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THE STORIES OF AGAMEMNON IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY* *

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The Oresteia-story is told repeatedly in the course of Homer's *Odyssey*, by narrators as diverse as Zeus, Athena, Phemius, Nestor and Agamemnon himself, and it has become a modern critical commonplace that the tale serves there as a foil for the larger story of Odysseus and his family.[1] The complex role of the Mycenean saga in Homer's epic and its implications for the way the poem was meant to be heard, however, have never been fully appreciated. Story-tellers within the *Odyssey* use the Oresteia for their own purposes, and present it in a variety of versions that reflect their different interests, insights and degrees of knowledge about what happened in Agamemnon's house. The characters who hear the tales understand and interpret them in accord with their own plans and preoccupations. Homer himself, meanwhile, uses the accumulating force of these varied versions of the Oresteia to deceive, mislead, frighten and intrigue his audience. Tradition probably demanded that Odysseus return to Ithaca, take revenge on the suitors and regain control of his household. The poet uses the tales of Agamemnon, however, to hint repeatedly to his audience that this Odyssey may end in a way they know it should not. Agamemnon's death and the way it functions in the epic thus becomes a paradigm not just of the saga of

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[1] The Oresteia story is told at I.35–43, 298–300; III.193–98, 234–35, 255–312; IV.90–92, 512–37, 546–47; XI.387–89, 409–34, 452–53; XIII.383–84; XXIV.19–22, 96–97, 199–200; cf. I.46–47, 326–27. That there is a connection between the two tales is an observation at least as old as Denton J. Snider, *Homer's Odyssey* (St. Louis 1895) 16. The scheme received its decisive modern formulation (at least for American scholars) in Edward F. D'Arms and Karl K. Hulley, "The Oresteia-Story in the *Odyssey*," *TAPA* 77 (1946) 207–13, to whom the idea is generally credited. Cf. also W. J. Woodhouse, *The Composition of Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford 1930) 140–41, 246–47; Ingemar Düring, "Klutaimestra—νηλὴς γυνά. A Study of the Development of a Literary Motif," *Eranos* 41 (1943) 95; Hildebrecht Hommel, "Aigisthus und die Freier," *Studium Generale* 8 (1955) 237–45, esp. 239–42; Uvo Hölscher, "Die Atridensage in der Odyssee," in *Festschrift für Richard Alewyn* (Cologne 1967) 1–16; Anthony T. Edwards, *Achilles in the Odyssey*, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie, Heft 171 (Königstein/Ts. 1985) 27–28; Alfred Heubeck and Stephanie West, in Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West and J. B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* Vol. 1 (Oxford 1988) 16–17 and 60, respectively. The most recent work on the subject is Uvo Hölscher, *Die Odyssee. Epos zwischen Maerchen und Roman* (Munich 1989) 94–102, 297–310.

Odysseus and his family, but also of the complexities of the interrelated processes of telling and listening to stories.[2]

Our *Odyssey* is almost certainly a retelling of a story familiar to much of its original audience. Every individual auditor, of course, will have brought with him or her a slightly different experience of the tale: for a few, it may have been entirely new; many will have been familiar with competing but often closely related versions told by other story-tellers or singers; some may have heard Homer himself describe Odysseus' adventures on a previous occasion. What Aristotle wrote four centuries later about tragedy was thus probably true for oral epic as well: a poet can develop a story as he likes, but he is not free to alter its basic "facts." Clytemnestra can only die at the hands of Orestes; only Alcmaeon can kill Eriphyle (*Poetics* 1453b.21–26).[3] So too much of Homer's audience was probably familiar enough with the Troy-cycle to demand that Achilles be killed by Paris, that the Greeks sack the city, and that Odysseus defeat the suitors.[4] Morrison has shown that the *Iliad*-poet generated tension and thus interest in his account of the wrath of Achilles by repeatedly implying that (contrary to all expectation) Hector would ultimately burn the Greek ships.[5] Willcock, following Kakridis, has demonstrated that the same poet felt a remarkable degree of freedom to adapt mythological paradeigmata to fit the situation of his characters more closely.[6] The stories of Agamemnon in the *Odyssey* are part of very similar poetic processes of manipulation of the expectations of an audience listening to an oral poem.

The story of the *Odyssey* begins with a description of the subject of Zeus' musings in the Assembly of the Gods, which is the sorry behavior of human beings in general, and of "faultless Aegisthus, whom Orestes, the far-famed son of Agamemnon, killed" in particular (I.29–30).[7] This brief initial summary of

[2] Some of the terminology used in, and much of the inspiration for this paper derives from a reading of John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1985).

[3] On the importance of Homer for Aristotle's understanding of tragedy, cf. James C. Hogan, "Aristotle's Criticism of Homer in the *Poetics*," *CP* 68 (1973) 95–108.

[4] On the dangers of overestimating Homer's originality, cf. Frederick M. Combellack, "Homer the Innovator," *CP* 71 (1976) 44–55.

[5] James Morrison, *Homeric Misdirection: False Predictions in the "Iliad"* (Diss. Michigan 1988), forthcoming as a monograph.

