the Telemachy, for example, are excluded. R. D. Dawe's translation and commentary is the most recent edition of the *Odyssey* influenced by the Analytic approach. Dawe employs two different point sizes for the typeface of the translation, one for acceptable passages and a smaller size for passages that are either "suspect" (in roman type) or that "have no right to be there" (in italic). [3] Penelope is often a victim of this practice; all references to her weaving and unweaving of a shroud for Laertes in order to forestall the suitors are writ small.

A related critical approach (sometimes called neo-analytical) is to search for the primitive folkloric tales that lie behind the epic. In this case, Homer plays the role of an (albeit extremely talented) adaptor of folkloric material; the material, however, is considered to have been too diverse for seamless synthesis. Almost as much effort has been made to discover flawed narrative elements as has been exerted to discover inauthentic lines. Book 19 is the obvious target. In it, Homer is supposed to have made a serious blunder by failing to assign Penelope an adequate motivation for her decision to initiate the contest of the bow. G. S. Kirk finds "a serious illogicality which supports the probability that an earlier version, in which the contest was arranged in full collusion between husband and wife, has been extensively but inadequately remodelled by the large-

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[2]Of the Homeric epics, the *Odyssey* is especially vulnerable because Analysts generally assume that all lines that it shares with the *Iliad* were cribbed from the supposedly earlier poem.

[3]Three typefaces seem to be the bare minimum for this meticulous scholar: "In a way I would like to have used a whole range of typefaces, but the restriction to just three does impose some kind of discipline on the editor, and with any luck corresponding limits to the reader's skepticism" (29).

scale composer" (246-7). Though Finley claims that "Because Penelope's decision for the test of the bow makes possible Odysseus's homecoming, she is a key to the unity of the poem" (2), the persistent narratological difficulties with this passage have done a great deal to marginalize Penelope. Penelope is thought to be forced to act completely out of character for the sake of advancing Homer's plot. W. J. Woodhouse complains:

> Willy nilly, one or other of the actors in the story must do something, in order that the whole thing may go forward. If the poet cannot find in his characters what he needs in the way of motive power, he must just contribute it out of his own head. (87)

The idea is that, in attempt to salvage his plot, Homer was forced to sacrifice the integrity of Penelope's character. This approach undercuts any effort or attempt to study Penelope as a consistent character.

If the Analytic school is unforgiving of inconsistencies of plot in its eagerness to athetize everything that does not square with its notion of Homer's genius, the reaction to that school led by the theories of oral composition that Perry and Lord championed takes a contrary approach. Apparent inconsistencies in Penelope's character pose little cause for wonder or study to the theory of oral composition. Instead, like many other errors that are forgiven the oral poet, they would seem to flow naturally from the difficulties of oral composition and the singer's continual need to vary his song rather than from any shortcomings of interpretation.

I set aside the above approaches because they tend to deny true unity to the plot of the *Odyssey*. This denial of unity is particularly egregious for this is a unity, as I read the

poem, upon which Penelope's agency depends. Some approaches, however, do accept unity of plot. For example, Aristotle defends the plot of the *Odyssey* as similar to tragedy, that is, built around a single action. The problem with Aristotle for my study is that he centers the unity of the *Odyssey* around the *nostos*.

> A certain man has been away from home for many years, kept that way by Poseidon, and he ends up being alone. Meanwhile, his affairs at home are in such a state that his wife's suitors are squandering his property and are plotting against his son. Tempest-tossed, he arrives home; he reveals himself to some; he attacks and destroys his enemies and is saved. That is the essence (ἴδιον) of the *Odyssey*: the rest is made up of episodes. (1455b17-24)

The treatment of the *Odyssey* as essentially a *nostos* story obviously discourages focus on Ithaca and Penelope. As I was writing this introduction I came upon the abridgment that Stanley Lombardo has lately made of his fine translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He entitles it *The Essential Homer*. Sadly, I was not overly surprised to discover what portions of the original were eliminated– significantly, most major references to Penelope before book 19.[4] No reader restricted to this "essential" Homer (so much like Aristotle's ἴδιον) could guess that Penelope has any serious agency in the plot at all.[5]

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[4]In *The Essential Homer*, Lombardo omits: books 2, 3, 4 (584-839 i.e. including Helen, but excluding Penelope), 7, 8 (1-453), 14, 15, 16 (321-481), 17 (491-606), 18 (107-428), 20. The omissions include: The stakes of the plot; The threat against Telemachos and Penelope's reaction; the suitors's failure and fears; the second plot against Telemachos and Penelope's confrontation with the suitors to avoid this; Penelope's request to see the beggar and Eumaios's warning; Odysseus's injunction; Penelope's appearance before the suitors and the gifts she gets from it; Penelope's final dream; the suitors's plans for an immanent attack on Telemachos and their temporary postponement.

[5]The routine tendency to privilege the male point of view is perhaps especially understandable with the *Odyssey*. The epic begins, after all, with the word "man" not "woman," an obvious challenge to my approach.

With the work of Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, especially in their 1978 *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, a new and productive chapter opened in the study of the *Odyssey*. The concentration upon μῆτις as one of the principal themes of the epic brought much that was obscure into bright focus. Not that scholarship had previously ignored the theme; it just never embraced it. The difficulty is that μῆτις, though translated benignly as "cunning intelligence," cannot be distinguished– except quite artificially– from deception and mendacity. From classical times, the trickster, deceiver, or inveterate liar who relishes his lies was a rogue. Sophocles's disdainful portrait of Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* is a typical response to this unheroic character.[6] Detienne and Vernant managed to demonstrate to critics how to treat μῆτις as a virtue. The anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, too-- through his studies of present day Greece and their influence on the classicist John Winkler-- helped point the way toward appreciation of the importance of secrecy and lying for people who consider those skills to be "unfortunate necessities but which they nonetheless practice diligently, constantly, and craftily" (Winkler, 134). [7]

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[6]The Iliadic hero on the other hand, (including Odysseus himself in that epic) is heroic to the extent that he is above lies and deceit. In the epic of force, (βίη), the ethic of deceit,(μῆτις) , is ignoble. This has been a major contributor to the sort of disdain with which Longinus viewed the *Odyssey* and relegated it to a secondary importance. The theme that lies at the heart of the *Odyssey* is considered to be inferior to, lighter than, or less serious than the central theme of the *Iliad*.

[7]Winkler goes on to say that Homer's profound meditation on deception even reaches the level of narrative technique. On one level this is unavoidable. It must be admitted that language itself is inherently capable of deceit. No language can avoid the existence of the lie. Also, metaphor, the lifeblood of language, is a kind of lie, in that it distorts reality in order to illuminate it. Furthermore, story-telling often require the audience to believe in things that it

I further accept John Peradotto's insistence that μῆτις is a fundamental theme of the *Odyssey* and integral to Odysseus's own identity. In his *Man in the Middle Voice*, Peradotto analyses the wonderful paranomasia of Book 9 where Odysseus identifies himself to the Cyclops as *Outis*, ("Noman"), and where the poet identifies οὖτις with μῆτις.[8] Peradotto writes,

> We have suggested that Odysseus under the name of Outis represents the fundamental potentiality of the narrative "subject" to take on any attribute, to be linked with any action. It is therefore associated with *mētis*, that hidden power of cunning intelligence to find a way (*posos*) through the problematical, and with *polutropos*, in its active sense the attribute to assume any attribute. (1990, 161)

The theme of μῆτις has been used in a number of valiant attempts to restore consistency to Penelope's motivations and thereby vindicate Homer's narratological skill. These scholars accept that Homer knew what he was doing when he had Penelope announce the bow-contest, but they deny that her decision is a serious indication that she intends to remarry. She is merely deceiving the suitors. Philip Harsh, for example, neatly circumvents the Analytic criticism of Book 19 by suggesting that Penelope guesses the beggar's true identity and tacitly connives with him. Others reject the idea that Penelope guesses Odysseus's identity, but nevertheless emphasize her craftiness. In this view, the contest of the bow is just another ruse (δόλος) to delay marriage, like the weaving and

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knows may not be factually true. And every sort of irony relies on the split between the factual and the verbal. But humans are addicted to stories, and rightly so, since our identities are inextricably tied to (and perhaps constituted by) the stories that we learn to tell about our lives.

[8]Technically μή τις, a grammatical variant of ου τις, but aurally indistinguishable from μῆτις.

unweaving of Laertes' shroud. Patricia Marquardt insists that Penelope would never agree to a bride-contest unless she were absolutely certain it would amount to nothing more than delay. Penelope is therefore not acting inconsistently: she is just deceiving the suitors about her real intention. This is possible, argues John Winkler, because Odysseus and Penelope share essentially the same personality: both are characterized by μῆτις, skill in secrecy and lying.

Disguise, deception, and the illusiveness of reality[9] are undoubtedly essential concerns of the *Odyssey*. To my mind, any approach that cannot accept the importance of μῆτις for the *Odyssey* is seriously flawed, and I will do my best in this dissertation to do it justice.

There are, however, problems with the all too easy assumption that the signal virtue of one forceful character, even the eponymous hero, ought to be imitated by the other main characters. Why should we not expect Homer to use Penelope as a challenge to the theme of μῆτις rather than an example of it? Furthermore, Penelope is doomed to be inferior to Odysseus on the scale of μῆτις. She will never attain to the wiliness of the wiliest of humans. Her deceits, no matter how amplified, are but a candle to his bonfire. Worst of all, the assumption that Penelope is lying about her own motives becomes an open invitation to read into her mind motivations that are not hers, or to disregard those that are.

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[9]At another level, the theme of μῆτις allows Homer to thematize language itself and draw the *Odyssey* closer to real life. Lying is not only a common use of language, it is inherent in language, in some sense its real power. Putting a word to a thing already begins to pry that thing away from "reality." This is the essential role of metaphor. To call a man a lion is to distort, embellish, or enrich the truth, depending.

If we are allowed to pronounce her statements as false when we have no spoken evidence from either her or the narrator, then we are free to discount everything that she says. Yes becomes no; no becomes a yes.

An even more recent approach partly avoids the temptation to put words in Penelope's mouth. This approach, which has itself profited greatly from the work on μῆτις, eagerly embraces the post-modernist virtue of indeterminacy. It does not insist that Penelope is always lying; rather, it holds that we can never be certain whether she is or not. Ioanna Papadopoulou-Belmehdi finds Penelope "*insaissisable*," continually woven and unwoven like "*la toile irrationnelle*" that symbolizes her (87). Nancy Felson-Rubin in her book *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics* and especially in her article "Penelope's Perspective: Character from Plot," deconstructs Penelope's agency by presenting a character that, according to her, is enmeshed in any number of diverse subplots and themes. Thus, her motives only seem contradictory to us. Marilyn Katz, in *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in Homer's Odyssey*, argues that since indeterminacy is the very nature of Penelope's character, by definition, her motivations cannot be fathomed. Sheila Murnaghan, in *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey*, locates Homer's very genius in his lack of narrative specificity and his refusal to settle for purposeful motivations. According to her, Homer is trying to emphasize that in real life the final word belongs to chance, or even absurdity. Indeterminacy may well reflect a reader's or an audience's uncertainty as a plot unfolds. For my purposes, though, the presumption of indeterminacy tends to render Penelope's character either too passive or too trivial.

The last approach I shall mention is perhaps really more of a fundamental assumption underlying all previous approaches. The assumption is that Penelope is to be understood in terms of her sexual fidelity to Odysseus. This is an old idea. In the *Heroides*, Ovid portrays Penelope as completely dependent upon her husband and obsessed with their romantic bond. Ovid imagines that Penelope writes to Odysseus and promises, Tua sum, tua dicar oportet; Penelope coniunx semper Vlixis ero.
I am yours. I must be called yours. Penelope will always be Ulysses' wife.[10]
The idea has endured. In 1995, Froma Zeitlin wrote that Penelope's testing of Odysseus's identity in Book 23 "raises the far more important question of *her* sexual fidelity to him," and that "This is the principal anxiety that hovers over the whole poem" (1995, 122).

Certainly, Penelope has loved and still loves Odysseus and her grief for him is genuine. There is no reason to disbelieve that Penelope has always longed for Odysseus's return, as Eurykleia asserts. Nevertheless, focusing on Penelope's sexual desire and romantic longing inevitably promotes Penelope's passivity since it leaves her nothing to do in Ithaca but wait for her man. I have discovered that surprising numbers of contemporary women of independent spirit disdain Penelope. At the 2001 annual convention of the American Philological Association, a British instructor of Greek reported that the young women in her class did not like Penelope at all. "I wouldn't wait twenty years for any bloke," said one intelligent student coed.

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[10]This line (84) so impressed H.S. Sedlmayer in his *Kritischer Commentar zu Ovids Heroiden.* that he proposed that it (and the previous line) be placed at the end of the poem, after line 114, as a conclusion.

Though Zeitlin herself points out that Homer has no exact words for adultery or sexual fidelity and "is noticeably reticent about addressing acts of adultery, " (128) the theme of sexual fidelity is not wholly anachronistic. Agamemnon *does* worry about the sexual treachery of his wife (and almost all other women). And the Ithacan populace has the same expectations of Penelope that so many modern critics do: she is laudable and consistent whenever she acts to avoid remarriage; she is disappointing whenever she does not. My problem with this assumption is that it confuses the poet's point of view with Penelope's or with the Ithacan onlookers.

Advances in the study of the *Odyssey* cannot be denied. The major theme of deception, the complexity and self-consciousness of narrative technique, the emphasis on indeterminacy, the awareness that the *Odyssey* comprises many additions to its earliest version— none of these am I inclined to deny. As productive as they have been, however, they have involved fundamental assumptions that inherently tend to maximize the passivity of Penelope's character and minimize the importance of the events in Ithaca. In an attempt to use what is useful in them to illuminate Penelope's agency while at the same time bracketing (in the sense that Husserl uses the word in his *Cartesian Meditations*) their prejudicial assumptions, I have laid down a few principles for my own study. 1) I shall treat the text as it comes to us as an integral whole. 2) I shall assume that subsequent additions to the text were made in a manner consistent with the direction of the plot and intent of the narrative meaning. This is to say, I shall work with the assumption, as far as possible, that Homer, or the text that we publish under his name, is competently plotted. 3) I shall assume that narrative affects and strategy— that is to say, narrative discourse whose

narratee is the the implied audience— are meant to be noticed by the audience and taken into account. Curiously, in Homer, emphasis on the diegetic requires at the same time a sharper emphasis on the mimetic. In other words, what is known by the characters must be rigorously distinguished from what is known by the audience. Therefore, 4) I will abandon the notion (fairly widespread even among contemporary commentators) that any of the characters can or should speak for the narrator. 5) Finally, I shall assume that Penelope gives accurate accounts of her own feelings and motives.

This last principle is likely to be the most controversial. I do not mean to say that Penelope is incapable of deceit, or should be. Certainly she lies. Before the moment when the *Odyssey* opens she has deceived the suitors for three years with her weaving. In Book 23, she tells a lie about her bed, or at least promotes the false impression that it has been hacked from its foundation. Nevertheless, in each of these cases, we have (or soon get) independent proof of the truth. The same holds for all Odysseus's lies. I am not calling for a different treatment of Penelope than of Odysseus; in fact, I insist upon the same criterion. Every time Odysseus lies, the epic audience *knows* that he is lying. Conversely, when there is no evidence that Odysseus is lying, we readily accept his account about his feelings or thoughts. No one doubts that he is eager to return home, is happy to embrace his son, is touched by Argos's loyalty, or intends to take revenge on the suitors. In contrast, nearly everything that Penelope reports about herself is brought into question by critics of the text. John Winkler, for instance, writes about Penelope's famous dream of the twenty geese in Book 19: "Though Penelope does have dreams in the Odyssey, I see no reason to believe that she actually had this dream" (153). One cannot help but feel that Winkler's skepticism

is a result of the difficulty he has fitting her dream into his interpretation. In a like manner, Penelope is conveniently supposed to be deceitful when she reports anything about herself. So, Penelope is thought to be lying when she says that she is all out of ways to stall the suitors; that Odysseus gave her a clear injunction about his wishes when he left; that she intends to follow this injunction; that she believes Odysseus will probably never return home; that she has decided to remarry; that she means for the bow contest to select her a husband; that she does not recognize the Cretan as Odysseus until she gives him the test of the bed; and that her testing of Odysseus was motivated by fear of being tricked by an impostor. Some of these claims have been denied by virtually all authors; all of them have been denied by some. But the narrative reveals none of these statements to be deceptions.

This dissertation asserts that Penelope offers strikingly accurate and straightforward accounts of her own feelings, intentions, and beliefs, and all of them square with the plot and her dramatic character. In the pages that follow, I will offer arguments intended to persuade the skeptic of the sincerity of Penelope's various reports about herself and her mind. I will also argue that the possible alternatives to her announced intentions are either untenable or destructive to her interests or the logic of the plot. However, my main loyalty is to those who are willing to grant Penelope the right to speak for herself and are willing to listen to what she says. I see the major importance of this work not in such polemic, but rather in the light that is shed on the plot, the characters, and the theme of the *Odyssey* when Penelope is taken at her word.

A focus on an aspect of the *Odyssey* other than that which centers around Odysseus, the adventures, or the homecoming (the *nostos* or the *Heimkehr*) is encouraged

by several things. First, the very narrative sophistication of the epic immediately alerts the readers or listeners (the implied audience) to the possibility that their expectations for the traditional travelogue will be frustrated. I take this to be the force of the proem, which has on its own caused so many problems for readers. Though the proem of the *Odyssey* pretends to do for the *Odyssey* exactly what some have claimed that the Proem of the *Iliad* does for that epic— namely, to offer a précis of the story— in fact, it does no such thing.[11] The voice that speaks the ten lines of the proem and then never utters another word is requesting the repetition of a well-known tale, a familiar *nostos*-story; but the Muse, to whom he gives discretion to mold the story according to her own lights, presents a substantially different tale.

In the five chapters of this dissertation which follow, I shall study the events in the *Odyssey* that describe the situation in Ithaca and Penelope's agency in the plot. In Chapter One, "The Stakes of the Plot," I analyze the crisis that launches the action of the *Odyssey* and hastens Athene to Ithaca. Full appreciation of the crisis necessitates a close reading of Book 2 of the *Odyssey*, a book that has perhaps been more neglected by critics than any of the other twenty-three. It lays out both the overt and the covert intentions of the suitors. On the surface, the suitors are pursuing a perfectly legitimate courtship of Penelope and can even plausibly claim that they are more oppressed by Penelope than she is by them. Secretly, however, the courtship masks an illegitimate and vile plan to rob Telemachos of

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[11] "Despite the care which has obviously been bestowed on its composition, this is, as has often been pointed out, an odd opening for our *Odyssey*. It covers only a third of the poem, not very accurately, and gives disproportionate emphasis to a single incident. ... It is a natural conjecture that this opening was composed for a poem devoted to Odysseus's wanderings..." (West, 1988, 68-69).

his estate, a plan which Penelope has been able to frustrate by refusing to pick a husband. Because of Penelope's successful resistance, the suitors have resorted to an attempt to force Penelope's hand by threatening her son's interests. The suitors have vowed to consume Telemachos's wealth either until it is gone or until Penelope chooses one of them as a husband. Because of this recent change of strategy by the suitors, Athene has hurried to Ithaca to incite Telemachos to confront them and to spirit the lad away to the Peloponnese when he is snubbed. So, the avalanche begins. The suitors interpret Telemachos's departure as a threat: either Telemachos has gone off to rally foreign allies or to procure poison. Then, the very failure of a first attempt on Telemachos's life forces the suitors to a second. Only immediate and unambiguous action from the mother can save the son.

Chapter Two, "Strategy for Survival," begins by exploring the great depth of love that Penelope bears for her husband and her son. Though her love reveals itself as grief for her lost husband and as concern for the welfare of her son, the latter is the key to her character and the true motive behind her actions. Still, there is no reason to think that devotion to her son takes anything away from her love of her husband since Odysseus himself seems to hold Telemachos's welfare as the highest priority. This is another way of saying that both husband and wife are steadfastly devoted to the preservation of the οἶκος and the continuation of the bloodline of which Telemachos is the sole heir. The strategy for defending the House of Odysseus that Penelope is pursuing was devised by Odysseus himself in his parting injunction to her upon departing for Troy. If Odysseus fails to return from the war, she is not to marry until Telemachos grows a beard, but once he does, she is

to pick a new husband and leave the household. I analyze the logic of this injunction and find in it a cogent strategy for defending the House of Odysseus and persuasive evidence that Penelope aims to pursue this defense. Furthermore, though she may hope for Odysseus's eventual return, she is determined not to allow a mere hope to thwart her determination to secure her son's position. She is, therefore, sincere in her eventual decision to remarry. Nor is this a betrayal of Odysseus, either. In fact, by the logic of the plot, any other decision would be irresponsible. Any further delay, even if she could manage it, risks sacrificing Telemachos's life and destroying the House of Odysseus.

In Chapter Three, "How Old is Telemachos?" I deal with the problem of why, if indeed she was following the strategy of Odysseus's injunction, Penelope has not remarried already, before the *Odyssey* opens. Telemachos is certainly old enough to have a beard. I argue that Penelope is being faithful to the spirit of the injunction rather than merely its letter. In Homer, getting a beard is equivalent to becoming a man, and the latter is what Odysseus must have meant to be the signal for Penelope's remarriage. The trouble is, Penelope is caught in a bind. Telemachos, though physically mature, has not been able to escape from childish ways nor prove himself to be a man capable of controlling the House of Odysseus. Telemachos's immaturity, I argue, is not a result of any character flaws, but rather of having been deprived of a father to instruct him in what he needed to know. Ironically, but thematically apt, Telemachos lacks exactly what Odysseus exudes, the ability to dissemble and deceive. Though it is generally accepted that Telemachos attains maturity in the course of the *Odyssey*, there is little accord among scholars on the character or pace of that maturation. I attempt to demonstrate that Telemachos does not

prove himself capable until Book 21 when it comes too late to relieve the dramatic pressure on Penelope.

Chapter Four, "Penelope as Tragic Heroine," explores a deeper level of complication for Penelope. The epic is careful to provide her with many alluring excuses for postponing remarriage, not least of which is her utter repugnance to the idea: she hates the suitors as much as she still loves her husband. The external temptations are provided by the plausible stories of self-interested visitors who claim to have seen Odysseus still alive and soothsayers who prophesy Odysseus's imminent return. Penelope is tempted with beguiling words to abandon the idea of action and to await hopefully and passively for rescue. The dangers of beguilement (θέλξις)[12] are the obverse of the Homeric theme of μῆτις. To beguile is to deceive; to be beguiled is to deceive oneself by wishful thinking. If, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus emerges as that great deceiver, Penelope emerges as the character most resistant to deception. Not only does Penelope withstand the deceptive power of the Cretan beggar who is Odysseus himself in disguise, but she employs this very power as an instrument for detecting and thwarting the threat of a deception more subtle and insidious than Odysseus himself is aware. In a close analysis of the three successive interpretations of Penelope's dream of the twenty geese that the *Odyssey* offers in Book 19, I attempt to show how formidable are Penelope's powers of intellectual discernment and self-control. I regard Penelope as heroic because she accomplishes a great feat despite overwhelming odds and also because she is willing to sacrifice her own happiness. I call

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[12]Actually, only the verb (θέλγειν) appears in Homer.

her tragic in an attempt to describe how her actions in fact go beyond the heroic. Typically, the lasting reputation of glory which is a hero's κλέος compensates the heroic sacrifice. Penelope, however, is the only Homeric character who is challenged to sacrifice the possibility of κλέος along with everything else.

At the beginning of Book 23, which is the subject of my last chapter "The Limits of Deception" I discuss how, in brilliant employment of narrative μῆτις, Homer seduces the epic audience into condemning as vice the very attitude of self-control and resistance to wishful thinking that it had been led to admire as high virtue in Book 19. Penelope's tragic stature only increases when it eventually becomes apparent that she has rightly persisted in a proper skepticism even without the support of the epic audience. I try to demonstrate that Penelope has no other motive for delaying recognition of the Cretan than a continued determination to defend the House of Odysseus. Then going beyond this, I argue that the question of the identity of the Cretan is not merely a practical one for the protection of the οἶκος. It bears on the important theme of Odysseus's identity and the poet's identification of him with μῆτις. The poem thematizes the very idea of recognition and makes it clear that he has heretofore seduced the epic audience by means of previous recognition scenes into accepting inadequate (shall we say romantic) evidentiary standards. The poem raises the question of what might be satisfactory criteria of identity. In other words, what would authenticate the Cretan vagabond as the true Odysseus? I argue that Odysseus, being the thorough trickster that he is, has no logical way of conclusively proving his own identity. I then try to show how in the test of the bed, Penelope does not so much trick Odysseus as

afford him a way to escape this trap of his own making. In the end, I find that Penelope is not merely the pillar of the House of Odysseus but the redeemer of Odysseus's identity and the standard by which Homer's message must be gauged.

I. The Stakes of the Plot

In *On The Sublime*, Longinus judges the *Odyssey* to be clearly inferior to the *Iliad* since it appears less dramatic and agonistic (ἐναγώνιον). The newest edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1996) seems to agree: "The *Odyssey* is a romance, enjoyable at a more superficial level than the heroic/tragic *Iliad*." Longinus rejects plot unity in the *Odyssey* out of hand: he thinks that the aging Homer not only loses his edge but his direction as well in that he "drifts from his course into fabulous and incredible tales of wonder." The *OCD* echoes: "For many readers the adventures are the high point" (719). In fact, many school editions of the epic (such as Herbert Bates's otherwise admirable translation) altogether exclude the Telemachy and other "slow" parts and begin with Odysseus weeping on the Ogygian shore. Nor is this approach restricted to schoolbooks. Peter Brooks in his 1984 *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* writes: "The *Iliad* opens with Agamemnon and Achilles locked in passionate quarrel over the girl Briseis, and the *Odyssey* with Odysseus, detained on Calypso's island, expressing the longing of his *nostos*, the drive to return home" (38). Of course, the *Odyssey* does *not* open on the Ogygian shore, but first on Olympus, then in Ithaca. Nor does it open at a moment particularly significant in the tale of Odysseus's *nostos*.

Why does the *Odyssey* begin when and where it does, in Ithaca, in the twentieth year after the beginning of the Trojan campaign? One who takes the *Odyssey* primarily as a *nostos* story might conceivably answer that since Ithaca is Odysseus's abiding goal, the audience ought to have an image of it to keep in mind as he journeys homeward. This is far from a satisfying answer, however, since what is currently happening in Ithaca is so unpleasant that it is more likely to undermine the goal of homecoming. Better for the *nostos* story, I think, would be to let the audience experience the adventures with the same idealized view of the goal that Odysseus does. This is probably why *nostos* tales, as Uvo Hölscher has shown in his analysis of märchen, invariably begin with the earliest adventures of the returning hero and continue in a strict chronological order until the hero is home.

We have to put aside the idea that Homer's *Odyssey* it is a traditional *nostos* story. As famous as Odysseus's adventures of the *apologia* are, they constitute a minor part of the poem compared to the struggles in Ithaca. Ithaca, after all, is where considerably more than half of the action takes place, getting at least four times more attention than Scheria, the next most featured place. Furthermore, Athene elects to go to Ithaca in order to help Telemachos rather than to Ogygia to aid Odysseus. In fact, Athene's decision has the effect of delaying Odysseus's return. Her chief worries concern Ithaca.

As Uvo Hölscher has shown, rather than the *nostos* pattern, the beginning of the *Odyssey* conforms better to a folktale pattern sometimes called "the nick of time" which proceeds something like this: a husband goes away specifying to his wife a limit to the time that she is supposed to wait for him and after which she is to act as if he were dead and

remarry. The appointed time comes without the husband. The wedding takes its course, but the husband comes home (perhaps in disguise) just in time to prevent (or reverse) it. In the *Odyssey*, the appointed time is when the beard grows on Telemachos' chin. So Hölscher can write that the whole of the Telemachy is but an expansion of the statement "when your son has gotten a beard."

But if Hölscher's studies have shown that Homer chose to begin the *Odyssey* in Ithaca for reasons that do not directly bear on Odysseus's *nostos*, he has unfortunately not solved the narratological problem of Book 19 that I discussed in my introduction.

Furthermore, if the *Odyssey* employs the "nick of time" motif in the Telemachy, it also distances itself from that pattern in the presentation of Penelope's weaving. As an excuse for not remarrying, the weaving of a shroud for Laertes makes very little sense. Penelope's father-in-law is old and feeble and *may* be near to death, but the imminence of his death is emphasized only here, and could easily be ignored for the purposes of the plot: no other element of the drama relies on his being moribund. A much more apposite excuse than a shroud for Laertes would have been something for the impending wedding, a bridle gown for example. The unceasing weaving and unweaving of a wedding dress ought to have been an irresistible devise for a nick-of-time folktale. The substitution of the shroud more likely implies the hand of the poet eager to avoid, as far as possible, association with the nick-of-time motif, and therefore with hopes for Odysseus's return.[1] In short, the

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[1]As we shall see below, none from the principal agents in Ithaca expect Odysseus to return.

dramatic situation in Ithaca is designed *not* to concentrate the focus on the promise of Odysseus's return.

Yet the question remains why the *Odyssey* begins where and when it does. Once again, Uvo Hölscher is a pioneer in the pursuit of a meaningful answer. As he argued in his 1976 lecture at the University of Cincinnati entitled "The Transformation from Folk-Tale to Epic," "The *Odyssey* starts with a crisis. Every scene of the first book is saying one thing: that the state of affairs is not to be endured any longer; that the moment has come when a decision has to be taken" (1978, 57). "Crisis" may be a strong word for those who hold the traditional view and insist that the same basic situation has obtained in Ithaca for many years. (This tradition is so ingrained that the *OCD* can assert that Penelope has been tricking the suitors in her house with the web for ten years now!)[2] But crisis it is.[3]

I part ways with Hölscher over the nature of "the state that is not to be endured any longer." Still looking for the folk-tale core, Hölscher emphasizes the romantic pressure placed on Penelope to marry, ignoring for the most part the struggle over the future of the House of Odysseus without which the *Odyssey* remains the mere romance that Longinus

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[2]"Penelope, daughter of Icarius, wife of Odysseus, and mother of Telemachus. In Homer's *Odyssey* she faithfully awaits Odysseus' return, although pressed to marry one of the many local nobles. She pretends that she must first finish weaving a shroud for Laertes, Odysseus' father, which she unravels every night for ten years [sic], until detected by a maid and forced to complete it. Finally twenty years after Odysseus' departure, in despair she resolves to marry the suitor who can string Odysseus' bow and perform a special feat of archery" (Oxford Classical Dictionary).

[3]Hölscher also saw that the crisis had little to do with Odysseus himself. "I do not find," he writes, "the moment of crisis in the course of the Odysseus action. Odysseus could easily continue to remain with Calypso."(1978, 57)

disdained, and not the agonistic drama that it might be. Rather, I would agree with Agathe Thornton who writes:

> But...we have to change our view of the *Odyssey*: it is not a fairy story of princes competing for the hand of a beautiful queen, but it is a tale from times in which power based on wealth and brute force was little hampered by law, a tale of greedy and ambitious aristocrats trying under a thin veneer of courtliness to seize the absent king's wife, wealth and position. (67)

To know what is really going on in Ithaca, and what counts in the structure of the plot, we must take a careful look at the generally neglected second book of the epic. Book 2 sets up what might be called the dramatic framework of the plot. It involves a power struggle in which the principal agents are the Ithacans, the suitors, Telemachos, and Penelope.

Let us now examine Book 2 in detail.

Telemachos: 2.1-14

As Book 2 begins, Homer describes godlike[4] Telemachos, who awakens and prepares himself to address the Ithacan assembly which he has called, with the same three lines that describe Menelaos in Book 4:

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[4]Telemachos is not usually described as godlike. I exclude the epithet θεοειδής which is used 5 times of Telemachos because it seems more polite than meaningful. It is also used five times of Theoklymenos and four times in connection with the suitors. I also exclude ἀντίθεος which Cunliffe calls "a vague general epithet of commendation." Twice, however, he is ἰσόθεος, equal to god twice, an epithet reserved only for him in the *Odyssey* but used a dozen times in the *Iliad* often in the heroic word phrase φώς ἰσόθεος. The first time that he appears as a man "equal to a god" is in Book 1, on the first day of the *Odyssey*. The second time is in Book 20 when he awakens on the day of the slaughter of the suitors. In the 19 intervening books he is referred to a number of times as the son of divine Odysseus. Most often, however, he is simply πεπνυμένος.

εἵματα ἑσσάμενος· περὶ δὲ ξίφος ὀξὺ θέτ' ὤμῳ,
ποσσὶ δ' ὑπὸ λιπαροῖσιν ἐδήσατο καλὰ πέδιλα,
βῆ δ' ἴμεν ἐκ θαλάμοιο θεῷ ἐναλίγκιος ἄντην·
[He] put on his clothes, and slung a sharp sword over his shoulder.
Underneath his shining feet he bound the fair sandals
and went on his way from the chamber, like a god in presence. (2.3-5)

Though by the end of the book Telemachos will cut a very different figure, here the poetry lends him Iliadic weight. For example, as he takes his father's seat in the assembly, the aorist of εἴκειν, a verb common in the *Iliad* though not in the *Odyssey*, is used to convey how the elders "make room for him." "Εἴκειν" commonly means to give way to the stronger side in battle. The metaphoric sense employed here and only here in the *Odyssey*, appears three times in the *Iliad*, all in the solemnity of Book 24. Room is made for the wagon that transports Hector's corpse back to Troy (716 and 718). Room is made for Thetis at the assembly of the gods next to Zeus (100). And so is room made for Telemachos as he strides into the assembly spear in hand, a couple of fine hounds at his side, and Athene's enchanting grace glowing forth from his whole person. The audience is set to expect great and noble things from Telemachos.

Aigyptios: 2.15-34

The first to speak, however, is one of the Ithacan citizens, "the hero Aigyptios, who was bent over with age, and had seen things beyond number." His first words reveal that there has been no official assembly in Ithaca for twenty years, that is, since Odysseus left.

οὔτε ποθ' ἡμετέρη ἀγορὴ γένετ' οὔτε θόωκος
ἐξ οὗ Ὀδυσσεὺς δῖος ἔβη κοίλῃς ἐνὶ νηυσί.
Never has there been an assembly of us or any session
since great Odysseus went away in the hollow vessels. (2.26-27)

This means that Telemachos has never before called a public assembly. In fact, so slight has been Telemachos's public life that Aigyptios can not even guess that it might be he who has called the assembly.

So who has been ruling Ithaca? The answer is no one. Odysseus did once, as "king," when he was in Ithaca, but since then, apparently no one has taken his place. Nor has there even been any official public discussion of political matters. Ithaca has therefore been more or less in anarchy for twenty years, a system which seems to have worked tolerably well. I think we can assume that each Ithacan household has reverted to the ancient practice of taking care of itself. Aigyptios's own family consisting of his four sons reflects a balance of interests in regard to the house of Odysseus. Two of his sons have involvement with it, one as a friend, and one as an enemy. Antiphos, sailed with Odysseus to Troy and was lost. Eurynomos is a suitor. The other two sons– unnamed, as are all of the unaffiliated Ithacans except Aigyptios– are at home, minding their own private, familial estates (δύο δ' αἰὲν ἔχον πατρώια ἔργα 2.22). They represent the very Ithacans from whom Telemachos is asking for help, and they are doing just what Telemachos is asking to be allowed to do. If Aigyptios's family is taken as representative of the political affiliations of the average Ithacan, we can see that Telemachos is about to address an assembly of men with complex and balanced affiliations, but whose interests are primarily private.

Aigyptios, however, also has good will for any one willing to shoulder public concerns and aid the community at large. Even before he knows the identity of the one who has called the assembly, he offers his approval and endorsement.

> ἐσλός μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι, ὀνήμενος. εἴθε οἱ αὐτῷ
> Ζεὺς ἀγαθὸν τελέσειεν, ὅ τι φρεσὶν ἦσι μενοινᾷ.
> I think he is a good man and useful. So may Zeus grant him
> good accomplishment for whatever it is his mind desires. (2.33-34)

This enthusiastic endorsement will strike anyone who knows the story of the *Odyssey* as highly ironic. The accomplishment of Telemachos' desires will prove a curse to Aigyptios who still grieves over the loss of his first son.

> ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὣς τοῦ λήθετ' ὀδυρόμενος καὶ ἀχεύων.
> τοῦ ὅ γε δάκρυ χέων ἀγορήσατο καὶ μετέειπε·
> ...he could not forget the lost one. He grieved and mourned for him,
> and it was in tears for him, now that he stood forth and addressed [the assembly]
> (2.23-24)

His second son will die along with the other suitors.[5]

Telemachos takes Aigyptios's words as support and encouragement, but immediately acts in a way to render it inapplicable. Aigyptios has had praise and appreciation for anyone who warns against invasion

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[5]Curiously, Eurynomos is the only named suitor whose death is not accounted for by Homer. A metrical replacement, Eurydamas, otherwise unmentioned in the *Odyssey* dies in what seems to be his stead. In two key manuscripts (Marcianus and Caesenas) the name is Euryalos, which appears in a list of Trojans cited by Demodokos on 8.115. The pattern of the deaths of the 14 named suitors who die is highly structured. The anomaly of this line is therefore striking. If, indeed, Telemachos kills Eurynomos in this line, not Eurydamas or Euryalos, then the irony of 2.34 is all the greater.

ἠέ τι δήμιον ἄλλο πιφαύσκεται ἠδ' ἀγορεύει
or has some other public matter to set forth and argue, (2.32)

but not for one like Telemachos who has come to request help, not offer it. Telemachos's business is only a private matter, an urgent personal need. *Mutatis mutandis*, Telemachos's line is an echo of Aigyptios's, but in the negative:

οὔτε τι δήμιον ἄλλο πιφαύσκομαι οὐδ' ἀγορεύω.
nor have I some other public matter to set forth and argue. (2.44)

Aigyptios's hopes are doomed to be frustrated.

The Two Evils: 2.46-61

Telemachos begins to present his case. Two evils (κακὰ δοιά), he explains, have struck his household (μοὶ ἔμπεσεν οἴκῳ).

τὸ μὲν πατέρ' ἐσθλὸν ἀπώλεσα, ὅς ποτ' ἐν ὑμῖν
τοίσδεσσιν βασίλευε, πατὴρ δ' ὡς ἤπιος ἦεν·
νῦν δ' αὖ καὶ πολὺ μεῖζον, ὃ δὴ τάχα οἶκον ἅπαντα
πάγχυ διαρραίσει, βίοτον δ' ἀπὸ πάμπαν ὀλέσσει.
μητέρι μοι μνηστῆρες ἐπέχραον οὐκ ἐθελούσῃ,
I have lost a noble father, one who
was king once over you here, and was kind to you like a father;
and now here is a greater evil, one which presently
will break up the whole house and destroy all my livelihood.
For my mother, against her will, is beset by suitors. (2.46-50)

The statement of the first evil (τὸ μὲν πατέρ' ἐσθλὸν ἀπώλεσα) is bound to be surprising to the audience who has witnessed, not long before, the opening scene on Olympus and

therefore knows that Odysseus is not dead. Telemachos's statement is unequivocal. He does not say that he has lost almost all hope that my father will return home. He offers no hope, warning, or threat that Odysseus might someday return home, though such a threat might have greatly helped his case and, considering the lack of a corpse, might plausibly have been believed.

Can Telemachos possibly believe that his father is dead? He has already announced this belief in Book 1 no fewer than three separate times. As he first gushes out his complaints about the household to Athene, he says: "As it is, [Odysseus] has died by an evil fate, and there is no comfort left for us, not even though some one among mortals tells us he will come back. His day of homecoming has perished" (1.166-168). A little later he says to his mother: "Odysseus is not the only one who lost his homecoming / day at Troy. There were many others who perished, besides him" (1.354-55). To Eurymachos whom Telemachos seems to prefer to the other suitors, calling him "their best man by far," (15.521) he says: "Eurymachos, there is no more hope of my father's homecoming" (1.413). Even upon leaving Pylos when he has absorbed all the stories about Odysseus's whereabouts and so many prophesies about his homecoming, he still tells Theoklymenos: "Friend, I will accurately answer all that you ask me. / Ithaca is my country, and Odysseus is my father, if ever he lived; but by now he must have died by a dismal / death" (15.266-69)[6]. His answer to the several oracles that predict Odysseus's return is expressed in the

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[6]Though Athene sends him on a voyage to inquire about his father, she never tells him unequivocally that Odysseus is still alive.

unreal optative of wish. There is no way around it. Telemachos doubts that his father is alive up until the very moment, in Book 16, that he comes face to face with Odysseus.[7]

R.D. Dawe finds this passage disturbing. Why, he asks, should Telemachos be announcing an event that took place "at some unspecified time during the last twenty years (95).[8] Dawe is surely right that this first evil (or, rather, the acceptance of it) occurred much earlier, and is, in this sense old news. What *is* new, however, is the public announcement. Without it, most of what follows would be incomprehensible, especially Telemachos's attitude to the courtship of his mother by the suitors.

Telemachos would probably never have bothered to herald the first evil if the second had not befallen him. The second evil, the real cause for alarm, is the damage being done to the household by the suitors's. Telemachos does not deny them right to court his mother. His complaint is only that they are courting her improperly. A proper courtship would leave his inheritance intact. If the suitors are serious in their courtship, he argues, they ought to petition Ikarios, Penelope's father, for her hand. The import of these lines can hardly be exaggerated. Telemachos tacitly justifies the legitimacy of the suitors's right to court his mother. Their suit is not *prima facie* illegal, irreverent, or contrary to custom.

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[7]It is true that Telemachos daydreams about his father's return, but even he recognizes this as no more than a daydream. Nor is his journey to the mainland motivated by belief in Odysseus's return. I will return to these points when I investigate his character and psychology in the next chapter.

[8]Page also complains that it makes Telemachos rather "crassly materialistic," preferring wealth to a living father. The scholia on line 48 gives a common sense solution: οὐχ ὡς προκρίνων τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν οὐσίαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν κατηγορίαν αὔξων τῶν νέων· ἄλλως τε τοῦτο μὲν ἀμφίβολον, ἐκεῖνο δὲ πρόδηλον.

Nor do the suitors think that they are doing anything blameable by courting Penelope. Athene condemns them often for courting the wife of a living man, but this is an unfair charge to level at them. No one, aside from gods and prophets, claim that he is not yet dead. The suitors's clear conscience on this matter is most strikingly shown in the desperate defense that Eurymachos offers to Odysseus in Book 22 as he "looked about him for a way to escape sheer death." Eurymachos does not deny that he courted Penelope, but puts the blame for all that is punishable on Antinoös who, he claims, was in reality *not* interested in Penelope, but had other intentions:

> οὗτος γὰρ ἐπίηλεν τάδε ἔργα,
> οὔ τι γάμου τόσσον κεχρημένος οὐδὲ χατίζων,
> ἀλλ' ἄλλα φρονέων, τά οἱ οὐκ ἐτέλεσσε Κρονίων,
> ὄφρ' Ἰθάκης κατὰ δῆμον ἐυκτιμένης βασιλεύοι
> αὐτος, ἀτὰρ σὸν παῖδα κατακτείνειε λοχήσας.
> It was he who pushed for this action,
> not so much that he wanted the marriage, or cared for it,
> but with other things in mind, which the son of Kronos would not
> grant him: to lie in wait for your son and kill him, and then
> be king himself in the district of strong-founded Ithaca. (22.49-53)

So, if Telemachos claims that his mother "against her will, is beset by suitors" (2.50), he does not claim the stronger case that the suitors have no right to court her, as they would if Odysseus were still alive. On the contrary, Telemachos *wants* his mother to remarry as do Penelope's own parents (and Penelope knows that they do). Telemachos encourages the courtship going so far as to reproach the suitors for insincerity. If they want Penelope so much, why haven't they simply gone to her father with gifts as is customary?

οἳ πατρὸς μὲν ἐς οἶκον ἀπερρίγασι νέεσθαι
Ἰκαρίου, ὥς κ' αὐτὸς ἐεδνώσαιτο θύγατρα,
δοίη δ' ᾧ κ' ἐθέλοι καί οἱ κεχαρισμένος ἔλθοι·
These shrink from making the journey to the house of her father
Ikarios, so that he might take bride gifts for his daughter
and bestow her on the one he wished, who came as his favorite. (2.52-54)

Telemachos apparently assumes that Penelope's father has the authority to give away his daughter (which he would not have if the husband were generally still considered alive). For their part, the suitors offer to bring their suit to Penelope's father if Telemachos will send her home, which in itself assumes that she is no longer legally bound by her former marriage to Odysseus. But there is a right way to do this courtship, and there is a wrong way.

What is wrong with the way that the suitors are now courting Penelope is that it is destroying the estate that Telemachos is due to inherit. But whose responsibility is it to protect the property? Obviously, Telemachos's own, in the absence of his father. Telemachos recognizes this but admits himself to be woefully inadequate to the responsibility.

οὐ γὰρ ἔπ' ἀνήρ,
οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκεν, ἀρὴν ἀπὸ οἴκου ἀμῦναι.
ἡμεῖς δ' οὔ νύ τι τοῖοι ἀμυνέμεν· ἦ καὶ ἔπειτα
λευγαλέοι τ' ἐσόμεσθα καὶ οὐ δεδαηκότες ἀλκήν.
ἦ τ' ἂν ἀμυναίμην, εἴ μοι δύναμίς γε παρείη.
We have no man here
such as Odysseus was, to drive this curse from the household.
We ourselves are not the men to do it; we must be
weaklings in such a case, not men well seasoned in battle.
I would defend myself if the power were in me. (2.58-62)

Plea for help: 2.62-84

Telemachos can only get what he wants if the Ithacans help him. But why should they? Telemachos offers a gallimaufry of arguments which become progressively less savory. He begins with an appeal to altruism but ends with one to greed. I discern at least seven separate arguments. First, he claims that his situation is no longer endurable to him (63). Second, that the destruction of his house is "beyond all decency" (63) Third, in an attempt to shame them into action, he says: "Even you must be scandalized and ashamed before the neighboring men about us, the people who live around our land" (64-6). Next, as if giving up on their sense of fair play, Telemachos attempts to tap their fear.

> θεῶν δ' ὑποδείσατε μῆνιν,
> μή τι μεταστρέψωσιν ἀγασσάμενοι κακὰ ἔργα.
> Fear also the gods anger
> lest they, astonished by evil actions, turn against you. (2.66-67)

Fifth, he offers himself as a suppliant and pathetically pleads: "leave me alone with my bitter sorrow to waste away," (70-71) methodically undercutting his own best argument for the intensity of the evil and the urgency of his need. As if this were not enough, Telemachos insults the Ithacans by implying that they have gone well beyond mere toleration of the suitors, that they, in fact, are the very ones who incited the suitors and instigated the attack on his property (73-74). Finally, Telemachos follows this up with a cynical appeal to greed (74-79). He suggests that the Ithacans cut out the middle man and snatch all his property for themselves. That way, he figures, he might one day have some chance of getting it back. Better to be robbed by thieves that can not run too far. If

anything, Telemachos has now sunk below the low moral standards of which he has just been accusing the Ithacans themselves. The fact that the Ithacans do not take him up on his offer nor race each other to loot the palace becomes a tribute to their basic honesty, and reminds us that they are not as Telemachos portrays them.

The fall from the heroic opening lines is precipitous. Telemachos ends up presenting himself as an extremely callow and pathetic character, reduced to ineffectual and adolescent anger:

> ὣς φάτο χωόμενος, ποτὶ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίῃ
> δάκρυ' ἀναπρήσας·
> So he spoke in anger, and dashed to the ground the scepter
> in a stormburst of tears. (2.80-81)

The Ithacans are silent (πάντες ἀκὴν ἔσαν) like those who are hearing a riveting story are silent.[9] They are unsure how to react. They seem to feel that the most proper response to the implicit insults and attacks would be angry words of their own (μύθοισιν ἀμείψασθαι χαλεποῖσιν). But no one dares (οὐδέ τις ἔτλη). Why? Is it that Telemachos seems too fragile, too near the breaking point? They pity him (οἶκτος δ' ἔλε λαὸν ἅπαντα 81). They certainly cannot be afraid of him.

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[9]The word "ἀκὴν" is used in the *Odyssey* four times of the Phaiakians and once of Eumaeus as they listen to Odysseus's fantastic tales. In the *Iliad*, it is used of the Achaeans inside the Trojan Horse as they listen to Helen imitate the voices of their wives.

Counter-suit: 2.85-128

Antinoös, the ringleader of the suitors, takes the floor to present the case for the suitors. He admits that the courtship has gone awry, but he puts the blame squarely and solely upon Penelope. Pieced together from Antinoös's account, the chronicle of events seems to run as follows. For nearly four years, at least, the suitors have had a desire for Penelope to marry one of them.[10] The trouble began soon after, when Penelope "began denying the desires of the Achaians" (90) who began to feel cheated. At or about this time, she makes clear her intentions. She admits that Odysseus is dead and promises– tacitly, if not explicitly– to remarry. She sends out, or continues to send out, secret messages of encouragement to all the suitors individually (πάντας μέν ῥ' ἔλπει καὶ ὑπίσχεται ἀνδρὶ ἑκάστῳ 91).[11] Nevertheless, she requests a delay before she chooses the man, enough time to do her duty by her father-in-law who will need a burial shroud when he dies.[12] This is the famous

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[10]Whether they were actively courting her before this we do not know. If they were, she was somehow not denying their desires, tolerating, perhaps, their amorous interests.

[11]Exactly what these messages were is controversial. Devereux, in his "Penelope's Character," goes so far as to assert that she was in love with the suitors. But it seems much more likely to me that what Antinoös calls making promises and sending out messages refers to promises about her intention to marry once she was free of her duty to Laertes, not to furtive *billets doux*.

[12]The strongest case to be made for Penelope's reasoning is to suppose that as a member of a new family and the wife of another she would have no business weaving a shroud for her former father-in-law. Since Anticleia is dead and Odysseus lost, there would be no one to provide for the old man's needs. Telemachos, of course, might provide the shroud, if he had a wife. But he seems altogether unlikely to marry because of his immaturity (though Odysseus could not have been much older when he went off to Troy). In any case, Penelope's request seems to have been a reasonable one, and the suitors thereby might have felt themselves reasonable in granting it.

weaving trick that is recounted three times in the *Odyssey*.[13] The suitors consent and consider themselves rather gallant for doing so: "and the proud heart in us was persuaded" (103). The weaving goes on for more than three years before the suitors discover that Penelope has been cheating them,[14] unweaving at night whatever she has woven by day. When the suitors catch her, they compel her to finish the shroud. They are not, however, able to compel her to choose a husband.

The question of how much actual power the suitors have over Penelope is a complex one, but one fundamental to understanding the structure of the conflicts in the *Odyssey*. Telemachos says that his mother is beset by suitors "against her will," and that the suitors can and will force her to marry. On the other hand, we must confront complaints, like those from Denys Page, that the suitors do not exercise the power that they have. Page accuses Homer of a serious lapse of narrative competency when the suitors neglect to force Penelope to marry once she has finished the shroud.

> For it would surely be a sad story-teller, who told us that Penelope was caught unpicking the web and compelled to finish it, and yet that nothing whatever happened as a consequence– that the Suitors generously regarded the incident as closed, and allowed affairs to continue exactly as they were before the story

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[13]Though there are scholars who would, if they could, eliminate all reference to this incident in the *Odyssey* on the grounds that it is imported later (see Dawe, 99), others make it the keystone of Penelope's character. This, I think, is probably Penelope's sole ruse. But, perhaps, there is a hint that Penelope has used other strategies in the use of ἡ δὲ δόλον τόνδ' ἄλλον. If this is the case, then those other tricks had to come sometime between the moment she began to deny the suits and the weaving of the shroud since we know from Penelope's testimony (in Book 19) that after she was compelled to finish the weaving, she was at a loss for any other stratagem.

[14]Antinoös portrays himself as bitterly offended. He claims that Penelope is cheating the suitors (ἀτέμβει θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν 90). West has a note on the verb ἀτέμβει: "cheat, frustrate', a strong and unusual verb." (137)

> of the web began. But that is what actually happens in the *Odyssey*. . . (1955, 120-121)

I do not think that the suitors are acting generously. Rather, they are applying as much pressure as they can get away with. If they do not go farther, it is because their power is checked by the power that the Ithacan populace wields.

It is an overlooked, if strange, fact that the structure of power between the protagonists and the mass of unnamed common people is more significant in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*. Though the setting of the *Iliad* is either the crowded Greek camp, bustling Troy or the battlefield, the Greek or Trojan populace has little or no influence on the direction of the plot. The poet gives them no backbone. Thersites, thoroughly dominated and discounted by Odysseus, is the symbol of their role. In the *Odyssey*, each party thinks that having the populace on its side would insure it success, but the populace is sternly independent. Both parties are also afraid that a mistake on its part will push the populace over to the other side. Furthermore it seems to be a moral standard that moves the Ithacan opinion. Telemachos is afraid of their resentment if he sends his mother away. The suitors are afraid of popular retaliation if they are caught hurting Telemachos. Penelope is aware that their esteem is won by her holding out against remarriage. Odysseus also assumes that the Ithacan populace will be a force to reckon with. He asks Athene how he will escape even if he kills all the suitors. The implication is that the Ithacans will not tolerate his action. From Book 24, we know that this is a fact. No one seems to have any confusion about the popular Ithacan response. The people are not to be manipulated.

Theirs is a solid and primal sense of justice. They would rise up equally against the killers of Telemachos and against the murderer of the suitors.

If Telemachos says that Penelope is being courted against her will, this is not in any way a *moral* accusation. How unwilling can Penelope be and still hold out hope to the suitors? Anything to which she does not consent would probably be retaliated for by her own parents, and would certainly not be sanctioned by the Ithacans. Furthermore, the suitors need Penelope to choose one of them. If the choice is not hers, then I think it would be impossible for the suitors to decide among themselves who would carry her away and who would go home disappointed. If it were possible simply to carry off an unwilling Penelope, as if by the hair, someone probably would have already done so.

The picture that Antinoös paints is a persuasive one, I think, if we look at it objectively. Antinoös claims that Penelope is bent on personal glory (μέγα μὲν κλέος αὐτῇ ποιεῖτ' 125-6). And why shouldn't she be? The pursuit of κλέος is certainly a good thing in the Homeric world. Antinoös also claims that Penelope is taking advantage of the suitors and even of Telemachos in her pursuit of glory. But that is inevitable. Κλέος is essentially competitive, and no Greek helps to increase another's κλέος at the expense of his or her own.[15]

Like Telemachos, Antinoös ends by implicating the Ithacans. Unlike, Telemachaos, he makes a point that the Ithacans cannot deny. Penelope *is* increasing her κλέος, and the Ithacans *are* helping her. κλέος is what people say about you (or rather, how much they

[15]This is precisely Aristotle's complaint in the *Nicomachean Ethics* about the friendship of nobility: it lacks generosity.

talk about you), and the townspeople esteem Penelope in direct proportion to her obstinate fidelity to the memory of Odysseus (as many modern readers of the epic do as well). We know that this is the opinion of the Ithacan populace and that Penelope is well aware of this. In Book 19, Penelope wonders whether she should continue to live in a way that would please the people or whether she should remarry. In Book 23 (148-51), the Ithacans, outside the barred doors of the palace, speculate that Penelope has finally disappointed them by giving in to impatience and remarrying. So to them, Penelope is most admirable if she resists marriage.

Antinoös seems to know this since he does not ask for direct intervention from the Ithacans. He merely asks them to stay out of the way. What is left to the suitors, if they cannot or will not use direct force against the person of Penelope? They seem to believe that they have but one alternative. If Penelope cannot be directly pressured as a woman, she *can* be indirectly pressured as a mother. Therefore, the suitors have quite consciously resolved to do just what Telemachos is complaining about. They intend to waste the estate until either there is nothing left, or Penelope picks a husband. Their hope is that Penelope will neither ruin her son's prospects in life (if she can help it) nor persist in her refusal to remarry (if that refusal robs Telemachos of his inheritance).

> τόφρα γὰρ οὖν βίοτόν τε τεὸν καὶ κτήματ' ἔδονται,
> ὄφρα κε κείνη τοῦτον ἔχῃ νόον, ὃν τινά οἱ νῦν
> στήθεσσι τιθεῖσι θεοί.
> So long, I say, will your livelihood and possessions be eaten away, as long as she keeps this purpose, one which the very gods, I think, put into her heart. (2.123-25)

This is a united front. Later, in his speech, Eurymachos, echoes the strategy:

> χρήματα δ' αὖτε κακῶς βεβρώσεται, οὐδέ ποτ' ἶσα
> ἔσσεται, ὄφρα κεν ἥ γε διατρίβῃσιν' Αχαιοὺς
> ὃν γάμον·
> there will not
> be compensation ever, while she makes the Achaians put off
> marriage with her. (2.203-5)

The suitors's strategy is probably not intended to force Telemachos's hand. Though Antinoös tells Telemachos what he can do if he should want to get the suitors off his back (he can return his mother to her father), apparently, the suitors neither want nor expect Telemachos to do any such thing. They seem quite reluctant to involve Penelope's father in any way. After all, as Telemachos points out, the suitors can sue Ikarios for his daughter's hand even without Penelope's being there.

Telemachos's answer: 2.129-45

Antinoös seems to make this demand knowing how unthinkable it is for Telemachos, who, in fact, rejects it promptly in his next speech.

> τὸν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα·
> ''Αντίνο', οὔ πως ἔστι δόμων ἀέκουσαν ἀπῶσαι
> ἥ μ' ἔτεχ', ἥ μ' ἔθρεψε· πατὴρ δ' ἐμὸς ἄλλοθι γαίης,
> ζώει ὅ γ' ἢ τέθνηκε· κακὸν δέ με πόλλ' ἀποτίνειν
> Ἰκαρίῳ, αἴ κ' αὐτὸς ἑκὼν ἀπὸ μητέρα πέμψω.
> ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ πατρὸς κακὰ πείσομαι, ἄλλα δὲ δαίμων
> δώσει, ἐπεὶ μήτηρ στυγερὰς ἀρήσετ' Ἐρινῦς
> οἴκου ἀπερχομένη· νέμεσις δέ μοι ἐξ ἀνθρώπων
> ἔσσεται· ὣς οὐ τοῦτον ἐγώ ποτε μῦθον ἐνίψω.
> Then the thoughtful Telemachos said to him in answer:
> Antinoös, I cannot thrust the mother who bore me,

> who raised me, out of the house against her will. My father,
> alive or dead, is elsewhere in the world. It will be hard
> to pay back Ikarios, if willingly I dismiss my mother.
> I will suffer some evil from her father, and the spirit will give me
> more yet, for my mother will call down her furies upon me
> as she goes out of the house, and I shall have the people's
> resentment. I will not be the one to say that word to her. (2.129-37)

Telemachos has two options, both of which he finds impossible: send his mother from the house, or fight the suitors. He is reduced to informing Antinoös that if the suitors are not satisfied, they can go home. This is clearly a ridiculous and effete statement, which Antinoös will ignore. Once again Telemachos threatens to appeal to Zeus for justice even though his threat seems weakened by the use of the enclitic ποθι:

> ἐγὼ δὲ θεοὺς ἐπιβώσομαι αἰὲν ἐόντας,
> αἴ κέ ποθι Ζεὺς δῷσι παλίντιτα ἔργα γενέσθαι.
> I will cry out to the gods everlasting
> in the hope that Zeus might somehow grant a reversal of fortunes (2.143-44)

One of the most important implications of this sequence is that it conveys how recently Ithaca has been thrown into crisis. The suitors have not been devastating the estate for four years while Athene calming watched from Olympus. Rather, they have only begun their attack. The drama opens at this critical moment that so frightens Telemachos and Athene.

The Speeches of Halitherses and Eurymachos: 2.146-207

As if to remind the hearer of the epic that, after all, the gods are on the side of Telemachos and his family, Zeus sends down two eagles who tear at each other in mid air.

> θάμβησαν δ' ὄρνιθας, ἐπεὶ ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσιν·
> ὥρμηναν δ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἃ περ τελέεσθαι ἔμελλεν.
> Then all were astounded at the birds, when their eyes saw them,
> and they pondered in their hearts over what might come of it. (2.155-56)

Halitherses interprets the omen in a way that is not at all surprising to us, the audience, who have been privy to the Olympian council described in Book 1. We know that Odysseus is still alive and will soon be on his way home. We know that Athene is angry with the situation in Ithaca and that she intends to see to it that the suitors taste her vengeance. We know that Zeus has recently promised to help. Furthermore, the Muse tells us that Halitherses is indeed wise and skilled at the birds. Nevertheless, the Ithacans in general do not seem to hold him in such high regard. Apparently, they have not given much heed to this prediction since he first announced it twenty years ago.

> καὶ γὰρ κείνῳ φημὶ τελευτηθῆναι ἅπαντα,
> ὥς οἱ ἐμυθεόμην, ὅτε' Ιλιον εἰσανέβαινον
> Αργεῖοι, μετὰ δέ σφιν ἔβη πολύμητις Οδυσσεύς.
> φῆν κακὰ πολλὰ παθόντ', ὀλέσαντ' ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους,
> ἄγνωστον πάντεσσιν ἐεικοστῷ ἐνιαυτῷ
> οἴκαδ' ἐλεύσεσθαι· τὰ δὲ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται."
> Concerning him, I say that everything was accomplished
> in the way I said it would be at the time the Argives took ship
> for Ilion, and with them went resourceful Odysseus.
> I said that after much suffering, with all his companions
> lost, in the twentieth year, not recognized by any,
> he would come home. And now all this is being accomplished. (2.171-76)

Of course no prediction can be proved to be right before the fact, but Halitherses offers nothing at all to add credibility to his claim except that he has done this before. "I who foretell this am not untried, I know what I am saying" (169). He offers no specific success. The only evidence that he offers to establish the truth of his current prophesy is that he made the same prophecy twenty years ago. The force of the narrative is to pull the audience's mind in two ways. The epic audience, who has been privy to the Council on Olympus in Book 1, knows that Halitherses's prediction is substantially right, if not entirely accurate[16]. At the same time, we cannot reasonably expect any level-headed Ithacan to accept Halitherses's specious logic. In the next speech, Eurymachos's makes just this point.

Enumerating all the reasons that the prophecy should be ignored, Eurymachos portrays Halitherses as a fussy old man who sees trouble everywhere. He then makes the rational and cogent point that not all things are meaningful simply because we want them to be: "Many are the birds who under the sun's rays wander / the sky; not all of them mean anything" (181-2). And he reminds the crowd that no one besides Halitherses doubts that Odysseus is dead.[17] Halitherses's prediction is as unlikely now as it was twenty years ago.

That is not all. Eurymachos then accuses Halitherses of seeking personal profit by providing Telemachos with an accommodating prediction (186). He then gives a wry turn

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[16]His prediction is not entirely accurate even from the audience point of view. We know that Odysseus is in fact *not* "already somewhere nearby (που ἤδη ἐγγὺς ἐὼν)." Nor is he "working out the death and destruction of these men."

[17]Perhaps Mentor doubts as well, but both of these men have a vested interest since they have been loyal partisans of Odysseus since the beginning, as we are told twice (2.253 and 17.69)

to his argument by insisting that Halitherses is not doing Telemachos any favors. Eurymachos makes his own prophesy, as it were, which has a certain ring of wisdom and bristles with the threat that he could indeed make this one come true.

> ἀλλ' ἔκ τοι ἐρέω, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται·
> αἴ κε νεώτερον ἄνδρα παλαιά τε πολλά τε εἰδὼς
> παρφάμενος ἐπέεσσιν ἐποτρύνῃς χαλεπαίνειν,
> αὐτῷ μέν οἱ πρῶτον ἀνιηρέστερον ἔσται,
> πρῆξαι δ' ἔμπης οὔ τι δυνήσεται οἷος ἀπ' ἄλλων·
> But I will tell you straight out, and it will be a thing accomplished:
> if you, who know much and have known it long, stir up a younger
> man, and by talking him round with words encourage his anger,
> then first of all, it will be the worse for him; he will not
> on account of all these sayings be able to accomplish anything. (2.187-91)

And he claims that the ruination of the young man will be on Halitherses' head.

> σοὶ δέ, γέρον, θωὴν ἐπιθήσομεν, ἥν κ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ
> τίνων ἀσχάλλῃς· χαλεπὸν δέ τοι ἔσσεται ἄλγος.
> And on you, old sir, we shall lay a penalty, and it will grieve your
> mind as you pay it, and that for you will be a great sorrow. (2.192-93)

Eurymachos then advises Telemachos to follow the course that Antinoös has already indicated and reminds him that the suitors are serious about their threats. According to him, the suitors fear no one and will pursue the courtship of Penelope uncompromisingly until the House of Odysseus is destroyed. Like Antinoös, he ends his speech with the insistence that the suitors are really Penelope's victims, and he even adds more plausibility to the argument. By stringing the suitors along with her delays and tricks, he claims that Penelope has wasted their valuable time and prevented them from wooing other desirable young women and winning them as their brides.

ἡμεῖς δ' αὖ ποτιδέγμενοι ἤματα πάντα
εἵνεκα τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐριδαίνομεν, οὐδὲ μετ' ἄλλας
ἐρχόμεθ', ἃς ἐπιεικὲς ὀπυιέμεν ἐστὶν ἑκάστῳ."
while we, awaiting this, all our days
quarrel for the sake of her excellence, nor ever go after
others, whom any one of us might properly marry. (2.205-7)

How long have the suitors employed their indirect strategy of attrition? The strategy would not have made sense before Penelope began to frustrate the suitors's hopes of marriage. Nor is it likely that it was in place either before or during the three years that Penelope resorted to the trick of the web. What good would Penelope's ruse have been if it put off marriage for three years only to let the suitors waste the estate? And what good would the suitors strategy of attrition do if Penelope has already proved impervious to it? Even if we assume that Odysseus's relatively poor estate (compared to the mainland cities) could have supported the suitors for so long, what good would Penelope draw from giving them *carte blanche* to waste it? One would even think that Telemachos, far from giving up his cause just after Eurymachos complains about having been forced to waste so much time on false promises, would have simply reminded him that he had been paid well for those years. Furthermore, Telemachos says that he was alerted to the threat to his property only some little time before Athene's epiphany. If he had ignored that fact for three years, he would perhaps be as culpable as the suitors, and much stupider. In short, the only sequence of events that makes sense and involves no logical or narratological contradictions is one in which the suitors's indirect strategy of attrition is started *after*

Penelope's subterfuge is revealed, and after she refuses to pick a husband even though the shroud is complete.

Telemachos retreats: 2.208-223

Howard Clarke's judgment, though intended to describe Telemachos in Book 1, rings true here as well: "Athena's encouragement is not without its effect, but Telemachus' adolescent attempts to take charge are a fiasco" (29). All of a sudden Telemachos drops his plea as if he finally recognized that he could make no headway in this manner without the support of the Ithacans. He contents himself with announcing that he wants to go away on a voyage to Sparta and Pylos.

> εἶμι γὰρ ἐς Σπάρτην τε καὶ ἐς Πύλον ἠμαθόεντα
> νόστον πευσόμενος πατρὸς δὴν οἰχομένοιο.
> For I am going to Sparta and going to sandy Pylos
> to ask about the homecoming of my father, who is long absent. (2.214-15)

Then, surprisingly, he requests the suitors to provide a ship and a crew.[18] Telemachos discloses his intentions quite plainly though he has managed to control himself enough not to threaten physical harm to the suitors. A hundred lines later, however, he can no longer control his rage even this much.

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[18]This is probably not evidence of his lack of independence since Antinoös as well must ask the other suitors for the wherewithal when he decides to go to sea.

The Speeches of Mentor and Leokritos: 2.224-59

Mentor intercedes in an attempt to shame the Ithacans into taking action against the suitors. He is even an older and closer friend to Odysseus than Halitherses is.[19] His rebuke is caustic. The Ithacans, he says, are unworthy of benign rule since obviously they respond only to brute force and shun the imperatives of justice; that is, they have forgotten the legacy of Odysseus. Once again, they are accused of being the real cause of all the trouble.

> ἀλλ' ἤτοι μνηστῆρας ἀγήνορας οὔ τι μεγαίρω
> ἔρδειν ἔργα βίαια κακορραφίῃσι νόοιο·
> σφὰς γὰρ παρθέμενοι κεφαλὰς κατέδουσι βιαίως
> οἶκον Ὀδυσσῆος, τὸν δ' οὐκέτι φασὶ νέεσθαι.
> νῦν δ' ἄλλῳ δήμῳ νεμεσίζομαι, οἷον ἅπαντες
> ἧσθ' ἄνεῳ, ἀτὰρ οὔ τι καθαπτόμενοι ἐπέεσσι
> παύρους μνηστῆρας κατερύκετε πολλοὶ ἐόντες.
> Now it is not so much the proud suitors I resent
> for doing their violent acts by their minds' evil devising;
> for they lay their heads on the line when violently they eat up
> the house of Odysseus, who, they say to themselves, will not come back;
> but now I hold it against you other people, how you all
> sit there in silence, and never with an assault of words try
> to check the suitors, though they are so few, and you so many. (2.235-41)

Mentor, of course, is speaking as an appointed caretaker of Odysseus's household. He takes it for granted that the Ithacan interest is the same as his. This is not the case. If it were, there would be no suitors from Ithaca. Instead, the suitors are described as the sons of the ones assembled. Therefore, reasonably, the Ithacan interest does not fit neatly with Mentor's. After all, Odysseus, the gentle ruler, was in some ways a disaster for many

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[19]Upon leaving for Troy, we are told, Odysseus turned the household over to him. Nevertheless, this role of Mentor's is not repeated, not does he ever speak again in his own voice, but always as a mask for Athene.

families. Indeed, it is not only Odysseus who lost his homecoming in Troy. We are even allowed a privileged insight into the horror: Aigyptios's son was one of those who were eaten alive by the Cyclops.

Mentor blames the Ithacans for their silence with the words: οἷον ἅπαντες ἧσθ' ἄνεω (2.239-40). The word translated as silence, (ἄνεω) presents difficulties. Its etymology is unknown,[20] and even its part of speech is argued. In fact, because it is applied with a singular verb in 23.93, it must be an adverb, not the plural adjective derived from a conjectured ἄνεως, as it could be in the other passages. The word is used only in Homer and there only eight times, four in the *Iliad* (2.323; 3.84; 9.30, 9.695), and four in the *Odyssey* (2.240; 7.144; 10.71; 23.93). The use of the word in the present passage is perhaps the least clear of all. Let us look at the other seven in order to refine the quality of this silence. The word is worth the excursus.

In all the cases that it is used, the subjects of the sentence are indeed silent. But what kind of silence? All seven describe a reaction to some surprising, highly charged, and anxious new occurrence. The silence is tinged with bafflement and more dread than awe. In Book 7, the Phaiakian court, when Athene dissolves the mist that enshrouds Odysseus, suddenly find a strange man in their midst, at the very knees of their queen.[21] They can't tell how to react until Echeneus advises them to treat him like a guest. In Book 10,

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[20]To both Chantraine and Frisk.

[21]This use is paralleled by the use of σιωπῇ in 154.

Aeolus's family are baffled by how to react to the horror of Odysseus's sudden return in abject failure. Only Aeolus finds words.

> ἔρρ' ἐκ νήσου θᾶσσον, ἐλέγχιστε ζωόντων·
> οὐ γάρ μοι θέμις ἐστὶ κομιζέμεν οὐδ' ἀποπέμπειν
> ἄνδρα τόν, ὅς κε θεοῖσιν ἀπέχθηται μακάρεσσιν·
> ἔρρ', ἐπεὶ ἀθανάτοισιν ἀπεχθόμενος τόδ' ἱκάνεις.
> O least of living creatures, out of this island! Hurry!
> I have no right to see on his way, none to give passage
> to any man whom the blessed gods hate with such bitterness.
> Out. This arrival means you are hateful to the immortals. (10.72-75)

Therefore, ἄνεω demands, I think, a stronger translation than "silent." "Dumbstruck" is more like it, though there is is probably a greater overtone of dread in the Greek word.

