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HEROIC (IM)MATURITY:
DOMESTIC RUPTURE AND THE MYTH OF TELEMACHUS' COMING OF AGE

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Abstract

As one of the most enduring narratives discussed in the field of Classics, extensive research has been written about Homer's *Odyssey*. The universal and flexible maxims of the desire for homecoming (νόστος) make the events of this epic so compelling. One central aspect of Odysseus' νόστος is the return of his son Telemachus to a specific role as the obedient prince. This implies that before the resolution of Odysseus' νόστος, there exists the rupture of the domestic sphere that allows for freedom and chaos, both of which are removed and checked when Odysseus returns to Ithaca. For as long as Penelope's suitors are present and continue their disturbance, Telemachus can assert himself as an individual, challenging what would otherwise be his role as a subordinate son under normal circumstances. Consequently, his maturation is halted and reversed upon Odysseus' fulfilled νόστος. Telemachus, just beginning to taste independence and leadership, is forced to forgo the little power he gains once Odysseus returns to set Ithaca back in proper order. This thesis explores the problems and complications within existing scholarly assumptions about Telemachus' coming-of-age narrative and instead argues that his maturation is halted and reversed upon Odysseus' return, despite continued attempts to assert himself.

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Introduction

In considering the narrative of Telemachus' growth in the *Odyssey*, many scholars maintain that he successfully undergoes a coming of age or at least some level of emotional and psychological development. For instance, Heath quite simply states that "through the course of the *Odyssey* Telemachus grows up."¹ Austin claims that Telemachus "undergoes a noticeable change, or a development, in the course of the *Odyssey*,"² while Petropoulos more specifically labels it as a "psychosocial maturation."³ Thalmann contends that "there is general agreement that he is still a youth at the beginning of the poem but matures as the plot proceeds."⁴ Beck outlines the evolution of his character as "from an uncertain boy to a young man."⁵ Millar and Carmichael describe him as unique in that "he is, perhaps, the only character in Greek literature who shows any development."⁶ Rose presents a more multifaceted thesis: "Many scholars have suggested that the journey is the instrument for Telemachus' psychological development, his education, his growth into manhood and strength of character, or, as some have expressed it, his initiation into his father's heroic world."⁷

These assertions each hinge on Odysseus' presence and influence. Once Odysseus returns and gradually begins to assert control, Telemachus achieves adulthood by successfully integrating Odysseus' cleverness into his speech and actions, culminating in the successful slaughter of the suitors. In discovering his father's whereabouts and later aiding him in his plot to

¹ John Heath, "Telemachus ΠΕΠΙΝΥΜΕΝΟΣ: Growing into an Epithet," *Mnemosyne* 54, no. 2 (2001): 129, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4433196>.

² Norman Austin, "Telemachos Polymechnos." *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 2 (1969): 45, doi: 10.2307/25010581.

³ J. C. B. Petropoulos, *Kleos in a Minor Key: The Homeric Education of a Little Prince* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 9.

⁴ William G. Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow: Representations of Class in the Odyssey* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 206.

⁵ Deborah Beck, *Homeric Conversation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 78.

⁶ C. M. H. Millar and J. W. S. Carmichael, "The Growth of Telemachus," *Greece & Rome* 1, no. 2 (1954): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/641054>.

⁷ Gilbert P. Rose, "The Quest of Telemachus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967): 391, doi: 10.2307/2935885.

regain his kingship, Telemachus achieves the independence necessary to no longer be considered a child. While some scholars certainly recognize Telemachus' subordination to Odysseus by the end of the epic, they continue to assert that he has successfully and fully evolved from the boy we met in Book 1. Scholars presuppose a linear growth model that aligns with Telemachus' role as a secondary character: once Athena rouses him to journey to Pylos and Sparta to seek news of his father, Telemachus has the knowledge necessary to return home and successfully cooperate with Odysseus. He begins as an immature, sheltered, and helpless prince, but his journey (ὁδός) is a microcosm of Odysseus' decade of wandering and thus enables him to transform into a confident and crafty young man.