[6] M. M. Willcock, "Mythological Paradeigma in the *Iliad*," *CQ* 14 (1964) 141–54, esp. 141–42, 147–53. Thus Niobe eats despite her sorrow because Priam must do the same (XXIV.601–20), and Meleager grows angry, withdraws from battle, rejects the pleas of noble ambassadors, and ultimately loses the gifts offered him because that is what Achilles is doing (IX.550–56, 573–99). Cf. Johannes Th. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches* (Lund 1949) 18–27, 96–105. Important related discussions include Alfred Heubeck, *Der Odyssee-Dichter und die Ilias* (Erlangen 1954) 19–22; Julia Haig Gaisser, "Adaptation of Traditional Material in the Glaucus-Diomedes Episode," *TAPA* 100 (1969) 165–76; Bruce Karl Braswell, "Mythological Innovation in the *Iliad*," *CQ* 21 (1971) 16–26; Mabel L. Lang, "Reverberation and Mythology in the *Iliad*," in Carl A. Rubino and Cynthia W. Shelmerdine (edd.), *Approaches to Homer* (Austin 1983) 140–64.

[7] On the early history of the Agamemnon-story in the literary tradition, cf. José Alcina, "Observaciones sobre la figura de Clitemestra," *Emerita* 27 (1959) 297–

the Mycenean saga is the poet's (or the Muse's) own and, by leaving Clytemnestra wholly out of the picture, suggests from the first that this will be a tale of men and conflict between men, set in a man's world (cf. I.1). All the same, no specific interpretation of the Oresteia story is offered here, and no direct application of it made to what is to come. In the next 75 lines, Zeus and Athena, acting in one sense independently but also under the direct control of the poet, take up the Mycenean tale and shape and adapt it to their own purposes. Neither of these retellings, however, offers Homer's audience any consistent or reassuring foreshadowing of what will happen in this version of Odysseus' homecoming.

Zeus, the epic's first independent speaker, is also its first independent storyteller, and begins his version of the Oresteia at I.35. Despite his indignant protest at I.64–67, Zeus has no thought at all for Odysseus at this point. Instead, he brings Aegisthus up only as part of a larger complaint about human beings, who get troubles σφῇσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν, and then foolishly blame the gods (I.32–34). Aegisthus in particular, Zeus remembers, was warned not to court Agamemnon's wife or kill him when he returned. Nonetheless he did so, and paid the price for his recklessness when Orestes began to long for his fatherland (I.35–43).

Zeus is not telling this story with any intention of setting the intellectual stage for a Homeric epic, but is simply complaining to his assembled fellow deities (I.26–27) about mortal folly and unreasonableness. He presents his version of the Mycenean saga in order to bring out one point only: that he and the other Olympians are not responsible for the troubles human beings have beyond their portion (esp. I.34). Homer, of course, is free to use his characters' words for purposes which transcend their own, and modern readers have thus often been tempted to compare the references made to the Mycenean saga later on in Book I (esp. I.298–300). Zeus' description of Aegisthus' outrages is then taken to reflect the behavior of the suitors on Ithaca, and the vengeance extracted by Zeus' Orestes associated with the part Telemachus takes in the fighting later on in the epic (XXII.91–309).[8] All the same, this is an entirely unnatural perspective. For an audience which experiences the *Odyssey* as an unfolding oral narrative, a textless song heard from one end to the other rather than read, no such connections are necessary or perhaps even possible. Aegisthus might be taken to

321; Düring (see above, note 1) 91–123; Albin Lesky, "Die Schuld der Klytaimestra," *WS* N.F. 1 (1967) 5–21, esp. 10–17; A. J. N. W. Prag, *The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition* (Warminster and Chicago 1985) 68–73; A. F. Garvie (ed.), *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* (Oxford 1986) ix–xxvi; Malcolm Davies, "Aeschylus' Clytemnestra: Sword or Axe?," *CQ* 37 (1987) 65–71; March (see above, note 1) 81–98. For the artistic tradition, cf. Emily Vermeule, "The Boston Oresteia Krater," *AJA* 70 (1966) 1–22; Mark I. Davies, "Thoughts on the *Oresteia* Before Aischylos," *BCH* 93 (1969) 214–60; Prag (above) esp. 1–60.

[8] Cf., e.g., Samuel E. Bassett, "The Proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *AJP* 44 (1923) 346–47: "It seems clear that the poet meant by the mention of Orestes in the opening speech of Zeus...to suggest...: as Orestes avenged his father, so shall Telemachus aid in the vengeance on the Suitors;" George Eckel Duckworth, *Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Epics of Homer, Apollonius and Vergil* (Princeton 1933) 46–48; West in Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (see above, note 1) ad 37ff.

represent in a general way the troubles that await Odysseus on Ithaca (I.18–19). Homer's audience has no compelling reason to think specifically of the suitors and Telemachus when they hear of Aegisthus and Orestes in Zeus' speech, however, for no mention has yet been made in the poem of any of the young men on Ithaca.[9] Unlike the Olympians in I.26–95, on the other hand, Homer's auditors have heard the prologue, and in particular have been introduced there to the theme of the exile of Odysseus, who has begun to pine for his homeland.[10] For them, therefore, a much stronger potential connection between the two stories has already emerged: Odysseus may be preparing to play Orestes, by returning to Ithaca to take vengeance for the wrongs done him there.[11]

Athena responds to her father's complaint by taking up his story and turning it to her own different and equally immediate purposes, which once again have nothing to do with foreshadowing the course of the epic as a whole.[12] Aegisthus deserved his fate, the goddess acknowledges (I.46–47), but she directs Zeus' attention to another case: her favorite, Odysseus, trapped against his will on Calypso's island (I.48–59). Athena's goal within the narrative context of the assembly on Olympus is thus only to use the Oresteia-story to influence her father. Here in Odysseus is another mortal, she suggests, another example of the race about whose misbehavior and ingratitude Zeus has just complained (esp. I.32–34). Although the gods intervened to help the first (cf. I.37–43), he foolishly rejected their advice, and has accordingly paid the deserved penalty (I.46–47). The case of Odysseus, however, seems to put the lie to Zeus' insistence on divine benevolence and human irresponsibility.[13] Odysseus always behaved with exemplary piety (esp. I.60–62), but now suffers from apparent divine malevolence and neglect, and seems to have no control over his fate. Athena

[9] Telemachus is not mentioned until I.88; the suitors are introduced at I.91–92. Even if Homer's audience did make this connection, the Agamemnon-paradigm would be considerably less assuring for them than it is for privileged modern readers, who know and study an essentially fixed text, and can thus have no doubt about how the story ends. If Homer's audience does somehow connect Agamemnon with the suitors or Orestes with Telemachus, the implication of the model is clearly that Odysseus (like Agamemnon) will be murdered when he reaches home.