In the *Iliad*, ἄνεω is linked to awful moments of decision that affect the whole expedition. The first use in Book 2 describes the Achaean reaction to the horrible omen at Aulis in which a snake devours a family of sparrows. Calchas's speech shows that he believes the Greeks were at a loss how to comprehend this omen. They are dumbstruck as though they, like the edacious snake, are turned to stone. At the start of Book 9 of the *Iliad*, the Greeks witness Agamemnon weeping in despair blaming himself for stupidity and urging the Argives to give up their campaign and go home; he believes that they no longer can win. The Achaians are ἄνεω. At the end of Book 9, the Greeks are suddenly faced with another shock. Odysseus reports bluntly that his embassy to Achilles has failed and that far from cooling, Achilles is in a greater rage than ever. Again they are ἄνεω. In both cases, it is only Diomedes who still has his wits and calms the fears of the army.

The last time that ἄνεω is used in the *Odyssey*, it describes Penelope as she confronts the man who has just slaughtered a small army of men in her house and whom she cannot quite recognize as the husband he claims to be.

> ἥ δ' ἄνεω δὴν ἧστο, τάφος[22] δέ οἱ ἦτορ ἴκανεν·
> ὄψει δ' ἄλλοτε μέν μιν ἐνωπαδίως ἐσίδεσκεν,
> ἄλλοτε δ' ἀγνώσασκε κακὰ χροῒ εἵματ' ἔχοντα.
> She sat a long time in silence, and her heart was wondering.
> Sometimes she would look at him, with her eyes full upon him,
> and again would fail to know him in the foul clothing he wore. (23.93-95)

The use of ἄνεω in Book 2 proves that the Ithacans are far from indifferent. Rather, they do not know what to make of this situation which threatens to cause them great trouble. Furthermore, their bafflement is *not* presented as a chronic condition. Mentor clearly does not mean to ask the Ithacans why they have not risen up against the suitors in the past?[23] If the Ithacans are dumbstruck now, it is because the revelation of the power struggle has just now burst upon them. Mentor is therefore blaming the Ithacans for not

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[22]Penelope not only sits "ἄνεω" but her heart is filled with "τάφος." Cunliffe lists a special meaning for "τάφος" for this passage which I think merely reflects its confusion with "ἄνεω." "τάφος" is another rare word, found only two other places in Homer: *Odyssey* 21.122 and 24.441. It describes the rather intellectual wonder over Telemachos's ability to arrange the twelve axes just as his father had done, though Telemachos would never have seen this. It also describes the amazement of the Ithacans that Medon and Phemius have survived the slaughter. At this point, the word is not associated with fear. The Ithacans are feeling sadness. If anything, Medon's appearance offers hope. Only as a consequence of Medon's report does "green fear" seize the Ithacans 450.

[23]Lattimore translates misleadingly, it seems. He translates: "and never with an assault of words try to check the suitors, Though they are so few, and you so many" (240-1). The hint that of a chronic state is not supported by the Greek. ἀτὰρ οὔ τι καθαπτόμενοι ἐπέεσσι παύρους μνηστῆρας κατερύκετε πολλοὶ ἐόντες. Lattimore's translation would require a πω instead of a τι.

fighting the suitors *on the spot*. This is surely the impact of νῦν on 239. The blame *has been* the suitors's, but now the responsibility devolves onto the Ithacans.

As Eurymachos was more violent in his speech than Antinoös, Leokritos now threatens brute force against any Ithacans who might take up Telemachos's cause. Still, he is careful to make it seem as though the suitors are acting within their rights. As Lydia Allione puts it,

> Come Antinoo, Leocrito non vuol mettersi in cattiva luce di fronte al popolo mostrando di ostacolare il viaggio."..... "Essi assumono un tono bonario, quasi paterno, di condiscendenza, che vuol forse anche apparire sfumata di ammirazione, per le temerarie pazzie di un ragazzaccio (21)

Nevertheless, Leokritos manages to effectively deny Telemachos the means for a voyage, and to hint that he might actively prevent it. The assembly is dismissed with the suitors in full control,[24] vowing not to abandon their aims even if Odysseus himself were to return home, thus confirming what Telemachos rightly calls their "evil overconfidence" (κακῶς ὑπερηνορέοντες, 266).

Telemachos and Athene: 2.260-295

Walking along the beach, alone and despondent, Telemachos betrays a tendency to give up rather too easily. In his prayer to Athene, he claims that the plans she had sketched in Book 1 are now thwarted by both the Achaians and the suitors. He is incapable of taking

[24]Note that it is Leokritos who dismisses the assembly, even though it was Telemachos who called it. Power has changed hands.

the initiative in planning his own trip. Without divine intervention, he would have presumably abandoned it.

Fortunately, Athene, disguised now as Mentor, consoles him. She assuages his deepest worry by twice insisting that he is no coward. She takes responsibility for arranging the trip to the Peloponnese.

The break with the suitors: 2.296–320

Athene goes off to secure a ship leaving Telemachos free to go back to his house, though he is not much consoled. "The heart troubled within him"(298). He now has a private confrontation with Antinoös who attempts to make peace and, amazingly, removes every obstacle to Telemachos's voyage that Leokritos had flung in the way.

> Αντίνοος δ' ἰθὺς γελάσας κίε Τηλεμάχοιο,
> ἔν τ' ἄρα οἱ φῦ χειρί, ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε·
> ''Τηλέμαχ' ὑψαγόρη, μένος ἄσχετε, μή τί τοι ἄλλο
> ἐν στήθεσσι κακὸν μελέτω ἔργον τε ἔπος τε,
> ἀλλά μοι ἐσθιέμεν καὶ πινέμεν, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ.
> ταῦτα δέ τοι μάλα πάντα τελευτήσουσιν Αχαιοί,
> νῆα καὶ ἐξαίτους ἐρέτας, ἵνα θᾶσσον ἵκηαι
> ἐς Πύλον ἠγαθέην μετ' ἀγαυοῦ πατρὸς ἀκουήν."
> Antinoös, with a smile, came straight up to Telemachos,
> and took him by the hand and spoke and named him, saying:
> 'High-spoken intemperate Telemachos, now let no other
> evil be considered in your heart, neither action
> nor word, but eat and drink with me, as you did in past time.
> The Achaians will see to it that all these things are accomplished,
> the ship, and chosen companions, so that you may the more quickly
> reach sacred Pylos, after news about your proud father. (2.301-8)

It is important to understand that Antinoös is offering to reinstate their *former* friendship. This means that at some time, at least, and from Antinoös's point of view probably to this very day, Telemachos had been more or less one of the group, and he had thought of himself that way. Antikleia, in Hades, gives independent confirmation that Telemachos and the young lords of Ithaca used to get on well.

> σὸν δ' οὔ πώ τις ἔχει καλὸν γέρας, ἀλλὰ ἕκηλος
> Τηλέμαχος τεμένη νέμεται καὶ δαῖτας ἐίσας
> δαίνυται, ἃς ἐπέοικε δικασπόλον ἄνδρ' ἀλεγύνειν·
> πάντες γὰρ καλέουσι.
> No one yet holds your fine inheritance, but in freedom
> Telemachos administers your allotted lands, and apportions
> the equal feasts, work that befits a man with authority
> to judge, for all call him in. (11.184-87)

This, of course, would have been the situation at least seven years before when Telemachos was still a boy. Nevertheless, at that time his grandmother found no reason to worry about his welfare and his future position.

Telemachos now wholly rejects the help of the suitors and all association with them. He scalds them with the anger that is "steaming up" inside him (2.315).

> πειρήσω, ὥς κ' ὔμμι κακὰς ἐπὶ κῆρας ἰήλω,
> ἠὲ Πύλονδ' ἐλθών, ἢ αὐτοῦ τῷδ' ἐνὶ δήμῳ.
> I will endeavor to visit evil destructions upon you,
> either by going to Pylos, or remaining here in the district. (2.316-17)

This rejection deserves to be taken seriously and given its due. Telemachos never again fraternizes with the suitors except as is called for in the plan of revenge that he and Odysseus implement in the later books. I see no reason to accept George Devereux's

psychoanalytic claim that an Oedipus complex renders Telemachos ambivalent about what the suitors deserve.[25]

Is announcing his irreconcilable animus toward the suitors a foolish move on Telemachos's part?[26] Is Telemachos ignoring the consequences and being shortsighted about his own future? I shall have more to say about these issues in the next chapter when I investigate the character of Telemachos and the specifics of what is at risk for him.

The suitors's true intentions: 2.321-336

The audience now becomes privy to the unguarded thoughts of the suitors and the falseness of Antinoös's offer of friendship. The suitors have no tenderness whatsoever for Telemachos. As they prepare their dinner and move freely about the house, the arrogant (this is the poet's word) suitors mock and insult Telemachos behind his back. As long as Telemachos is in Ithaca and under their control, he is harmless. They are aware, however, that Telemachos's intended trip to Pylos and Sparta could change everything. There, on the mainland, he might recruit reinforcements. Or worse, he might get hold of poison, and

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[25]Devereux writes: "Like Hamlet, he is incapable of punishing the suitors, because he unconsciously identifies himself with them."(1957, 381)

[26]Is it prudent or not to let the suitors know just what he intends? The *Odyssey* asks the question, I think, pithily in one word. "He spoke, and lightly drew away his hand from Antinoös' hand (ἦ ῥα, καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς χεῖρα σπάσατ' Ἀντινόοιο ῥεῖα" (320-1). Lightly is ῥεῖα. Although it is normally an uncomplicated word, the adverb of ῥᾴδιος, here it has a more powerful meaning, I think. The first occurrence of the word was in Book 1 where it describes the carelessness of the suitors. "Since *without penalty* they eat up the substance of a man whose white bones lie out in the rain" (1.160-1). It is used tellingly in Book 14 of the *Iliad* when Sleep explains that he could easily put Zeus to sleep, but he has reason to fear the consequences.

return to kill them all by treachery.[27] They cheer themselves however with the thought that the dangerous crossing alone might kill the boy and make their work that much easier .

What they call their work, they now boldly confess: they intend to divide up all of Telemachos's possessions among themselves (though whoever succeeds in marrying Penelope will also become owner of the palace, presumably because that is something that cannot be easily divided). In short, their actual purpose is not love, but theft. [28]

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[27]The suitors are not wrong to worry about poison. This could easily have been Athene's plan since she describes a similar tactic used by Odysseus. "Odysseus, you see, had gone there also in his swift ship in search of poison to kill men" (1.260-1).

[28]Do the suitors feel shame about their real intentions? I find the best evidence that they do in the report that Amphimedon makes to the shades in Hades:

> καὶ τότε δή ῥ' Οδυσῆα κακός ποθεν ἤγαγε δαίμων
> ἀγροῦ ἐπ' ἐσχατιήν, ὅθι δώματα ναῖε συβώτης.
> At that time [i.e. As soon as Penelope has finished the shroud under duress] an evil spirit, coming from somewhere, brought back Odysseus to the remote part of his estate, where his swineherd was living" (24.149-5).

Amphimedon ignores the interval of time between the completion of the shroud and the arrival of Odysseus. This is the time of their shameful waste of Telemachos's estate. Though he does not totally avoid responsibility for his actions as a suitor, he may be (understandably) eager to minimize them. Why *should* he make himself seem worse to his fellow shades than he has to? Page calls this passage "among the most perplexing of all mysteries in the *Odyssey*" (120). This is one of the three places that we get the story of the web trick. In most aspects, this account is like the others. Yet its few differences are telling. Amphimedon tells his fellow shades that the bow-contest was actually Odysseus's idea.

> Then, in the craftiness of his mind, he urged his lady
> to set the bow and the gray iron in front of the suitors,
> the contest for us ill-fated men, the start of our slaughter. (24.167-9)

Page protests rightly: "we, on the contrary, distinctly remember that the plan was (as in our version of the *Odyssey* it must be) Penelope's own," but he absolves the character himself of deceit, making the claim (for which I can find no foundation) that "it has long been observed that there are other witnesses to the good character of this ghost who greets him into Hades; he is not, as we are too often told, meaning one thing and saying another" (Page, 122). According to Page, there are only two possibilities: either the *Odyssey* is once again including more or less gratuitous material from other sources "even at the cost of some inconsistency or even contradiction" or the whole story of the web– in all three places it is told– is spurious, added by some later overzealous interpolator (121).

Eurykleia's warning and Telemachos's departure: 2.337-434

The scene abruptly shifts to the wide storeroom of the palace to view the objects of the suitors greed, the treasures of the House of Odysseus.

> ὣς φάν· ὃ δ' ὑψόροφον θάλαμον κατεβήσετο πατρός
> εὐρύν, ὅθι νητὸς χρυσὸς καὶ χαλκὸς ἔκειτο
> ἐσθής τ' ἐν χηλοῖσιν ἅλις τ' ἐυῶδες ἔλαιον·
> ἐν δὲ πίθοι οἴνοιο παλαιοῦ ἡδυπότοιο
> ἔστασαν.
> [Telemachos] went down into his father's high-roofed
> and wide storeroom, where gold and bronze were lying piled up,
> and abundant clothing in the bins, and fragrant olive oil,
> and in it jars of wine, sweet to drink, aged,
> were standing. (2.337-41)

Telemachos has his nurse Eurykleia, the incontestably loyal servant and guardian of the house, prepare the provisions for him. When he confides his plans to her, she is appalled at the foolishness of the risk and aggressively tries to dissuade him from the voyage. She seems to know quite well just what the suitors intend.

> οἱ δέ τοι αὐτίκ' ἰόντι κακὰ φράσσονται ὀπίσσω,
> ὥς κε δόλῳ φθίῃς, τάδε δ' αὐτοὶ πάντα δάσωνται.
> And these men will devise evils against you, on your returning,
> so you shall die by guile, and they divide all that is yours. (2.367-68)

The final fifty-two lines of the book are devoted to the arrangements that Athene makes for the voyage. She borrows a ship and drugs the suitors into a sweet slumber of sleep. Finally, after everything is ready, she calls Telemachos to board the ship and, slipping it out of the harbor, they set sail for Pylos.

Further crises: beyond Book 2

The first major crisis in the *Odyssey* is precipitated by the suitors's change of strategy to pressure Penelope into marriage, and centers on the conflict between Telemachos and the suitors. It forces Telemachos into action. Inaction, which is Telemachos's natural preference, is no longer feasible. From this moment the conflict between Telemachos and the suitors intensifies. Two more crises mark its significant stages. I now attempt to make these clear.

As they amuse themselves nonchalantly "with discs and with light spears for throwing," in Book 4, the suitors get a shock. Noëmon, the Ithacan citizen from whom Athene borrowed a ship, casually asks Antinoös whether he thinks Telemachos might have returned from Pylos yet. The suitors, who had no idea that Telemachos ever sailed, are stunned. Antinoös is beside himself with anger. He was

> ἀχνύμενος· μένεος δὲ μέγα φρένες ἀμφιμέλαιναι
> πίμπλαντ', ὄσσε δέ οἱ πυρὶ λαμπετόωντι ἐίκτην·
> raging, the heart within filled black to the brim with anger
> from beneath, but his two eyes showed like fire in their blazing: (4.661-62)

The true seriousness of the threat to his interests has dawned on Antinoös, just as Agamemnon, in Book 1 of the *Iliad*,[29] suddenly recognizes that he will be asked to give up Chryseis.

The news of Telemachos's voyage comes as such a surprise because Antinoös has had all the confidence in the world in both his own influence over Telemachos and Telemachos's own aboulia. I will discuss these matters more fully when I turn to a study of Telemachos's character in the next chapter. Let me say now that it is not unreasonable to be surprised at Telemachos's decision. Both Eurykleia and Penelope are. In fact, it is

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[29]These lines, identical to *Iliad* 1.103-4, were athetized by Aristarchus. They are supposed to be spurious here in the *Odyssey* because borrowed from the *Iliad*. But what if they *are* borrowed from the *Iliad*? Far from obscuring the plot of the *Odyssey*, they are a special illumination of it because of the very fact that they are borrowed. Antinoös feels in the same way that Agamemnon does. All we would have to swallow is a small dose of Pietro Pucci's theory that there is intertextual sensitivity between the two texts in order to draw the conclusion that this line was an *improvement* of the plot. Dawe discounts the lines of the *Odyssey*, taking the *Iliad* as the original: "where Agamemnon may reasonably be said to be feeling sorrow; and flashing eyes belong more to the outraged fieldmarshal than to the *primus inter pares* domestic villain Antinoös" (203). Such criticism seems to flow from the commonplace discounting of the domestic situation at Ithaca. Is the purpose of the supposed interpolation meant to unfairly (melodramatically) augment the stature of Antinoös, making him as noble as Agamemnon? First of all, one could quibble about the nobility of Agamemnon or to what degree he is held in honor by Homer. But more importantly it must be pointed out that the lines do not heighten (or even lower) the *moral* status of Agamemnon. They are primarily used in the *Iliad* to intensify a sense of danger and threatening power. Calchas has just indicted Agamemnon as the cause of the devastating plague. If Calchas is right, Agamemnon will lose what is dear to him (not out of love, we suppose, but out of his greedy nature). Calchas emerges suddenly as a threat and the Atreidean eagle is on the attack. In Homer, aggression is seen in the eyes. One is reminded of the boar hunt in Book 19 of the *Odyssey*.

> The thudding made by the feet of men and dogs came to him
> as they closed on him in the hunt, and against them he from his woodlair
> bristled strongly his nape, and with fire from his eyes glaring (πῦρ
> δ'ὄφθαλμοῖσι δεδορκώς)
> stood up to face them close 19.444-47.

The allusion to the *Iliad* should be seen as a way to heighten the threat to Telemachos. Telemachos is stepping into treacherous waters, he has threatened a powerful man, brought a wild boar to bay.

doubtful that Telemachos would ever have gone if Athene had not made all the arrangements. Telemachos has proven himself in the past to be too immature (νήπιος) to act independently, and the recent signs of change have been ambiguous.[30]

In fear that Telemachos might now topple his greedy plans, Antinoös makes the decision to lay in ambush for Telemachos and to kill him on his way home from Pylos.

> ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι δότε νῆα θοὴν καὶ εἴκος' ἑταίρους,
> ὄφρα μιν αὐτὸν 'ιόντα λοχήσομαι ἠδὲ φυλάξω
> ἐν πορθμῷ Ἰθάκης τε Σάμοιό τε παιπαλοέσσης,
> ὡς ἂν ἐπισμυγερῶς ναυτίλλεται εἵνεκα πατρός."
> But come now, give me a fast ship and twenty companions,
> so that I can watch his return and lie in wait or him
> in the narrow strait between Ithaka and towering Samos,
> and make him sorry for this sea-going in search of his father. (4.669-72)

The third crisis in the conflict between Telemachos and the suitors is precipitated by the failure of this ambush. In Book 16, the suitors call a secret assembly.

> αὐτοὶ δ' εἰς ἀγορὴν κίον ἀθρόοι, οὐδέ τιν' ἄλλον
> εἴων οὔτε νέων μεταΐζειν οὔτε γερόντων.
> They went in a throng to the assembly, nor did they suffer
> any of the young men or any of the elders to sit with them. (16.361-62)

Antinoös urges the next move.

> ἡμεῖς δ' ἐνθάδε οἱ φραζώμεθα λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον
> Τηλεμάχῳ, μηδ' ἦμας ὑπεκφύγοι· οὐ γὰρ ὄΐω
> τούτου γε ζώοντος ἀνύσσεσθαι τάδε ἔργα.

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[30]Nor is Telemachos's voyage to the mainland in itself proof that Telemachos is maturing into a capable young man. In fact, for both Eurykleia and Penelope, it is sign of ultimate foolishness. Any threat it poses to the suitors is adventitious. He intends neither to recruit an army nor solicit deadly poisons.

> [Therefore,] we who are here must make our plans for the grim destruction
> of Telemachos, so he cannot escape us; since I have no thought
> we can get our present purpose accomplished while he is living. (16.371-73)

Antinoös fears that Telemachos will report to the Ithacans and that they will be sufficiently scandalized and enraged to attack the suitors. And Antinoös has no doubt that Ithacan power would be sufficient to drive all the suitors into exile.[31]

> ἀλλ' ἄγετε, πρὶν κεῖνον ὁμηγυρίσασθαι Αχαιοὺς
> εἰς ἀγορήν -- οὐ γάρ τι μεθησέμεναί μιν ὀίω,
> ἀλλ' ἀπομηνίσει, ἐρέει δ' ἐν πᾶσιν ἀναστὰς
> οὕνεκά οἱ φόνον αἰπὺν ἐράπτομεν οὐδ' ἐκίχημεν·
> οἱ δ' οὐκ αἰνήσουσιν ἀκούοντες κακὰ ἔργα·
> μή τι κακὸν ῥέξωσι καὶ ἡμέας ἐξελάσωσι
> γαίης ἡμετέρης, ἄλλων δ' ἀφικώμεθα δῆμον·
> But come now, before he can gather the Achaians and bring them
> to assembly; for I think he will not let us go, but work out
> his anger, and stand up before them all and tell them
> how we designed his sudden murder, but we could not catch him;
> and they will have no praise for us when they hear of our evil
> deeds, and I fear they will work some evil on us, and drive us
> from our own country, so we must make for another community. (16.376-82)

Antinoös, whether sincerely or not, does present the suitors with an alternative to the assassination of Telemachos. If they are not seriously ready, he explains, to kill Telemachos and to continue in their plan to rob the boy of what he has and divide it among themselves (a plan which Antinoös re-iterates here), the suitors can disband and go each to his own home, courting Penelope from there with whatever expensive gifts each might

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[31]It may also be as Edouard Delebecque thinks that "Avant l'embuscade, Télémaque voulait chasser les prétendants. Après elle, il veut les tuer"(1958, 42). I could not find textual evidence of this, but the suitors might well assume it.

manage. None of the suitors demurs at the assassination except Amphinomos, who only wants to delay long enough to query the gods will.

> ἀλλὰ πρῶτα θεῶν εἰρώμεθα βουλάς.
> εἰ μέν κ' αἰνήσωσι Διὸς μεγάλοιο θέμιστες,
> αὐτός τε κτενέω τούς τ' ἄλλους πάντας ἀνώξω·
> We should first have to ask the gods for their counsel.
> Then, if the ordinances from great Zeus approve of it,
> I myself would kill him and tell all others to do so. (16.402-4)

The plot necessitates the delay. Without it, Telemachos would be dead before he could set foot inside the palace again. But the suitors have no intention of renouncing their plans, a fact which Homer makes emphatically clear fifty lines later when Eurymachos lies to Penelope who has just heard of the plot against Telemachos's life and who is demanding that the suitors give it up. Though Eurymachos says that "of all men Telemachos is the dearest to me by far"(445-6) (and there is ample evidence that he is, at least, the most friendly of all the suitors to Telemachos) and claims that he would never allow any harm come to the boy, the poet adds:

> ὣς φάτο θαρσύνων, τῷ δ' ἤρτυεν αὐτὸς ὄλεθρον.
> So he spoke, encouraging her, but himself was planning the murder. (16.448)

From here on out, the death of Telemachos is merely a matter of time. If the suitors are not blocked by some potent force outside of themselves, they will murder Telemachos.

Whether or not the suitors actually make their query to the gods, they are on the verge of assassinating Telemachos on the very morning of the bow-contest, that is, on the last day of their lives.

> ὣς οἳ μὲν τοιαῦτα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀγόρευον,
> μνηστῆρες δ' ἄρα Τηλεμάχῳ θάνατόν τε μόρον τε
> ἤρτυον·
> Now as [the herdsmen] were conversing thus with each other,
> the suitors were compacting their plan of death and destruction
> for Telemachos. (20.240-42)

Only then does Amphinomos see a sign that he can interpret: an eagle carrying a dove.

> τοῖσιν δ' Ἀμφίνομος ἀγορήσατο καὶ μετέειπεν·
> "ὦ φίλοι, οὐχ ἡμῖν συνθεύσεται[32] ἥδε γε βουλή,
> Τηλεμάχοιο φόνος· ἀλλὰ μνησώμεθα δαιτός."
> Now it was Amphinomos who spoke forth and addressed them:
> 'Odysseus friends, this plan of ours to murder Telemachos will not
> ever be brought to completion; so let us think of our feasting.' (20.244-46)

This eagle (which Homer does *not* describe as an omen from Zeus, as he surely would if it were), comes just in time for Telemachos. *Il l'a échappé belle.*

Conclusion

Contrary to Longinus, I find that the construction of the conflict in the *Odyssey* bears a family resemblance to that of the *Iliad*. In the broadest strokes, the success of character A (Penelope; Chryses) forces character B (the suitors; Agamemnon) to exert their power over C (Telemachos; Achilles) whose dilemma fuels the plot. This is the initial dramatic conflict which must intensify in any good story. The conflict demands a change

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[32]This verb is a *hapax legomenon*, and, though it is in the future tense, I do not think that we can be certain that the intention is, as Russo says, "to annul definitely the murder plot" (120). Thus, I think Lattimore over translates when he includes "ever."

(the beginning), it then transforms into a greater– broader or more intense– conflict (the middle); finally, it becomes a conflict with a logic of its own– an ineluctable duel that must lead to resolution (the end). The *Odyssey*, then– no less than the *Iliad*– opens at a moment of crisis.

Let me summarize now the essential elements of the crisis in Ithaca. The suitors have recently employed a new strategy in their attempt– legitimate on its face, but criminal in its ulterior motives– to force Penelope to marry one of them. They intend to openly squander Telemachos' inheritance until Penelope gives in. Telemachos has even more recently become aware of the threat to his estate, and though he is incapable of protecting it, his new awareness renders him a threat to the suitors who cross their Rubicon when they attempt to ambush him. When the crisis breaks in Ithaca, the only one in a position to save Telemachos is his mother.

II. Strategy for Survival

Until the end of Book 4 Penelope has made no more than a single appearance. She comes downstairs, in what apparently is a rare visit, to protest the theme of the song which the bard is singing. Our first impression may be of someone retiring and fragile who does not even show outrage for the suitors (though she will many times hereafter), but rather a willingness to tolerate them, providing she is spared any further reminder of her bitter loss.

> ἡ δ' ὅτε δὴ μνηστῆρας ἀφίκετο δῖα γυναικῶν,
> στῆ ῥα παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο,
> ἄντα παρειάων σχομένη λιπαρὰ κρήδεμνα·
> ἀμφίπολος δ' ἄρα οἱ κεδνὴ ἑκάτερθε παρέστη.
> δακρύσασα δ' ἔπειτα προσηύδα θεῖον ἀοιδόν·
> "Φήμιε, πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλλα βροτῶν θελκτήρια οἶδας,
> ἔργ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τά τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί·
> τῶν ἕν γέ σφιν ἄειδε παρήμενος, οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ
> οἶνον πινόντων· ταύτης δ' ἀποπαύε' ἀοιδῆς
> λυγρῆς,....
> When she, shining among women, came near the suitors,
> She stood by the pillar that supported the roof with its joinery,
> holding her shining veil in front of her face, to shield it,
> and a devoted attendant was stationed on either side of her.
> All in tears she spoke then to the divine singer:
> 'Phemios, since you know many other actions of mortals
> and gods, which can charm men's hearts and which the singers celebrate,
> sit beside them and sing one of these, and let them in silence
> go on drinking their wine, but leave off singing this sad song. (1.332-341)

That first impression is also of someone capable of very strong feeling, indeed.

> ...ἥ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ
> τείρει, ἐπεί με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον.
> τοίην γὰρ κεφαλὴν ποθέω μεμνημένη αἰεί,
> ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ελλάδα καὶ μέσον Αργος."
> ...which always afflicts the dear heart deep inside me,
> since the unforgettable sorrow come to me, beyond others,
> so dear a head do I long for whenever I am reminded
> of my husband, whose fame goes wide through Hellas and midmost Argos.
> (1.341-44)

There is no doubt that Penelope's sorrow over Odysseus is genuine, lasting, and keen. This part of our first impression will last. She will retire to her quarters in tears of grief for her lost husband many more times before the epic is over. In Homer, tears are not always a sign of weakness. Odysseus, himself, will be discovered in Book 4 weeping on the Ogygian shore. But Telemachos encourages us to link the two when he attempts to give his mother a lesson in fortitude:

> σοί δ' ἐπιτολμάτω κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀκούειν·
> οὐ γὰρ Οδυσσεὺς οἶος ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ
> ἐν Τροίῃ, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι φῶτες ὄλοντο.
> So let your heart and let your spirit be hardened to listen.
> Odysseus is not the only one who lost his homecoming
> day at Troy. (1.353-55)

But if others who have lost loved ones at Troy can derive pleasure from Phemios's song, perhaps it is because their feelings are less intense than Penelope's. Telemachos may be one of these. He abruptly commands her to go back to her quarters saying: "For mine is the power in this household." Penelope goes, without a word, "in amazement." Is

Telemachos rude? Is Penelope passive? Is there tension between mother and son? Does Penelope feel less love for her son than for her husband? Though Penelope will say that her son is beloved (ἀγαπητὸς 4.817), is this anything more than a minimum requirement for a mother? The answer to these important questions ought not to be based on this passage alone.

We do not see Penelope until 1500 lines later, the end of Book 4, at the moment that she learns of the plot against Telemachos' life. The poetry works hard to convey the extremity of her love for her son.

> ὣς φάτο, τῆς δ' αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατα καὶ φίλον ἦτορ,
> δὴν δέ μιν ἀμφασίη ἐπέων λάβε· τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
> δακρυόφι πλῆσθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.
> ὀψὲ δὲ δή μιν ἔπεσσιν ἀμειβομένη προσέειπε·
> So [Medon] spoke, and [Penelope's] knees gave way and the heart in her.
> She stayed a long time without a word, speechless, and her eyes
> filled with tears, the springing voice was held still within her.
> At long last she found words to speak to him and answer: (4.703-6)

Expressive enough on its own, the first line gains force from the other nine times (adapted slightly to context) that it appears in Homer. Each instance describes an extreme, genuine, uncontrollable emotion,[1] usually the fear of certain– or what appears to be certain– death. So in the *Iliad* it describes what Lykaos feels as he faces an Achilles who has rejected all pleas for mercy. Of the seven appearances of the line in the *Odyssey*, three

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[1]Both Penelope and Laertes feel it when they recognize Odysseus for the first time (23.205 and 24.345 respectively). Curiously, Homer applies a similar line to describe how the suitors are entranced by the presence of Penelope (18.212). We ought not to forget the first reaction of Andromache to suspicions that Hector is dead: "Within me / my own heart rising beats in my mouth, my limbs under me / are frozen. Surely some evil is near for the children of Priam."*Iliad* 22.451-3.

apply to Odysseus himself. In Book 5, Odysseus feels this fear as he sails his little raft into the teeth of the tempest that Poseidon is gathering against him. He says: "Ah me unhappy, what in the long outcome will befall me?. . My sheer destruction is certain" (5.299, 305). His raft is wrecked and he nearly drowns. He feels it again two days later. Though the sky has cleared, the sea, still rough, bashes him violently against the rocky Scherian coast. Had Athene not intervened

> ἔνθα κ' ἀπὸ ῥινοὺς δρύφθη, σὺν δ' ὀστέ' ἀράχθη...
> ἔνθα κε δὴ δύστηνος ὑπὲρ μόρον ὤλετ' Οδυσσεύς,
> And there his skin would have been taken off, his bones crushed together,...
> and Odysseus would have perished, wretched, beyond his destiny. (5.426, 436)

As it is, he leaves some of his skin on the rocks.. In Book 22, when he is in battle against the overwhelming numbers of suitors who have managed to arm themselves, Odysseus feels the mortal threat one last time (146). In turn, the suitors feel it when they first realize that Odysseus, who has just jugulated Antinoös with an arrow, intends to slaughter all the rest of them as well (68).

In using this formula for Penelope, Homer shows that she feels the threat to her son as if it were a mortal threat to herself. The poet embroiders upon the point in the famous simile that compares Penelope to a lion at bay in fear for its life (4.791-2). Of course, the suitors have no intention of killing Penelope, but the narrator is telling us that Penelope is willing to defend Telemachos's life with her own. In fact, thirty lines later she will tell Eurykleia that she would have laid down her life to prevent Telemachos from departing, from placing himself at risk (4.734).

The next two lines continue to intensify Penelope's feeling for her son. Let us hear them again.

> δὴν δέ μιν ἀμφασίη ἐπέων λάβε· τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
> δακρυόφιν πλῆσθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.
> she stayed a long time without a word, speechless, and her eyes
> filled with tears, the springing voice was held still within her. (4.704-5)

To a Greek ear attuned to both epics, this pair of lines plucks the memory of its companion at *Iliad* 17.695-6 which is identical and repeated nowhere else. The link is forged even tighter by the word "ἀμφασίη" which appears in Homer only in these two passages. In the *Iliad*, the pair of lines describes how Antilochus reacts to devastating news: Hector has killed Patroklos and kept Achilles's armor; and, as if that were not enough, Menelaus, who is now quite certain that the Trojans will crush the Greeks, is commanding him, Antilochus, to report the news to Achilles. As hair-raising as the prospect of reporting such news to the brooding hero must have been, Antilochus is not paralyzed. "Yet even so," as the poet goes on to say, "he neglected not Menelaos'order but went on the run. . .(*Iliad* 17.697-8).

Penelope's consternation, on the other hand, is not so easily dispelled. It is a long time before she can collect herself enough to talk. " δὴν... ὀψὲ": for a long time. . . after which". . . For its part, "ὀψὲ" (706) is employed ten times in the *Odyssey*, half of which describe the "late" returning of Odysseus from his journeys. But there is no other such dramatic pairing of δὴν and ὀψὲ. The closest is the pairing, also in Book 5, of "πολὺν χρόνον" with ὀψὲ (319-22) when Odysseus is hurled under water by the storm and nearly drowned. For a long time he is unable to come up for air because of the weight of the

clothes that Calypso has given him. At long last (ὀψὲ)– and no doubt we are supposed to feel it as a very long while indeed (we hold our breath, you may say, to our limits)– he resurfaces, spitting out the bitter brine. Penelope, too, after a long, worrisome delay, her face streaming with tears, eventually finds her voice. She manages to ask Medon why Telemachos has put himself in such danger. The answer collapses her to the floor.

> τὴν δ' ἄχος ἀμφεχύθη θυμοφθόρον, οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔτ' ἔτλη
> δίφρῳ ἐφέζεσθαι πολλῶν κατὰ οἶκον ἐόντων,
> ἀλλ' ἄρ' ἐπ' οὐδοῦ ἷζε πολυκμήτου θαλάμοιο
> οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρομένη·
> And a cloud of heart-wasting sorrow was on her, she had no strength left
> to sit down in a chair, though there were many there in the palace,
> but sat down on the floor of her own well-wrought bedchamber
> weeping pitifully. (4.716-19)

This is shocking both because she collapses and because she sits on the floor, which, in Homer, is a great indignity. Odysseus, it is true, sits on the floor on three occasions; but this is the disguised Odysseus who, as a dirty, ragged beggar, is purposely assigned the lowest possible place of seating. And even then, it is a sign of inhospitality: the floor is for indigents or animals– or for one so distraught as to have forgotten all dignity, comfort, status, or propriety.[2]

Penelope loses awareness of her bodily needs as well: she neither eats or drinks.

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[2]Homer is very interested in chairs. He mentions θρόνος at least forty times in the *Odyssey*, κλιμός twelve times. δίφρος, the word used here– a seat often highly polished and overspread with a rich fleece and appearing only in the palace of Ithaca– is mentioned ten times in three books alone (19, 20, 21). Still in modern, rural Greece to sit on the floor is to make oneself like an animal. Human beings sit on chairs. In fact, even in our relaxed American culture where half of the family watches television sitting on the carpet, an adult collapsing to the floor as Penelope does would be disturbing, indeed.

κεῖτ' ἄρ' ἄσιτος,[3] ἄπαστος ἐδητύος ἠδὲ ποτῆτος,
ὀρμαίνους', εἴ οἱ θάνατον φύγοι υἱὸς ἀμύμων,
ἦ ὅ γ' ὑπὸ μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι δαμείη.
She lay there fasting,[4] she had tasted no food nor drink, only
pondering whether her stately son would escape from dying
or have to go down under the hands of the insolent suitors. (4.788-90)

The only other character who goes without food or drink in this way is Laertes when he, in his turn, learns that Telemachos is in danger. But, in order that we should not think that this is a routine or common reaction to sorrow, Homer tells us that Laertes, as distraught as he has been about Odysseus's absence, never before went this far in his grief.