This perspective overlooks the complexity of how Telemachus' narrative weaves into Odysseus' νόστος ("homecoming"). One aspect of Odysseus' νόστος is the return of his son to a specific role: that of the obedient prince. This implies that before the resolution of Odysseus' νόστος, there exists the rupture of the domestic sphere that allows for freedom and chaos, both of which are removed and checked when his νόστος is completed. The suitors, then, embody the disruption of the home and family and the failure of νόστος. However, this also means that for as long as the suitors are present and continue their disruption, Telemachus can assert himself as an individual, challenging what would otherwise be his role as a subordinate son under normal circumstances.

This thesis aims to consider the problems and complications within existing scholarly assumptions about Telemachus' coming-of-age narrative and instead argue that his maturation is halted and reversed upon Odysseus' return, despite continued attempts to assert himself. Telemachus does not experience a constant progression toward maturity and independence, but a series of starts and stops that ultimately result in his acquiescence to his family's hierarchy.

Telemachus, just beginning to taste independence and leadership, is forced to forgo the little power he gains once Odysseus returns to set Ithaca back in proper order.

Chapter 1: Telemachus' Journey in the Telemachy

The first four books of the *Odyssey*, collectively referred to as the *Telemachy*, open the narrative with Telemachus, a melancholic and self-doubting youth troubled by the consumption of his father's estate at the hands of the suitors who insist his mother Penelope remarry. With the divine inspiration of Athena to seek news of his presumed-dead father Odysseus, Telemachus departs from Ithaca to Pylos and Sparta. At Pylos, Telemachus meets the warrior Nestor, who recounts Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and Orestes' vengeance, an inspirational parallel to Telemachus' own desire for revenge against the suitors. Menelaus and Helen receive Telemachus at Sparta, and from them, Telemachus hears of how Odysseus' exploits through the Trojan horse aided in the fall of Troy.

The *Telemachy* presents Telemachus' growth as a series of starts and stops, of both progression and reversal, whereby he faces the discomfort that comes with the initial acceptance of independence. Through his encounters in these first four books, the narrator presents Telemachus as an individual who recognizes his plight but does not have the internal and external means to resolve the problems he must confront. Telemachus' return home signifies not only the beginning of his understanding of the relationship between himself and his father, but his use of that knowledge in confronting the power of the suitors, Penelope, and the other residents of Ithaca who deny him authority. This chapter will analyze a series of passages from the first four books to illustrate how Telemachus' newfound independence does not equate with a fully-fashioned sense of responsibility and maturity but provides an opportunity for him to transform his abandonment into a source of freedom.

Book I: My mother says that I am of him, but I do not know

In the conversation that introduces Telemachus as a character, Telemachus immediately divorces himself from his relation to Odysseus, establishing an internal pattern that resurfaces and evolves throughout the narrative. Telemachus, upon hearing the possibility that Odysseus is alive and merely kept from home against his will from Athena-Mentes, immediately doubts his relation to Odysseus rather than the truth of Athena's statement:

τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.
 μήτηρ μὲν τέ μέ φησι τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γε
 οὐκ οἶδ': οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἐδὸν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω.
 ὡς δὴ ἐγὼ γ' ὄφελον μάκαρός νύ τευ ἔμμεναι υἱὸς
 ἀνέρος, ὃν κτεάτεσσιν ἐοῖς ἐπι γῆρας ἔτετμε.
 νῦν δ' ὃς ἀποτμότατος γένετο θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων,
 τοῦ μ' ἔκ φασι γενέσθαι, ἐπεὶ σύ με τοῦτ' ἐρεεῖνεις. [1.214–220]

Therefore I will tell you everything exactly, stranger. My mother says that I am of him, but I do not know: for any man does not yet know well his own descent. Would that I now be the son of some happy man, whom old age came upon among his own possessions. Now he has become the most unhappy man among mortal men, of whom they say I am born from, since you ask this of me.⁸

Notably, Telemachus uses the personal pronoun ἐγὼ three times within this portion of his first exchange with Mentes-Athena. This pronoun intensifies Telemachus' relationship to the three verbs it is connected to—ἀγορεύσω, οἶδα, and ὄφελον—and thus conveys a resolute sense of self-ownership and isolation.