[10] νόστου κεχρημένον I.13; οἰκόνδε νεέσθαι/ εἰς Ἰθάκην I.17–18; πάρος ἦν γαῖαν ἱκέσθαι I.21; cf. I.49, 57–59, 75–77, 83, 87.

[11] Cf. Düring (see above, note 1) 96: "These words also foreshadow the vengeance Odysseus is going to resort to."

[12] Athena's repeated νυ...νυ...νυ (I.59–62) suggests that she is impatient with her father, but this does not mean that what she says is merely an aggressive *non sequitur*.

[13] The poet has already made a point of the fact that Odysseus' comrades perished σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν (I.7–9). The hero is thus defined by contrast as the non-reckless man. Jenny Strauss Clay, "The Beginning of the *Odyssey*," *AJP* 97 (1976) 315–17, rightly asserts that part of the point here is to absolve Odysseus (rather than the gods) of responsibility for his men's deaths, but the question of divine vengeance is nonetheless also introduced (I.9). In any case, there can be little doubt that an audience actually hearing the poem will recognize the verbal echoes, and thus the thematic connections, between I.7–9 and I.32–43, esp. 34. On the theological difficulties in the passage, cf. Bernard Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey*, Hermes Einzelschrift 30 (Wiesbaden 1974) 208–30; Jenny Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton 1983) esp. 215–39.

therefore asks that her father intervene in this second case as well, by once again sending Hermes (I.84–87; cf. I.38).[14] Perhaps this time events in the human world will turn out differently.

The *Odyssey* thus opens with a sophisticated manipulation and exploration not only of the Oresteia-theme, but also of the whole problem of story-telling and -interpreting. The poet initially introduces the Mycenean saga without comment, although with a distinctly masculine bias; Zeus seizes upon it to establish a particular basis for his general denunciation of human folly, and the poet uses these words to suggest a parallel between Odysseus and Orestes; Athena takes up the theme to suggest a telling and troubling contrast between Aegisthus and Odysseus, and to spur her father to action on the latter's behalf. Homer's audience may already have begun to suspect that the Mycenean saga will be an important standard for comparison throughout this new poem. That it will have any single, obvious significance there, however, already seems quite unlikely.

When Athena arrives in Ithaca a few hundred lines later, she uses a new version of the Oresteia-story to urge another character to action. Athena's avowed purpose in visiting Odysseus' home is to see to it that Telemachus wins his fair share of reknown (I.93–95), and she therefore plays off the boy's fixation on the κλέος he has lost through his father's mysterious disappearance at sea (esp. I.237–41) in order to encourage him to oust the suitors from his house (esp. I.294–96). Orestes won glory when he killed Aegisthus, she reminds Telemachus (I.298–300), and the same sort of glory is available for him if he will only act as he ought (I.301–2). Like Homer's audience, Athena is well aware that Odysseus is alive and will return soon to Ithaca (esp. I.76–87). Telemachus, however, is firmly (if incorrectly) convinced that his father is dead (esp. I.161–62, 166–68), and Athena carefully exploits this misapprehension to encourage him to think of himself in the role of the avenging son.[15] At the same time, the goddess neglects to mention Orestes' murder of his mother Clytemnestra. Tensions are emerging on Ithaca between Telemachus and Penelope (I.249–51), but there is no expectation on the boy's part that they will reach the point of bloodshed. The Oresteia Athena presents here is thus carefully tailored to fit the situation she confronts in Odysseus' household, and to accomplish her specific goals there.[16]

Both Athena and Telemachus also ignore the fact that the suitors have not killed Odysseus as Aegisthus killed Orestes' father Agamemnon (cf. I.299–300). In one sense, therefore, even the limited details of the rather circumscribed paradigm the goddess offers the boy seem not entirely well suited to his situation. For Homer's audience, which has heard this detail mentioned earlier in the

[14] Prag (see above, note 7) 68, notes that Hermes' mission to Aegisthus is mentioned nowhere else in Greek literature, and suggests the detail is an innovation introduced into the story to further the parallel with Odysseus. Cf. West in Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (see above, note 1) ad 37ff.

[15] On Odysseus' "death" and return to life in the *Odyssey*, cf. Rick M. Newton, "The Rebirth of Odysseus," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 5–20.

[16] Cf. Garvie (see above, note 7) xi; Hölscher 1989 (see above, note 1) 300–303.

poem (I.35–36, 39), however, the way in which the Mycenean king died now suddenly becomes highly significant. The character of Odysseus' return to Ithaca, after all, remains unspecified, beyond the vague assurance it will include further troubles (I.18–19).[17] Telemachus, moreover, is being encouraged to leave his own country (I.280–86), just as Orestes did (I.41). For an audience which knows (as Telemachus does not) that Odysseus may return in the meantime, the model Athena offers here implicitly suggests the hero will be murdered on his homecoming. This "ought not," of course, to happen. All the same, the Oresteia-model here discreetly raises the possibility that (contrary to all expectation) it will be Telemachus rather than Odysseus who plays the part expressly assigned him here, that of Orestes the avenger.