[Λαέρτης] τείως μὲν Ὀδυσσῆος μέγ' ἀχεύων
ἔργα τ' ἐποπτεύεσκε μετὰ δμώων τ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ
πῖνε καὶ ἦσθ', ὅτε θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἀνώγοι·
αὐτὰρ νῦν, ἐξ οὗ σύ γε ᾤχεο νηῒ Πύλονδε,
οὔ πω μίν φασὶν φαγέμεν καὶ πιέμεν αὖτως,
οὐδ' ἐπὶ ἔργα ἰδεῖν, ἀλλὰ στοναχῇ τε γόῳ τε
ἧσται ὀδυρόμενος, φθινύθει δ' ἀμφ' ὀστεόφιν χρώς."
Laertes... while he so greatly grieved for Odysseus
yet would look after his farm and with the thralls in his household
would eat and drink, whenever the spirit was urgent with him;
but now, since you went away in the ship to Pylos,
they say he has not eaten in this way, nor drunk anything,

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[3]Penelope is the only one who is "ἄσιτος." Perhaps this *hapax legomenon* was chosen for the possibilities of the striking asyndeton that it makes with the next word "ἄπαστος" (4.788). The asyndeton itself cannot help but remind the reader of Greek of the only other similar figure in the *Odyssey*. On 1.242, Telemachos describes Odysseus as out of sight, out of knowledge. So while Penelope is ἄσιτος, ἄπαστος, Odysseus is ἄιστος ἄπυστος.

[4]Fasting may have the wrong connotation. It is not that Penelope is abstaining from food on principle, as Achilles vows to do until he has avenged Patroklos. Hers does not seem to be a conscious choice at all. Butler: "unable to eat or drink."; Murray:"touching no food."; Rouse:"without food."; Rieu: "fasting."; Lattimore:"fasting."; Fitzgerald:"silent."; Fagels:"fasting."

nor looked to his farm, but always in lamentation and mourning
sits grieving, and the flesh on his bones is wasting from him. (16.139-45)

The *Odyssey* is an epic that celebrates eating and drinking. Hunger is normally intolerable, as when Odysseus's men cannot resist roasting the sacred kine, though they know it will cost them their lives.

Is this enough to convince us that Penelope's consternation over the threat to her son is all-consuming? I am inclined to think so. But Homer goes further by bringing in an "outside" authority[5]. Penelope makes a desperate prayer to Athene, and Athene becomes sufficiently alarmed to feel that she must intervene. She sends an image of Iphthime, Penelope's sister, to Penelope in a dream in order to assuage the suffering that has left Penelope teetering at the brink of the intolerable.

τὴν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενον προσέφη εἴδωλον ἀμαυρόν·
"θάρσει, μηδέ τι πάγχυ μετὰ φρεσὶ δείδιθι λίην·
τοίη γάρ οἱ πομπὸς ἅμ' ἔρχεται, ἥν τε καὶ ἄλλοι
ἀνέρες ἠρήσαντο παρεστάμεναι, δύναται γάρ,
Παλλὰς Ἀθηναίη· σὲ δ' ὀδυρομένην ἐλεαίρει·
ἦ νῦν με προέηκε τεῖν τάδε μυθήσασθαι."
Then in turn the dark dream image spoke to her in answer:
"Take courage, let not your heart be too frightened,
such an escort goes along with him, and one that other
men would have prayed to have standing beside them, for she has power,
Pallas Athene, and she has pity on you in your grieving,
and it is she who has sent me to you to tell you of these things." (4.824-29)

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[5]In the *Iliad* when Helen appears in the *skopeia*, Homer makes no attempt to describe Helen's beauty directly but reveals it through the wonder of the old men who behold her. The idea is that if Helen's beauty can set these men to gasping, then her beauty must be potent, indeed. In the *Odyssey*, the suitors gaze on Penelope: "and all prayed for the privilege of lying beside her"(1.366)

As an authority, Athene ought to be able to impress the most hard-bitten cynic. The goddess who could abandon her favorite hero for ten troubling years is no soft touch. And this is the only time that she offers Penelope any information whatsoever about her plans. Furthermore, from the point of view of simple plot construction, Athene's intervention is strange. Considering that the threat to Telemachos is meant to be a real one and to hang over the whole of the *apologia* like a pall, and that, in fact, Athene will try to frighten Zeus with the prospect of it at the second council on Olympus, would it not seem more exciting to hold Penelope, and the audience with her, in suspense about Telemachos' safety?

The only reasonable explanation for this scene– which holds an absolutely salient position in the *Odyssey* in that it is the very last scene before the poet switches all his attention to Odysseus– is the signal importance of understanding the power of Penelope's love for her son, a love which admits no stipulation. Athene's alarm confirms what every attentive reader has begun to suspect: Odysseus is not Penelope's chief concern. So, we have every reason to believe her when she says:

> τοῦ δὴ ἐγὼ καὶ μᾶλλον ὀδύρομαι ἤ περ ἐκείνου.
> And it is for [Telemachos] I grieve even more than for [Odysseus]. (4.819)

Penelope does, in fact, take the opportunity to ask about Odysseus after she has heard the good news about her son. But Iphthime tells her not to ask idle questions. Unlike the news about Telemachos, Athene thinks that Penelope can live without knowing that Odysseus is alive. The rebuff is certainly not good news, but it does not bother Penelope who awakes "soothed in the inward heart, because this clear dream in the dim of

night had come to visit her" (840-1). There is no qualification to her joy, as there surely would be if she were hanging onto hopes for Odysseus's return.

The House of Odysseus

Telemachos's physical safety is not Penelope's only worry. If it were, she might have sent him far away before this. She certainly would not be so distraught that he has gone to the Peloponnese. He is safer, after all, far away from the suitors. Her first words imply a different worry: "Must it be so that even his name shall be gone from men's minds?" (4.710), a worry that finds temporary calm only when Eurykleia assures her by saying:

> οὐ γὰρ ὀίω
> πάγχυ θεοῖς μακάρεσσι γονὴν Αρκεισιάδαο
> ἔχθεσθ', ἀλλ' ἔτι πού τις ἐπέσσεται ὅς κεν ἔχῃσι
> δώματά θ' ὑψερεφέα καὶ ἀπόπροθι πίονας ἀγρούς.
> I think the seed of Arkeisios is not altogether hated
> by the blessed gods, but there will still be one left to inherit
> the high-roofed house and the rich fields that lie at a distance. (4.754-57)

What Penelope wants is for Telemachos to reach maturity, to successfully claim the inheritance that is due to him, and therefore to continue the seed of Arkeisios. This is to preserve the οἶκος . I mean οἶκος in the broadest sense, including, the palace, fields, household goods and other possessions. The word "estate" might be the closest English word providing it includes the idea that it must be passed on in an unbroken line to subsequent generations. The House of Odysseus, the οἶκος, is Telemachos' inheritance

and also his legacy. Let us look at its two basic elements in turn, the possessions and the lineage.[6]

Tangible riches command open respect in the *Odyssey* to a degree that might strike many post-classical scholars as superficial. But, Odysseus, sacker of cities, unabashedly pursues treasures to increase the wealth of his house. Several times the pursuit of additional booty is accepted as a reasonable excuse for Odysseus to stay away so long from home. Eurykleia's best reason for Telemachos to stay home and not go to Pylos is that he must guard his possessions:

> ἀλλὰ μέν' αὖθ' ἐπὶ σοῖσι καθήμενος·
> But stay here and guard your possessions. (2.367-69)

We have already seen how the suitors have resorted to a strategy of depleting Telemachos' inheritance in order to finally force (and "win") Penelope's hand.

As any Trojan of the time could have attested, war and piracy made the riches of every archaic dynasty precarious enough. Still, those of the House of Odysseus are especially vulnerable. This is because Odysseus is not at home to protect them. Thus, Telemachos is in jeopardy primarily because he is fatherless.

The Homeric epics make it abundantly clear that a boy without a father to protect him and his possessions would naturally be savagely robbed of everything he has. We know from Andromache's famous speech to Hector about the fate of their son Astyanax

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[6]Perhaps it should be the House of Arkeisios since Arkeisios, Telemachos's paternal grandfather is the oldest named member of the line. Nevertheless, I will stick with the name that is better known.

that a boy without a father to protect him, even if he be the son of a hero and unthreatened by foreign enemies, will have his lands snatched away from him and be reduced to beggary.

> Though he escape the attack of the Achaians with all its sorrows,
> yet all his days for your sake there will be hard work for him
> and sorrows, for others will take his lands away from him. The day
> of bereavement leaves a child with no agemates to befriend him.
> He bows his head before every man, his cheeks are bewept, he
> goes, needy, a boy among his father's companions,
> and tugs at this man by the mantle, that man by the tunic,
> and they pity him, and one gives him a tiny drink from a goblet,
> enough to moisten his lips, not enough to moisten his palate.
> But one whose parents are living beats him out of the banquet
> hitting him with his fists and in words also abuses him:
> "Get out, you! Your father is not dining among us." (*Iliad* 22.487-99)

In the *Odyssey*, the dangers to a boy whose father is dead or gone emerge explicitly several times. For example, the Cretan (in disguise) recounts to Eumaios a plausible tale of his youth which treats the theme of the unprotected boy. The Cretan tells how he was born the illegitimate son of Kastor, a very prosperous man, who during his life treated the boy as a legitimate son. When Kastor died, however, the other sons divided the inheritance among themselves. Odysseus claims that he survived this ordeal only because of his courage "for I was no contemptible man, not one who fled from the fighting" (14.212-3).

The seriousness of the threat to Telemachos is intensified by the fragility of the patriline. If Telemachos dies, so does the House of Odysseus. Odysseus has great concern over what will happen to the estate that he left behind. In Hades, the first thing he asks his mother Antikleia in Hades is how she died. The second is about his lineage: "And tell me of my father and son whom I left behind. Is my inheritance still with them, or does some

other man hold them now, and thinks I will come no more?" (11.174-6). This concern is especially important because Telemachos is alone, a hard fact which Odysseus himself points up when he asks Telemachos in Book 16 (before he reveals himself) why he has not demanded the rights to his inheritance. Is it, he asks, because Telemachos can not trust his own brothers to help him? Telemachos admits that he does not suffer from the treachery of brothers because, in fact, he has none. He recounts how *lonely* he essentially is, and Homer reminds the audience that Odysseus's lineage is, and always has been, a very thin and delicate one. In each of the last three generations there has been only one son born to carry on the name. Telemachos explains this in a very striking speech in which he uses the word μοῦνον in a powerful triple anaphora, unparalleled in the rest of the *Odyssey*.

> ὣδε γὰρ ἡμετέρην γενεὴν μούνωσε Κρονίων·
> μοῦνον Λαέρτην Ἀρκείσιος υἱὸν ἔτικτε,
> μοῦνον δ' αὖτ' Ὀδυσῆα πατὴρ τέκεν· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
> μοῦνον ἐμ' ἐν μεγάροισι τεκὼν λίπεν οὐδ' ἀπόνητο.
> For so it is that the son of Kronos made ours a single
> line. Arkeisios had only a single son, Laertes,
> and Laertes had only one son, Odysseus; Odysseus in turn
> left only one son, myself, in the halls, and got no profit of me. (16.117-20)[7]

This chain of single son generations is what Paul Friedrich in his seminars on the *Odyssey* has termed monofilial descent. The consequent patrilineal fragility (especially since the grandfather is languishing and the father lost) goes a long way to explain Telemachos's diffidence. He knows that more is at risk than merely his life.[8]

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[7]The anaphora is ignored in every translation that I have consulted. Variety replaces the power of repetition.

[8] Penelope is aware that it is Odysseus's entire *gonos* that is at risk. See 4.741.

This may explain the attention given to Laertes, in spite of his having no direct affect on the plot. Penelope's weaving of a shroud for Laertes takes on a poetic and thematic beauty when we understand that it really is the fabric of the House of Odysseus that is in Penelope's hands. Laertes represents the House of Odysseus hanging on by a thread. Of course, Laertes, will revive in Book 23, and Athene will rejuvenate him when the three generations are united to defend the family. Seen in another light, tenuousness of the connection between the generations is counter-balanced by the strength of the bond. Laertes does nothing but pine for his son.[9]

In his *Composition of the Odyssey*, W.J. Woodhouse acknowledges that the welfare of the son is a constitutive theme in the *Odyssey*. "Without Telemachos, no *Odyssey*," he writes. He even goes so far as to claim that

> The simple but entirely adequate reason why Odysseus, and not some other of great personages of tradition, became the hero of the Romance, lay in the fact that, among all the chieftains who survived the War, Odysseus alone had a son. (Woodhouse 249)

Though Woodhouse's statement is not quite accurate, he rightly emphasizes the importance of the patriline. Nestor could not have been the hero of the *Odyssey* since he has several sons. Much less would have depended upon his successful homecoming. It is more likely that what makes Odysseus worthy of the *Odyssey* is the attitude toward his son that he displays in the *Iliad*. The other Greek heroes at Troy boast that they are their fathers' sons. Only Odysseus– and he does it at two key moments when he wants to insist

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[9]Anticleia says that she died out of grief for her son. This is a close family.

upon what kind of man he really is– identifies himself as the father of his own son. When he reads the riot act to Thersites he says:

> If once more I find you playing the fool, as you are now,
> nevermore let the head of Odysseus sit on his shoulders,
> let me nevermore be called Telemachos' father. (*Iliad* 2.258-60)

When Agamemnon questions his courage, Odysseus shoots back with

> How can you say that... ... I hang back from
> fighting? Only watch, if you care to and if it concerns you,
> the very father of Telemachos locked with the champion Trojans,
> breaker of horses. (*Iliad* 4.351-5)

Strategy for Survival

If the House of Odysseus has survived this long, it is no doubt Penelope's doing. The strategy that she has been following, and continues to follow, seems to be the one laid out by Odysseus himself when he left for Troy.

> ἦ μὲν δὴ ὅτε τ' ἦε λιπὼν κάτα πατρίδα γαῖαν,
> δεξιτερὴν ἐπὶ καρπῷ ἑλὼν ἐμὲ χεῖρα προσηύδα·
> "ὦ γύναι, οὐ γὰρ ὀίω ἐυκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς
> ἐκ Τροίης εὖ πάντας ἀπήμονας ἀπονέεσθαι·....
> τῷ οὐκ οἶδ' εἴ κέν μ' ἀνέσει θεός, ἦ κεν ἁλώω
> αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ· σοὶ δ' ἐνθάδε πάντα μελόντων.
> μεμνῆσθαι πατρὸς καὶ μητέρος ἐν μεγάροισιν
> ὡς νῦν, ἢ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐμεῦ ἀπονόσφιν ἐόντος·
> αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ παῖδα γενειήσαντα ἴδηαι,
> γήμασθ' ᾧ κ' ἐθέλῃσθα, τεὸν κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσα.
> When he went and left me behind in the land of his fathers,
> he took me by the right hand at the wrist, and then said to me:
> "Dear wife, since I do not think the strong-greaved Achaians
> will all come safely home from Troy without hurt....
> I do not know if the god will spare me, or if I must be lost
> there in Troy; here let everything be in your charge.

> You must take thought for my father and mother here in our palace,
> as you do now, or even more, since I shall be absent.
> But when you see our son grown up and bearded, then you may
> marry whatever man you please, forsaking your household." (18.257-60...65-70)

A proper understanding of these lines is central to the understanding of Penelope's role in the plot of the *Odyssey*. The issues, unfortunately, are complex and have been made obscure in the extreme by criticism. R.D. Dawe writes in exasperation:" The variety of opinions expressed on this passage by Greek scholars of proven competence calls into question the reliability of any literary assessment of anything anywhere in Homer" (671).[10] A great majority of scholars simply reject Odysseus's injunction out of hand.[11] Samuel Butler skips any mention of it in the eighty page retelling of the story that prefaces his 1897 *The Authoress of the Odyssey*. A hundred years later in 1999, it is not included in *The Essential Homer*. Surprisingly, in 1930, Woodhouse recognized the potential of the speech to make sense of the plot.

> Now it is obvious that the parting injunctions of Odysseus are
> decisive– if true. They explain everything, both the long years
> of delay in accepting marriage, and her present implied change

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[10]See Dawe for an amusing sampling of the various views page 671 and notes 11-14 on page 683. Dawe who himself denies an absurd number of passages as suspicious or inauthentic almost willy-nilly, writes, "Now whether these words of Penelope's sit well in their present place in the *Odyssey* we have got is debatable, but the qualitative verdict must be that 250-271, and especially Odysseus's own words of 259-270, is a fragment of Homer at his best" (671).

[11]Cf. Buchner, W. "Die Penelopeszenen in der *Odyssee*." *Hermes*, lxxv (1940). Also, Hexter writes: "That it is her husband's command, so she says, removes any criticism of her. If this was what Odysseus had told her, he would indeed have felt the urgency to get back to Ithaka." *A Guide to the Odyssey*, 229. Knox cites this very passage as the key evidence for the tradition that Ovid followed and amplified. "But Ovid found a precedent in his reading of Homer for a cunning Penelope willing to stretch the truth:... Penelope is lying when she reports Odysseus' injunction to her to marry." (97)

> of attitude. Nothing more was required than that she should quote those injunctions whenever the occasion demanded. (86)

But to Woodhouse, the injunctions are not true. Penelope has "just told a fib." Most others agree. E. Knox, for example, says flatly: "Penelope is lying when she reports Odysseus' injunction to her to marry" (37). John Winkler writes in 1990: "We might well suppose that Penelope's account of Odysseus' parting words about Telemakhos' beard is her own invention, on the spur of the moment..." (147).[12]

I believe that there is really no textual reason to think that she is lying. The suitors take the news as if they had heard it before and assumed it. Telemachos hears it without a blink, and so does Odysseus. Eurykleia shows herself aware of it at 18.176, before Penelope's speech. One reason for the critical rejection of Odysseus's parting directive seems to be that it does not square with the traditional notion of what sort of man Odysseus is and what sort of thing this kind of man is likely to say. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff expresses this particularly strongly in *Heimkehr*. To him, the whole notion that a hero as manly as Odysseus would ever have delivered such a cautious speech seemed utterly incredible and absurd.

> Wer ihn ernst nimmt, geht ganz wie die Freier auf den Leim. Oder wird ein Held, der in den Krieg zieht, davon reden, daß das etwas lebensgefährlich ist. Der sagt vielmehr 'wisch ab dein Gesicht, eine jede Kugel, die trifft ja nicht. (*Heimkehr* 24)

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[12]In the meantime a few scholars have accepted the directive. Uvo Hölscher in his 1967 "Penelope vor den Freiern" is the first that I know of (translated in Schein 1996) and he takes it as the center structuring principle in the nick-of-time folk theme. Agatha Thornton endorsed it in her excellent 1970 book *People and Themes in Homer's Odyssey* which, unfortunately, is out of print. John Finley assumes it to be valid in his influential 1978 *Homer's Odyssey*.

Nevertheless, we must believe that the directive was as Penelope narrates, if we are to understand the importance of Penelope's role in the *Odyssey*.

The sticking point is in the last two lines of Odysseus's directive:

> αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ παῖδα γενειήσαντα ἴδηαι,
> γήμασθ' ᾧ κ' ἐθέλῃσθα, τεὸν κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσα
> But when you see our son grown up and bearded, then you may
> marry whatever man you please, forsaking your household.

which Lattimore translates somewhat tendentiously. His rendering would require the Greek verb γήμασθε in the final independent clause be cast in the subjunctive mood, not the imperative. Moreover, the last participle λιποῦσα, which has imperative force as well, *can* mean "forsaking," as Lattimore translates it, but that meaning is recorded for the *Odyssey* neither by Cunliffe nor by Liddell and Scott. The *Odyssey* seems to employ the verb in the transitive without hint of moral censure, and Lattimore himself generally renders it "to leave." For example, Athene refers to Odysseus's family as "your wife and child, those whom you *left* behind in your palace (13.403). The soul *leaves* the body at death (14.124); and Odysseus says to Alkinoös: "let life *leave* me when I have once more seen my property, my serving people, and my great high-roofed house" (7.224-5). Thus the last line is simply:

> "Marry whomever you please and leave your house."

It clearly means that Penelope is *not* to marry before Telemachos is a man (has a beard) but that she *must* remarry when he is.

The second major reason for doubting the veracity of Odysseus's directive is the question of Penelope's motives. Joseph Russo writes: "But it is not necessary to interpret this as a *lying* speech in order to see it as a speech intended to deceive and *mislead* the suitors" (66). I would not go even that far. Perhaps it might have profited Penelope to lie about Odysseus's parting words while Telemachos was still a boy (as a stalling tactic), but it makes no sense at all in Book 18 since it offers no excuse for further delay but only emphasizes that Penelope ought already to be married, that she is disappointing both them *and* her husband. It makes even less sense if this is the first time she has announcement it. As a lie, then, it is inconvenient; as a stratagem, self-defeating. Therefore I assume that Penelope is telling the truth when she relates Odysseus's parting words. The challenge of this assumption is that it entails taking seriously Penelope's intention to remarry, and valuing it as virtue.

This calls for some reasoned speculation. What will happen to the the House of Odysseus in Odysseus's absence? The civil laws of Mycenaean Greece are vague enough as it is, and there is no assurance that Homer, who wrote centuries after that time, respected whatever those laws might have been. In fact we understand little more than the general picture that Fustel de Coulanges painted in *The Ancient City*. We can assume a patriarchy, patrimony, filial piety. "Every father, therefore, expected of his posterity that series of funeral repasts which was to assure to his manes repose and happiness. This opinion was the fundamental principle of domestic law among the ancients. From it followed, in the first place, this rule, that every family must perpetuate itself forever" (Fustel de Coulanges, 41).

To take Penelope at her word, it remains to find some logic in Odysseus' command. Wilamowitz notwithstanding, Odysseus' command to Penelope seems an eminently sane and shrewd one for a man leaving for war if that man's prime concern is for the safety of what he is leaving behind. As I already mentioned, in the *Iliad*, Odysseus is characterized by identification with the son beyond what is usual for a hero. Others care about their sons, but Odysseus bases his sense of pride on being the father. He is a family man. So, it is consistent with this extended character, at least, that Odysseus should take care to insure as strongly as possible the future of his son.[13] Odysseus wants the House of Odysseus to remain intact and in the bloodline. Thus, Odysseus first needs to make sure that his possessions are guarded assiduously until Telemachos can do it for himself and, second, that Telemachos is never displaced by another claimant to the estate. Penelope must bear no children that would displace Telemachos. On the other hand, when Telemachos has come of age, Penelope must give him control of the οἶκος. This is best accomplished if Penelope leaves to marry another. Odysseus may have envisioned the possibility of exactly what is currently happening in Ithaca: the suitors wasting the estate and plotting against his son on the excuse of wooing Penelope. Odysseus's directive seems to me to map out a strategy that, though not perfect, is the best possible for insuring that Telemachos successfully inherit the House of Odysseus.[14]

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[13] There is also the story in the *Cypria* that Odysseus would not plow over his son when he was attempting to evade the draft to Troy.

[14]The directive makes sense from what we know about Mycenaen culture as implied or stated in the Homeric epics. Achilles in Hades laments the fact that he cannot be home to aid his father whom he thinks no doubt is encountering trouble keeping what he has. "If only / for a little while I could come like that to the house of my father, / my force and my invincible hands

That Penelope must forsake her household is less obvious but, I believe, no less sound. First of all, Penelope may be bound to leave home if she remarries. All the women in the *Odyssey* do. Penelope's own family is at a distance; neither Klytemnestra, Helen, nor Iphthime live in their ancestral homes. This squares with Fustel de Coulange's insistence that an ancient Greek wife had to worship the religion of her husband, and that in order to do this, all ties with her former religion had to be severed. Fustel de Coulange's describes the young girl going off to be married to her first husband, but the principle would have to apply to any wife, since marriage bound her to worship at her husband's sacred hearth.[15] In the *Odyssey*, Agelaos advises Telemachos to make sure his mother remarries:

> ὄφρα σὺ μὲν χαίρων πατρώια πάντα νέμηαι,
> ἔσθων καὶ πίνων, ἡ δ' ἄλλου δῶμα κομίζῃ."
> So you can be happy, control your father's inheritance,
> and eat and drink, while she looks after the house of another. (20.336-37)

While it is true that the suitors make a compact by which whoever marries Penelope also takes the house, the very fact that the suitors must make it an explicit chip in their sordid bargain reveals that it was not a traditional given. In any case, if it were not normally

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would terrify such men/ as use force on him and keep him away from his rightful honors." (11.500-3). Achilles can have no news of any threat to his father's right, but he assumes that the aging man is under attack by his own people ("whether he still keeps his position among the Myrmidon / hordes, or whether in Hellas and Phthia they have diminished his estate, because old age constrains his hands and feet." 11.495-97). Hostility is to be expected.

[15]"For the young girl would not be able to go at once to worship at the hearth of her husband, if her father had not already separated her from the paternal hearth. To enable her to adopt her new religion, she must be freed from every bond that attaches her to her first religion."(Fustel de Coulange, 37).

necessary that Penelope leave the house upon marriage – and Odysseus's words can conceivably be taken that way– then Odysseus's directive adds this as a second command.

Even if we concede that to follow Odysseus's instructions was a sound strategy while Telemachos was young, is it still? If Penelope marries, will all the danger be lifted from Telemachos? Unfortunately, there are no guarantees. The suitors have made a pact to plunder the estate no matter who gets Penelope and the palace. In this plan, whoever marries Penelope, gets the house. But why should the bridegroom be eager to give the rest away? How much honor is there among these thieves? In Book 22, Eurymachos betrays Antinoös as soon as he sees that Odysseus has the upper hand. And what of love for Penelope? Would the new husband slaughter the son of his new bride? Penelope's appearance before the suitors in Book 18 may speak to this question.

> τῶν δ' αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατ', ἔρῳ δ' ἄρα θυμὸν ἔθελχθεν,
> πάντες δ' ἠρήσαντο παραὶ λεχέεσσι κλιθῆναι.
> Their knees gave way, and the hearts in them were bemused with passion,
> and each one prayed for the privilege of lying beside her. (18.212-13)

They also send their heralds to bring back rich gifts to please her. Penelope's power over them is clear. Her best strategy is surely to determine who is the strongest among the suitors and ally herself, and her son, with him.

What prevents Penelope from staying on in the house as a widow, the revered mother? Wouldn't this just lead to exactly the condition in Ithaca that obtains as the *Odyssey* opens? How many would court Penelope in her own court? How many would use courting her as an excuse to band together in the palace. She *might* openly refuse to

marry ever again and give the palace to Telemachos. But then, we are back to the original problem. If she had announced any such intention in advance, then the rival lords would surely have acted peremptorily, ransacking the House of Odysseus long before this. If she has been pretending but "has had something else in mind" then we face the original problem of why she should remind the suitors that Odysseus himself commanded her to remarry. Or more to the point, why does she not insist that Odysseus is not dead, but still alive and liable to return home? In this case, instead of a self-proclaimed duty to have already chosen a new husband, she would have no legal right to remarry.

Agelaos tries to be reasonable to Telemachos in Book 20. He says that the suitors understood why Penelope resisted marriage as long as there was hope of Odysseus's return. "But now it has become evident that he never will come back," (20.333) he says, and urges Telemachos to counsel his mother to marry. This passage shows that Penelope would have had a stronger case if she had openly expressed hope for Odysseus's return, instead of insisting upon his demise. Agelaos says:

> ὄφρα μὲν ὑμῖν θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἐώλπει
> νοστῆσαι Ὀδυσῆα πολύφρονα ὄνδε δόμονδε,
> τόφρ' οὔ τις νέμεσις μενέμεν τ' ἦν 'ισχέμεναί τε
> μνηστῆρας κατὰ δώματ', ἐπεὶ τόδε κέρδιον ἦεν,
> εἰ νόστης' Ὀδυσεὺς καὶ ὑπότροπος ἵκετο δῶμα·
> As long as the spirits in the hearts of you both were hopeful
> that Odysseus of the many designs would have his homecoming,
> then no one could blame you for waiting for him, and holding
> the suitors off in the palace, since that was the better way for you
> in case Odysseus did come home and return to his palace. (20.328-32)

ἐπεὶ θάνε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς

One might argue that the plan laid out by Odysseus on his departure stipulates that its implementation depends upon his not returning from Troy (τῷ οὐκ οἶδ' ἤ κέν μ' ἀνέσει θεός, ἦ κεν ἁλώω αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ). Does Penelope really believe that Odysseus will not return? First of all, we should note that the very wording of the strategy as reported implies that Odysseus will have been gone too long (and so be lost) if there is no word of him by the time Telemachos has a beard. Odysseus need not even be dead.

Even so, Penelope strongly holds the opinion that Odysseus *is*, in fact, dead. When Telemachos voices this same conviction to Penelope in Book 1 (οὐ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς οἷος ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ ἐν Τροίῃ, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι φῶτες ὄλοντο 1.354-55), she does not contradict him. From whom else but Penelope would Telemachos have gotten *his* convictions? As I have already noted, the most powerful and useful argument that Penelope and Telemachos could make to the Ithacans against the suitors would be that Odysseus was soon expected to return home. Yet neither of them make the argument (in fact they forcefully reject it), even when they are invited to do so.[16] Further, Penelope like Telemachos never claims that the suitors are outside of their rights in wanting to marry her, which they certainly would if she considered herself still married and waiting for her husband to return.[17] Finally, Homer (the implied narrator) gives us no grounds for thinking

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[16]And they would have soothsayers to back them up.

[17]Interestingly enough, Odysseus himself says nothing (even to Anticleia) to indicate that he would think Penelope blameable if she were already remarried. He has been gone too long, and he knows it.

that the Ithacans ought to believe that Odysseus is coming back. The narrator undermines the credibility of every single character who predicts that Odysseus will return (Halitherses, Medon, Theoklymenos, Helen, the Cretan). In addition, not one character who clearly knows that Odysseus is alive or believes that he will return, (Athene, Iphthime, Zeus, Odysseus himself) denies it.[18]

We have already discussed what little motive Penelope would have for telling this to the suitors if she did not have to. Furthermore, she has no cause to lie when she says to her maids: "for first I lost a husband with the heart of a lion" (4.724). In the privacy of her dream, she says the same thing to her beloved sister (4.814). And as late as Book 23, speaking to Eurykleia who has already shown that she would lay down her life rather betray her lady, Penelope says:

> αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς ὤλεσε τηλοῦ νόστον Ἀχαιΐδος, ὤλετο δ' αὐτός.
> But Odysseus has lost his homecoming and lost his life, far from Achaia. (23.67-68)

She is remarkably consistent. Twice the suitors' quote her as having unequivocally stated: "Odysseus is dead." And they have not gotten it wrong: Telemachos does not quibble when he hears them say it, and Penelope uses the same words in reporting her own speech to the Cretan beggar: ἐπεὶ θάνε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς. (19.141=2.96= 24.131)

Nevertheless, does the very fact that Penelope thinks to ask about Odysseus in her first dream prove that she is waiting for him? This is a delicate question and goes toward

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[18]Athene and Iphthime put themselves in uncomfortable situations in order to avoid doing so.

the heart of the plot. Obviously, Penelope does not know *for sure* that Odysseus is dead. She would then never have asked her sister whether he was or not. There is no corpse, and no eyewitness. (Aigyptios says that he has lost his son, though he is no more sure than Penelope can be about Odysseus.) It is possible that Odysseus is alive and will eventually return. Penelope does not preclude this. Telemachos dreams idly of his father's return, and Penelope entertains foreigners who claim to have news of her lost husband.

If Telemachos has heard enough over the years and now refuses to listen to soothsayers, Penelope *enjoys* listening to reports about her husband. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that she ever believes any prophecy. In fact, whenever anyone makes a strong claim for Odysseus– that he is alive, or that he will return home– Penelope says the equivalent of "wouldn't it be pretty to think so?" To the predictions of Theoklymenos and to the Cretan beggar she says the same thing.

> αἲ γὰρ τοῦτο, ξεῖνε, ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἴη·
> τῷ κε τάχα γνοίης φιλότητά τε πολλά τε δῶρα
> ἐξ ἐμεῦ, ὡς ἄν τίς σε συναντόμενος μακαρίζοι.
> If only this word, stranger and guest, were brought to fulfillment,
> soon you would be aware of my love and many gifts given
> by me, so any man who met you would call you blessed. (17.163-65 = 19.309-11)

These are optatives of wish. They describe an alternate reality that would be preferable but which is clearly out from the question. It is not *actionable.* Very similar is Penelope's use of the potential optative in her response to Eurykleia in Book 23.

> μαῖα φίλη...
> οἶσθα γὰρ ὥς κ' ἀσπαστὸς ἐνὶ μεγάροισι φανείη

πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί τε καὶ υἱέι, τὸν τεκόμεσθα·
Dear nurse. . . You know
how welcome he would be if he appeared in the palace:
to all, but above all to me and the son we gave birth to." (23.59-61)

None of Penelope's actions that effect the plot are motivated by a hope that Odysseus will return. Quite the contrary, all of her actions and decisions, I would argue, are founded upon a conviction that her husband most likely *is* lost and will not return. All her official and confidential statements are to this effect so that the assumption that she has an expectation (let us use this instead of hope) of Odysseus's return is our own fantasy, a product either of disdain for her inability to act or account for herself, of an utter confusion of our knowledge with hers, or of sheer sentimentality. Though we may *wish* her to do otherwise, the logic of the injunction compels Penelope to act as if Odysseus were dead. Most critics reject the logic in favor of the sentiment. But viewed in light of the threat to Telemachos, we should be able to understand that Penelope must agree to remarry. If she does not, Telemachos will die.

One problem remains. If Penelope is following Odysseus' instructions, why has she not remarried *already*? Why is she still at home? Why has she allowed the young lords to band together and present a united front against Telemachos. Why did she not let Telemachos take over? Isn't he old enough? Isn't he mature enough? Is he ready? These are questions for the next chapter.

III. How old is Telemachus?

If the significant question of Telemachus's age is whether or not he has gotten his beard, the answer must be, "Certainly, long since." After all, he is twenty years old.[1] If, on the other hand, the question is whether or not he has become a man, we have more to consider. In classical Athens, a boy came into majority at 14 and in Sparta at 18 years old (Auffarth, 425). We do not know exactly at what age the Homeric Greek youth "reached the measure of manhood (ἥβης μέτρον ἱκάνει)." The best measure we have is the age at which he got a beard[2]. In Greek art, the bearded male is a consistently a man, the unbearded one a boy. In the *Odyssey*, maturity (ἥβης) is explicitly linked twice to the new beard, once about the form that Hermes takes to confront Odysseus (10.279) and once about Otos and Ephialtes, the giant twins whom Apollo kills just in time. Otos and Ephialtes, sons of Iphimedeia, measured nine cubits across and nine fathoms height when they were only nine years old and threatened to climb the sky by piling mountain upon

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[1]It depends upon how one interprets the formula "in the twentieth year" and how old the baby boy was when Odysseus left. John Finley claims that he is "more than twenty years old"(1978, 5).

[2]"Der Bartwuchs ist das äußere Kennzeichen, daß der Junge zum Manne herangereift ist.." 423. And in the note to this passage:"In griechischen Wettkämpfen sind die Teilnehmer nach Altersklassen eingeteilt: zwischen den παῖδες und den ἄνδρες steht dabei die Gruppe der ἀγένειοι, der Bartlosen, vgl etwa Pind Ol 9. 88 f." (Auffarth, 423).

mountain and to attack the gods. The Olympians tolerated the boys only so long as they were not a real menace, that is, as long as they were without beards.