Ἀγορεύσω as a future indicative verb conveys a powerful sense of confidence, and in Telemachus' particular case, serves as an assertion of his agency. By commanding his own speech, Telemachus embodies the Odyssean quality of taking control of his narrative, but unlike Odysseus, he chooses to reveal his insecurities to a stranger. Telemachus employs the formulaic phrase μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω (“I will tell you everything exactly”) in two other instances: at 15.266 when speaking to Theoclymenus and at 16.113 when speaking to the disguised

⁸ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Odysseus.⁹ In contrast, Odysseus only uses this formula once at 14.192 as he prepares to recite his elaborate false narrative as a Cretan to Eumaeus.¹⁰ He also employs a phrase with a similar sentiment at 24.303 when he falsely presents himself as Eperitus to his father Laertes before revealing himself shortly after.¹¹ Telemachus' honesty, whether a deliberate confession or a signifier of his immaturity, immediately differentiates him from his father. This candid expression of doubt presents the opportunity for the formulation of the distance between himself and Odysseus. By attributing Odysseus' status as a father to Penelope's words, Telemachus has neither internalized nor personalized Odysseus' relationship with himself. This dissociation of blood grants Telemachus limited independence, even if Telemachus views this independence as disadvantageous:

νῦν δέ μιν ἀκλειῶς ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο:
οἷχεν ἄιστος ἄπυστος, ἐμοὶ δ' ὀδύνας τε γόους τε
κάλλιπεν. οὐδέ τι κείνον ὀδυρόμενος στεναχίζω
οἶον, ἐπεὶ νῦ μοι ἄλλα θεοὶ κακὰ κήδε' ἔτευξαν. [1.241–244]

But as it is the hurricanes swept him away without fame. He is gone unseen and unheard, and he left to me both grief and mourning. I, grieving, do not lament for that man alone, since now the gods prepared other baneful troubles for me.

This passage depicts how Telemachus crafts an internal narrative about what happened to his father that allows him to justify his own inaction. Although mournful of his father's disappearance, he relents to the conflicts brought by Odysseus' absence and to how the gods dictate his present and future circumstances. Telemachus is so preoccupied with the problems

⁹ I will discuss the other two employments of this formula at 15.266 and 16.113 in greater detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Odysseus employs a similar formula, ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπὲ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον ("But come, tell me this and recount it exactly"), in the *Iliad* when he questions Dolon (10.384, 405). In the *Odyssey*, this formula also appears when Odysseus asks Tiresias why his mother's ghost does not recognize him (11.140), when the disguised Odysseus urges Eumaeus to continue the story of how he became a servant of Laertes and Anticleia (15.383), and when he questions Laertes before revealing his true identity (24.256). Telemachus also uses the formula when he first questions Athena-Mentes' identity (1.169). This alternative usage is a means of extracting information rather than offering it. I do not point out the number of times these formulas are used to formulate a statistical argument since obvious limitations are imposed by the available data, but to instead illustrate how they are used in the context of truthful and deceitful speech.

¹¹ The phrase used here is τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι πάντα μάλ' ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω ("Therefore I will recount to you everything exactly"), thus conveying the same sentiment as μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.

that plague his house that he cannot envision a return of order to Ithaca through his own efforts (although he does imagine his father's response in 1.115–117), especially as other Achaean authorities refuse to claim the throne. The social and political upheaval caused by the uncertainty of Odysseus' status prevents Telemachus from associating himself with the order and authority entitled to kingship. His avoidance of responsibility is a signature quality of both his immaturity and the manifestation of his independence in the *Telemachy* that, as I will elucidate in Chapter 3, disappears when the narrative returns to him in Book 15. At this point in the narrative, Odysseus' νόστος does not entail Telemachus' refusal of responsibility and authority, but Odysseus' denial of it.