The Mycenean saga is alluded to one last time in Book I, in the song of Phemius (Ἀχαιῶν νόστον.../ λυγρόν, ὅν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη I.326–27), and this brief retelling of the story works once more to provoke questions and anxieties in the poem's external audience about what is to come.[18] Once again, the poet introduces questions of narrative selectivity and parochial interpretation into his tale. The suitors are entranced by Phemius' song (I.325–26), as well they might be, since it suggests the ultimate justification for their courtship of Penelope: that Odysseus (like Agamemnon and so many others) died in "the wretched homecoming of the Achaians."[19] Penelope herself, in fact, explicitly identifies Odysseus with the lost Greeks (I.340–44), and her tearful reaction (I.336) to Phemius' song acknowledges that it contains no obvious hint of any happy ending. Telemachus, however, like Homer's audience, is a more privileged auditor, for he can think now in terms of the Oresteia-story as a whole. For him, the νόστοι can be interpreted as paradigms not of loss but of opportunity: if his father is like Agamemnon (as everyone seems to acknowledge), then he can be like Orestes (cf. I.289–302). It is thus not just hard-heartedness when Telemachus tells his mother to listen to what the bard is singing (I.353). He now recognizes a fuller (if still fundamentally defective) interpretation of Phemius' poem, and therefore pointedly observes that "not only Odysseus lost his homecoming day" (I.354).

Phemius' song contains one further novel and disturbing feature, which escapes the notice even of Odysseus' son but cannot fail to attract the attention of Homer's audience, who know who the stranger "Mentes" really is. It was specifically Athena who devised the disastrous homecoming of the Greeks (I.327), and this new detail raises disturbing questions about the goddess' ulti-

[17] Athena has so far promised or explicitly planned nothing for Odysseus beyond the simple fact of his return to Ithaca (esp. I.83, 87; cf. I.76–77).

[18] The νόστοι-catalogues of Nestor (III.184–94) and Menelaus (IV.499–569) make it clear that the stories of Agamemnon and Odysseus would have been at the center of any such song, and Nestor explicitly ties their fates together at III.162–64; cf. Nestor's comment in III.193–94, about how well-known the story of Agamemnon is. Hölscher 1989 (see above, note 1) 97–99, argues that the myth of the "wretched homecoming" originally had to do almost exclusively with Agamemnon and then Odysseus.

[19] West in Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (see above, note 1) ad I.325–27, notes the irony in the contrast between the contents of the song the suitors are listening to and their ignorance of "Mentes'" real identity.

mate trustworthiness and purposes in Book I. After all, although it is said in the poem's opening lines that all the gods except Poseidon pitied Odysseus (I.19–20), Athena, who is directly responsible for the hero's impending return to Ithaca (esp. I.48–62, 80–87), has already established herself as a crafty and deceptive character. Homer's audience thus has good reason to hear in Phemius' song the troubling suggestion that this story of Odysseus may in the end be only a further extension of the "wrath of Athena"-theme so prominent in the other νόστοι.[20] This hero too, the poet seems to hint, may well be coming home to die.

The Oresteia story is thus referred to repeatedly throughout Book I of the *Odyssey*. Nonetheless, no single authoritative interpretation of its significance ever emerges either for Homer's audience or for the characters within the poem, who know and refer to events in Mycenae constantly, and every retelling (and hearing) of the saga is in fact different in small but significant ways. Odysseus may emerge as another "typically human" Aegisthus, or he may instead be a counter-example of mortal self-control. He may come home to play the part of Orestes, but perhaps he will be Agamemnon, since the role of avenger is also promised to Telemachus by Athena, whose own motives in this final, climactic νόστος are not altogether clear. The most important function of the Mycenean saga in the first Book of the *Odyssey*, in fact, seems to be to stir up anxiety in the poet's audience, by quietly suggesting that this apparently predictable story still has the capacity to end in unexpected ways. Odysseus "ought" to return to Ithaca and kill the suitors. All the same, Homer's audience is being encouraged to believe that he will be murdered, and that revenge will have to be taken by Telemachus.

Homer continues to use the Mycenean saga as part of this process of manipulative narrative misdirection when Nestor gives the poem's first true catalogue of νόστοι in Pylos in III.193–98. The old man sums up his brief story of Agamemnon with a profoundly positive evaluation of Orestes, whom he presents to Telemachus as the ideal son of a dead father: ὡς ἀγαθὸν καὶ παῖδα κατεφθιμένοιο λιπέσθαι/ ἀνδρός (III.196–97). Nestor's words can be read as a subtle compliment to and general encouragement of Telemachus.[21] He is not urging his young guest to kill the suitors, however, in the way Orestes killed Aegisthus. In fact, Nestor seems momentarily to have forgotten the troubles on Ithaca, and to be unaware of all the details of events there in any case (cf. III.211–15).[22] In his eyes, the story of Agamemnon and Orestes has only a very

[20] Cf. the connection Athena suggests between Odysseus and the villainous Aegisthus in I.46–48. Clay 1983 (see above, note 13) esp. 46–50, 208–11, identifies Athena's wrath against Odysseus as a central idea in the poem.

[21] Nestor would seem to have no way of knowing independently whether Odysseus is actually dead or not (III.184–85), but he never disputes Telemachus' assertion that he must be (III.88–91).