> καί νύ κεν ἐξετέλεσσαν, εἰ ἥβης μέτρον ἵκοντο·
> ἀλλ' ὄλεσεν Διὸς υἱός, ὃν ἠύκομος τέκε Λητώ,
> ἀμφοτέρω, πρίν σφῶιν ὑπὸ κροτάφοισιν ἰούλους
> ἀνθῆσαι πυκάσαι τε γένυς εὐανθέι λάχνῃ.
> Surely they would have carried it out if they had come to maturity,
> but the son of Zeus whom Leto with ordered hair had borne him,
> Apollo, killed them both, before ever the down gathered
> below their temples, or on their chins the beards had blossomed. (11.317-20)

Physically, Telemachus seems, in fact, to be a rather mature 20 year old, a fact which Athene carefully notes. " τόσος [μέγας]," she says, which Lattimore translates, "Big as you are," and Fagels, "You've sprung up so!" (1.207). Later, she claims: "You are big and splendid" (1.301). A single month passes between this and Book 21 where Telemachus shows himself strong enough to string his father's bow, a feat which none of the suitors who attempt it (many are no doubt older than he) are able to achieve. He ventures to the mainland where he wins the admiration of several heroes. Later, he fights alongside his father in two battles. As with Otos and Ephialtes, maturity is linked to the power to harm enemies and specifically to extract revenge. Zeus holds that he warned Aigisthos that Orestes would take vengeance as soon as he reached maturity and hungered to reclaim what was his (1.41). Athene exhorts Telemachus to be bold and to imitate Orestes. She urges him to consider "some means by which you can force the suitors out of your household" (1.269-70) and "by which you can kill [them]... by treachery or open

attack" (1.295-6).[3] Telemachus is big enough and splendid enough, physically, to accomplish it.

Before Athene visits Ithaca, Telemachus is lost in daydreams and has no intention of taking action.

> ἧστο γὰρ ἐν μνηστῆρσι φίλον τετιημένος ἦτορ,
> ὀσσόμενος πατέρ ἐσθλὸν ἐνὶ φρεσίν, εἴ ποθεν ἐλθὼν
> μνηστήρων τῶν μὲν σκέδασιν κατὰ δώματα θείη,
> τιμὴν δ' αὐτὸς ἔχοι καὶ κτήμασιν οἷσιν ἀνάσσοι.
> He sat among the suitors, his heart deep grieving within him,
> imagining in his mind his great father, how he might come back
> and all throughout the house might cause the suitors to scatter,
> and hold his rightful place and be lord of his own possessions. (1.114-7)

The full pathos of this scene emerges only when we discover that Telemachus knows the futility of the dream he embraces. He openly and thoroughly rejects the possibility that Odysseus will return home.

> ῥεῖ', ἐπεὶ ἀλλότριον βίοτον νήποινον ἔδουσιν,
> ἀνέρος, οὗ δή που λεύκ' ὀστέα πύθεται ὄμβρῳ
> κείμεν' ἐπ' ἠπείρου, ἢ εἰν ἁλὶ κῦμα κυλίνδει. ...
> νῦν δ' ὁ μὲν ὣς ἀπόλωλε κακὸν μόρον, οὐδέ τις ἥμιν
> θαλπωρή, εἴ πέρ τις ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων
> φῇσιν ἐλεύσεσθαι· τοῦ δ' ὤλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ.
> Easy for them, since without penalty they eat up the substance

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[3]The comparison to Orestes, though provocative and thematic, is an invidious one. Orestes had greater motivation and much better odds. (In Homer, Orestes is not confronted with the thornier problem of having to decide whether to kill his mother or not.) It seems highly unlikely that Athene should really want Telemachus to make an attack on the suitors. It is not, after all, among the reasons she gives Zeus for going to Ithaca. Ostensibly, she urges Telemachus to go away in order to find news of his father and then to kill the suitors if he hears that Odysseus is dead. Of course, she knows that Odysseus is not dead. Nor is sending Telemachus a good strategy if his best shot is to attack the suitors off guard. And as we have seen in chapter 2, the departure has only served to instigate the threat against Telemachus' life.

> of a man whose white bones lie out in the rain and fester
> somewhere on the mainland, or roll in the wash of the breakers...
> as it is, he has died by an evil fate, and there is no comfort
> left for us, not even though some one among mortals
> tells us he will come back. His day of homecoming has perished. (1.160-62...166-8)

Penelope knows that Telemachus is a grown man, but she also knows that he is not ready to defend himself. If the letter of Odysseus's directive was that Penelope should hold off remarriage until his son has a beard, the spirit is that she ought to wait until Telemachus is mature, which, in her mind, he clearly is not. At least as late as Book 4, Penelope points out that her son is still a child, νήπιος "unversed in fighting and speaking (4.818). Athene would actually not debate the point. This *is* a problem with Telemachus of which Athene is aware and which the very phrasing of her exhortation betrays. Athene chides him: "You should not go on clinging to your childhood. You are no longer of an age to do that" (1.296-7). Can Telemachus be at the same time both ἥβης and νήπιος?

As obscure as the Greek notion of a childhood is, the notion of childishness– behavior by adults more appropriate to children-- is not. This metaphorical sense of νήπιος is applied to many characters in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, even (especially?) Agamemnon. Cunliffe defines it variously as "feeble...foolish, thoughtless, senseless, credulous." Each of these can be– and has been– plausibly applied to Telemachus's character. Let us look at them in turn.

Telemachus's Character

If it is true the Telemachus has more muscle than any of his enemies, why does he not use it? Why has he neglected his fathers weapons as if he has never given a thought to a clash of arms? Why is he so certain that "soon [the suitors] will break me myself to pieces?" (1.251). Is his will feeble? Is he a coward? There is sufficient ready criticism from Athene in Book 1 to make us wonder, not to mention the much sharper reproof in Book 16 by the disguised Odysseus who insists that even a lowly beggar such as himself would be ashamed to shrink from battling the suitors.

> αὐτίκ' ἔπειτ' ἀπ' ἐμεῖο κάρη τάμοι ἀλλότριος φῶς,
> εἰ μὴ ἐγὼ κείνοισι κακὸν πάντεσσι γενοίμην,
> ἐλθὼν ἐς μέγαρον Λαερτιάδεω Ὀδυσῆος.
> εἰ δ' αὖ με πληθυῖ δαμασαίατο μοῦνον ἐόντα,
> βουλοίμην κ' ἐν ἐμοῖσι κατακτάμενος μεγάροισι
> τεθνάμεν ἢ τάδε γ' αἰὲν ἀεικέα ἔργ' ὁράασθαι,
> If such things could be, another could strike my head from my shoulders
> if I did not come as an evil thing to all those people
> as I entered the palace of Odysseus, the son of Laertes.
> And if I, fighting alone, were subdued by all their number,
> then I would rather die, cut down in my own palace,
> than have to go on watching forever these shameful activities. (16.102-7)

Nevertheless, key details reveal that the beggar's taunt is not really offered in good conscience. The beggar asks what is wrong: "Do you find your brothers wanting? A man trusts help from these in the fighting when a great quarrel arises" (97-8). Of course, Telemachus's problem is not that his brothers are weak or that he is afraid to call or rely upon them. Telemachus's problem is that he has no brothers, and the beggar knows it well enough. "The son of Kronos made ours a single line," and, as I pointed out in chapter 3,

the triple anaphora of μοῦνος hammers the point home to the audience. Telemachus is one, but his enemies seem "beyond numbering" (μυρίοι). So, when Telemachus says for the second time, "and soon they will break me myself to pieces" (128), we are inclined to be more sympathetic. No doubt the true Odysseus lurking behind the disguise is as well. Can he possibly want his only son to make a kamikaze assault on the suitors? Such may be the way of Achilles, but it certainly is not the way of the usually careful, always wily, hero who prefers far more to win by stealth than bravado.[4] My point is that none of this evidence for Telemachos's cowardice is compelling. If anything, Telemachos's decisions prove him to be quite level-headed and prudent, and the above analysis, I think, ought to acquit him of foolishness as well. Whether his departure for Pylos and Sparta is a foolish choice in itself is a moot question: one would have to take that up with Athene.

Debate whether Telemachus is νήπιος has flourished in many guises. Most striking is the varied opinions over the supposedly thoughtless three lines with which, in Book 1, he claims authority in the house and dispatches his mother back to her quarters.[5] Stephanie West thinks that it shows "callousness in this context" and that "Certainly the favourable impression created by Telemachus' earlier observations is quite destroyed by this adolescent rudeness..." (West 1988, 120). Is Telemachus really being cheeky? Penelope is nonplused, true, but is that not because Telemachus has for the first time found the pluck to

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[4]Athene, too, it turns out, is less than sincere in her exhortation to action. She tries to rally Telemachus by giving him a prophesy that Odysseus is on his way home (1.203-5), but she neglects to add any credible evidence that she knows what she is talking about. She wants to woo Telemachus away from Ithaca, not incite him to fight it out on the spot.

[5]The lines are unflatteringly compared to the near identical lines in the *Iliad* that Hector uses in his farewell to Andromache. Compare *Odyssey* 1.356-59 to *Iliad* 6.490-93.

make such a claim, a claim to the responsibility that she has so long hoped he might shoulder? She takes his words seriously: "for she laid the serious words of her son deep away in her spirit" (1.361). There is no textual reason to think that she resents them.

As for senselessness– if Penelope finds her son lacking, neither Nestor nor Menelaos do. Even in Book 2, so full of his callow attempts to assert himself, he shows eminently good sense and self-discipline by renouncing all political ambition in order to concentrate his efforts on minding his own house. Even the case for credulousness is in some way quite weak. Like his mother– even more so, he says– he is not taken in by soothsayers. He does not throw his lot in with Halitherses's prophesies. He even resists Helen's accomodating interpretation of the eagle and insistence that Odysseus "will come home and take revenge; or he is already home, and making a plan of evil for all of the suitors."

> τὴν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα·
> "οὕτω νῦν Ζεὺς θείη, ἐρίγδουπος πόσις Ηρης·
> τῷ κέν τοι καὶ κεῖθι θεῷ ὡς εὐχετοώμην."
> Then the thoughtful Telemachus said to her in answer:
> "May Zeus, high thundering husband of Hera, so appoint it.
> Then even at home I would make my prayers to you, as to a goddess." (15.179-81)

Let us abandon a search for a character flaw in Telemachus. Though Penelope will complain when she believes that he is acting as a bad host to the disguised Odysseus, she will do it by reminding him that his *phrenas* was sound when he was younger; Antikleia's report in Hades– when Telemachus could have been no older than 13-- is that the boy had

found favor from the other lords. The problem is that Telemachus is clinging to his childhood.[6] Behavior which was a virtue in a boy is unsuitable now that he is a man.

When the reader of the *Odyssey* in Greek thinks of Telemachos, πεπνυμένος is the word that first comes to mind. This epithet, used at least forty-six times for Telemachos in the *Odyssey*, provides a more specific clue to his problem. It is here in the encounter with Athene that the epithet has its debut: τὴν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα (1.214). Of obscure derivation and uncertain meaning,[7] the word bears translations like: "thoughtful" (Lattimore), "wise" (Fitzgerald) "cautious" (Lawrence) "prudent" (Bates), "excellent person" (Butler), "having good feeling" (Rouse). Cunliffe allows: "wise, of sound understanding, of good sense, astute, shrewd, sagacious." Hainsworth, in his commentary, recommends "perfect gentleman."

The epithet is shared by others,[8] but in every case, describes a manner of speaking, specifically a manner that emphasizes honesty and frankness. It is routinely connected to the heralds Medon and Peisenor, I think, because honesty and frankness are the virtues of a herald.[9] When it is applied to Nestor and Menelaos, it is definitive: "[Nestor / Menelaos]

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[6]In this way, Telemachus contrasts sharply with his father who was adult-like as a child. Odysseus lead an embassy when he was still a boy.

[7]The attempt to tie it to *pnew*, (root, *pnu-) meaning breath has not been successful. Cf. Chantraine.

[8]The epithet describes Medon, Peisenor, anonymous (8.586), the Atreidei, Nestor, Menelaos, Amphinomos, Laertes. It is applied to Odysseus twice, but only when the speakers (Alkinoös and Penelope) do not know who they are talking to.

[9]Neither thoughtfulness nor wisdom are requisite to the profession, and shrewdness could well do more harm than good, as in Sophocles's *Trachiniae*.

will not tell you any falsehood; he is too πεπνυμένος (3.20, 3.328). Telemachus is honest, frank, unguarded, naive, like a good child. He opens up to Mentes without the least introduction. The English word that best captures the idea behind πεπνυμένος, I think, is "artless."

Artlesness, an inability to be deceptive, to conceal his thoughts and feelings, poses the primary block to Telemachos's maturation and his ability to assume the responsibilities of the House of Odysseus. Though successful old men like Nestor and Menelaos can afford to be πεπνυμένος, a young man whose future is in the balance must confront the hostile and dishonest world on its own terms.

"Every culture and subculture teaches its young how to tell the truth – and how to deceive," Donald Lateiner writes in his *Sardonic Smile* (1995, 140). The Greeks are especially serious about the later. Studying modern Greek culture, P. Walcot finds that "to lie does not constitute the moral crime which it has become in the sophisticated culture of Western Europe and North America...to tell lies, then, is a way of life and does not convey moral stigma" (Walcot 1977, 7). Lying is not, however, "natural" even to the Greek peasants of Vasilika, the village that Walcot cites. "An inferior is vulnerable and must be taught to protect himself, and this process of education is not always pleasant" (19). Of course, his father could have taught Telemachus all he needed to know. Odysseus is more than gifted at the art of deception and employs it even when it may seem gratuitous and cruel. The best Greek antonym for πεπνυμένος could easily be one of Odysseus's epithets, like πολύμητις. Heroic honesty, the kind that is so dominant in the *Iliad*, plays

almost no role in Odysseus's adventures. His cause is not advanced by it; his mind finds in it no charm. Odysseus may be fair to his companions, but he is rarely honest. He could have taught Telemachos well, if he had been around.

If the son is in jeopardy primarily because he has not had a father to protect him and to teach him what he needed to know to defend himself, the interesting question then becomes what Telemachos thinks about Odysseus.

Questions of Birth

In Book 2, Mentes-Athene pretends to guess that Telemachos is Odysseus's son because of how the boy looks and asks whether the suspicion is true. Telemachos, who will withold his father's name for almost another hundred and fifty lines, now attempts to put Athene's very question in question:

> τοιγὰρ ἐγώ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.
> μήτηρ μέν τέ με φησὶ τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγώγε
> οὐκ οἶδ'· οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἐὸν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω.[10]
> See, I will accurately answer all that you ask me.
> My mother says indeed I am his. I for my part
> do not know. Nobody really knows his own father. (1.214-16)

What can we make of Telemachos's philosophizing? What is being claimed and who is claiming it?

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[10]Butler: "but it is a wise child who knows his own father."; Murray:"for never yet did any man know his parentage of his own knowledge."; Rouse:"I never heard of anyone who knew whose son he was."; Rieu: " it's a wise child that knows its own father."; Lattimore:"."; Fitzgerald: "Who has known his own engendering?"; Fagels: "who, on his own, has ever known who gave him life?"

For a long time, this passage was not taken as a comment on Odysseus at all. Nor even one primarily about Telemachos. Rather it was read as if it were Homer revealing his own true opinion about women. In the notes to these lines in her 1708 translation of the *Odyssey,* Mme. Dacier argues against the interpretation prevalent at the time and its *cherchez la femme* mentality "Voici un passage dont on a fort abusé contre les femmes, comme si Telemaque avait voulu faire ici une satire contre elles, ce qui est très-faux." Expecting to find moral teachings in Homer, 17th Century readers looked to blame some one for Telemachos's uncertainty. If Telemachos could not be certain of his father, to these moralists it was because he could not trust his mother. She may *say* that Odysseus is the father, but she may also be lying or merely too promiscuous to be certain herself.[11]

Unable to believe that Telemachos intends to impugn Penelope's virtue as if he "ait voulu douter et faire douter de sa sagesse et and sa fidelité, " Dacier proceeds to offer something like the modern interpretation of this line, arguing, in effect, that the male is uncertain about the genuineness of his offspring not because he is the dupe of woman, but because he is victim of the natural logic of maleness. Only woman gives birth; only she has direct evidence that the child is of her flesh. The bond between father and son is naturally putative. She cites Euripides as evidence. She then uses Menander to go further to claim that no one knows his own father. One has only suspicions and faith.

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[11]Dacier cannot reject the moralizing outright. In fact, she accepts that such doubts as are leveled at women are natural and justified in the case of a loose woman. But not all women, she insists, are loose. Women like Penelope dispel all doubt. "Mais ce soupçon et cette croyance deviennent des certitudes et des veritez constantes, lorsque les meres menent, comme Penelope, une vie très-sage et trés-regleé. Quand cela n'est pas, les doutes narratee se font que trop bien fondez."

This ontological argument might be pushed a step further. If a man cannot be as certain as a woman about his biological link to the child, the child has even less certainty about his link to either parent. "Who has known his own engendering?" as Fitzgerald translates line 216. The child, though present at the birth, can't remember it. Any child is therefore as epistemologically uncertain of his mother as he is of his father. And this fact is not overlooked by Homer or Telemachos. The Greek word that Lattimore translates "father" is not πατέρα but γόνον. Expanded in this way, Telemachos's question either rises to philosophy or sinks to cliché. West thinks that "the idea must already have been commonplace, and the tone is surely mildly ironical, though Telemachos might well be somewhat diffident in asserting that the hero whom his visitor knows so much better and so much admires is in fact his father" (1988, 102). I do not see any diffidence here. I see a repudiation. In the next two lines, he tells exactly the sort of father that he would rather have:

> ἀνέρος, ὃν κτεάτεσσιν ἑοῖς ἔπι γῆρας ἔτεμε.
> But how I wish I could have been rather son to some fortunate man, whom old age overtook among his possessions. (1.217-18)

Telemachos is telling just what he feels.

How else should he feel? Some rage from an adolescent toward an absent father is not unreasonable. What Telemachos has inherited from his father is a threatened and threatening identity. Arthur Atkins writes:

> Telemachus is despondent, thinking not of his *arete*. but of his generally wretched condition. People say he is the son of Odysseus, the *apotmotatos* of mankind, but he for his part does not know whether it is true. In either case, in his present state

> of dejection, he does not feel that it would affect his *arete* much; for he is not at the moment conscious of himself as *agathos*." (1972, 18).

If Telemachos's question is not an idle intellectual conundrum, then his philosophizing looks very much like a strategy to make some sense out of an impossible situation. While no one can be certain of his parents, it is also true that one must usually act as though there were no question of it. In Telemachos's case, the indeterminacy of his parentage is emblematic of his indeterminate future. He is being squeezed into a corner with little or no hope of success. He will lose his life, his estate, or both, which is enough to make anyone despondent.[12] As Telemachos wrestles with his questions, Penelope is attempting to determine if his answers reveal him to be ready to defend himself against his enemies. The import of this passage transcends Telemachos's mind alone and introduces a question thematic to the *Odyssey* as a whole. How does one live and act in the face of partial knowledge?

Paideusis

The question of Telemachos's maturity has occupied the minds of commentators on the *Odyssey* almost as much as it occupies Penelope's mind. Though it is generally recognized that at the outset Telemachos is, as Amy Kass has called him, "a mere babe" and acts out of what Lydia Allione calls "*sua passiva fanciulezza,*" there is no general agreement on whether or when he matures. Essentially, all the critics take one of three

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[12] "Telemachus...is despondent, thinking not of his *arete,* but of his generally wretched condition" (Atkins, 1972, 18).

viewpoints: he does not change at all; he is transformed all at once by Athene; or he goes through a slow maturation in Pylos and Sparta. This last viewpoint has two possible interpretations: psychological development, or initiation rites.

The first of these is most notably represented by Wilamowitz who categorically rejected that character development (*Charakterentwickelung*) is possible in Greek literature.[13] Despite Wilamowitz's authority and the protection he can provide against the abuses of Neo-Platonic or Jungian interpretations of the Telemachy, few people nowadays can accept that Telemachos does not change at all.

Lydia Allione championed a simple, all-at-once approach to Telemachos's change. "Anzi ci è parso che Telemaco acquistasse consapevolezza della sua maturità con un unico atto di conoscenza."[14] This second approach often emphasizes Athene's power to transform Telemachos with her visit.

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[13]Schon Porphyrios (zu a 284) hat gemeint, daß die Absicht Athenas παίδευσις sei, deshalb schicke sie den Jüngling auf die Reise, und so hat wohl mancher geglaubt, der Dichter wolle uns zeigen, wie Telemachos zum Manne ausreifte. Jetzt traue ich dem Dichter eine solche Tendenz nicht mehr zu. Charakterentwickelung zu verfolgen liegt der hellenischen Poesie, liegt überhaupt den Hellenen fern. Es is auch in den späteren Büchern von einer Veränderung im Wesen Telemachs nichts zu spüren. Die Sache liegt wohl anders" (106).

[14]Or, "La παιδεία di Telemaco (se pur si può chiarmarla così) si compie, necessariamente, in un tempo solo, non trattandosi dell'insegnamento di una serie di norme, ma di un unico atto di riflessione e di conoscenza, il quale viene provocato in lui in un particolare momento dalla divinità. Dopo, non si tratta più se non delle visibili conseguenze di questo atto spirituale"(15). Instead of a παιδεία, Allione thinks that Telemachos's trip has more the character of a πομπή.

Most scholars embrace a third approach, the so-called παίδευσις, which allows for Telemachos to develop gradually.[15] Agathe Thornton for example begins her chapter on Telemachos unequivocally: "It is well known that in the course of the *Odyssey* Telemachus grows from boyhood to manhood"(68). Uvo Hölscher attempts to affect a compromise between the second and the third approach. Though Hölscher believes that "the one change is change enough," he asserts that Telemachos's first step toward maturity must be fleshed out by later experiences. "The entire *Telemachy*," he writes, "is nothing other than the transformation of the folktale formulation, "when our son has grown a beard," into various epic situations" (139). Opinions vary, of course, about the nature and the pace of the developmental change, and its turning point, if any. Howard W. Clarke for example writes: "For Telemachus, this [being accepted into Nestor's household] has been a tonic experience after the desperation of his life at Ithaca, and at last he is ready to break out of the shell of his depression and uncertainty and make his way in broad heroic society" (1969, 32).

Norman Austin deserves credit for perceiving in his 1969 article "Telemachos Polymechanos" that the παίδευσις is the change of an initially "candid and ingenuous young man" (52)[16] into one who knows how to use deception. For him, however, it is

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[15]In German, one can get various aspects of this view from Schwartz (253), von de Mühll (705), Klingner (42), Jaeger (55). In English, one can look at Woodhouse (212-4) or Kitto (135-6). In antiquity the tradition began at least with Porphyry (schol. i 284).

[16]In the later *Archery at the Dark of the Moon* (1975), Austin finds the epithet πεπνυμένος to mean "diplomatic." "In the Homeric world, if a young man is noted as gifted with words, a true diplomat, his elders are intimating that here is a man of promise. The ideal young man is one who speaks well but knows when to defer to his elders; this is the man whom the elders will welcome, in due course, into full participation in the community" (77).

Athene, not Odysseus, who serves as instructor.[17] "Athena proceeds to educate Telemachos into consciousness of himself as the son of Odysseus and of the responsibility which that entails by the Socratic method" (52). And Austin's Telemachos is a quick study indeed. By the end of Book 1 he has shown himself "an apt pupil in Athena's school," already lying like the master.

> More precisely, [Telemachus] tells not one but three lies in quick succession (1.413-419): "My father will never return," he says. "I no longer am swayed by messengers who may chance by or by the pronouncements of seers whom my mother may invite in. The stranger you ask about was Mentes, an old friend of my father's." The last lie is of Athena's making, second-hand material lying conveniently to hand for the occasion. But the first two, which spring from Telemachos's own quick intelligence, show him as much capable of personal initiative in mendacity as in other activities of life. Now, as never before, Telemachos has reason to think his father alive and to respect the words of messengers or seers. It is the suitors who cannot recognize a messenger and mock at prophecies. (54) [18]

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[17]After his return to Ithaca, Odysseus gives Telemachos explicit instructions on at least two occasions. He instructs Telemachos how to go to the palace and pretend that the beggar who is about to show up is no one he knows. In Book 19, he instructs his son to store away whatever weapons are lying about the house ready at hand and "when the suitors miss them and ask you /about them, answer and beguile them with soft words (μαλακοῖς ἐπέεσσι παρφάσθαι), saying..." Odysseus suggests an elaborate lie. Thirty lines later, when Telemachos is amazed at the light cast by Athene who is helping them to stash the weapons and wants to talk about it, Odysseus warns him to be more guarded in his emotions. "Hush, and keep it in your mind, and do not ask questions." The experience is transformative for Telemachos who lies awake that night "pondering how, with the help of Athene, he would murder the suitors." This is the first time he has been confident enough to fully embrace the plan. Still, Telemachos remains without any active affect on the plot until Book 21.

[18]None of the three statements that Austin pronounces as lying are in fact lies. They are rather undisguised statements of what Telemachos believes or has been told by his mother or by Athene. The last statement is perhaps somewhat debatable because line 420 reads: So spoke Telemachos, but in his heart he knew the immortal goddess. ὣς φάτο Τηλέμαχος, φρεσὶ δ' ἀθανάτην θεὸν ἔγνω. But there are four good reasons not to think it a lie. First, Athene, whose disguise is not likely to be revealed against her will, has done her best to hide her divinity. Second, Telemachos might have enjoyed a stronger position if the suitors knew that he had divine help. Third, Telemachos, for his part, never again shows such acuity. It is even

Telemachos's supposed skill at deceit poses no wonder for Austin because he finds that Telemachos has it bred in the bone.

> "It would be a strange thing indeed if, with Autolykus for great-grandfather, Odysseus for father, Penelope for mother and Athena for divine patron, Telemachus should grow to manhood with not a trace of the congenital proclivity for deception, or if we prefer, for artful invention." (46)

For Austin, it is not really a question at all of education, but rather of Athene's reminding Telemachos whose son he is.

The παίδευσις cannot be denied. Telemachos begins the *Odyssey* as an ineffectual, if not wholly passive, character, at a loss as to how to defend himself. Athene points out more than once that there are two ways to attack the suitors: openly or by stealth (ἠὲ δόλῳ ἠ ἀμφαδόν 1.296). For this artless boy, stealth is impossible. Open attack against the overwhelming number of suitors is out of the question. Yet by the end of Book 2, Telemachos learns both aspects of aggression. He will participate fully in a lineage whose members have always excelled in manhood and valor in time past, as Odysseus says (24.508-9). His last lines in the poem greatly please the old Laertes since they show that father and son are on equal enough terms to vie over their courage (24.515). Telemachos becomes a self-assured man, and the House of Odysseus enjoys renewed vigor:

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possible the this line is a later interpolation by someone who assumed as Austin does that Telemachos ought of know and ought to be cagey about his knowledge. As Stephanie West points out rightly "the word is illogical here, since if Telemachos had not identified his divine visitant as Athena, there would be no reason for him to think specifically of a female divinity" (125), which seems to go beyond all likelihood.

ὄψεαι, αἴ κ' ἐθέλῃσθα, πάτερ φίλε, τῷδ' ἐπὶ θυμῷ
οὔ τι καταισχύνοντα τεὸν γένος, ὡς ἀγορεύεις.
You will see, dear father, if you wish, that as far as my will goes,
I will not shame my blood that comes from you, which you speak of. (24.511-12)

When are we to understand the principal turning point in Telemachos' maturation to be? Was it before the *Odyssey* opened, in Telemachos's recognition that the suitors are robbing him? In Book 1 when he asserts his rights? The experience of Athene? the decision to travel? the embracing of courtly life at Sparta? the decision to return home? the recognition of his father? the assertions of hospitality that he gives in the beggar's favor? the near drawing of the bow? In fact, though Telemachos's struggle is central to the story, the plot requires that Telemachos *not* be an active agent until quite late in it.[19] Furthermore, from a narratological point of view, the dramatic pressure placed on Penelope would be prematurely released if Telemachos prematurely matured.

The problem with most interpretations of the παίδευσις is that they tend to rush Telemachos's progress and ignore the significance of what does *not* quickly change. Consequently, they tend to undo the dramatic tension that fuels the Ithaca-centered plot. The ineluctable truth is that, upon his return to Ithaca, Telemachos is, if anything, less prepared and much less willing than he ever has been to fight for his rights.

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[19]It is important to re-emphasize that Telemachos has not been a threat to the suitors because he has failed even to comprehend until shortly before the *Odyssey* opens that his estate was being pillaged. His naivete and extreme ineffectuality was one of his chief means of defense. The Telemachy allows Telemachos to perform some activities without thereby becoming any more of an agent in the plot than, say, Nestor or Menelaos.

For the turning point in Telemachos's maturation, we must seek a confluence of maturity and agency. In order for the plot of the *Odyssey* to sustain its suspense until the proper moment of release, Telemachos's story ought to conform to three guidelines: Telemachos's maturation ought to be a consequence of his reunion with Odysseus; it ought to employ a major deception; it ought to be a moment of crisis that only Telemachos can resolve; and it ought to come late enough not to make Penelope's decision moot. Therefore, I would propose an analysis of the plot that keeps the question of Telemachos's maturity open until the 22nd book. This is not to say that Telemachos shows no progress all before that, but that he truly comes into his own only during the contest of the bow.[20]

The Pace of Maturation

The very morning before Penelope announces the contest which will end in their slaughter, the suitors resolve to assassinate Telemachos immediately. The situation is saved, however, by the fortuitous flight of a bird that persuades the suitors to postpone their plot in order to enjoy the pleasures of the feast that is being laid out for a festival in

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[20]Many authors trace the details of Telemachos's progress. See especially, Delebecque, *Télémaque et la structure de l'Odyssée*, 1958. Also: "The development of Telemachus' manhood can be traced in detail, as he gradually gathers confidence, assumes control of many matters in his own home, joins with Odysseus in planning the destruction of the suitors, takes a worthy part in their slaughter when the time comes, and finally stands with Laertes and Odysseus against the numerous relatives of the slain suitors in Book XXIV" (Combellack 1983, 208). And: "But from Book 17 onwards, the success of Telemachus' and Odysseus' joint deception is absolutely crucial to their eventual triumph and it hangs largely on Telemachus' ability to negotiate a continuing deception" (Jones 1988, 505).

honor of Apollo.[21] By the time that Penelope announces the contest and the twelve axes are arranged in the great hall, the suitors' must be plenty drunk. Drunkenness no doubt underlies their inability to string the bow as well as Antinoös's postponement of the competition until the morrow when he and the suitors will be better prepared for the challenge. The axes are left in place. Then, with "crafty intention" (δολοφρονέων), resourceful Odysseus asks for a try at the bow. Penelope is willing to let him, though she makes it clear that there is no question of his taking the prize, and, to prove it, she retires.[22]

Once Penelope is gone, Eumaios grabs the bow in order to deliver it into Odysseus's hands, but the suitors, en masse, raise a hue and cry against him and threaten his life if he persists. Intimidated, Eumaios puts the bow down, thereby placing Odysseus's entire plan in jeopardy. At this point Telemachos takes the initiative, commanding Eumaios to deliver the bow and adding his own threats of violence. The manner in which he does this convinces the suitors that he is harmless. He tacitly admits that he is weaker than the suitors and submissive to them, and he announces a puerile

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[21]The suitors promptly regret their decision to postpone the plot against Telemachos. As soon as the suitors enter the feast, Telemachos reminds them that the house belongs to Odysseus.

> So he spoke, and all of them bit their lips in amazement
> at Telemachos, and the daring way he had spoken to them.
> Now Antinoös, the son of Eupeithes, said to them:
> "We Achaians must accept the word of Telemachos,
> though it is hard. Now he threatens us very strongly.
> Zeus, son of Kronos, stopped us; otherwise we should before now
> have put him down in his halls, though he is a lucid speaker." (20.268-74)

[22]No one seriously thinks that the Cretan is a threat to the suitors's position. He is only a threat to their good name. What if it got out that this decrepit man bested them with the bow? They might become the butt of all sorts of jokes by the Ithacan populace at large. So Penelope retires with very little, if any, sense of relief since the following day is sure to reveal the groom.

willingness (reminiscent of Irus) to take out his hostility on those even weaker than he. He chides Eumaios:

> μή σε καὶ ὁπλότερός περ ἐὼν ἀγρόνδε δίωμαι,
> βάλλων χερμαδίοισι· βίηφι δὲ φέρτερός εἰμι.
> αἲ γὰρ πάντων τόσσον, ὅσοι κατὰ δώματ' ἔασι,
> μνηστήρων χερσίν τε βίηφί τε φέρτερος εἴην·
> τῷ κε τάχα στυγερῶς τιν' ἐγὼ πέμψαιμι νέεσθαι
> ἡμετέρου ἐξ οἴκου, ἐπεὶ κακὰ μηχανόωνται.
> Take care, or, younger though I am, I might chase you
> out to the fields with a shower of stones. I am stronger than you are.
> I only wish I were as much stronger, and more of a fighter
> with my hands, than all these suitors who are here in my household.
> So I could hatefully speed any man of them on his journey out of our house,
> where they are contriving evils against us 21.370-75.

The suitors get the intended point. Telemachos presents himself as a silly child happy to bully whomever he can in place of the ones he cannot, and he parades his undisguised animosity toward his enemies before their eyes.

> ὣς ἔφαθ', οἳ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἡδὺ γέλασσαν
> μνηστῆρες, καὶ δὴ μέθιεν χαλεποῖο χόλοιο
> Τηλεμάχῳ
> So he spoke, and all the suitors laughed happily at him,
> and all gave over their bitter rage against Telemachos. (21.376-78)

If the suitors had felt a threat of danger when Telemachos departed for Pylos, they now see that Telemachos is still a harmless child or a fool, somewhat like Thersites who also makes an effete display of hostility in the *Iliad*.

The trick works: the bow reaches Odysseus's hands, and Telemachos has become an effective agent in plot. Ironically, it is only in being able to pretend that he is a silly,

ineffectual boy that he becomes a serious, effective man. He shows the audience that he has learned to conceal his intentions by concealing from the suitors the fact that he has learned it. Homer's solution to the problem of Telemachos' maturation is therefore brilliant. In one stroke, without relieving the intense pressure on Penelope to decide how to act, he proves Telemachos to be a man, a worthy son to his wily father, and an active, effective, and decisive agent in the plot.

IV. Penelope as Tragic Heroine

In Book 16, Penelope learns of the second plot against her son's life, or rather, the persistence of the first. It is evident to her that only an immediate remarriage holds any hope of saving him.[1] Later the next day, she will confess her intention to the Cretan.

> νῦν δ' οὔτ' ἐκφυγέειν δύναμαι γάμον οὔτε τιν' ἄλλην
> μῆτιν ἔθ' εὑρίσκω· μάλα δ' ὀτρύνουσι τοκῆες
> γήμασθ', ἀσχαλάᾳ δὲ πάϊς βίοτον κατεδόντων,
> γιγνώσκων· ἤδη γὰρ ἀνὴρ ὅιός τε μάλιστα
> οἴκου κήδεσθαι, τῷ[2] τε Ζεὺς ὄλβον ὀπάζει.
> Now I cannot escape from this marriage; I can no longer
> think of another plan; my parents are urgent with me
> to marry; my son is vexed as they eat away our livelihood;
> he sees it all; he is a grown man now, most able
> to care for the house, and it is to him Zeus grants this [happiness in
> possessions]. (19.157-61)

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[1]In Book 18, she reminds the suitors of her promise to marry when Telemachos has a beard. She also solicits gifts. This solicitation can only mean that she is announcing her intention to remarry. It would certainly be risky, otherwise. The gifts are going to restore to Telemachos some of what he has lost recently through the suitors's new strategy.

[2]Penelope's attitude toward Telemachos is made somewhat obscure by the difficulty of "τῷ " on 161. Although Monro takes the antecedent to be οἴκου, which is how Murray's translates it, I think Russo, and Lattimore are right in assigning it to "ἀνὴρ."

The night between books 16 and 17 must have been a horrible one for Penelope, as she no doubt wrestled with conflicting feelings about remarriage. This is the night that she dreams the dream of the twenty geese that so disturbs her. Later in this chapter, I will look closely at this dream. Right now I will do no more than note that Penelope's distress over this dream seems to be the reason that she asks Eumaios for an interview with the Cretan vagabond, the mysterious guest who "seems like a man who has wandered widely" (17.511).

The threat of beguilement

Eumaios does not think an interview between the two is a wise idea. He protests: "If only these Achaians, my queen, would let you have silence!" (17.513). Eumaios is not usually so protective of the lady of the house. Often, he encourages story tellers because they provide Penelope pleasure as well as the fulfilment of a duty since, according to him, "this is the right way for a wife when her husband is far and perished"(14.129-30). In Book 14, he had invited, even challenged, the beggar to win himself a reward from Penelope with some skillful-- that is, harmless and lying-- tale. Any successful tale would inevitably be a lie since only stories about Odysseus's return afford Penelope pleasure, and everyone, including Penelope, assume that Odysseus is dead. Such a tale would also be harmless because Penelope is generally not the least bit credulous. "Old sir," Eumaios tells the Cretan, "there is none who could come here, bringing a report of him, and persuade his wife and his dear son" (14.122-3). Nor is Eumaios himself very susceptible to these sorts of stories. In Book 14, he alluded to an earlier experience which hardened him sufficiently.

ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ οὐ φίλον ἐστὶ μεταλλῆσαι καὶ ἔρεσθαι,
ἐξ οὗ δή μ' Αἰτωλὸς ἀνὴρ ἐξήπαφε μύθῳ,
....
καὶ σύ, γέρον πολυπενθές, ἐπεί σέ μοι ἤγαγε δαίμων,
μήτε τί μοι ψεύδεσσι χαρίζεο μήτε τι θέλγε·
But I have no liking for this inquiry and asking of questions,
since that time an Aitolian man beguiled me by telling a story.
....
You, too, old man of many sorrows, since the spirit brought you
here to me, do not try to please me nor spell me with lying words. (14.378-79...386-87)

But the Cretan is no ordinary vagabond spinning an ordinary and harmless yarn. Eumaios is alerted to the exceptional power of this storyteller as soon as he gets a sample of his lying tales. In order to dissuade Penelope from meeting the Cretan, he tells her of the profound affect that they had on him.

τρεῖς γὰρ δή μιν νύκτας ἔχον...
ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἀοιδὸν ἀνὴρ ποτιδέρκεται, ὅς τε θεῶν ἐξ
ἀείδῃ δεδαὼς ἔπε' ἱμερόεντα βροτοῖσι,
τοῦ δ' ἄμοτον μεμάασιν ἀκουέμεν, ὁππότ' ἀείδῃ·
ὣς ἐμὲ κεῖνος ἔθελγε παρήμενος ἐν μεγάροισι.
Three nights I had him with me...
But as when a man looks to a singer, who has been given
from the gods the skill with which he sings for delight of mortals,
and they are impassioned and strain to hear it when he sings to them,
so he enchanted be in the halls as he sat beside me. (17.515...518-21)

In brief:

οἷ' ὅ γε μυθεῖται, θέλγοιτό κέ τοι φίλον ἦτορ.
Such stories he tells, he would charm out the dear heart within you. (17.514)

The key words are ἔθελγε and θέλγοιτο, from θέλγειν, to charm, to enchant, to beguile. To be beguiled is to feel pleasure, but it is also to be vulnerable to deception. θέλγε appears in the previously quoted passage (14.387) and is a synonym for ἐξήπαφε in that same passage (14.379). Though ἐξήπαφε usually means cheated or deceived, Lattimore translates "beguiled" because the word is clearly being used as a synonym for θέλγε in 387 which he translates here as "spell me," but other places as "beguile." Homer is presenting three linked ideas: χαρίζεσθαι, θέλγειν, ἐξαπαφίσκειν. In these two passages, "to beguile" is a good translation for the central term since it can mean to cheat, charm, deceive, delude, divert, or even "to pass (time) pleasantly." θέλγειν incorporates both pleasure and deception. It provides the means to play the confidence game, to play on someone's desires in order to get what one wants.

Between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* there is a telling change in the meaning of θέλγειν, nicely revealed by Richmond Lattimore in his use of "maze" to translate one and "beguile" to render the other. In the *Iliad*, immortals maze mortals, usually by employing their superior force. Zeus strikes with his thunderbolt; Hermes mazes with his staff. It is the eyes that are affected.[3] The victim is forcibly blocked, diverted, or pushed aside from the object of desire. The hero strives to kill one man, but another gets in his way, instead. Or the hero finds himself chopping vainly at air. In the *Iliad*, beguilement is a great frustration because the victim's will remains untouched by the charm.

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[3]Vision is the only sense mazed in the *Iliad* with the possible exception of Thetis's encounter with Achilles.

In contrast, beguilement in the *Odyssey* usually comes through the ears by way of words and alters the will itself.[4] Lured into an alternate course, the victim forgets the original goal and is transformed into a collaborator in his or her own destruction. The victim is pulled, not pushed; seduced, not thwarted. The fundamental mechanism is the seductive song of the Sirens.

> Σειρῆνας μὲν πρῶτον ἀφίξεαι, αἵ ῥά τε πάντας
> ἀνθρώπους θέλγουσιν, ὅτις σφέας εἰσαφίκηται.
> ὅς τις ἀιδρείῃ πελάσῃ καὶ φθόγγον ἀκούσῃ
> Σειρήνων, τῷ δ' οὔ τι γυνὴ καὶ νήπια τέκνα
> οἴκαδε νοστήσαντι παρίσταται οὐδὲ γάνυνται,
> ἀλλά τε Σειρῆνες λιγυρῇ θέλγουσιν ἀοιδῇ
> the Sirens, who are enchanters
> of all mankind and whoever comes heir way; and that man
> who unsuspecting approaches them, and listens to the Sirens
> singing, has no prospect of coming home and delighting
> his wife and little children as they stand about him in greeting,
> but the Sirens by the melody of their singing enchant him. (12.39-44)

Odysseus is no match for these weird creatures who destroy without lifting a finger. He begs to be allowed to pursue the overwhelming desire that the Sirens kindle in him. Absent the will of his men rowing onward, wax in their ears, strapping him ever tighter to the mast, Odysseus would have tossed his life away upon those rocks.

In the *Odyssey*, to beguile is also what a bard does, employing words to entice the ears. The audience listens, and "they are impassioned and strain to hear it when he sings to them" (17.520). Everyone enjoys the fantasies that the bard, the skilled vagabond, or the lover have to spin. The first night that Penelope and Odysseus spend together after their

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[4]Hermes and Athene continue to maze by bright light.

long separation, they make love and they tell each other stories. To embrace the well-made tale is a virtuous pleasure for the Homeric man or woman, but an excess of it must also be guarded against. Getting too involved exposes one to being deceived and cheated. One must be, to the proper degree, ἄπιστος. Once again, a comparison with the *Iliad* is quite revealing: there the term ἄπιστος always means "not to be trusted, faithless" while in the *Odyssey*, ἄπιστος means "not believing, incredulous."[5] The vice in the former epic becomes a virtue in the latter.

Despite his vigorous protest against Penelope's meeting the Cretan, twenty-two lines later Eumaios is off to do that very thing. What has happened, I think, is that Penelope has found a way to convince Eumaios in her speech between lines 529 and 550 that she is not as callow as he fears. She does it shrewdly. When Telemachos interrups his mother's bitter complaint against the wasteful habits of the suitors's with a huge sneeze that ever-echoes through the palace, Penelope laughs and pretends to take it as a sign that all the suitors will suddenly and miraculously perish, and everyone else will live happily ever after. She is mocking the superstition and showing herself sufficiently ἄπιστος to cope. Eumaios gets the message.

When Penelope finally meets the Cretan, she is gracious and attentive, though at first the Cretan refuses to talk about himself. At length, however, feigning reluctance, the beggar tells his story which is a tissue of lies, a colossal fabrication, and worthy of the

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[5]ἄπιστος appears six times, three in the *Iliad* and three in the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad* it always means "not to be trusted, faithless." *Iliad* 3.106, 24.63, 24.207; *Odyssey* 14.125, 14.391, 23.72. (Menelaos about Priam, Hera to Apollo, Hecuba to Priam about Achilles; Odysseus to and about Eumaios, Eurykleia to and about Penelope.) See Cunliffe's definitions.

Cretan birth that he claims. Whether or not Callimachus' opinion (Hymn 1.8) that all Cretans are liars was proverbial in Homer's time, the Homeric audience knew that Minos, the great King of Crete, whom the beggar claims as his grandfather, was the constructor of the labyrinth. It was impossible for those who wandered in to the labyrinth find their way out. So, a Cretan is a master deceiver. This Cretan seems especially adept at fashioning his lies to satisfy his audience, adding new twists to his web of deceit better to entangle Penelope. For example, when he tells the tale to Eumaios, he makes himself out to be the bastard son of a rich Cretan; now he is of pure noble stock. It is a good tale.

> ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα.
> He knew how to say many false things that were like true sayings. (19.203)

Moved profoundly, Penelope immerses herself in her memories and her grief. Her cheeks– in one of literature's most beautiful similes– stream with tears like a mountain flooded with snow melt in the spring. Even so, Penelope's response is more or less independent of whether she believes that the Cretan is telling the truth. After she takes "her pleasure of tearful lamentation," she asks the Cretan to verify his story

> νῦν μὲν δή σευ, ξεῖνέ γ', ὀίω πειρήσεσθαι,
> εἰ ἐτεὸν δὴ κεῖθι σὺν ἀντιθέοις ἑτάροισι
> ξείνισας ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμὸν πόσιν, ὡς ἀγορεύεις.
> Now, my friend, I think I will give you a test, to see if
> it is true that there, and with his godlike companions,
> you entertained my husband, as you say you did, in your palace. (19.215-17)

In a very cagey manner, pretending not to know the significance of what he knows, the Cretan describes the clothes that Odysseus's wore at the time. This proves to Penelope that

the Cretan had seen Odysseus twenty years ago, and she says so. However, it does not mean that Odysseus will return home, and she says this, too (19.257-60). He protests, using both truth

> νημερτέως γάρ τοι μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ἐπικεύσω
> ὡς ἤδη Ὀδυσῆος ἐγὼ περὶ νόστου ἄκουσα
> For I say to you without deception, without concealment,
> that I have heard of the present homecoming of Odysseus.

and lies.

> ἀγχοῦ, Θεσπρωτῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐν πίονι δήμῳ,
> ζωοῦ·
> He is near, in the rich land of the men of Thesprotia,
> and alive, and bringing many treasures back to his household. (19.269-72)

He then offers to swear a firm oath that what he has predicted will happen.

> τοῦδ' αὐτοῦ λυκάβαντος ἐλεύσεται ἐνθάδ' Ὀδυσσεύς,
> τοῦ μὲν φθίνοντος μηνός, τοῦ δ' Ἰσταμένοιο.
> Some time within this very year Odysseus will be here,
> either at the waning of the moon or at its onset" (306-7).

But Penelope is no more impressed by this solemn oath than Eumaios was by the one the Cretan gave to him in Book 14. As emotional as she is, she nevertheless remains ἄπιστος.[6] Penelope says categorically:

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[6]C.R. Trahman assumes, as do many other critics, that Penelope is persuaded by the truth of the Cretan's statement, citing the evidence of Aristotle who pointed to the Bath Scene of the *Odyssey* as evidence of Homer's (commendable) reliance on logical fallacy. (This one being an affirmation of the consequence.) "Aristotle," he writes, "in the passage of the *Poetics*

> ἀλλά μοι ὧδ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ὀίεται, ὡς ἔσεταί περ·
> οὔτ' Ὀδυσεὺς ἔτι οἶκον ἐλεύσεται,
> But here is the way I think in my mind, and the way it will happen.
> Odysseus will never come home again. (19.312-13)

At this point the Cretan goes off to have his feet washed and his scar recognized by Eurykleia. Penelope sits wordlessly apart by the fire, absorbed in her own thoughts. When Odysseus finally returns to the fire, it is she who begins the conversation.

> ξεῖνε, τὸ μέν ς' ἔτι τυτθὸν ἐγὼν εἰρήσομαι αὐτή·
> Friend, I will stay here and talk to you, just for a little. (19.509)

R. D. Dawe translates this line as : "Stranger, there is still one little thing I will myself ask you" and then adds a very catty commentary:

> Words which would sound more natural if we were in a continuously flowing conversation. But in our texts Penelope's last words were some one hundred and fifty lines ago, and her little question now is itself to be delayed by some adventitious moralizing and mythology. When we finally hear it (535), we find it to be one of extraordinary silliness." (715)[7]

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mentioned above (1460a), points to the fallacy which Penelope here commits: if the old man's story were true, he would know these details; but he does know them; therefore his story is true" (Trahman 1952, 42). Whether Aristotle was referring to this piece of reasoning is not certain. Porphyry, for example, took Aristotle to be referring to Eurykleia's recognition of Odysseus through the scar.

[7]Other translators have been less scornful. Butler: Stranger, I should like to speak with you briefly about another matter. Murray: Stranger, this little thing further will I ask you myself." Bates: it is a small thing, stranger, this that I have yet to ask. Rouse: My guest, she said, there is another thing I will ask you on my own account. Rieu: Sir, she said, I shall venture to detain you yet a while and put another matter to you...Lattimore: Friend, I will stay here and talk to you, just for a little. Fitzgerald: Friend, allow me one brief question more. Dawe: Stranger, there is still one little thing I will ask you Fagels: My friend, I have only one more question for you, something slight.

Dawe is right in one respect, though: the words do sound like a continuation, which, from Penelope's point of view, they undoubtedly are. Emerging from her brown study, Penelope decides to reveal in full detail what is weighing on her mind, and it is strikingly consistent with her last thoughts before the Cretan went to get washed. Therefore, what R.D. Dawe dismisses with a decided upturn of his nose as a petty addition to the conversation, I take to be the heart of the poem's plot and message.

The Struggle Turns Inward

Penelope now takes the Cretan completely into her confidence, revealing the extremity of the mental pain which she suffers. There are two distinct kinds of pain. One dominates the day; the other haunts the night.

By day, she suffers grief over thoughts of her husband. This is a manageable sorrow, she says, (κηδόμενον, 511) that allows her enough peace of mind to tend to her household duties and supervise her maids. There is even a certain joy in her grief (τέρπομ' ὀδυρομένη), as if it rewarded her with some hidden, but vital energy. This daytime sorrow is of a kind with the woes of other people, and one can usually find some escape from it in the sweet rest (ἡδέος ὥρη) of delicious sleep (ὕπνος γλυκερός).

If Penelope can find no such rest, it is because at night she is tortured by an altogether different and uncompromising sort of pain, a measureless anguish (πένθος ἀμέτρητον) without the least hint of joy.

ὀξεῖαι μελεδῶνες ὀδυρομένην ἐρέθουσιν [8]
Sharp anxieties...torment my sorrowing self. (19.517)

These anxieties emerge from a bitter dilemma which she has not been able to resolve.

ὣς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔδνα.
so my mind is divided and starts one way, then another. (19.524)

She describes with great precision both horns of the dilemma. As she explains it in the next verses, her choice is between staying at home and leaving.

ἠὲ μένω παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσω,
κτῆσιν ἐμήν, δμῳάς τε καὶ ὑψερεφὲς μέγα δῶμα,
εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δήμοιό τε φῆμιν,
ἢ ἤδη ἅμ' ἕπωμαι Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος
μνᾶται ἐνὶ μεγάροισι, πορὼν ἀπερείσια ἕδνα.
Shall I stay here by my son and keep all in order,
my property, my serving maids, and my great high-roofed house,
keep faith with my husband's bed and regard the voice of the people,
or go away at last with the best of all those Achaians
who court me here in the palace with endless gifts to win me? (19.525-29)

Penelope knows, as it should be clear to us now, that if she wants to save her son and preserve the House of Odysseus, her best course of action is to remarry and leave. But the other course tempts her and is the source of the nighttime anguish that implies a connection between her own story and the cause of the nightingale's pain.

ὡς δ' ὅτε Πανδαρέου κούρη, χλωρηΐς ἀηδών,
καλὸν ἀείδῃσιν ἔαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο,

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[8]As most readers of the Greek have surely noted, this is an extraordinary line. "It is a very weighty line," writes Rutherford, "four long words each with some reference to her pain and grief" (Rutherford 192).

δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκινοῖσιν,
ἥ τε θαμὰ τρωπῶσα χέει πολυηχέα φωνήν,
παῖδ' ὀλοφυρομένη Ἴτυλον φίλον, ὃν ποτε χαλκῷ
κτεῖνε δι' ἀφραδίας, κοῦρον Ζήθοιο ἄνακτος,
ὣς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔδνα.
As when Pandareos' daughter, the greenwood nightingale,
perching in the deep of the forest foliage sings out
her lovely song, when springtime has just begun; she, varying
the manifold strains of her voice, pours out the melody, mourning
Itylos, son of the lord Zethos, her own beloved
child, whom she once killed with the bronze when the madness was on her:
so my mind is divided and starts one way, then another. (19.518-24)

Unlike Itylos, Telemachos is not yet dead. Still, Penelope is feeling a terrible apprehension in this proleptic vision of shame. It would be helpful for understanding Penelope's psychology to be able to discern whether the comparison with Pandareos's daughter implies any malice against Telemachos. From Homer's brief account alone, it is not clear whether the crime against Itylos was committed willingly or not. But let us spend a moment on this question.

The key phrase is "δι' ἀφραδίας" (523)[9] which may both indicate intentionality or be proof against it. It might be taken either way since there are precedents for both. In Book 14, for instance, the phrase is used for the soldier at Troy who "carelessly" has neglected to take his cloak along on an all night watch. This could hardly be intentional. In book17, it is used to describe Melanthios's intentional attempt to kick Odysseus out of the road. Trying to decide the issue, scholars have looked to two later versions of the story– one found in the scholia and one found among the Attic authors– which are unfortunately

[9]Butler: "by mishap;" Murray: "unwittingly;" Bates: "unknowing;" Rouse: "and knew it not;" Rieu: "in her careless folly;" Lattimore: "when the madness was on her;" Fitzgerald: "in madness;" Dawe: "unwittingly;" Fagels: "in innocence."

quite different from each other.[10] In the scholia, the nightingale is named Aëdon. Because she envies Niobe's large family, Aëdon attempts to kill Niobe's eldest son but, confused by the darkness of the night, mistakenly kills her own son instead. The Attic version tells the tale of Procne, a woman enraged at her husband for his adultery. In order to exact revenge, Procne deliberately kills their son and serves him to her husband for dinner. W. W. Merry prefers the former version in his commentary and so would render the crucial δι' ἀφραδίας as "unwittingly," while Joseph Russo favors "in her senseless folly" for the same adverbial phrase because he accepts the latter interpretation.[11] I prefer to emphasize what the two versions have in common, namely that the grievous act resulted from a mother's passion for something other than her son. Aëdon lets her envy control her, Procne, her jealousy. So, what is the threat to Telemachos? What is tempting Penelope to remain at home?

In the first place, remarriage means a break with all she knows and loves. Penelope loves the house where she has spent her best years, and she loves Odysseus. In a new home she might reasonably be expected to curb her grief over the loss of her old life. More important, I think, is that remarriage would also mean the loss of her reputation and

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[10]The version offered in the scholia may be the oldest, but may also be a mere consequence of a misunderstanding of the word for nightingale in the text; the later version is from the Attic authors, who felt no great compulsion to retell stories just as they found them. And since the spellings of the two principal names differ from Homer's (Pandion for Pandareos and Itys for Itylos), we may, as Joseph Russo points out, be dealing with accounts as different from each other as Sophocles's account of Oedipus is from Homer's.

[11]Russo defends the Procne story by arguing that Penelope implies that the "nightingale killed her own son not by mistake" (100) when she admits that her own mind is divided between two courses of action. But Penelope is not trying to decide whether to kill her son for revenge. The Aëdon story, on the other hand, is too simple.

personal glory, her κλέος which depends upon what the majority of Ithacans say about her. The Ithacans seem to hold the cynical view that most women in Penelope's situation would act selfishly, choosing the best of the Achaians and going away with him to enjoy the comfort and wealth that he could provide. Like the great misogynist Agamemnon, they seem to assume that sexual fidelity among women is a rare virtue indeed. Penelope, however, has held their respect until now because she has not remarried. Remarriage would compromise her κλέος. I will return to this theme at the end of the chapter.

The Dream of the Twenty Geese

Penelope asks the Cretan to listen to a dream that she has had the previous night and that disturbed her greatly. She wants his interpretation of what it means.

> ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον.
> But come, listen to a dream of mine and interpret it for me. (19.535)

A proper interpretation, she suspects, holds the key to healing the split in her mind. The relevant lines, in English, are:

> I have twenty geese here about the house, and they feed on
> grains of wheat from the water trough. I love to watch them.
> But a great eagle with crooked beak came down from the mountain,
> and broke the necks of them all and killed them. So the whole twenty
> lay dead about the house, but he soared high in the bright air.
> Then I began to weep– that was in my dream– and cried out
> aloud, and around me gathered the fair-haired Achaian women
> as I cried out sorrowing for my geese killed by the eagle.
> But he came back again and perched on the jut of the gabled
> roof. He now had a human voice and spoke aloud to me:
> "Do not fear, O daughter of far-famed Ikarios.
> This is no dream, but a blessing real as day. You will see it

> done. The geese are the suitors, and I, the eagle, have been
> a bird of portent, but now I am your own husband, come home,
> and I shall inflict shameless destruction on all the suitors."
> So he spoke; and then the honey-sweet sleep released me,
> and I looked about and saw the geese in my palace, feeding
> on their grains of wheat from the water trough, just as they had been. (19.536-53)

A Little Dream Theory

Dreams can be differentiated on the basis of whether their origin is outside or inside the mind. Generally, this means whether the dream is a vision of reality sent by a god or an attempt by the dreaming mind to assert the reality of a mere wish. Sigmund Freud, who reduces all dreams to intra-psychic wish fulfillment, insisted that antiquity reduced them all to the extra-psychic. The pre-scientific view of dreams," he writes in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, "adopted by the peoples of antiquity was certainly in complete harmony with their view of the universe in general, which led them to project into the external world as though they were realities things which in fact enjoyed reality only within their own minds" (38). Despite the commemorative marble plaque that Freud hoped might one day be placed over the house at Bellevue, the theory of dream subjectivity did not originate with him at the dawn of the 20th Century CE. Antiquity knew both ideas. E. R. Dodds points out that the Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen* "anticipates Freud's principle that the dream is always egocentric" (119) and thinks that as early as the 3rd Century BCE, Herophilus had already distinguished between god sent and wish-fulfilment dreams (107).

Although Freud's view of ancient dream theory is simplistic, there is some credibility to that view when applied to literature. Dreams are often used as a simplifying devise. A god shines a light in an otherwise dark tunnel. Penelope's first dream is of this

sort. Athene sends Iphthmine with a true vision. The idea is not so unlike some contemporary, notably Jungian, theory. It does not really make much difference whether it is sent by god or by the unconscious. The critic assumes that the dream is better informed about its own content than is the dreamer. Most of the time in Homer a dream is taken at face value and trusted. Even if the divine sender is being deceitful, the dreamer trusts its superior wisdom. For instance, since Agamemnon's dream in Book 2 of the *Iliad* strikes Nestor as unreal and contrary to the facts of waking life, he concludes that the facts of waking life have to be altered in light of this greater truth.[12] On the other hand, the dream can serve as a literary trope to convey the unreal, the ambiguous, or the overly complex. Thus, in the *Odyssey*, Homer separates ὄναρ and ὕπαρ mainly to disparage the reliability of dreams. To say that it was not just a dream but a waking vision is to betray distrust of dreams.

Among Homeric dreams, the dream of the twenty geese is unique in several ways. "Of several dreams in Homer, only this one," writes Joseph Russo, "resembles a true dream: its message is hidden in a symbolic code" (102). E.R. Dodds concurs: "This is the only dream in Homer which is interpreted symbolically" (106). Furthermore, it is the only one whose dreamer is altogether puzzled by the meaning. It is the only one that interprets itself, and it is the only one whose interpretation is ultimately rejected by the dreamer.

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[12]In an interesting irony, the authority of the dream Nestor prevails over that of the real Nestor. This might be attributed to Zeus's cunning since Agamemnon is convinced by the presence of Nestor in the dream and Nestor is persuaded because it is Agamemnon who dreamed it.

The Core dream

One way to approach the analysis of the dream of twenty geese is to see it as a core dream that gets three distinct interpretations in the *Odyssey*: the dream interprets itself; the Cretan evaluates the dream; Penelope makes her final judgment about its meaning.

The symbolic meaning of the dream centers around the twenty geese that begin and end the dream. These geese also link the dream to the waking world in a kind of imitation of the meaning of the dream itself. Exactly at which point in the first two lines the dream begins, it is hard to tell. The last three lines as well tend to blur the boundary between dream and waking reality. Her search for them after the dream assures us that these are actually household pets that are close at hand.

> χῆνές μοι κατὰ οἶκον ἐείκοσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν
> ἐξ ὕδατος, καί τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα·
> ....
> ὣς ἔφατ', αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ μελιηδὴς ὕπνος ἀνῆκε·
> παπτήνασα δὲ χῆνας ἐνὶ μεγάροις ενόησα
> πυρὸν ἐρεπτομένους παρὰ πύελον, ἦχι πάρος περ.
> I have twenty geese here about the house, and they feed on
> grains of wheat from the water trough. I love to watch them.
> ....
> So he spoke; and then the honey-sweet sleep released me,
> and I looked about and saw the geese in my palace, feeding
> on their grains of wheat from the water trough, just as they had been. (19.536-37...51-53)

Out of the sky swoops an eagle, slaughtering all twenty geese and swerving back to its mountain. Penelope is left in bitter sorrow at their loss.

> ἐλθὼν δ' ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχείλης
> πᾶσι κατ' αὐχένας ἧξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ' ἐκέχυντο

ἀθρόοι ἐν μεγάροις, ὁ δ' ἐς αἰθέρα δῖαν ἀέρθη.
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαῖον καὶ ἐκώκυον ἔν περ ὀνείρῳ,
ἀμφὶ δέ μ' ἠγερέθοντο ἐυπλοκαμῖδες Αχαιαί,
οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρομένην ὅ μοι αἰετὸς ἔκτανε χῆνας.
But a great eagle with crooked beak came down from the mountain,
and broke the necks of them all and killed them. So the whole twenty
lay dead about the house, but he soared high in the bright air.
Then I began to weep– that was in my dream– and cried out
aloud, and around me gathered the fair-haired Achaian women
as I cried out sorrowing for my geese killed by the eagle. (19.538-43)

The focus is on the intensity of the sorrow: οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρομένην: which she feels ἔν περ ὀνείρῳ. Why should Penelope have to remind her listener that she is describing a dream? And how are we to take the "περ"? The particle can read as either an intensifier or a sign of opposition, in English, either "even" or "even though." So, Penelope could be using it to distance herself from the actual importance of the emotion, as in Fagel's translation, ("only a dream, of course") or as a way of revealing its exceptional intensity, as is hinted at, perhaps in Rieu's translation ("though it was only a dream).[13] Since there can be little doubt, I think, that Penelope would feel sorrow in waking life if the pets that she loves were slaughtered, the particle only makes sense if the assumption is rather that she might not be as prone to weep over them in a dream as she would in waking life.[14] The περ then emphasizes her extreme attachment to the geese and her awareness that dreams are not

[13]Most translators have tried for neutrality. Butler: "in my dream;" Murray: "in a dream though it was;" Rouse: "I mean in my dream;" Lattimore: "that was in my dream;" Fitzgerald: "all this in dream."

[14]We all know that it is not unusual for one to coolly witness in a dream what would be horrible in real life. Freud would insist that nothing in a dream is what it seems, except the affect, which always is.

reality, but may well feel like it. Thus, the core of the dream seems to be the product of a high anxiety whose waking source is whatever the geese symbolize.

The eagle interprets

The eagle of the dream returns and offers a symbolic interpretation of the geese.

> ἆψ δ' ἐλθὼν κατ' ἄρ' ἕζετ' ἐπὶ προὔχοντι μελάθρῳ,
> φωνῇ δὲ βροτέῃ κατερήτυε φώνησέν τε·
> "θάρσει, Ἰκαρίου κούρη τηλεκλειτοῖο·
> οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἐσθλόν, ὅ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται.
> χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δέ τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις
> ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα,
> ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω.
> But he came back again and perched on the jut of the gabled
> roof. He now had a human voice and spoke aloud to me:
> "Do not fear, O daughter of far-famed Ikarios.
> This is no dream, but a blessing real as day. You will see it
> done. The geese are the suitors, and I, the eagle, have been
> a bird of portent, but now I am your own husband, come home,
> and I shall inflict shameless destruction on all the suitors. (19.544-50)

The dream seems to pull out all the stops in endorsing its own interpretation. Returning with a compassionate human voice and a comforting message, the eagle insists that this is no dream (ὄναρ) but a "blessing real as day," an auspicious and expected waking reality (ὕπαρ). Essentially, his is a claim to objective truth. In other words, the eagle wants to assure Penelope that what he is about to say has more authority than a mere dream. ὕπαρ is more dependable than ὄναρ. As if this were not enough, he also claims authoritative truth: he is no less a reliable source than Odysseus himself, Penelope's own dear husband. We can compare this claim once again to Agamemnon's dream in *Iliad* 2

where Zeus's has employed the strategy of making the dream more authoritative by casting the dream messenger in the form of the wise and πεπνυμένος Nestor.

The eagle's message is that the dream is not what it seems. Whatever Penelope may think, the dream is not actually a sad one since it is not her pet geese that are slaughtered at all, but only the suitors, whom the geese merely symbolize. That her dream tears are dried seems to indicate that Penelope accepts the eagle's interpretation. Most critics accept it at face value. Rutherford comments: "This dream explains itself: the geese are the suitors, the eagle Odysseus" (194). The dream is taken then as a kind of prophesy. In fact Lattimore amplifies his translation with that notion by rendering what in Greek is literally "but I who was formerly the eagle bird" with "and I, the eagle, have been a bird of portent, [but now I am your husband]" (19.548-9). A common assumption is that Homer is doing more than merely teasing his audience, but is trying once again to tip Penelope off to what he is planning for Odysseus.

Accepting the reliability of the eagle's interpretation has inevitably led to psychoanalytic investigation of Penelope's unconscious thoughts. George Devereux, for instance, who rather petulantly dismisses "the psychological scotomata of philologists to complex psychological overtones in great literary works," applies a psychoanalytic method to prove that "Penelope cried over her geese for the simple reason that unconsciously she enjoyed being courted..." (Devereux 1957, 382). Devereux's conclusion is picked up and amplified five years later by Anne Rankin who believes that "in the dream, and this is the crux of the matter, these emotions are for the suitors!" (Rankin 620). (The exclamation point seems appropriate). The Devereux-Rankin analysis is like walking on stilts: it afford a

way of looking down on things, but it is awkward and precarious. For it to work, Penelope would have to have identified the geese with the suitors beforehand, at least in her unconscious mind. Rankin insists that Penelope has: "As the elucidation of the symbolism of the eagle and the geese takes place within the dream, we can assume Penelope's awareness from its beginning of the equation of geese with suitors and eagle with Odysseus" (Rankin 619-20). Rankin is here assuming that the eagle's interpretation is objectively correct and definitive. But the eagle and his interpretation are *part of the dream.* As such they are part of its strategy. Of course, the analysis of any dream can become as endless and circular as a Mobiüs strip, like the well-known conundrum of the man who dreams that he is a butterfly but can not be sure that he is not really a butterfly dreaming that he is a man. But then, why is the dreaming Penelope comforted by the eagle's insistence that it will soon slaughter the objects of her desire?

The eagle's identification of geese with the suitors seems quite far-fetched, indeed. All that we know about the geese in the dream is that they are twenty, eat wheat, and are thoroughly domesticated. In contrast, the 106 suitors are thoroughly unruly carnivores. These beloved pet geese are much more likely to symbolize the happiness that Penelope finds in the home of her married life. It also seems to me that the most powerful association to the number twenty in the *Odyssey* is first and foremost the number of years that Odysseus has been gone, the years that the eagles of Atreus have snatched away. "In the twentieth year" is a frequent refrain. The waking anxiety then that motivates the dream may be over having to leave this beloved home for that of a new husband's. Leaving the house is effectively negating all that she has built in twenty years.

If Penelope abandons the house and her present marriage, she abandons any hope of a reunion. Moreover, to remarry and depart obliterates in a single act twenty years of hard-won κλέος. It may be her duty to go away, but Penelope will depart with nothing that she loves.

The Cretan interprets

Penelope now turns to the Cretan for an opinion.

> ὦ γύναι, οὔ πως ἔστιν ὑποκρίνασθαι ὄνειρον
> ἄλλῃ ἀποκλίναντ', ἐπεὶ ἦ ῥά τοι αὐτὸς Ὀδυσσεὺς
> πέφραδ' ὅπως τελέει· μνηστῆρσι δὲ φαίνετ' ὄλεθρος
> πᾶσι μάλ', οὐδέ κέ τις θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξει.
> Lady, it is impossible to read this dream and avoid it
> by turning another way, since Odysseus himself has told you
> its meaning, how it will end. The suitors' doom is evident
> for one and all. Not one will avoid his death and destruction. (19.555-58)

In an uncharacteristic (and even comic) twist, the wily and compulsive bender of reality finds no urge to alter or embellish this story. Voicing the probable sympathies of the epic audience, the Cretan urges Penelope to relax and wait, to be a little less ἄπιστος.

Penelope's dream should remind the reader of the bird omen in Book 15 since it is similar in structure and interpretation. Telemachos is about to leave Sparta when

> ὣς ἄρα οἱ εἰπόντι ἐπέπτατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις,
> αἰετὸς ἀργὴν χῆνα φέρων ὀνύχεσσι πέλωρον,
> ἥμερον ἐξ αὐλῆς·
> As he spoke a bird flew by on the right, an eagle,
> carrying in his talons a great white goose he had caught
> tame from the yard. (15.160-162)

Helen is the only one who feels confident of its meaning. She interprets:

> ὣς Ὀδυσεὺς κακὰ πολλὰ παθὼν καὶ πόλλ' ἐπαληθεὶς
> οἴκαδε νοστήσει καὶ τίσεται· ἠὲ καὶ ἤδη
> οἶκοι, ἀτὰρ μνηστῆρσι κακὸν πάντεσσι φυτεύει.
> so Odysseus, after wandering long and suffering
> much, will come home and take revenge; or he is already
> home, and making a plan of evil for all of the suitors. (15.176-78)

At first blush the parallel seems to hint almost at a standard code of interpretation aimed at insuring that we can embrace the Cretan's endorsement of the dream's self-interpretation. Nevertheless, once we take into account who it is that interprets the omen, we are forced to a very different conclusion. Helen proves unreliable in these matters. "Hear me!" she says,

> αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μαντεύσομαι, ὡς ἐνὶ θυμῷ
> ἀθάνατοι βάλλουσι καὶ ὡς τελέεσθαι ὀίω.
> I shall be your prophet, the way the immortals
> put it into my heart, and I think it will be accomplished. (15.172-73)

What immortal could that be? Athene has just visited Telemachos in order to warn him and urge him on, yet did not see fit to breathe a word about Odysseus. So there is no point to *her* inspiring the omen. And what other god would have intervened at this point?

Because she knows how to beguile, Helen's intervention in anything is dangerous. For instance, in Troy's last hours, she nearly wrecked the scheme of the wooden horse by counterfeiting the voices of the wives of all the various men who were hidden in it; if it had not been for Odysseus' discipline and strong hands (as Menelaos reveals in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*), the Greeks would have been discovered and slaughtered. How did Helen

manage to delude all these men? More to the point, how could these hardened warriors– though separated from their families by a wide sea and from death by a few thin boards– have deluded themselves into believing their wives were within easy reach, except through a deep wish to believe and Helen's extraordinary talent for accommodating and exploiting wishes? Helen is the master broker of escapism-- of the pleasant, the unreal, the merely wishful. It is she who administers the dreamy drug.[15]

> αὐτίκ' ἄρ' εἰς οἶνον βάλε φάρμακον, ἔνθεν ἔπινον,
> νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἁπάντων.
> ὃς τὸ καταβρόξειεν, ἐπὴν κρητῆρι μιγείη,
> οὔ κεν ἐφημέριός γε βάλοι κατὰ δάκρυ παρειῶν,
> οὐδ' εἰ οἱ κατατεθναίη μήτηρ τε πατήρ τε,
> οὐδ' εἰ οἱ προπάροιθεν ἀδελφεὸν ἢ φίλον υἱὸν
> χαλκῷ δηιόῳεν, ὁ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὁρῷτο.
> Into the wine of which they were drinking she cast a medicine
> of heartease, free of gall, to make one forget all sorrows,
> and whoever had drunk it down once it had been mixed in the wine bowl,
> for the day that he drank it would have no tear roll down his face,
> not if his mother died and his father died, not if men
> murdered a brother or a beloved son in his presence
> with the bronze, and he his own eyes saw it. (4.220-26)

Helen's drug could make even the daughter of Pandareos cheerful. Penelope knows from Eumaios that the vagabond trucks in deceit, and she has more or less promised him that she won't believe a word. Even so, she oddly tells Eumaios that she will reward the vagabond with beautiful clothing

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[15]"Helen's drug introduces the danger that he will lose sight of the urgency of his duty to home and family. . . When the thought crosses Telemachus' mind a little later that his father must be dead (4.292-93) his only reaction is to seek the joyful oblivion of sleep" (Apthorp 295).