Returning to 1.214–220, οὐκ οἶδα as a negated perfect verb form suggests Telemachus does not know his father because he has had no direct personal experiences with him. This emphasis suggests Telemachus' entire disconnect from Odysseus as a paternal figure; anything he *does* know about Odysseus comes through accounts from others, whether Penelope, the loyal servants of the palace, or other residents of Ithaca. Telemachus emphasizes himself because he only knows Odysseus as a construct, not a father. Ὀφελον in the aorist not only indicates obligation, but when used within a wish construction, implies an impossible fulfillment in either the past or the present. Telemachus expresses an impossible wish: to be the son of another man entirely. Telemachus rejects his relation to Odysseus in favor of a hypothetical construction of both an individual and a place not beset by suffering. Telemachus, so distant from his father, is unwilling to suffer hardship inflicted by and for the sake of a man he does not know. By claiming this opportunity to recount his knowledge (and more crucially, the lack thereof) of his father, Telemachus presents himself as an individual who is unwillingly dependent upon an absent paternal and political figure, pointing to his need to assert more agency.

Telemachus' characteristic complacency is illustrated in his defense against the eldest suitor Antinous' insult:

τὸν δ' αὖτ' Ἀντίνοος προσέφη, Εὐπείθεος υἱός:
 'Τηλέμαχ', ἧ μάλα δὴ σε διδάσκουσιν θεοὶ αὐτοὶ
 ὑπαγόρην τ' ἔμεναι καὶ θαρσαλέως ἀγορεύειν:
 μὴ σέ γ' ἐν ἀμφιάλῳ Ἰθάκῃ βασιλῆα Κρονίων
 ποιήσειεν, ὅ τοι γενεῆ πατρώϊόν ἐστιν.'
 τὸν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:
 'Ἀντίνο', ἧ καὶ μοι νεμεσήσεια ὅττι κεν εἴπω;
 καὶ κεν τοῦτ' ἐθέλοιμι Διός γε διδόντος ἀρέσθαι.
 ἧ φῆς τοῦτο κάκιστον ἐν ἀνθρώποισι τετύχθαι;
 οὐ μὲν γάρ τι κακὸν βασιλευμένον: αἰψὰ τέ οἱ δῶ
 ἀφνειὸν πέλεται καὶ τιμηστέρος αὐτός.
 ἀλλ' ἧ τοι βασιλῆες Ἀχαιῶν εἰσὶ καὶ ἄλλοι
 πολλοὶ ἐν ἀμφιάλῳ Ἰθάκῃ, νέοι ἠδὲ παλαιοί,
 τῶν κέν τις τόδ' ἔχησιν, ἐπεὶ θάνε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς:
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν οἴκοιο ἄναξ ἔσομ' ἡμετέροιο
 καὶ δμῶων, οὓς μοι ληίσσατο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς.' [1.383–398]

Then Antinous, son of Eupheithes, addressed him: "Telemachus, certainly the gods themselves teach you to be a braggart and to speak audaciously! May the son of Cronus not make you a king in sea-girt Ithaca, which is your patrimony by your birthright." Again observant Telemachus answered him: "Antinous, will you be indignant with me for what I shall say? I would be willing to take up this thing, that is if Zeus grants it. Do you truly say that this is the worst thing to arise among men? For it is not a bad thing to be king. His house quickly becomes wealthy and he is esteemed. But truly there are many other kings of the Achaeans in sea-girt Ithaca, young and old. Any man among these could possess this since godlike Odysseus is dead. However, I myself will be the master of our house and slaves, whom godlike Odysseus carried off for me.

What Antinous intends as an insult Telemachus instead accepts with not only resignation, but even contentment, choosing to open his response with a consideration of Antinous' anger rather than a sharp rebuke. Telemachus is so consumed by the problems the suitors cause for him and Penelope that he forgets the difference in status between himself and the suitors; he is content to relinquish his advantage in claiming Odysseus' kingship under his princely status for the sake of appeasing the suitors. Telemachus, like the suitors and the Achaean assembly, associates Odysseus' kingship alone with Ithaca and does not consider the potential of his own

rule, despite his adamant belief in Odysseus' death. While one can argue that this refusal establishes the necessity of Odysseus' νόστος, it also offers insight into Telemachus' conception of kingship. Telemachus associates sovereignty with wealth and honor, neither of which he truly possesses. The suitors consume his wealth, and Telemachus neither holds himself in great honor (by denying himself the opportunity to exercise his authority) nor do his mother and the other Achaeans recognize his potential authority. Telemachus is aware that the exercise of sovereignty will grant an opportunity to resolve the conflicts the suitors pose, but he does not view his potential authority as a benefit, since he does not believe in his right and ability to claim and wield that authority. In longing for Odysseus' return, in expressing frustration with Penelope for not outright refusing the suitors, and in being content with being master only of the smaller territory and possessions of his palace (1.397–398), Telemachus demonstrates an unwillingness to consider what will happen if he acts within this precarious situation rather than fantasizing about others returning order.