[22] The explicit comparison between the two young men in III.199–200 is apparently a later intrusion into the text. Cf. the Scholiast ad loc., who notes that the Alexandrian critics Aristophanes and Aristarchus athetized the lines (= I.301–2), ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ λόγου τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς...μετήχθησαν ἐνθάδε. Aristophanes did not necessarily have any manuscript evidence to support his judgment, but the lines certainly do not make sense in context.

general paradigmatic force: let Telemachus too be a good son, whatever that may mean.

Telemachus (along with Homer's audience), on the other hand, has been primed to see the Mycenean saga as applying much more directly to events in Odysseus' household (I.298–302). It is therefore he who makes a close paradigmatic association between the two stories, comparing the murder of Aegisthus to his own desire to kill the suitors, albeit only by insisting he is no Orestes (III.205–9). For Homer's audience, Telemachus' remarks about the gods' neglect of him and his father (III.208–9) are deeply ironic, since we know Athena is standing there next to him all the while, disguised as Mentor.[23] All the same, anyone who cannot flip a few pages ahead in order to be absolutely certain how this tale of Telemachus and Odysseus will turn out cannot help but be disturbed by the poet's reintroduction of the Mycenean saga here. Odysseus has been cast once more as "the new Agamemnon," and thus implicitly threatened once more with death. That Telemachus now declines to play the part of Orestes only raises the further possibility that this story may not end in any effective revenge for what is being done on Ithaca.

In direct response to Telemachus' repeated expressions of despair (esp. III.226–28), Athena invokes the Agamemnon-pattern yet again (III.234–35), albeit in terms that are, if not openly pessimistic, at least profoundly ambiguous. Athena promises Telemachus that the gods are capable of doing a great deal for those they love if they wish, καὶ τηλόθεν ἄνδρα σαώσαι (III.230; cf. III.228). All the same, she concludes by insisting that even the Olympians have no power over fate (III.236–38). In between these two essentially conflicting assertions, the goddess describes the murder of Agamemnon, who came home only to die. Even a late and difficult return, she insists, would be better than that (III.232–35). Telemachus takes Athena's opening remarks (III.230) as overly optimistic at best, and concludes that the gods have indeed allowed Odysseus to perish (III.240–42), just as he has believed all along (cf. I.161–62, 168; III.88–97). An audience which knows Telemachus' father is on his way back to Ithaca, on the other hand, will probably take Athena's reference to the possibility of a homecoming late and after many troubles (III.232–33) as an allusion to Odysseus' return. They will thus undoubtedly be disturbed by a new detail added to the goddess' latest version of the story: that Agamemnon died specifically ἐφέστιος (III.234).[24] Odysseus will certainly come home, Athena's story of Agamemnon reminds Homer's audience (cf. I.17–18). Nonetheless, her words hint at the possibility that he may still be killed there if that is his fate, in which case there is nothing his divine patron can do to save him (III.236–38). The goddess' favor may then have to be reserved for Telemachus, as Nestor's words earlier seemed to hint (III.218–20), and it may be his homecoming for which she will need to intervene (cf. III.231).

[23] The irony is even stronger in III.221–23, where Nestor wishes for Telemachus the sort of immediate protection Athena used to provide Odysseus.

[24] Contrast IV.532–35, XI.409–11, and XXIV.22, where the killing takes place at Aegisthus' house. On the problem of where Agamemnon lives and is assassinated, cf. Clarence Powers Bill, "The Location of the Palace of the Atridae in Greek Tragedy," *TAPA* 61 (1930) 111–29.

Athena introduces one other new detail into her story of Agamemnon, and this too seems intended primarily for the external Homeric audience: that the Mycenean king's wife had an equal share in the treachery leading up to the murder (III.235). None of the characters within the poem comment on this point, which remains largely irrelevant for them, since they all assume (with varying degrees of assurance or hypocrisy) that Odysseus is dead, and that his wife will therefore be of only marginal importance in what is to come. For an audience which knows the hero is alive and returning to Ithaca, however, this new detail brings up the issue of Penelope's character and behavior with particular force. Perhaps Odysseus' wife will continue to be faithful to her husband, as she has so far. Penelope's credentials for δόλοι of all sorts, on the other hand, have already been firmly established in the story of the shroud (II.88–122, esp. 88, 93, 116–22).[25] In the end, Athena's new version of the Oresteia tentatively suggests, Odysseus' wife may give in to her suitors and attempt to become another Clytemnestra. The hero's impending νόστος will then end either in his death or in a dramatic reversal of the Mycenean pattern, as the returning husband kills his treacherous spouse.

As the conversation in Pylos continues, Telemachus presses Nestor for further details of the story of Agamemnon (III.243–52), but does his best to turn the old man's narrative to his own purposes. Telemachus asks first about Menelaus, whom he plans to visit next (cf. I.93, 285), but quickly turns the focus of his questions to the details of Agamemnon's murder, and in particular to how Aegisthus killed someone far better than himself and then escaped punishment at the hands of the dead man's brother (III.249–50). The significance of this new area of interest is obvious: Telemachus, who despairs of Odysseus' return, now recognizes he must kill the suitors, if not openly then at least by guile (cf. I.294–96). If he cannot play Orestes (cf. III.205–9), therefore, he is willing to imitate at least some aspects of the outward behavior of the murderous Aegisthus.[26]

Nestor responds with yet another re-telling of the Agamemnon-story, which replies formally to Telemachus' questions but ultimately reflects the old king's own opinions and concerns rather than those of his young interlocutor (III.254–312). While the other Greeks were away at Troy, Nestor says, Aegisthus remained at home with Clytemnestra (III.263–64). The seduction, however, was not an easy or straightforward one. The queen's virtue remained intact for some (unspecified) period of time, during which she steadfastly resisted her suitor's advances, φρεσὶ γὰρ κέχρητ' ἀγαθῇσι (III.265–66). In this resistance the queen was assisted by another man, a singer who guarded her carefully (III.267–68).