αἴ κ' αὐτὸν γνώω νημερτέα πάντ' ἐνέποντα.
if I learn that everything he says is truthfully spoken. (17.550)

More oddly yet, after she gives him her test, Penelope decides to disclose her deepest secrets to the Cretan, and one cannot shake the feeling that she does so because she comes to trust the man to speak truthfully.

The word that Lattimore translates as "truthfully" is νημερτέα. What sort of truth does this word imply? Five of the 27 times it is used in the *Odyssey*, it is the epithet of Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea. The episode with Proteus, which involves the problem of how to wrestle and pin down the ever changing form in order to question it, is a sort of *mise en abyme* of the *Odyssey*.[16] Eidothea, Proteus's daughter gives Menelaos instructions on how to handle her father. Changing from shape to slippery shape, the old man will make capture difficult but once pinned down, he will remain docile, offering his knowledge in presumably good will. His knowledge, though, is not prophetic.[17] It is knowledge of the past (495-537), the present happening in other places (555-60), the possible (547) or the

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[16]"[Proteus] epitomizes the spirit of the whole work. ....The *Odyssey* is assuredly one of the works in which the problem of identity is most acutely and profoundly perceived. A doubt is often voiced by its characters: And what if I am not what I am? .... The spirit of Proteus runs through the entire poem" (Ferucci 34, 37).

[17]It is assumed that he is a prophet, though Homer never says so. Lattimore's marginal caption for this section reads: "Capture of the prophetic Old Man of the Sea," and West cites speculation that the name derives from a connection to prophesy. "His name has been connected with his gift of prophecy, *fatidicus*, cf. πρωτόν, πέπρωται (see further Schulze, *Quaestiones*, 22 note 3), though the poets audience would probably have derived it from πρῶτος" (West 217). See P. Plass for a wishful comparison to Tiresias's predictions in Book 11 (104).

conditional (475-80). His only prediction of the future is the highly problematic one that Menelaos will never die but live a blissful eternal life romping through the Elysian Fields. [18]

I believe that Penelope decides to solicit the Cretan's advice because he has somehow proved that he intends to put her interests above his. One of the ways he does this is to refuse the gifts that she offers. Apparently, he tells his story not for the reward but for Penelope's pleasure alone.

> ὦ γύναι αἰδοίη Λαερτιάδεω Ὀδυσῆος,
> ἦτοι ἐμοὶ χλαῖναι καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα
> ἤχθεθ', ὅτε πρῶτον Κρήτης ὄρεα νιφόεντα
> νοσφισάμην ἐπὶ νηὸς ἰὼν δολιχηρέτμοιο,
> κείω δ' ὡς τὸ πάρος περ ἀύπνους νύκτας ἴαυον·
> πολλὰς γὰρ δὴ νύκτας ἀεικελίῳ ἐνὶ κοίτῃ
> ἄεσα καί τ' ἀνέμεινα ἐύθρονον Ἠῶ δῖαν.
> οὐδέ τί μοι ποδάνιπτρα ποδῶν ἐπιήρανα θυμῷ
> γίγνεται·
> O respected wife of Odysseus, son of Laertes,
> coverlets and shining rugs have been hateful to me
> ever since that time when I left the snowy mountains
> of Crete behind me, and went away on my long-oared vessel.
> I will lie now as I have lain before through the sleepless
> nights; for many have been the nights when on an unpleasant
> couch I lay and awaited the throned Dawn in her spendor.
> Nor is there any desire in my heart for foot basins...(19.337-44)

Penelope makes her evaluation of the Cretan at the end of their first fireside conversation. She concludes:

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[18]The reference to the Elysian Fields is a *hapax legomenon* in Homer and does not appear again in Greek until Apollonius Rhodius (4.811) five hundred years later, who was consciously mimicking Homer. Although, the Elysian Fields will appear in any encyclopedia of religion as a fact of Greek religion, it is just as likely here that Proteus was having one over on the gullible Menelaos.

ξεῖνε φίλ'· οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἀνὴρ πεπνυμένος ὧδε
ξείνων τηλεδαπῶν φιλίων ἐμὸν ἵκετο δῶμα,
ὡς σὺ μάλ' εὐφραδέως πεπνυμένα πάντ' ἀγορεύεις·
Dear friend, never before has there been any man so thoughtful,
among those friends from far places who have come to my palace
as guests, so thoughtful and so well-considered is everything you say.[19] (19.350-52)

What is especially interesting about this passage is the use of πεπνυμένος (and πεπνυμένα, the plural neuter noun having in effect the same force as the adjective). The real Odysseus is distinctly *not* πεπνυμένος, that is, *not* artless. Alkinoös, the king of Phaiakia, is the only other character to apply the word to Odysseus and he does this before he knows who he is talking to. In both cases (πεπνυμένος at 8.388 and πεπνυμένα at 586), the word is used as an explanation of why friendly, even brotherly trust ought to be extended toward the stranger. Alkinoös comes to trust the stranger who has mysteriously appeared at his court when he witnesses the stranger's ability to feel deeply for others. The story that the Phaiakian bard tells is of the destruction of Troy, and the stranger is overcome with emotion

ταῦτ' ἄρ' ἀοιδὸς ἄειδε περικλυτός· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
τήκετο, δάκρυ δ' ἔδευεν ὑπὸ βλεφάροισι παρειάς.
ὡς δὲ γυνὴ κλαίῃσι φίλον πόσιν ἀμφιπεσοῦσα
So the famous singer sang his tale, but Odysseus
melted, and from under his eyes the tears ran down, drenching.
as a woman weeps, lying over the body of her dear husband. (8.521-23)

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[19]εὐφραδέως means "in clear or well-chosen terms" (Cunliffe). Of course as a *hapax legomenon* in Homer and an extremely rare word in subsequent literature, this passage defines its use, not the other way around, and cannot tell us more much more than we already know.

The message is that Odysseus is not weeping for himself, but for the lost ones of both sides. Finding that the stranger's feelings are generous, Alkinoös becomes confident that he will react toward the Phaiakians as a sympathetic friend. Then, in the last words of Book 8, which are the last words before Odysseus reveals his identity, Alkinoös defines friendship.

> ἤ τίς που καὶ ἑταῖρος ἀνὴρ κεχαρισμένα εἰδώς,
> ἐσθλός; ἐπεὶ οὐ μέν τι κασιγνήτοιο χερείων
> γίγνεται, ὅς κεν ἑταῖρος ἐὼν πεπνυμένα εἰδῇ."
> Or could it then have been some companion, a brave man knowing
> thoughts gracious toward you, since one who is your companion, and has
> thoughts
> honorable toward you, is of no less degree than a brother? (8.584-86)

It is not for his knowledge then, but for his empathy and good will that Penelope turns to the Cretan. Once she has pinned him down, she can trust him to tell her nothing but pleasing things that he believes will be of help. One might say that she trusts the artlessness of his art.

The Cretan's interpretation of the dream should be welcome news indeed to Penelope. "My son and I would be glad if he did so" (19.569). Rejecting the Cretan's interpretation will invite great pain for her: .

> ..νοσφισσαμένη τόδε δῶμα
> κουρίδιον, μάλα καλόν, ἐνίπλειον βιότοιο·
> τοῦ ποτὲ μεμνήσεσθαι ὀΐομαι ἔν περ ὀνείρῳ."
> ...forsaking this house
> where I was a bride, a lovely place and full of good living.
> I think that even my dreams I shall never forget it" (19.579-81).

Still, Penelope cannot credit the interpretation, even though she has expressly solicited his interpretation. Are there any valid grounds for rejection?

Penelope interprets

Penelope's own interpretation of the dream of the geese begins at line 560. She notes that in themselves "dreams are baffling and unclear of meaning (ὄνειροι ἀμήχανοι ἀκριτόμυθοι γίγνοντ')." Penelope does not deny that dreams cannot be true but admits that they are sometimes true and sometimes false, depending.

> δοιαὶ γάρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὀνείρων·
> αἱ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχαται, αἱ δ' ἐλέφαντι·
> τῶν οἳ μέν κ' ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
> οἵ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε' ἀκράαντα φέροντες·
> οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
> οἵ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδηται.
> There are two gates through which the insubstantial dreams issue.
> One pair of gates is made of horn, and one of ivory.
> Those of the dreams which issue through the gate of sawn ivory,
> these are deceptive dreams, their message is never accomplished.
> But those that come into the open through the gates of the polished
> horn accomplish the truth for any mortal who see them. (19.562-67)

This altogether reasonable theory runs immediately into an epistemological wall. No dreamer knows through which gate any dream comes unless the dream makes it known. At the same time, no dream can communicate reliable information about what gate it has come through unless the dreamer knows from an independent source the gate through

which it has in fact emerged.[20] Treated as a purely linguistic structure, the dream is ultimately inscrutable. Evaluation of the dream requires close scrutiny of the dreamer's motives.

I believe that Penelope is doing just that. She recognizes that the core of her dream is the expression of an acute, intolerable anxiety, but that the motive for the eagle's return and interpretation of the dream is to relieve that very anxiety.[21] So she understands that the second part of the dream is a desperate attempt to lull herself into thinking that the dream is a pleasant one, as beautiful as carved ivory, and that all her problems will miraculously evaporate without the slightest pain or effort. Indeed, such a dream would be welcome.

ἦ κ' ἀσπαστὸν ἐμοὶ καὶ παιδὶ γένοιτο.

C. Emlyn-Jones finds that the entire dream is driven by a wish to be taken care of, to be rid of responsibility. "On a psychological level, it is surely more plausible to see Penelope's dream, as related at 19.535-53, as pure wish-fulfillment; her dream and her account of it is an expression, *not* of her belief or suspicion about the identity of the beggar but of her intense desire that Odysseus should come and extricate her from a terrible situation" (1984, 4).

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[20]Whatever we believe that the early Greeks *should* have thought about dreams, Penelope's distinction between true and lying dreams cannot but ring true to us now. Everyone one knows that there are dreams that come to nothing. We may dream of winning a distinction that we know we have little or no chance of enjoying. Many men, says Jocaste, dream of sleeping with their mothers without it ever happening.

[21]It is after all their major function according to Freud to allow the dreamer to sleep by disguising the anxiety of the thought, and we know that Penelope could use some sleep.

Still, Penelope has no conclusive evidence that her dream is *not* what it claims to be. Successful interpretation requires the kind of careful self-scrutiny of slippery motives that is all but logically impossible. Penelope does her best by turning to the Cretan, not as a soothsayer, or as an oneiromancer, but as a storyteller, a kind of benevolent confidence man, professionally adept at discerning and exploiting a latent desire. She uses him as a touchstone of her wishes, but not so she may follow them– so she may resist them.

Penelope's last dream

We can apply what we have learned directly to Penelope's last dream, a dream which has otherwise resisted analysis. The night after she reports the dream of the twenty geese to Odysseus, her nightmares become so much worse that she prays to Artemis for release from them even if it must be in death.[22]

> αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ καὶ ὀνείρατ' ἐπέσσευεν κακὰ δαίμων.
> But now the god has sent the evil dreams thronging upon me. (20.87)

[22]Since Penelope is praying to Artemis, she is unlikely to be falsifying her reality or her feeling. A wish for suicide is not shameful in Homer. When reality is overwhelming, one naturally would like escape. Odysseus contemplates suicide (10.51) or wishes to die (10.498). The important thing is that one decides to live, to tough it out.

Paradoxically, the horrible nightmare which she cites is a vivid dream of unmitigated joy.

> τῇδε γὰρ αὖ μοι νυκτὶ παρέδραθεν εἴκελος αὐτῷ,
> τοῖος ἐὼν οἷος ἦεν ἅμα στρατῷ· αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ
> χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην ὄναρ ἔμμεναι, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἤδη."
> For on this very night there was one who lay by me, like him
> as he was when he went with the army, so that my own heart
> was happy. I thought it was no dream, but a waking vision. (20.88-90)

And Penelope would indeed be happy to lie beside Odysseus even, as she says, among the shades:

> ἠέ μ' ἐυπλόκαμος βάλοι Αρτεμις, ὄφρ' Οδυσῆα
> ὀσσομένη καὶ γαῖαν ὑπο στυγερὴν ἀφικοίμην,
> μηδέ τι χείρονος ἀνδρὸς ἐυφραίνοιμι νόημα.
> Artemis strike me, so that I could meet the Odysseus I long for, even under the
> hateful earth, and not have to please the mind of an inferior
> husband. (20.80-82)

Now that the sweet wish has taken over her sleep and even managed to shed its dreaminess and present itself as reality, as a waking vision, why should Penelope be distressed? What is so evil about a pleasant dream? [23] Pleasant daydreams were enough for Telemachos in Book 1. The answer, I think, is that it is not the pleasure that is evil, nor the wish for the pleasure, but the consequence of being beguiled by it. At 20.88, the verb for "lay beside" is παρέδραθεν. Homer employs it just one other time, at *Iliad* 14.163, when Hera connives to beguile Zeus and thwart his will by lying with him, satisfying him,

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[23]Dawe is perplexed: "If she meant that happy dreams are after all a bad thing, because the waking reality becomes by contrast that much harder to bear, she has notably suppressed the most important part of her thesis" (Dawe, 730).

and lulling him to sleep. The nightmare is Penelope's glimpse of the power of illusion and self-delusion, the seduction into the wished-for reality, the forgetting of the pain that is real life. She fears that her own mind is slipping her drams of Helen's drug.

Her crying leads us, so to speak, right to Odysseus who overhears it in his sleep and integrates it into his own anxieties and second thoughts. He envisions his wife standing beside him and recognizing him. The fight is already over! This is what Odysseus wishes for. Once awake he begs Zeus for an auspicious sign. Zeus sends *two*. What would have happened if the signs were not forthcoming? Penelope gets none. She is left quite alone.

Penelope's Heroism

It is important to be clear about exactly what Penelope has accomplished. She has been powerfully tempted by her own wishful thinking, but she has managed to discern the wish and resist the temptation. She flatly refuses to be deceived by her own desires, no matter how strong they are or how plausible the excuses they generate may be made to seem. Lovely it would be for Penelope if, on the strength of the recent predictions by the sympathetic beggar and by Theoklymenos, she *could* excuse herself for a while from the painful necessity of remarriage. Lovely, but irresponsible. It is to her great credit that she faces her responsibility squarely. She will not be conned. In the end, whether or not her dream actually has come through the gate of horn or through the gate of ivory, Penelope knows that she cannot take the chance. The stakes are too high.

The dramatic irony that Homer employs so skillfully throughout the *Odyssey* to engage and challenge the reader is here especially intense. We know that reality is about to

take a sudden turn in Penelope's favor. Does this mean that she is making a mistake? Hardly. We, the audience, who know more, are placed in a relationship with Penelope that is characteristic of tragedy. We long to cry out to her: "Please Penelope, believe the beggar! Believe the dream! Delay a few more days, at least."

Ironically, at the very moment that Penelope rises to her greatest stature by stubbornly doing the right thing, she induces bitter criticisms of infidelity, irrationality, passivity, confusion, lack of integrity, foolishness, deception, and self-delusion But this is *exactly* the moment that she proves herself above every one of these charges. If, in the process, she leaves the audience morally gaping, so much more wonderful is the dramatic moment.[24] Instead of competing with Odysseus for the crown of deception, Penelope should get laurels for being the most resistant to being deceived.

Penelope's Tragedy

I have purposely delayed discussing one of the most powerful pressures on Penelope. In Book 19, after Penelope has heard the Cretan's skillful account of himself and Odysseus, Penelope arranges a few comforts for her affable guest. As she orders a bed to be made, and a foot bath to be drawn, she emphasizes that she does all these things out of concern for her own reputation.

πῶς γὰρ ἐμεῦ σύ, ξεῖνε, δαήσεαι εἴ τι γυναικῶν

[24]Ancient audiences, I think, may have been less likely to have felt sold out by Penelope's sudden move. They were not dominated by Ovid's portrait of femininity as sexual fidelity that precludes this kind of tragic stance.

ἀλλάων περίειμι νόον καὶ ἐπίφρονα μῆτιν,
For how, my friend, will you learn if I in any way
surpass the rest of women, in mind and thoughtful good sense. (19.325-26)

Like any Homeric character, she is, and should be, concerned with her κλέος. Unlike other Homeric characters, she is extremely articulate about exactly what κλέος is. Her last words before sending Odysseus to Eurykleia to get his feet scrubbed eloquently expose the Homeric philosophy of fame and its overwhelming importance to the individual.

ἄνθρωποι δὲ μινυνθάδιοι τελέθουσιν.
ὃς μὲν ἀπηνὴς αὐτὸς ἔῃ καὶ ἀπηνέα εἰδῇ,
τῷ δὲ καταρῶνται πάντες βροτοὶ ἄλγε' ὀπίσσω
ζωῷ, ἀτὰρ τεθνεῶτί γ' ἐφεψιόωνται ἅπαντες·
ὃς δ' ἂν ἀμύμων αὐτὸς ἔῃ καὶ ἀμύμονα εἰδῇ,
τοῦ μέν τε κλέος[25] εὐρὺ δια ξεῖνοι φορέουσι
πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, πολλοί τέ μιν ἐσθλὸν ἔειπον.
Human beings live for only a short time,
and when a woman is harsh herself, and her mind knows harsh thoughts,
all men pray that sufferings will befall her hereafter
while she lives; and when she is dead all men make fun of her.
But when a woman is blameless herself, and her thoughts are blameless,
the friends she has entertained carry her fame widely
to all mankind, and many are they who call her excellent. (19.328-34) [26]

As a mere expansion on her desire for her guest to be comfortable in the house, this philosophical meditation is a bit much; as a sign, however, that she is acutely aware of the importance of κλέος and has begun to concentrate on the tragedy of her situation, it is

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[25]It is here (line 333) that Penelope first uses the word κλέος.

[26] Penelope is speaking about human beings of both sexes throughout. I change the gender of the nouns and pronouns from Lattimore's translation to emphasize just that.

not. The double use of ἀπηνὴς (harsh)[27] on 329 helps to focus the meditation on Penelope herself. Though the only previous use of the word is when the Cretan beggar rebukes Eurymachos who then tosses a stool at the poor man (18.381), the only times that the word is used after Book 19, apply exclusively to Penelope. Telemachos calls her ἀπηνέα at 23.97. At 23.230, she admits that her own heart has been ἀπηνέα. The focus on Penelope is sharpened further when we allow ourselves to hear the word "ἀπηνέα" the phonological root of Penelope's own name.

So, Penelope is left at the fireside pondering her κλέος as Eurykleia bathes Odysseus's feet and suddenly recognizes the scar. Fame is the underlying theme of the famous digression that follows. The account of the boar hunt and Odysseus's wound is too well-known to need retelling here. We ought to take it as something like the unadulterated story, tradition within tradition, exemplifying the sort of eternal fame that Penelope has just been talking about. The indelible scar demonstrates the sheer power of κλέος. Upon getting a glimpse of it, Eurykleia wells over with admiration and love. Odysseus's reputation is one that can hardly be contained, even when he wants it to be.

By definition, Penelope's κλέος depends upon what the people say about her and what they hold to be virtuous action. Penelope's κλέος would get its biggest boost if Odysseus were to vindicate her long wait by a triumphant return home. Barring that, what κλέος she enjoys flows from her obstinate refusal of other men. The worst thing that Penelope could do to her reputation is just what she is called upon to do. We get a glimpse

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[27]It may mean ungentle, harsh, rough, hard, insulting, and stubborn, though Cunliffe does not record the last two.

of the probable Ithacan reaction to what she plans to do when they think that she has already done it. Σχετλίη, they call her, wicked, cruel woman. There is great irony hidden in this word. Here it is pejorative, but the ameliorative sense is "tenacious, tough, stubborn." According to Chantraine, the original sense is "holding out to the very end."[28] The Ithacan accusation is that she is not holding out as she should:

> σχετλίη, οὐδ' ἔτλη πόσιος οὗ κουριδίοιο
> εἴρυσθαι μέγα δῶμα διαμπερές, ὄφρ' ἂν ἵκοιτο.
> She had no patience to keep the great house
> for her own wedded lord to the end, till he came back to her. (23.150-51)

The Ithacans have gotten the virtue right but not its manifestation. The noble and courageous choice will win Penelope disdain, or worse, oblivion.

Heroes are heroes because they make the hard choice that no one else can, and in return for their heroism they win κλέος. Penelope will not. For her, heroism demands the courage to go unrecognized as a hero. I call this tragic. No one else in the Homeric epics is ever asked to make such a great sacrifice.

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[28]"Tiré de la racine σχε- (de ἔχω), donc 'tenant bon, obstiné, allant jusqu'au bout' comme sense originel." (Chantraine, 1081)

V. The Limits of Deception

ἔγρεο, Πηνελόπεια

Penelope, awake! are the first words of the elderly Eurykleia who comes laughing– practically dancing– with the news that Odysseus has returned and slaughtered every last one of the suitors, news that Penelope has "longed for all her days." But Penelope resents being disturbed from the sweetest sleep she has had in twenty years.

We can see why Penelope might want another hour in bed, now that the die has been cast, remarriage inevitable, and her dreams consequently freed from guilty or tempting nightmares. At the same time, this may be the last night she spends in her own bed; she certainly has no reason to rush into a day that will reveal her new, inevitably loathsome, husband.

Penelope wonders whether the gods have not scrambled Eurykleia's normally level head.[1] The gods, she insists, can do it to anyone, if they choose.

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[1] "Orderly" is αἰσίμη. The word means "appointed by the will of the god." Specifically, what do the gods appoint in this word. Justice is the general answer. More specially is balance, moderation, fairness, equality. Eumaios uses the word when he apportions a meal equally to all alike. Mentor and Athene use it to describe Odysseus's moderate and even handed style of ruling. Antinoös uses it in the negative to describe someone who overdoes it with wine and loses control.

μαῖα φίλη, μάργην σε
ἄφρονα ποιῆσαι καὶ ἐπίφρονά περ μάλ' ἐόντα,
καί τε χαλιφρονέοντα σαοφροσύνης ἐπέβησαν·
οἵ σέ περ ἔβλαψαν· πρὶν δὲ φρένας αἰσίμη ἦσθα.
They are both able to change a very sensible person into a senseless
one, and to set the light-wit on the way of discretion.
They have set you awry; before now your thoughts were orderly. (23.11-14)

Eurykleia insists that her report is the simple truth, which Telemachos can confirm, and suddenly– as if she were only just now fully awake– Penelope springs up in joy at the possibility. Eurykleia, encouraged, expands upon what she heard and saw, and exhorts Penelope to go downstairs to accept her long-suffering, but triumphant, husband together with the happiness that she can now enjoy with him. Again she reminds Penelope that this has always been the dream. "Now at last what long you prayed for has been accomplished (54), and Penelope confirms her longing in words very similar to those she has used so often before to answer prophesies of Odysseus's return:

οἶσθα γὰρ ὥς κ' ἀσπαστὸς ἐνὶ μεγάροισι φανείη
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί τε καὶ υἱέι, τὸν τεκόμεσθα·
You know how welcome he would be if he appeared in the palace:
to all, but above all to me and the son we gave birth to. (23.60-61)

Nevertheless, contrary to Eurykleia's expectations, Penelope concludes: "No, but this story is not true as you tell it" (62). Not that Penelope doubts the fact of a slaughter, merely who is responsible. More likely, from her point of view, the gods themselves have extracted justice on their own account for the "wicked deeds (κακὰ ἔργα) and heart-hurting violence (ὕβριν θυμαλγέα)" of the suitors. So, Penelope holds firm to the kind of

skeptical reasoning that she so forcefully and commendably applied in Book 19. To her, Eurykleia's report is like a dream that has slipped through the gate of ivory: it would be sweet if it were true, but wishing does not make it so. Penelope is determined not to be seduced out of the one thing that she considers most likely to be true.

> αὐτὰρ Οδυσσεὺς
> ὤλεσε τηλοῦ νόστον Αχαιΐδος, ὤλετο δ' αὐτός.
> But Odysseus
> has lost his homecoming and lost his life, far from Achaia. (23.68-69)

Has Penelope's resistance gone too far?

Eurykleia is incredulous, and so, I think, is the epic audience. There is no question for the audience that Odysseus is home and has slaughtered the suitors. Book 22 is no dream for *us!* What earlier appeared to be a virtue in Penelope now seems to border on perversion. Has she gone crazy? Did we give her too much credit for good motivations? Did we wrongly applaud her decision as resistance to deception? Isn't she really deceiving herself now? At the very least, isn't Penelope carrying her skepticism too far? Homer has engineered the scene so that these worries come spontaneously. He further promotes our disappointment with Penelope through Eurykleia's next, scolding words, through Penelope's own attitude toward the scar, and through Telemachos's indignant speech to his mother. Let us consider each, in turn.

Though Penelope has previously discounted all reports of Odysseus's return, apparently with Eurykleia's approval, the old nurse now argues that it is no longer wise to be so ἄπιστος as to insist that Odysseus will never return since he already has. [2]

> ἦ πόσιν ἔνδον ἐόντα παρ' ἐσχάρῃ οὔ ποτε φῆσθα.
> οἷκαδ' ἐλεύσεσθαι· θυμὸς δέ τοι αἰὲν ἄπιστος. (23.71-72)[3]

As I pointed out in an earlier chapter, ἄπιστος shifts its meaning from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, but, here, the Iliadic connotation shades its use. Penelope's all but rabid skepticism makes her "not to be trusted"'even "faithless." E.V. Rieu's translation hints at this: "Here is your husband at his own fireside, and you declare he never will get home. What little faith you always had!" Penelope is not to be trusted to face reality, to accept what she has so longed hoped for, or to continue her loyalty to her husband. Is she

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[2]The adverbial idea may be shaded by its etymon αἰών which, according to Chantraine, means fundamentally, "force vitale" and only then, "vie, durée, eternity"(42). To be ἄπιστος has become part of Penelope's very identity, Eurykleia seems to hint, and therefore more or less independent of reality. The 21th century might say that she is hardwired for suspicion. αἰὲν is used similarly by Telemachos at 23.103, quoted below in the next paragraph.

[3]This is a difficult passage to English. Here are a few versions. Butler: "But you were always unbelieving, and have made up your mind that your husband is never coming, although he is in this house; " Murray:"what a word has escaped the barrier of your teeth, in that you said that your husband, who is here at his own hearth, will never return! Always your heart refuses to believe"; Rouse:"Here's thi man in the house, by the hearthstone, tha'lt have it he'll never come back home! But thi mind was even unbelieven" [sic]; Rieu: "Here is your husband at his own fireside, and you declare he never will get home. What little faith you always had!"; Lattimore:"Though your husband is here beside the hearth, you would never say he would come home. Your heart was always mistrustful."; Fitzgerald: "Here he is, large as life, by his own fire, and you deny he ever will get home! Child, you always were mistrustful. "; Fagels: "Here's your husband...here– and you, you say he'll never come home again, always the soul of trust!" I prefer Samuel Butler's translation.

breaking faith, acting irrationally? Is Penelope preparing some deception? The *Iliad*'s vice which became a virtue in the *Odyssey*, is now, because of excess, threatening to revert.

More disturbing yet may be Penelope's rejection of the scar as proof of Odysseus's identity. Three loyal people have accepted the scar as incontrovertible evidence, and Homer has established its reality in one of the most famous digressions in all literature. Here in Book 23, Eurykleia swears to Penelope that she has recognized the scar, and offers an oath upon her very life as guarantee (78-79). When Penelope lightly rejects the oath,[4] saying merely,

> μαῖα φίλη, χαλεπόν σε θεῶν αἰειγενετάων
> δήνεα εἰρυσθαι, μάλα περ πολύιδριν ἐοῦσαν.
> Dear nurse, it would be hard for you to baffle[5] the purposes
> of the everlasting gods, although you are very clever. (23.81-82)

Her own words seem to inform against her.

Finally confronting the Cretan, Penelope is nonplused. Taking his mother's silence as a sign of mulishness, Telemachos launches into a bitter diatribe.

> μῆτερ ἐμή, δύσμητερ, ἀπηνέα θυμὸν ἔχουσα,
> τίφθ' οὕτω πατρὸς νοσφίζεαι, οὐδὲ παρ' αὐτὸν
> ἑζομένη μύθοισιν ἀνείρεαι οὐδὲ μεταλλᾷς;
> οὐ μέν κ' ἄλλη γ' ὧδε γυνὴ τετληότι θυμῷ
> ἀνδρὸς ἀποσταίη, ὅς οἱ κακὰ πολλὰ μογήσας
> ἔλθοι ἐεικοστῷ ἔτει ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν·
> σοὶ δ' αἰεὶ κραδίη στερεωτέρη ἐστὶ λίθοιο."

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[4]Just as lightly, Eumaios rejected a similar oath sworn to him by the Cretan.

[5]"Baffle" is Lattimore's translation of this problem word (εἰρυσθαι) that might be more modestly rendered by "discover," "spy," or even "know."

> My mother, my harsh mother with the hard heart inside you,
> why do you withdraw so from my father, and do not
> sit beside him and ask him questions and find out about him?
> No other woman, with spirit as stubborn as yours, would keep back
> as you are doing from her husband who, after much suffering,
> came at last in the twentieth year back to his own country.
> But always you have a heart that is harder than stone within you. (23.97-103)

The pith of the speech comes through in the four underlined phrases, and is essentially: My mother, you are no mother, with your cold, stubborn heart, harder than stone!

These are harsh words. The ugly and impious δύσμητερ is not only a *hapax legomenon* in Homer, but finds virtually no other occasion for employment in extant Greek literature.[6] ἀπηνέα is a pejorative word that Odysseus uses to rebuke Eurymachos just before Eurymachos throws a stool at him, and that Penelope uses to describe the kind of person who is hated while alive, mocked when dead, and never blameless enough to enjoy κλέος (19.329). And at first τετληότι θυμῷ, and κραδίη στερεωτέρη λίθοιο seem like harsh phrases as well. (I will return to consider them below.) Exasperation that leads Telemachos to complain that no normal woman would deny a man who has already suffered so much for so long.

Both Eurykleia and Telemachos, in their own ways, accuse Penelope of being irrational. Her virtue, they complain, has gotten out of hand. Odysseus, however, remains cool. Smiling the Homeric smile of superiority, he calmly assures his son that he knows how to handle Penelope. Her problem, he says, is no more than a matter of what he is wearing.

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[6]In the *Iliad*, however, Paris warrants the prefix attached to his name (3.39 and 8.769)

νῦν δ' ὅττι ῥυπόω, κακὰ δὲ χροῒ εἵματα εἶμαι,
τοὔνεκ' ἀτιμάζει με καὶ οὔ πω φησὶ τὸν εἶναι.
but now that I am dirty and wear foul clothing upon me,
she dislikes me for that, and says I am not her husband. (23.115-16)

So, Odysseus goes off to be bathed, oiled, and spruced by Eurykleia, and glorified by Athene.

αὐτὰρ κὰκ κεφαλῆς χεῦεν πολὺ κάλλος Αθήνη
μείζονά τ' εἰσιδέειν καὶ πάσσονα· κὰδ δὲ κάρητος
οὐλας ἧκε κόμας, ὑακινθίνῳ ἄνθει ὁμοίας....
ἐκ δ' ἀσαμίνθου βῆ δέμας ἀθανάτοισιν ὁμοῖος·
[A]nd over his head Athene suffused great beauty, to make him
taller to behold and thicker, and on his head she arranged
the curling locks that hung down like hyacinthine petals. ...
...Then, looking like an immortal, he strode forth from the bath... (23.156-58...163)

Returning to his wife, however, Odysseus quickly learns that his rather condescending assessment of her was not correct: she is not won over by his fresh look. This is too much for him, and, suddenly losing his composure, he is reduced to reproaching his wife with the very same words of exasperation that his son used only sixty-eight lines before:

οὐ μέν κ' ἄλλη γ' ὧδε γυνὴ τετληότι θυμῷ
ἀνδρὸς ἀποσταίη, ὅς οἱ κακὰ πολλὰ μογήσας
ἔλθοι ἐεικοστῷ ἔτεϊ ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν·
No other woman, with spirit as stubborn as yours, would keep back
as you are doing from her husband who, after much suffering,
came at last in the twentieth year back to his own country. (23.168-70)

Ironically, Penelope's reaction– or lack of it– is the very reason that a number of critics reject the scene as a post-Homeric interpolation. "This [scene] is obviously in contrast to the normal development of this form of typical scene; in such circumstances it is usual to mention the effect of the transformation of appearance on the other person, and then for the other party to make some comment on the change" (Heubeck 329). The two other occasions on which Athene radically transforms Odysseus's appearance elicit strong responses. In Book 6, Nausicaa says:

> πρόσθεν μὲν γὰρ δή μοι ἀεικέλιος δέατ' εἶναι,
> νῦν δὲ θεοῖσιν ἔοικε, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν.
> A while ago he seemed an unpromising man to me. Now
> he even resembles one of the gods, who hold high heaven. (6.242-43)

In Book 16, Telemachos reacts with fear as well as admiration:

> ἄλλοῖός μοι, ξεῖνε, φάνης νέον ἠὲ πάροιθεν,
> ἄλλα δὲ εἵματ' ἔχεις, καί τοι χρὼς οὐκέθ' ὁμοῖος.
> ἦ μάλα τις θεός ἐσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν·
> ἀλλ' ἵληθ', ἵνα τοι κεχαρισμένα δώομεν ἱρὰ
> ἠδὲ χρύσεα δῶρα, τετυγμένα· φείδεο δ' ἡμέων"
> Suddenly you have changed, my friend, from what you were formerly;
> your skin is no longer as it was, you have other clothing.
> Surely you are one of the gods who hold the high heavens
> Be gracious, then, so we shall give you favored offerings
> and golden gifts that have been well wrought. Only be merciful. (16.181-85)

Clearly, the pattern is for such changes to make a strong impression, but then, the consequence of any pattern is a heightened awareness of its absence. Thus, the epic

formula possesses a sort of potential energy that the poet can exploit, as Homer does here.[7] Such potential may even be the principal reason that the formula is employed in the first place. What better way than this to emphasize that Penelope is not awed by appearances nor pressured by fear, even of the gods?

If the transformation scene is rejected by some as un-Homeric because it disappoints the expectations of the epic audience, others reject it as a waste of the audience's time. Dawe, who prints it in his smaller type to show that he thinks it spurious, writes: "[Odysseus] now returns from the bath resplendent in beauty but the change is quite unnoticed...We do not need this transformation" (816). True, we do not need Odysseus's transformation in order to sway Penelope's opinion. We do need it, however, to force a re-evaluation of our own.

In Book 23, Homer engineers one of his most impressive narrative effects. Even though, until this moment, Penelope was called upon to act heroically without the compensatory prospect of personal recognition for it from the people in her world, at least Homer allowed her to enjoy sympathy and affirmation from those outside, that is, from the epic audience. At the beginning of Book 23, however, the poet affords the epic audience the bittersweet experience of abandoning her, too. Eventually, when the audience discovers that its reasons for doubting Penelope, which looked so valid through the eyes of

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[7]The method of reasoning characteristic of the Analytic school is troubling at its core. If a passage does not conform to what is expected of the writing as formula, Analysts judge an interpolation. But isn't it much more likely that any interpolator would follow as closely as possible the formulae and the other obvious characteristics of the master text? I find it more surprising that some scribe has not inserted a few appreciative words by Penelope simply because he assumed it would make the poem more Homeric.

Eurykleia, Telemachos, and Odysseus, are nothing of the kind, she again commands its humblest respect.

Penelope Reconsidered

The first hints of a countercurrent that gradually guides the attentive audience to respect for Penelope's position come at least as early as Telemachos's diatribe against his δύσμητερ. Two phrases that Telemachos uses to blame Penelope are employed elsewhere in *Odyssey* as praise.