Book II: Pity seized all of the men

Book two contains Telemachus' longest uninterrupted speech in the *Odyssey* at 40 lines (2.40–79). In this speech, Telemachus relays the difficulties brought by both his father's absence and the suitors' harassment of his mother. His words quickly devolve into a desperate plea for the assemblymen to take action, culminating with Telemachus deflecting any semblance of responsibility and throwing the scepter to the ground in frustration. His words are closely intertwined with his actions through the involvement of the scepter, which plays a vital role at both the beginning and end of the scene.

Telemachus has thus far presented himself to the epic's audience as a powerless, passive, and despondent young man. Here, however, he is so encouraged by Aegyptius' indirect compliment that he physically stands up:

ὦς φάτο, χαῖρε δὲ φήμη Ὀδυσσῆος φίλος υἴος,
οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔτι δὴν ἦστο, μενοίνησεν δ' ἀγορεύειν,
στῆ δὲ μέση ἀγορῆ: σκῆπτρον δέ οἱ ἔμβαλε χειρὶ
κῆρυξ Πεισήνωρ πεπνυμένα μῆδεα εἰδώς. [2.35–38]

So he spoke, and the beloved son of Odysseus was delighted with the speech. But he was not yet seated long, since he was eager to speak. He stood in the middle of the assembly, and the herald Peisenor, who knew observant schemes, put the staff into his hand.

The herald Peisenor, who grants Telemachus the authority to speak before the assembly, has his “schemes” (μῆδεα) described with the same epithet (πεπνυμένα) used most frequently for Telemachus, πεπνυμένος, applied to him 46 times.¹² He is also pronounced μῆδεα εἰδώς (“knowing cunning things”); Alcinous is described in Book 6 as one who “knew cunning things from the gods” (θεῶν ἄπο μῆδεα εἰδώς, 6.12), but this participial phrase is employed more frequently in the *Iliad*. It is applied to the herald Idaeus (*Il.* 7.278), the herald Periphas (*Il.* 17.325), and Zeus (*Il.* 24.88), each used in the context of providing counsel. Its usage indicates that heralds must know how to speak carefully when delivering messages, which entails noticing how the recipient reacts to their words. It is from this perspective that I suggest a more nuanced understanding of the epithet πεπνυμένος.

Deborah Beck suggests that “the usage of πεπνυμένος in the *Odyssey* is more complex and less clearly generic than it is in the *Iliad*.”¹³ However, it is critical to note that πεπνυμένος does not have a definitive translation. Most dictionaries suggest that the epithet is derived from

¹² Heath, 130.

¹³ Deborah Beck, “Speech Introductions and the Character Development of Telemachus,” *The Classical Journal* 94, no. 2 (1998): 125, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3298206>.

the verb πνέω, meaning “to have breath or soul,”¹⁴ but its subsequent translations are largely dependent upon the context of the passage, and thus are metaphorical rather than literal.¹⁵ Rather than accepting the traditional translation of πεπνυμένος as “wise” or “thoughtful,” I instead suggest that “observant” more accurately captures the intricacies of this epithet and better corresponds to Telemachus’ character development. Richard Martin states that Telemachus’ characterization “works through a process of careful differentiation,” whereby the repetition of formulaic epithets allows for the bard to construct a consistent, three-dimensional persona and for the audience to perceive his growth.¹⁶ Just as Martin argues that the epithet θεοειδής (“godlike”) Telemachus shares with Paris in the *Iliad* suggests a potential for becoming “an indolent golden boy who relies on looks to get by,”¹⁷ his sharing of πεπνυμένος with the suitors Antinous (18.65), Eurymachus (18.65), and even Amphinomus (18.125) has a similar effect. Telemachus’ description of Antinous and Eurymachus as πεπνυμένος is insincere and ironic; it is clear that Antinous’ words are far from observant of proper custom when he encourages the

¹⁴ *Middle Liddell*, s.v. “πέπνυμαι,” 1999, Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=pepnu_me%2Fnos&la=greek&can=pepnu_me%2Fnos0&d=Perseus:text:1999.04.0073:entry=pepnume/nos&i=1#Perseus:text:1999.04.0058:entry=pe/pnumai-contents.