[25] On the complexities of Penelope's character in the epic, cf. Sheila Murnaghan, "Penelope's *Agnoia*: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in the *Odyssey*," in Marilyn Skinner (ed.), *Rediscovering Creusa: New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity*, *Helios* 13 (1987) 103–15, and the bibliography cited there. For Penelope's weaving and its significance, cf. most recently Carol G. Thomas, "Penelope's Worth: Looming Large in Early Greece," *Hermes* 116 (1988) 257–64.

[26] The problem of vengeance by relatives does become a serious issue in this version of the *Odyssey*, but only after Odysseus kills the suitors; cf. XXIII.117–22, and the speech of Eupeithes at XXIV.426–37, esp. 433–37.

Only when he was out of the way did she finally give in to temptation and surrender herself voluntarily to her lover (III.269–72). Aegisthus then took her to his own house (III.272), although it was only after the murder of Agamemnon that he seized control of the kingship (III.304–5). During all this time, Menelaus was abroad, travelling among strange peoples and amassing wealth (III.299–302). When he finally returned home it was too late, for his brother was dead and the killing had been avenged by another man (III.309–12).

Nestor's story of Agamemnon is told almost entirely from Menelaus' perspective, with little attention paid to Orestes or his father, and this narrative innovation is both a response to Telemachus' specific question (III.249, 251–52) and closely tied to the old man's final point: that Telemachus must not be like Menelaus, who stayed away from his country for too long (III.313–16). An audience which (unlike Telemachus and Nestor) is aware that the boy's father is on his way back to Ithaca, of course, will see an even larger significance in the story, since Odysseus is in fact available to play the part of Agamemnon. The emphasis on Clytemnestra in Nestor's story, and particularly his otherwise odd remark that she had good sense (III.266), can also be understood as a comment on the situation of Penelope.[27] The danger on Ithaca, after all, has to do not so much with the queen's virtue or good intentions as with her endurance (cf. II.89–92, 122–28). Like Clytemnestra, Penelope is being offered an opportunity to betray her husband, long absent at Troy. Like Clytemnestra, she has not given in immediately to temptation. In the end, however, despite all her good sense, Clytemnestra's virtue failed when the one man who had been encouraging her to endure was removed from the scene. Perhaps Penelope's resistance to the suitors will collapse as well, now that Telemachus is absent from the household.[28]

Similarly disturbing questions about what is to come in this Odyssey are raised for Homer's audience in IV.512–37, in Menelaus' own story of Agamemnon. Menelaus initially mentions the part played by his brother's "destructive wife" in his death (IV.91–92), and it is tempting to see a reflection here of the domestic tensions that lie not too far beneath the surface in Sparta.[29] Once Helen joins the party (IV.121–22), however, Menelaus turns his attention entirely to the guilt of Aegisthus (IV.512–37).[30] Menelaus' account is itself only a report of what he was told by the Old Man of the Sea (cf. IV.349–50), and is therefore punctuated by the narrator's report of his own reactions to the news he now offers Telemachus (esp. IV.538–40; cf. IV.572). When Agamemnon

[27] Vermeule (see above, note 7) 11, attempts to explain this comment away by introducing new details into the story: "[This] does not make her a good woman corrupted; it only means she had good female sense, did not yield to Aegisthos' first seducing but waited and increased her price." Homer, however, does not say this.

[28] It is precisely the fear of such a development, in fact, that Athena uses to encourage Telemachus to return home as quickly as possible in XV.15–23.

[29] Cf. most recently S. Douglas Olson, "The Stories of Helen and Menelaus (*Od.* 4.240–289) and the Return of Odysseus," *AJP* 110 (1989) 387–94.

[30] Cf. the observations of Alcina (see above, note 7) 304, who believes Menelaus is only trying not to embarrass his wife with a public mention of her sister's misdeeds.

finally reached his native land, his brother reports, it was with joy and no apparent suspicion that further troubles were in store for him there (IV.521–23). Unfortunately, he was seen in advance by Aegisthus' watchman (IV.524–28) and met by an ambush of twenty select men (IV.530–31), who butchered him in a pitched fight at a feast (IV.532–37). Vengeance for the death was carried out by Orestes (cf. IV.546–47). All Menelaus did was build a burial-mound for his brother in Egypt (IV.584) and attend the funeral in Argos (IV.547; cf. III.309–12).

Menelaus offers no specific application of this story to Telemachus' situation, although one is clearly implicit in it. Athena, in her almost chaotic series of suggestions to Telemachus in Book I, advises him that if he decides his father is dead, he ought to heap up a grave-mound for him and settle his affairs calmly (I.289–92). This is all Menelaus did for his brother (IV.584), and Telemachus thus has the same option open to him now if he remains unwilling to act like Orestes (cf. III.205–9). Although he claims to regret his decision bitterly (IV.90–93), moreover, Menelaus says he spent the time when he should have been returning to his own country travelling about and growing rich in other lands (esp. IV.83–85; cf. III.301–2). When the narrative leaves Telemachus at IV.621, it is not altogether clear that he will not make the same unfortunate decision, particularly when the scene in Sparta closes with the eager host's (esp. IV.587–88) offer of magnificent gifts to his guest (IV.613–19; cf. IV.589–92).[31] If Odysseus does play the part of Agamemnon, Homer's audience is entitled to reflect, it is not yet clear whether Telemachus will take the role of Orestes or that of Menelaus. One other new detail added to Menelaus' story also seems designed to stir up anxiety in those listening to Homer's story: Agamemnon's death is now said for the first time to have taken place at a banquet (IV.534–35). If Telemachus does return to the feasting in the palace on Ithaca, it may be only to play the part of the Mycenean king and die. This possibility is made more immediate for Homer's audience when they (unlike the dinner-guests in Sparta) learn a little later that an ambush of precisely twenty young thugs awaits the prince on his homecoming (IV.669–71, 778–79, 842–47; cf. IV.530).[32]

As Book V begins, Zeus affirms specifically that it is Athena's purpose that Odysseus come home to take vengeance on the suitors (V.23–24). All the

[31] Menelaus does, in fact, suggest some books later that his guest put off his homecoming in favor of gathering more property, but at that point Telemachus turns the offer down (XV.80–91).