The formula τετληότι θυμῷ (with a stout heart), a rebuke in Telemachus mouth, shows a clear link in other places to successful and heroic survival. Menelaos uses it twice in the story of how he clung firmly to Proteus, his only chance for returning home. With equal tenacity– and the same phrase– Odysseus clung to the ram's fleece in order to escape the Cyclops. Both Antikleia and Eumaios applied the phrase to Penelope. Odysseus cites it as mankind's redeeming virtue in his great assessment of the human condition.

> οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον γαῖα τρέφει ἀνθρώποιο,
> πάντων ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνείει τε καὶ ἕρπει.
> οὐ μὲν γάρ ποτέ φησὶ κακὸν πείσεσθαι ὀπίσσω,
> ὄφρ' ἀρετὴν παρέχωσι θεοὶ καὶ γούνατ' ὀρώρῃ·
> ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ λυγρὰ θεοὶ μάκαρες τελέσωσι,
> καὶ τὰ φέρει ἀεκαζόμενος τετληότι θυμῷ·
> Of all creatures that breathe and walk on the earth there is nothing more helpless than a man is, of all that the earth fosters;
> for he thinks that he will never suffer misfortune in future days, while the gods grant him courage, and his knees have spring in them. But when the blessed gods bring sad days upon him,
> against his will he must suffer it with enduring spirit. (18.130-35)

Telemachos's phrase "harder than stone" is a transformed compliment, as well. Remember when Eurykleia assured Odysseus that she would keep his secret.

> οἶσθα μὲν οἷον ἐμὸν μένος ἔμπεδον οὐδ' ἐπιεικτόν,
> ἔξω δ' ὡς ὅτε τις στερεὴ λίθος ἠὲ σίδηρος.
> You know what strength is steady in me, and it will not give way
> at all, but I shall hold as stubborn as stone or iron. (19.493-94)

Penelope's initial silence does not have to be taken as the obstinate affront that Telemachos takes it to be. ἡ δ' ἄνεω δὴν ἧστο, τάφος δέ οἱ ἦτορ Ἱκανεν· The use of the word ἄνεω shows that this is no ordinary or calculated silence. I discussed this word at length in chapter two and concluded that it means something like dumbstruck but with a greater sense of dread. Penelope's wonder is authentic.

Odysseus is not privy to the same clues. When Penelope does not react as he figures she should, Odysseus cries out, "δαιμονίη" (166). She responds a few lines later by turning the accusation right back at him. "δαιμόνιε" (174), she says to him. Cunliffe defines *daimonios* as "under superhuman influence; possessed, whose actions are unaccountable; senseless. If what Odysseus means is that she is "under superhuman influence," Penelope is quite correct to reverse the charge. Athene is behind him, not her. Even if Odysseus means simply that Penelope is acting– as we would say– irrationally, the charge is still more applicable to him than to her. The Cretan irrationally expects Penelope to accept as proof of his true identity a miraculous transformation wrought by one of the gods, none of whom (she could assure us) scruple to deceive a human mind.

Penelope is at pains to insist that none of her motives are petty or irrational. οὔτ' ἄρ τι μεγαλίζομαι οὔτ' ἀθερίζω οὔτε λίην ἄγαμαι. Her initial wonder (ἄνεω) shows that she is far from indifferent (οὔτ' ἀθερίζω) about the outcome of these events. Her equanimity in the face of his miraculous splendor shows that she was not being haughty (οὔτ' ἄρ τι μεγαλίζομαι). The last (οὔτε λίην ἄγαμαι) is probably a more sweeping disclaimer meant to deny any admixture of awe, fear, or anger in her motives. (All of these charges have been made against Penelope through the ages.)[8] What then is Penelope's motivation, if it is not any of these? How can she justify her hesitation as a rational act?

After the recognition is successful, Penelope tells us exactly what was guiding her actions, and her statement is consistent with what we have seen of her all along. She was protecting the House of Odysseus by staying on the alert against impostors.

> αὐτὰρ μὴ νῦν μοι τόδε χώεο μηδὲ νεμέσσα,
> οὕνεκά ς' οὐ τὸ πρῶτον, ἐπεὶ ἴδον, ὧδ' ἀγάπησα.
> αἰεὶ γάρ μοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν
> ἐρρίγει μή τίς με βροτῶν ἀπάφοιτο ἔπεσσιν
> ἐλθών· πολλοὶ γὰρ κακὰ κέρδεα βουλεύουσιν.
> Then do not now be angry with me nor blame me, because
> I did not greet you, as I do now, at first when I saw you.
> For always the spirit deep in my very heart was fearful
> that some one of mortal men would come my way and deceive me
> with words. For there are many who scheme for wicked advantage. (23.213-17)

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[8]ἄγαμαι could mean "be jealous, or bear a grudge," which sounds like Ovid's Penelope. Cunliffe cites this passage as an example of the meaning "to be offended or hurt." Hanna Roisman attributes just such a motivation to Penelope. She is supposed to be acting out of the anger that arose from her hurt pride. "For it must have been rather insulting that Odysseus chose to confide in his son rather than his wife" (62).

I would argue that this should be taken seriously, that not only should Penelope be taken at her word about her motivation, but also that this concern is far from frivolous. Obviously, a usurper might spell the end of the House of Odysseus. Regardless of whether Telemachos believes the man to be his father, the man is unlikely to privilege him as his son if he is not. For his part, Telemachos ought to be very grateful to his mother for being on the *qui vive* for deceivers since she is now confronting a master of deception. Fortunately, she knows this about the Cretan and in fact counted on it (as we have seen) when she consulted him about her dream. From Penelope's point of view, this Cretan could very easily be pretending to be Odysseus.

Recognitions

There is always some testing– the application of an evidentiary standard– in every recognition.[9] The standard will vary from genre to genre, from work to work, and even between two scenes of a single work. Among other things, the standard will depend on what is at risk to the characters and what is the thematic goal of the poet. Sometimes the standard is quite high, as in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; at other times, quite low, illogical, or merely symbolic. A strand of hair might do, or even a footprint that is supposed, unrealistically, to be commensurate between a brother and a sister. In fairy tale, a glass

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[9] "A recognition, as the word itself indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity, among people defined in relation to good fortune or misfortune. ...And in addition misfortune and good fortune will come about in the case of such events ἀναγνώρισις δέ, ὥσπερ καὶ τοὔνομα σημαίνει, ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή, ἢ ἰς φιλίαν ἢ εις ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸ εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν ὡρισμένων·..... ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὸ ἀτυχεῖν καὶ τὸ εὐτυχεῖν ἐπὶ τῶν τοιούτων συμβήσεται (*Poetics* 1452a30-32...1452b2-3).

slipper will fit no other than the one special foot. Likewise, recognitions in the Homeric poems are generally as intellectually unproblematic as they are emotionally profound. A fine example is the iconic mutual recognition of master and dog. Argos, the loyal and once fine hound, now lying near death on a dung pile, recognizes his master and makes a final, feeble gesture of contentment:

> οὐρῇ μέν ῥ' ὅ γ' ἔσηνε καὶ οὔατα κάββαλεν ἄμφω,
> ἆσσον δ' οὐκέτ' ἔπειτα δυνήσατο οἷο ἄνακτος
> ἐλθέμεν· αὐτὰρ ὁ νόσφιν ἰδὼν ἀπομόρξατο δάκρυ,
> ῥεῖα λαθὼν Εὔμαιον, ἄφαρ δ' ἐρεείνετο μύθῳ·
> he wagged his tail, and laid both his ears back; only
> he now no longer had the strength to move any closer
> to his master, who, watching him from a distance, without Eumaios
> noticing, secretly wiped a tear away." (17.302-5)

The recognition between father and son in the previous book was more emotional yet.

> ὣς ἄρα φωνήσας κατ' ἄρ' ἕζετο, Τηλέμαχος δὲ
> ἀμφιχυθεὶς πατέρ' ἐσθλὸν ὀδύρετο, δάκρυα λείβων,
> ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ὑφ' ἵμερος ὦρτο γόοιο·
> κλαῖον δὲ λιγέως, ἀδινώτερον ἤ τ' οἰωνοί,
> φῆναι ἢ αἰγυπιοὶ γαμψώνυχες, οἵσί τε τέκνα
> ἀγρόται ἐξείλοντο πάρος πετεηνὰ γενέσθαι·
> ὣς ἄρα τοί γ' ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον
> So he spoke, and sat down again, but now Telemachos
> folded his great father in his arms and lamented,
> shedding tears, and desire for mourning rose in both of them;
> and they cried shrill in pulsing voice, even more than the outcry
> of birds, ospreys or vultures with hooked claws, whose children
> were stolen away by the men of the fields, before their wings grew
> strong; such was their pitiful cry and the tears their eyes wept. (16.213-19)

But as for the evidentiary standard that Telemachos employs in order to be convinced that this man really is his long lost father– that standard could hardly be more lax. οὔ τίς τοι

θεός εἰμι· (No, I am not a god, 16.187)" says the man which has just been miraculously transformed on the spot, ἀλλὰ πατὴρ τεός εἰμι (But I am your father, 188)." Tears running down his cheeks, the man kisses Telemachos who holds back long enough to show that he knows the risks involved:

> οὐ σύ γ' Οδυσσεύς ἐσσι, πατὴρ ἐμός, ἀλλά με δαίμων
> θέλγει, ὄφρ' ἔτι μᾶλλον ὀδυρόμενος στεναχίζω.
> No, you are not Odysseus my father, but some divinity
> beguiles me, so that I must grieve the more, and be sorry. (16.194-95)

To that objection, the man offers a simple and winning response:

> Τηλέμαχ', οὔ σε ἔοικε φίλον πατέρ ἔνδον ἐόντα
> οὔτε τι θαυμάζειν περιώσιον οὔτ' ἀγάασθαι·
> οὐ μὲν γάρ τοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐλεύσεται ἐνθάδ' Οδυσσεύς,
> ἀλλ' ὅδ' ἐγὼ τοιόσδε,
> Telemachos, it does not become you to wonder too much
> at your own father when he is here, nor doubt him. No other
> Odysseus than I will ever come back to you. But here I am. (16.202-5)

No other Odysseus than I will ever come back to you. This is evidence enough for Telemachos who falls into his father's arms, weeps, and believes.

This scene recalls the meeting of Nausicaa and Odysseus in Book 6 on the Scherian beach, which has the structure of a recognition scene: Nausicaa recognizes Odysseus as her future husband. Athene transforms Odysseus (the poet uses exactly the same words that he employs in Book 16) and Nausicaa is mightily impressed. Nausicaa, of course, is mistaken; this is not her future husband standing before her. The mistake is made plausible not least by Athene's involvement. She has deceived Nausicaa, or rather, abetted her own

self-deception in order to make it easier for her favorite hero. Both Nausicaa and Telemachos show themselves to be rather callow (νήπιος). Both make their decisions not on the basis of thoughtful evaluation of evidence, but rather on the basis of wishful thinking. They except what they wish to be true.

It is instructive to look at the actual events of 16th century Languedoc recorded in several books and a French movie under the title of *The Return of Martin Guerre*. The point of this is that Bernarde, Martin's abandoned wife, decides that the man presenting himself as her husband (alias Pansette), though likely an impostor, was preferable to her wedded husband or to no husband at all. In this story, the sentiment is with Bernarde, and her in-laws, who eventually feel threatened by Pansette's claim to a share of the family property, seem cruel. Whatever we think of Bernarde in the end, we can surely see the magnitude of her choice and the lure that Pansette represents for her. Since Martin has abandoned her for so long and was quite possibly dead, Pansette may have represented to Bernarde her only chance at married life.

The pressures on Penelope are even greater than those on Bernarde because the risks are so much greater. Unlike Bernarde, Penelope does not have the power to prevent this man from claiming rights to the household and to its goods. Penelope has a different way of dealing with the claims of the man standing before her. We should expect and welcome more maturity and higher standards of proof than either Telemachos, Nausicaa, or Bernarde showed. Do we want Penelope to capitulate just because this is perhaps the only, or even the best husband that she is likely to get?

Mistaken identity can be dangerous. Polyphemus suffers greatly for believing that Odysseus is Noman. Aeolus discovers upon Odysseus's return to his island paradise that Odysseus is not the man Aeolus thought he was when he sent him away with honor and gifts. Instead, Odysseus's true identity includes being bitterly hated by the gods. Thus, Aeolus's mistake might mean retaliation against him from those gods, and he is duly frightened. "O least of living creatures, out of this island! Hurry!" (10.72). Poseidon will later do his worst to the Phaiakian island for aiding Odysseus.

There are two further recognition scenes before the one between husband and wife. Both rest on the tangible evidence of the scar on Odysseus's thigh. Eurykleia recognizes her former master by this scar. So do Eumaios and Philotios. Odysseus uncovers the scar and the herds are ready to obey. As I have argued earlier, Homer has established the scar as solid and seemingly incontrovertible evidence so that it is a shock to see Penelope ignore it. Nevertheless, she does, and this forces reflection on its probative value. Once called into question, the scar cannot bear the weight of close scrutiny.

How identifiable is a scar? Would the application of a scar be too much for a goddess who has affected so many of the profound changes on Odysseus that we have already seen? A wound in the thigh would not be uncommon for hunters of animals with horns or tusks. Modern bullfighters, for example, are gored most often in the thigh. And I don't suppose one can easily distinguish a hunting wound from a war wound, or remember very accurately the precise character of a any scar after twenty years since scars change over time. Furthermore this scar could have been self-inflicted for the very purpose of deception. Think of the account in Herodotus of Zopyrus who "cut off his nose and ears

and shaved his hair to disfigure himself, and laid lashes on himself," all so that he could pass himself off to the Babylonians as a traitor to Darius, his king. The imposture works for Zopyrus, and he wins himself the rule of Babylon, tax-free, for the rest of his life. (Herodotus 3.154, Grene translation.) In Book 24, the scar will not be enough to convince Laertes that the man showing it is his son.

If Penelope can expect little sympathy for her standard of proof from other members of the household who have accepted one less rigorous, the epic audience is forced to admit that Penelope has a good point. By making the standards higher, the poet focuses attention on the idea of recognition itself and links it to the thematic concerns of the poem. How is it possible, he seems to ask, to keep from being deceived in a world where deception is a virtue and an art?

The pressures on Penelope are tremendous. We must appreciate the full force of her position (Penelope does). She now believes that all the suitors have been miraculously killed by some one man, obviously with the endorsement of the gods, if not their direct intervention. This agent of god claims to be Odysseus, and no one but she has any doubts about this? She is alone, once again. And, once again, her position requires a good deal of bravery. The so-called interlude (23.123-65), that Homer provides between the two halves of the recognition, demonstrates how difficult her position really is. On the one hand, since Odysseus has de facto power in the house, there is really little chance that Penelope's obstinacy could do much more than keep the Cretan from sleeping with her. At the same time, Odysseus is in great and imminent danger from forces outside the palace which Penelope's obstinance would effectively aid.

The struggle for the future of the House of Odysseus is not over, and the first half of the interlude (123-140) makes clear that Odysseus knows it. The Ithacan populace, as Odysseus impresses upon Telemachos, can be expected to retaliate. For, if the Ithacans condemn the murderer of even one man to shame and exile, how are they likely to treat the destroyer of all "the finest young men in Ithaca," the sons of many of their own families? The populace has been consistently portrayed as a force of fairness and moderation-- the island's political ballast. Book 2 demonstrated that they have respect for the legitimate claims of both the suitors and the House of Odysseus, holding no special preference for either side though sure to rally to the aid of the one who is wronged. And the slaughter of the suitors's has been uncompromisingly brutal. Odysseus's plan is therefore to retreat to the country on the sly and prepare a defensive action against the Ithacans from there. The plan assumes cooperation from Penelope whom Odysseus intends to leave once again in charge of the palace. κτήματα μὲν τά μοι ἔστι, κομιζέμεν ἐν μεγάροισι ("You look after my possessions which are in the palace" 23.355). He also counts on her to cover for him by stonewalling the Ithacans.

> αὐτίκα γὰρ φάτις εἶσιν ἅμ' ἠελίῳ ἀνιόντι
> ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων, οὓς ἔκτανον ἐν μεγάροισιν·
> εἰς ὑπερῷ' ἀναβᾶσα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξὶν
> ἧσθαι, μηδέ τινα προτιόσσεο μηδ' ἐρέεινε."
> Presently, when the sun rises, there will be a rumor
> about the men who courted you, whom I killed in our palace.
> Then go to the upper chamber with your attendant women,
> and sit still, looking at no one, and do not ask any questions. (23.362-65)

So Odysseus is under great pressure and can hardly afford to be indulgent or tolerant of anyone who is not ready to fight on his side.

If Penelope were concerned only with her own personal comfort and security, perhaps it would be understandable, and even wise, for her to embrace the victor right off. Everybody wants her to. Embracing him would solve a number of problems. Telemachos would get a father, and she a husband to secure her place in the ὄικος and promote her κλέος. Rejecting him would invite a cascade of new problems. There is no time or place for frivolity. The question of Odysseus's identity is serious, indeed.

Penelope's criticism of the transformation lies in the difficult half line: μάλα δ' εὖ οἶδ' οἷος ἔησθα (23.175). This phrase, no doubt chosen for its ambiguity, yields several possible interpretations, all of which are devastating to the rationality of Odysseus's claims. Let us first suppose Penelope to be referring to the physical, as the immediate context and many of the most recent translators seem to encourage. Lattimore translates:" But I know very well what you looked like when you went in the ship with the sweeping oars, from Ithaca." Fitzgerald makes it: "I know so well how you– how he– appeared." Lombardo says: "I know very well what you looked like." If Penelope is referring to the new clothes, she could logically admit that Odysseus wore these very ones twenty years ago without accepting that it is Odysseus who is wearing them now. If she is referring to his person, what can she mean? Is Odysseus made to look more like himself, say, as he recently was on Phaiakia? If so, no one on Ithaca, not even Penelope can say how that is supposed to be.

Odysseus has apparently aged almost beyond recognition since his own father in the next book cannot recognize him in Book 24, even though Odysseus is without a disguise and announces who he is. Because of these problems some readers like Uvo Hölscher or Lydia Allione have speculated that Odysseus has been made younger, though there is no specific reference to it in Homer. Athene has made him taller, burlier, more beautiful, "and on his head she arranged the curling locks that hung down like hyacinthine petals." Is this how he looked twenty years ago? A magical transformation to youth such as Fagels promotes when he has Penelope say "You look– how well I know– the way he looked" would hardly allay Penelope's reservations.

Conceivably Athene made Odysseus look younger when he encountered Nausicaa in Book 6; but then, of course, Nausicaa, whose wish would be to meet a young man, has no inkling of how old the man that she encounters is supposed, in reality, to be. Penelope does. Nor should it be forgotten that Odysseus's recent plea to Penelope is rendered ridiculous if he looks much younger than he is. Radically rejuvenated, he could hardly continue to present himself to her as a man who has suffered a twenty year ordeal and is worthy of, if not in need of, some affection. The bottom line is that any rejuvenation in the pursuit of recognition is highly absurd if Penelope is serious about determining this man's true identity. Thus, we might then paraphrase Penelope's cryptic statement as: "Yes, I know very well that you looked just like this when you went to Troy, but that was twenty years ago. You should not look this way now." The word οἶδα might be emphasized: "I *know* what you looked like, and you have obviously found out, too." In fact, any mere test

of knowledge is bound to be as suspect as a change of clothes. Why could a god not be coaching the impostor? Why is it certain that the real Odysseus never gave up the secret? In *Martin Guerre*, Pansette seals his claim with the knowledge of a pair of silk hose in a trunk in Bernarde's bedroom that no one else but her knew anything about.

Some translators have avoided making Penelope's words μάλα δ' εὖ οἶδ' οἷος ἔησθα refer to physical features.[10] Samuel Butler translated this passage: "But I remember well what kind of man you were when....; Bates writes:"Well I know what you were once when...."; Rouse says:"but I know what manner of man you were when..." Unlike the case with the physical, we are now concerned about personal characteristics that are supposed *not* to change. Penelope could be taken as meaning, then, that she has a solid and reliable grasp of the kind of man he was and cannot be fooled into a false recognition, and he has not yet proven himself to be that man. For starters, she might be suspicious of a man who thought that his wife could be bought by a show of power and fine dress. Is this the same man who gave her his parting directive and expected her to guard the home? Would the true Odysseus not be the sort of man who would expect her to demand a better reason to capitulate than he has yet given her?

This raises the fascinating (and unanswerable) question of what Penelope would do if she discovered this man standing before her to have nothing of the character or ideology that Odysseus had when he left for Troy. Is he any longer the just man that once ruled

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[10]The second person singular used here has caused trouble. Is Penelope tacitly admitting that she is convinced, or on her way to be convinced? Is it a slip of the tongue as Roisman thinks (65)?

fairly and mildly? Is he the man who, unlike any of the other Achaians, defines himself in terms of his own son? Is he the man who places his son and the sanctity of the ὄικος higher than any of the other heros do? What if, for instance, she discovered that he, too, had a plot to eliminate Telemachos? How much and in what way must Odysseus be like the Odysseus of twenty years ago? Must Odysseus have preserved the core of his character and essential loyalties to be accepted as the same man that he was when he left for Troy? [11]

Putting aside such questions for a moment, and assuming that as long as Odysseus can identity himself as the same body that left twenty years ago, there is still a great problem for him. The simple but ineluctable truth is that Odysseus has become a man *unable*– on the strongest logical and rational grounds– to give credible assurances of his own identity. He is now in the position of the Cretan who says, "Believe me, all Cretans are liars," or, perhaps more to the point, "Believe me, I am not the Cretan that I said I was when I said that I was a Cretan." How does the lover of lies convince us that he is not now lying? In chapter one, I showed how tightly Homer ties Odysseus's identity to his μῆτις, even a sort of super-metis that warrants him, and him alone, the epithet πολύμητις. The link is especially explicit and self-conscious in Book 9, in Polyphemus's cave, through the

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[11]Many critics have simplified and trivialized the test of the bed. Heubeck believes that Penelope has all but given in. What the purpose of the test could be for those who believe that Penelope has already recognized Odysseus through his disguise is beyond comprehension. Forcing Penelope to play the coquette is no service to her agency. John Winkler attempts to have it both ways. Penelope, he thinks, is only 99 percent sure that this man is Odysseus. The stakes are so high that she must be 100 percent sure. And yet, she is sure enough to help this man gain sovereign control in the ὄικος. A one percent error would give Odysseus one hundred percent of the household.

elaborate paronomastic interweaving of οὖτις and μῆτις. In his *Man in the Middle Voice,* John Peradotto has eloquently pointed out about Book 9 that "Odysseus is never more himself, *autos,* than when he is *Outis"* (161), that is, when he is playing the trickster, when he is in disguise, when he is employing his genius for μῆτις in order to get what he needs--when he is Noman, or when he is a con man. It does not negate Peradotto's insight into Book 9 and the theme of identity to point out that in Book 23 Homer performs a sort of thematic peripitea in which Odysseus's defining virtue becomes a confining vice, in which his very identity prevents him from having one. Odysseus's identity which has been the cause of so many troubles for others, is now the cause of his own: Polyphemus was trapped by the Οὖτις that is μῆτις; Odysseus now traps himself in the μῆτις that is οὖτις.

Penelope must be especially aware of the problem. After all, she recognizes the Cretan as a master seducer who can play on the wishful hopes and desires of those he encounters, and she trusts him in Book 19 to tell her exactly what he thinks that she wants to hear. His words are guaranteed to aim at beguiling (θέλγειν). Homer brings the theme of deception back into sharp focus for the audience at the beginning of the interlude. When Odysseus suggests giving Penelope a little time to come to her senses, Telemachos consents out of respect for his father's reputation for μῆτις.

> αὐτὸς ταῦτά γε λεῦσσε, πάτερ φίλε· σὴν γὰρ ἀρίστην
> μῆτιν ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους φάς' ἔμμεναι, οὐδέ κέ τίς τοι
> ἄλλος ἀνὴρ ἐρίσειε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.
> You must look to this yourself, dear father; for they say
> you have the best mind among men for craft, and there is
> no other man among mortal men who can contend with you. (23.124-26)

Odysseus then turns his attention to the implementation of an elaborate deception designed to gain time for arming his allies and for his own escape to his country estate: he locks the doors and stages a mock wedding festival. His plan to win Penelope over by changing his appearance is also thoroughly based on the spirit of deception.

The Test

Odysseus therefore cannot establish his identity on his own. It is up to Penelope to find a way. She does so with her own sort of deception, but a deception different from most others in the *Odyssey*, not least because she does not proceed by telling Odysseus what he would like to hear. Recent criticism has tended to credit Penelope in the recognition scene with tricking the trickster, deceiving the deceiver, beating Odysseus at his own game. Richmond Lattimore's explanatory heading for this page of his translation is "She tricks him into betraying himself." Neither "trick" nor "betray" are the right ideas here. The central fact of this scene is that Odysseus *wants* to be recognized and accepted, and he has no reason to be fussy about the terms. He loses nothing by being made to reveal the secret of the bed. Penelope is not tricking the trickster so much as attempting, as it were, to redeem him, to save him from himself. Perhaps we might say that she is unweaving the web that he has woven around himself. Penelope's task is no easy one since, as we have seen, no material evidence, not even the scar, is conclusive, nor is any knowledge, not even a supposed secret, inviolable. In truth, any test that Odysseus is conscious of would be compromised by that very fact. So, instead of questioning him

further, Penelope pretends to back off, ceding to him every right but the right to sleep in her chamber.

> ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
> ἐκτὸς ἐυσταθέος θαλάμου, τόν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίει·
> ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθεῖσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ' εὐνήν,
> κώεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα.
> Come then, Eurykleia, and make up a firm bed for him
> outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself
> built. Put the firm bed here outside for him, and cover it
> over with fleeces and blankets, and with shining coverlets. (23.177-80)

Odysseus's passion immediately gets the best of him. Angrily he says:

> ὦ γύναι, ἦ μάλα τοῦτο ἔπος θυμαλγὲς ἔειπες·
> What you have said, dear lady, has hurt my heart deeply. (23.183)

What exactly has hurt his heart deeply? Hints of adultery? That is a tempting answer. Beds are after all metonymically connected to the sexual act as indeed this one will be at the end of this book (οἱ μὲν ἔπειτα ἀσπάσιοι λέκτροιο παλαιοῦ θεσμὸν ἵκοντο· 23.295-6). Nevertheless, the connection of a moveable bed with adultery does not hold up in this case. Penelope would not move the bed out into the hall, or anywhere else for that matter if she wanted to share it with another man. The need for privacy would demand that she prefer the one place where no one but herself and one trusting maid (Aktor's daughter) ever goes or is allowed to go. Furthermore, if Odysseus were reacting in anger to the threat of adultery, I think that the long (sixteen line) speech that carefully and lovingly details the construction of the bed would be rather superfluous and silly.

Odysseus's rage does not really depend in the end upon whether of not he thinks that Penelope has moved the bed. It is enough that she should forget that it, unlike all other beds, was built to be immoveable. He is fundamentally hurt that she should forget such an important secret, and she is relieved to see that he has not. No one but Odysseus would have taken so much care to build his bed so carefully and solidly, and no one but Odysseus would still be so emotionally tied to it as he shows himself to be. Odysseus himself continues to hold the values that he held when he made the bed to be the solid core of the ὅικος. I do not doubt that the bed is a symbol of marriage as well as being a symbol of the stability of the ὅικος. After all is said and done, the marriage and the ὅικος are one. For Penelope, the marriage bond is a commitment to the House of Odysseus. It is their heritage that she has protected so stubbornly.

Apology for Helen

After Penelope establishes Odysseus's identity, she explains why she has been so careful and stubborn. Temptation is great, and knowledge is uncertain. Though all human beings might aim at doing what is good, their ability to succeed is naturally limited. Penelope cites Helen as a potent example.

> οὐδέ κεν Ἀργείη Ἑλένη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,
> ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀλλοδαπῷ ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ,
> εἰ ἤδη ὅ μιν αὖτις ἀρήιοι υἷες Ἀχαιῶν
> ἀξέμεναι οἰκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδ' ἔμελλον.
> τὴν δ' ἦ τοι ῥέξαι θεὸς ὤρορεν ἔργον ἀεικές·
> τὴν δ' ἄτην οὐ πρόσθεν ἐῷ ἐγκάθετο θυμῷ
> λυγρήν, ἐξ ἧς πρῶτα καὶ ἡμέας ἵκετο πένθος.

> For neither would the daughter born to Zeus, Helen of Argos,
> have lain in love with an outlander from another country,
> if she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaians would bring her
> home again to the beloved land of her fathers.
> It was a god who stirred her to do the shameful thing she
> did, and never before had she had in her heart this terrible
> wildness, out of which came suffering to us also. (23.218-24)

Since this speech is arguably the most limelit in the entire *Odyssey* (if for no other reason than its dramatic placement), it seems almost comical that the overwhelming majority of classical philologists of antiquity and such moderns as Kirchhoff, Merry, Wilamowitz, van Leeuwen, Finsler, Schwartz, von der Muhll, and Schadewaldt[12] reject the next six lines as spurious-- and not for firm textual reasons, either, but because they have not been able to fathom why the lines are there. The sentiment has struck them as inapposite, illogical, or just plain nonsense. Here is a case in which Penelope's words are not discounted by the claim that she is lying; rather, they are discounted by the claim that she never said them at all.

Even many scholars who accept the speech as authentic have trouble with it. Hanna Roisman in her article "Penelope's Indignation, " attempts to salvage Penelope's apology for Helen by interpreting it as a subtle expression of her "hurt pride" and her anger at Odysseus for being left out of the loop (1987, 68): "...she greets her husband not with unalloyed delight, but rather with mixed feelings provoked by Odysseus's earlier treatment of her" (59). "The analogy she draws between her own experience and Helen's," Roisman

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[12]Merry, *Odyssey*, XIII-- XXIV, ad loc; Kirchhoff, 531-2; Wilamowitz, 7; van Leeuwen, ad loc.; Finsler, 434 ('*Unsinn*'); Schwartz, *332;* von der Muhll, ad loc.; Schadewaldt, op. cit (Introd.), 24 ('*unlogisch*').

goes on to say, "which implies that there was no motive for her fidelity to Odysseus beyond her knowledge that he would someday come back and make her remarriage useless, is simply another cutting statement that expresses her anger" (68). I hope that I have dispelled any tendency to embrace this sort of an argument that inevitably reduces Penelope to a minor character with petty motives who has no positive agency in the plot.

To my mind, with the apology for Helen, the poem attains a sublime height of grace and wisdom. It is not the power of the human seducers that is emphasized– Paris is not mentioned– but the weakness of the seduced, or rather, the human propensity to self-deception. Penelope's analysis assumes the essentially Platonic point that no one does evil willingly who knows the truth and its corollary, namely, that the doer always believes his deed is for the best, and will work out well. Penelope's insight is that not even Helen, the most destructive of all women, intended to do evil. According to Penelope, Helen believed that she was making the right decision when she ran off with Paris, and that all would be for the best. The value of any decision, Penelope implies, depends upon its consequences; but its consequences can never be known at the moment the decision is made. Helen would have had the strength to resist her act of wildness (ἄτην) had she been able to foresee the future. An incontrovertible fact of human existence, though, is that no mortal *can* ever have certain knowledge of the future. From that fact, flows all of life's permanent and ineluctable indeterminacy. In the face of the inescapable incompleteness of knowledge, it is the human tendency (the human gift, perhaps) to fill in the gaps of knowledge with the imagination.

Penelope's speech is less of an apology for Helen's faults than it is a modest account of her own virtue. Except in the stoutest, the most ἔμπεδος of minds, the imagined outcome of any action is often the dupe of wishful thinking. Penelope is indicating that she is aware of the risk and has always taken great pains– she says out of fear– to resist it. For this reason, Penelope's vision is essentially tragic, though by no means sad or defeatist. Action must be accomplished in spite of partial knowledge of what we are really doing. This is the idea of the tragic that Helene Foley finds in both Aristotle and Penelope.[13] It does not blame the gods for human suffering. In this, it invokes Zeus's lament in Book 1 over the general stupidity of people who blame the gods for their troubles.

> ὦ πόποι, οἷον δή νυ θεοὺς βροτοὶ αἰτιόωνται·
> ἐξ ἡμέων γάρ φασι κάκ' ἔμμεναι· οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
> σφῇσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν,
> Oh, for shame, how the mortals put the blame upon us
> gods, for they say evils come from us, but it is they, rather
> who by their own recklessness win sorrow beyond what is given. (1.32-34)

The gods may meddle, tempt, deceive, even act badly out of jealousy for human happiness as Penelope hints that the gods did in the case of her marriage. Nevertheless, the stubborn human being with a stout heart and steadfast mind can endure. These are the qualities that Penelope shares with Odysseus and constitutes their true *homophrosyne*. The word ἔμπεδός is used for the bonds that hold Odysseus against the mast to prevent him from being seduced by the Siren's song (12.161) and for the footing that he manages to maintain

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[13]See Helene Foley, "Penelope as a Moral Agent."

as he dangles over Charybdis, the whirlpool. In Book 19, the Cretan once describes Penelope as a king whose fame (κλέος) goes to wide heaven because his land flourishes under good rule, and the "sheepflocks continue to bear vigorous young (ἔμπεδα μῆλα)" (19.113). This is not so much to make Penelope into a king, as to make a king into a mother whose own firmness secures the family. Finally, I would point out that the word ἔμπεδον is used at 23.203 to describe the unshakeable bedpost of the marital bed.

The apology reveals the centrality of the theme of self-deception, symbolized by the idea of seduction and of the contrast between ὄναρ and ὕπαρ, and may form a critical response by the poet of the *Odyssey* to the poet of the *Iliad*, even if they be one and the same. If Helen is a goddess of love who acts like a mere woman, Penelope is the mere woman who acts like a god. In Book 2 of the *Iliad*, Agamemnon is the supreme symbol of one who is eager to fool himself. Zeus, who is himself vulnerable to seduction by Hera, successfully deceives Agamemnon through a dream that can be profitably contrasted to the one that Penelope refuses to believe. Zeus deliberately sends a lying dream to Agamemnon which the epic audience knows is false and to which none of the other Greeks would have given the slightest credence had they dreamed it. The poet makes it clear that the leader of all the Achaians believes the dream to be false because he badly wishes to believe it so. Would he have curbed himself, as Penelope says even Helen would have, if he could have glimpsed the results? Would anyone have gone off to Troy, if the consequences had been clear?

It is not merely that Penelope and Odysseus love each other, which they do. Penelope falls weeping into Odysseus's arms, and he into hers. The poet describes this moment with a simile that banishes all doubts about their joy. More important, though, the simile highlights how Penelope's trials have been no less harsh and turbulent than Odysseus's.

> ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ἀσπάσιος γῆ νηχομένοισι φανήῃ,
> ὧν τε Ποσειδάων εὐεργέα νῆ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ
> ῥαίσῃ, ἐπειγομένην ἀνέμῳ καὶ κύματι πηγῷ·
> παῦροι δ' ἐξέφυγον πολιῆς ἁλὸς ἤπειρόνδε
> νηχόμενοι, πολλὴ δὲ περὶ χροῒ τέτροφεν ἅλμη,
> ἀσπάσιοι δ' ἐπέβαν γαίης, κακότητα φυγόντες·
> ὡς ἄρα τῇ ἀσπαστὸς ἔην πόσις εἰσοροώσῃ,
> δειρῆς δ' οὔ πω πάμπαν ἀφίετο πήχεε λευκώ.
> and as when the land appears welcome other men who are swimming,
> after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open
> water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy
> seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward
> by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them,
> and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;
> so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,
> and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms. (23.233-40)

Book 23 is the emotional climax of the *Odyssey*, but the epic ends with husband and wife again separated, continuing to secure what is most important to them, the stability of the οἶκος. Odysseus unites the three generations of men in a show of continuity and strength.

ὣς φάτο, Λαέρτης δ' ἐχάρη καὶ μῦθον ἔειπε·
τίς νύ μοι ἡμέρη ἥδε, θεοὶ φίλοι; ἦ μάλα χαίρω·
υἱός θ' υἱωνός τ' ἀρετῆς πέρι δῆριν ἔχουσιν.
Laertes also rejoiced, and said to them:
"What day is this for me, dear gods? I am very happy.
My son and my son's son are contending over their courage." (24.513-15)

Though Penelope is not there with a spear in her hand, she is doing her part. Once again, she remains at home entrusted with the house and its wealth. And she is equal to the job.

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