¹⁵ This epithet is not exclusively used for Telemachus. In the *Iliad*, it is applied to the Trojan elder Ucalegon (3.148) (Christopher John Mackie, “Oukalegon (Οὐκαλέγων, “not caring”),” 615); the Trojan elder Antenor (3.148, 3.203, and 7.347) (Johnathan S. Burgess, “Antenor (Ἀντήνωρ),” 58); Agamemnon’s herald Talthymbios (7.276) (Margalit Finkelberg, “Talthymbios (Ταλθύβιος),” 838–39); Priam’s herald Idaios (7.276 and 7.278) (Bruce Loudon, “Idaios (Ἰδαῖος),” 395); Idomeneus’ attendant Meriones (13.254 and 13.266) (Bruce Loudon, “Meriones (Μηριόνης),” 511–12); Polydamas, son of the Trojan elder Panthous (18.249) (Daniela Dueck, mentioned in “Panthoos (Πάνθοος, “all swift”),” 619); and Nestor’s son Antilochus (23.570 and 23.586) (Jonathan S. Burgess, “Antilochos (Ἀντίλοχος),” 60–61). In the *Odyssey*, it is applied to the Ithacan herald Peisenor (2.38, discussed above) (Nancy Felson, “Peisenor (Πεισήνωρ),” 636); Odysseus’ herald Medon (4.696, 4.711, 22.361, 24.442) (Bruce Loudon, “Medon (Μέδων),” 501); Nestor, king of Pylos (3.20) (Elizabeth Minchin, “Nestor (Νέστωρ),” 571–72); Nestor’s youngest son and Telemachus’ companion Peisistratus (3.52) (Nancy Felson, “Peisistratos (Πεισίστρατος),” 636); Menelaus, king of Sparta and brother of Agamemnon (3.328, 4.190) (Hanna Roisman, “Menelaos (Μενέλαος),” 506–7); the blind Theban prophet Tiresias (10.495) (K. Janet Watson, “Tiresias (Τειρεσίης),” 881); Antinous, the first leader of the suitors (18.65) (Bruce Loudon, “Antinoos (Ἀντίνοος),” 61–62); Eurymachus, the second leader of the suitors (18.65) (Bruce Loudon, “Eurymachos (Εὐρύμαχος),” 275); Amphinomus, arguably the only decent suitor (18.125) (Margalit Finkelberg, “Amphinomus (Ἀμφινόμος),” 43); Odysseus’ father Laertes (24.375) (Nancy Felson, “Laertes (Λαέρτης),” 453–54); and Odysseus himself (8.388, 19.350, 19.352, and 23.210) (Richard B. Rutherford, “Odysseus (Ὀδυσσεύς),” 581–83). All entries can be found in *The Homeric Encyclopedia*, ed. Margalit Finkelberg (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

¹⁶ Richard P. Martin, “Telemachus and the Last Hero Song,” in *Mythologizing Performance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 373.

¹⁷ Martin, 372.

beggar Irus and the disguised Odysseus to fight one another within the palace for a seat at their feast (18.43–49). Similarly, Odysseus’ consideration of Amphinomus as *πεπνυμένος* serves as a warning for the slaughter to come that Amphinomus does not perceive (18.125–56). In both of these instances, the application of the epithet *πεπνυμένος* provides insight into the “box of potential narrative directions” Telemachus’ character could take.¹⁸ If Telemachus does not mature, he could become insolent like Antinous and Eurymachus, or oblivious like Amphinomus—two qualities antithetical to his consistent observance of social customs.