[32] Cf. XVI.371–72, 383–84; XX.240–41, where the suitors plot against Telemachus' life once again, and Telemachus' specific anxieties on that count in XVII.78–80. Edwards (see above, note 1) 29, notes that "In view of the parallel which the *Odyssey* draws between the returns of Agamemnon and Odysseus, the suitors' attitude towards Telemachus holds unmistakeable implications for Odysseus." That the murder of Agamemnon is said here to take place in a house to which the victim came only after his initial arrival home (IV.519–35), also adds to the eventual significance of the passage. Neither Odysseus nor Telemachus returns directly to the palace on Ithaca, for both go first to Eumaius' hut instead (XIII.404; XV.38), and then head off to the great feast in Odysseus' halls (XVII.6–25).

same, Homer continues to use the Agamemnon-pattern to create ironies and uneasy forebodings of the future in his audience's mind. Thus Odysseus' attempt to intimidate the Cyclops Polyphemus by boasting about his association with Agamemnon "whose fame is now the greatest under heaven" (IX.263–64) takes on a grimly ironic quality for anyone who knows (as Odysseus does not) that the king of Mycenae is most famous for having just been murdered. The more important function of the Oresteia stories in the second third of the *Odyssey*, however, is to create further uneasy intimations of the role Penelope may play in events to come on Ithaca.[33]

Odysseus first hears the story of Agamemnon in Hades from the dead man himself (XI.409–34, 452–54), and summarizes the tale to Alcinoos and the other Phaeacians as destruction κακῆς ἰότητι γυναικός (XI.384). Agamemnon devotes particular and painful attention to Clytemnestra's role in the killing, insisting that Aegisthus did not do the deed alone. Instead, it was carried out σὺν οὐλομένῃ ἀλόχῳ (XI.410), and it is for his "dog-eyed" wife that the murdered king reserves his bitterest denunciations (XI.421–34). Odysseus too, he insists, must beware of Penelope when he returns home (XI.441–43, 454–56), even though she is apparently trustworthy in a way Clytemnestra never was (XI.444–46). Agamemnon's knowledge of both the situation on Ithaca and his own story, of course, is severely circumscribed. He knows nothing about the suitors, Penelope's dilemma or the travels of Telemachus (cf. XI.447–51). Nor is he aware of how Clytemnestra was seduced or of Orestes' ultimate vengeance. For an audience which knows all these details, however, there is a bitter irony in Agamemnon's assumption that no similar troubles await Odysseus on his homecoming (esp. XI.444). The murdered king's question about his son (XI.457–61) is also only a natural one under the circumstances (cf. XI.492–93). All the same, although Odysseus can tell Agamemnon nothing (XI.463–64), the dead man's words are enough to provoke thoughts once again in Homer's audience of the oft-repeated tale of Orestes' revenge, and so an awareness that another potential Orestes awaits in the wings in the person of Telemachus.[34] This Odyssey, after all, has already become in large part a Telemacheia, in the same way that Agamemnon's story (unbeknownst to him) became an Oresteia.[35] This new poem, the poet seems to suggest, still has the capacity to end in unexpected ways.[36]

While in the Underworld, Odysseus acknowledges no direct connection between Agamemnon's story and his own life (XI.435–39). That he takes what he has learned there seriously, however, becomes clear when he arrives on Ithaca.

[33] Cf. the discussion of Hölscher 1989 (see above, note 1) 303–4; for a similar attempt by the poet to create doubts about the trustworthiness of Odysseus' wife, cf. Anne Vannan Rankin, "Penelope's dreams in books XIX and XX of the *Odyssey*," *Helikon* 2 (1962) 617–24.

[34] Cf. the discussion of Hölscher 1989 (see above, note 1) 305–6.

[35] Teiresias' speech does little to diminish the suspense about Telemachus' role in the story, since he makes no mention of him whatsoever (XI.115–20). Anticleia's information is pathetically outdated (XI.184–87).

[36] If Telemachus were somehow to take the part of Agamemnon and be murdered, on the other hand, generational roles might switch, and Odysseus become his avenger.

In response to Athena's description of the situation in his household (XIII.377–81), Odysseus immediately compares himself to the murdered Mycenean king, claiming he has nearly fallen into the same sort of trap (XIII.383–85). The comparison is at first glance an odd one, since Athena has just told the hero that his wife (unlike Clytemnestra) remained faithful to him during all the years of his absence (XIII.379–81).[37] Odysseus, however, is no less artful a story-teller and -interpreter than anyone else in the epic (cf. XI.367–76),[38] and is interested in a different connection between his story and Agamemnon's: other men are courting his wife (cf. XIII.377–78) and thus may try to kill him. Odysseus still knows nothing of Telemachus or Orestes (cf. XI.463–64), and the implications of the pattern thus end for him in this threat to his own life. Once again, however, an audience which knows about both young men and has heard the story of Orestes' revenge told over and over again will be quick to recognize that the hero's story will inevitably be more complex than he himself realizes.