John Heath instead specifically defines *πεπνυμένος* as “the mark of a man who has reached mature judgment and can speak and act accordingly.”¹⁹ In associating this epithet with Telemachus’ maturation, Heath claims that his transition from boyhood to manhood lies in his ability to disguise his knowledge and intentions.²⁰ This emulation of his father’s signature traits is currently impossible, however, because his speech does not yet evoke the authority necessary to defend his household. Heath notes that this epithet belongs to the character of Telemachus fully realized by the end of the epic,²¹ suggesting that not only does his worthiness of this epithet manifest in him masterfully replicating his father’s language, but that the development of this talent is one he must grow into and claim for himself.

Despite Telemachus having been described with this epithet even in Book 1, it is an older man worthy of the epithet who affords him the chance to speak. Telemachus, however, rejects this opportunity to seize authority when he throws the scepter to the ground:

ὦς φάτο χωόμενος, ποτὶ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίῃ
δάκρυ’ ἀναπρήσας: οἴκτος δ’ ἔλε λαὸν ἅπαντα. [2.80–81]

¹⁸ Martin, 372.

¹⁹ Heath, 135.

²⁰ Heath, 144. Heath constructs the majority of this argument in the context of Book 16 onward.

²¹ Heath, 130.

So he spoke in anger, and threw the staff on the ground, bursting into tears; and pity seized all of the men.

This refusal is a rejection on Telemachus' part to become a public figure, and moreover, his inability to incite action with his words reflects that this is a status he has not yet rightfully earned.²² The manner and impact of one's status as *πεπνυμένος* on individual speech are only effective when willingly recognized, and since Telemachus' words do not evoke these authoritative elements, the assemblymen can only respond to him with silence (2.82–83).

Ancient audiences were likely sensitive to Telemachus' similarity here with Achilles in the *Iliad* in the assembly scene of Book 1:

ὥς φάτο Πηλεΐδης, ποτὶ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίῃ
χρυσείοις ἥλοισι πεπαρμένον, ἔζετο δ' αὐτός: [*Iliad* 1.245–46]

So the son of Peleus spoke and threw the gold-studded scepter to the ground and sat down.

Achilles' gesture with the scepter visually enhances the verbal expression of his outrage, effectively incorporating movement into the intensity of his speech. Achilles weaponizes the political exclusivity of the scepter in that he recognizes its origin as a gift passed down from the gods that eventually reached Agamemnon (*Iliad* 2.100–108). By taking hold of the scepter and dashing it to the ground, Achilles not only rejects Agamemnon's authority, but the authority of the gods who enabled Agamemnon's rise to power. The significance of the scepter as an authoritative tool is compromised in the assembly scene of the *Odyssey* because the continuity of kingship has been disrupted. Odysseus' unconfirmed death prevents any Ithacan kings, least of all Telemachus, from claiming what is presented as a divine right. As a result, Telemachus' rhetorical happenstance of mimicking Achilles (whether intentionally on behalf of the tradition or not) has the opposite effect. With no authoritarian continuity established between Odysseus

²² Heath, 136.

and Telemachus, his outburst is embarrassing rather than a befitting reaction to injustice. Whereas Agamemnon continues to speak over Achilles until Nestor intervenes and urges for compromise, Telemachus' speech concludes with the tense silence of the assemblymen eventually broken by Antinous' mocking words. Telemachus' despairing declaration that "there is no man here, such as Odysseus was, to ward off ruin from the house" silently includes himself (οὐ γὰρ ἔπ' ἀνὴρ, / οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκεν, ἀρὴν ἀπὸ οἴκου ἀμῦναι, 2.58–59), and while a candid expression of his emotions, his defeatism extends to the assembly.

It is critical that Telemachus' only extended opportunity to speak results in failure. When compared to how he describes his planned speech to the assembly as a μῦθον in 1.373,²³ the reality of his speech succeeds in neither reinstating power in Ithaca through his assumption of the throne nor in convincing any men in the assembly to voluntarily solidify authority. This failure forces Telemachus to depart for Pylos and Sparta, an acquiescence to Athena's command to discover his father's whereabouts (1.271–96). Since he does not have the authority necessary to enact change in Ithaca, he must "think of climbing down, reaching a new agreement and asking for a respite in which to make enquiries" elsewhere.²⁴

This scene in Book 2 illuminates the advancements and hindrances of Telemachus' maturity: while he willingly took the opportunity to speak publicly by accepting the scepter, he failed to transmute his words into viable action for either himself or those present at the assembly, ultimately resulting in a personal rejection of the power he was offered. Since Telemachus does not receive or create an opportunity to redeem his speech, his observance remains internally incomplete rather than externally articulated.