Odysseus now returns home, kills his rivals, and is reunited with his wife and son. Homer uses the Oresteia-theme only one more time in the *Odyssey*, but this final reference offers a tentative suggestion about its larger significance in the poem as a whole.[39] As Achilles and Agamemnon meet in the Underworld in Book XXIV in the aftermath of the fighting on Ithaca, an explicit and extended contrast is drawn between their deaths: Achilles' brought him glory and recognition (XXIV.36–94); Agamemnon's was disgraceful (esp. XXIV.34). Few details of the Mycenean king's story are given, but Achilles' remarks (XXIV.24–34) and the short, stark description Agamemnon himself offers of the murder (XXIV.95–97) create a sharp implicit contrast with the much happier homecoming of Odysseus. The Ithacan hero, it seems, has successfully escaped both the dangers of the war at Troy and the threatening pattern of events at Mycenae. Both Achilles and Agamemnon, moreover, are accompanied by crowds of companions (XXIV.15–22), and these hangers-on, otherwise utterly unnecessary to the action, invite comparison with a third group of men, the suitors, who now arrive in Hades *en masse* under the escort of Hermes (XXIV.99–100). The suitors have not died gloriously in battle, as Achilles and other heroes at Troy did (cf. XXIV.15–18). Instead, they have been butchered ignobly in another man's halls, like Agamemnon and his companions (esp. XXIV.22).

Throughout the course of this Odyssey, therefore, both the characters themselves and Homer's external audience catch glimpses of many connections (or potential connections) between the story of Odysseus and events at Mycenae, but no single "correct" or final interpretation of the paradigm emerges. In the end, Odysseus turns out not to be a second Agamemnon, killed by his deceitful wife and her lover on his return from Troy (esp. XI.409–11). Instead, he

[37] Athena's remark in XIII.333–34, that anyone else in Odysseus' situation would certainly have rushed off home immediately to see his wife and children, moreover, is clearly intended as a direct contrast with the behavior of Agamemnon (cf. XI.430–32, 450–53).

[38] On Odysseus as a manipulative story-teller, cf. C. R. Trahman, "Odysseus' Lies (*Odyssey*, Books 13–19)," *Phoenix* 6 (1952) 31–43.

[39] Cf. the discussion of Hölscher 1989 (see above, note 1) 306–8.

successfully plays the parts of Aegisthus, who killed his rival in his own halls (esp. IV.532–35, XXIV.22), and Orestes, who returned from exile to win κλέος by taking vengeance for his house and honor (esp. I.39–40). Odysseus' son Telemachus also takes the part of Orestes by taking revenge for his dishonored father (esp. I.298–300), but without any need for the death of his parents. Despite his extended absence from Ithaca and the plots against him, moreover, Telemachus avoids the fate of Agamemnon, who was murdered on his homecoming, and the shame of Menelaus, who returned to his country too late to take revenge and did nothing but heap up a burial mound for the dead man in a distant land (cf. III.311–12; IV.584). Odysseus' wife Penelope proves herself both the polar opposite of Clytemnestra and her equal. Unlike the Mycenean queen, she does not give in to sexual temptation and betray her husband with another man (esp. XXIV.199–200), even when her one male guardian is removed (cf. III.267–72). She earns a Clytemnestra-like (esp. III.235) reputation for tricks and treachery (II.88–122, XXIV.125–41), however, and in recognition of this Odysseus' victims ultimately assign her a substantial and even conscious role in their murder (esp. XXIV.126–27).[40] She also wins for herself a κλέος like that of Orestes (XXIV.196–98; cf. I.298–300) and precisely the opposite of Clytemnestra's (cf. XXIV.198–202).[41] The suitors, finally, try to imitate the initial success of Aegisthus, who seduced the king's wife, murdered him on his homecoming, and took control of the kingship (esp. III.272, 304–5). In the end, they succeed only in sharing the villain's ultimate punishment (esp. I.43), and in emulating the unfortunate Agamemnon, who was butchered ingloriously at a feast in another man's house (esp. IV.534–35).[42]

The tales of Agamemnon are thus not a straightforward and simple blueprint for a new poem, a sort of narrative shorthand which defines this Odyssey's course in advance for the characters within it or for Homer's audience without. Not only the implications of the Mycenean saga but even its contents vary in each retelling, depending on who is repeating the story, who is listening to it, and what information, presuppositions or intentions the various parties bring with them to the narrative. The Mycenean tales' most basic and repeated function in the epic, in fact, is to create suspense and irony through a series of deceptive hints and foreshadowings, false leads and suggestive dead ends. All of these serve Homer's ends, by forcing his audience to recognize that even this traditional story remains beyond their power to control or predict. They must therefore listen to this new version of Odysseus' return with concern and attention, for it still has the power to surprise them. The stories of Agamemnon and

[40] This is the suitors' own misinterpretation of the degree of cooperation between Odysseus and Penelope. Murnaghan (see above, note 25), rightly rejects the unfortunate modern notion (most recently revived by John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* [New York and London 1990] 129–61) that Penelope recognizes Odysseus on some level before he kills his rivals.

[41] Cf. Garvie (see above, note 7) xi; Victoria Pedrick, "The Hospitality of Noble Women in the *Odyssey*," *Helios* 15 (1988) 85–101.

[42] For the killings in Book XXII as an example of a λόχος-pattern in Homer, cf. Edwards (see above, note 1) 27–38, esp. 35–37.

his house are thus powerful and significant precisely because they retain their elemental power as stories, in that they can be told and retold in new and various ways, and thus made to serve the poet's larger ends.