²³ Martin, 375. Martin distinguishes unmarked ἔπος, any verbal speech, from marked μῦθος, "important speeches that accomplish something" or "performative utterances."

²⁴ Friedrich Klinger, "The Fight for Justice and Departure of Telemachus," in *Homer: German Scholarship in Translation*, trans. G.M. Wright and P.V. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 193.

Book III: I must nevertheless endure

While Athena-Mentes briefly mentions Orestes to Telemachus when convincing him to set sail (1.298–302), the significance of Orestes as an archetypal avenger is given greater attention in Telemachus' encounter with Nestor. Nestor, king of Pylos and a prominent counselor in the *Iliad*, hosts Telemachus after Telemachus eloquently pleads for news of Odysseus. Nestor recounts the prominent Achaeans who perished in or survived the Trojan War before he narrates the conflict between Agamemnon and Menelaus in the war's aftermath. In detailing Agamemnon's murder, Nestor encourages Telemachus to adopt Orestes' initiative. Telemachus, however, responds to Nestor's use of Orestes as a hortatory exemplar with deflection:

ὦ Νέστορ Νηληϊάδη, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν,
καὶ λίην κείνος μὲν ἐτίσατο, καὶ οἱ Ἀχαιοὶ
οἴσουσι κλέος εὐρὺν καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι:
αἶ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τοσσήνδε θεοὶ δύναμιν περιθεῖεν,
τίσασθαι μνηστῆρας ὑπερβασίης ἀλεγεινῆς,
οἳ τέ μοι ὑβρίζοντες ἀτάσθαλα μηχανόωνται.
ἀλλ' οὐ μοι τοιοῦτον ἐπέκλωσαν θεοὶ ὄλβον,
πατρί τ' ἐμῶ καὶ ἐμοί: νῦν δὲ χρὴ τετλάμεν ἔμπης. [3.202–209]

Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory of the Achaeans, truly that man avenged himself, and the Achaeans will carry his far-reaching glory so that future generations may hear of it. Would that the gods grant me power sufficient to punish the suitors for their grievous transgression, who are arrogant and contrive wicked things for me. But the gods do not spin such happiness for both my father and for me; as it is I must nevertheless endure.

Antithetical to the Oresteian narrative, Odysseus is not dead, leaving Telemachus incapable of perfectly replicating Orestes in his revenge fantasy. The little Telemachus knows of Orestes comes from the narratives others relay to him, just as he receives secondary knowledge of his father from Nestor and Menelaus. The morality of Orestes' and Telemachus' behavior correlates to the present status of their fathers, and while Orestes takes decisive action following his father's murder, the ambiguity of Odysseus' condition prevents Telemachus from initiating a

response to the suitors' exhaustion of his household assets.²⁵ This comparable dissonance allows Telemachus to associate Orestes' revenge paradigm with κλέος ("glory"), but doubt how he could justify the extermination of the suitors as a lawful execution:²⁶

ὦ γέρον, οὐ πῶ τοῦτο ἔπος τελέεσθαι οἶω:
λίην γὰρ μέγα εἶπες: ἄγη μ' ἔχει. οὐκ ἂν ἐμοί γε
ἐλπομένῳ τὰ γένοιτ', οὐδ' εἰ θεοὶ ὧς ἐθέλοιεν. [3.226–228]

Old man, I do not think this word will ever come to pass, for you spoke too highly of me; astonishment holds me. I have no hope that it may happen to me, not even if the gods are willing.

Just as with his conception of sovereignty over Ithaca, Telemachus does not see his place within such a reality; he associates vengeance with personal happiness or relief rather than a tale of the caliber of Orestes'. The ambiguity of Odysseus' absence does not grant Telemachus the freedom to slaughter the suitors himself, since there is no certainty that Telemachus can rightfully make such an authoritative decision. Compared to Orestes' condemnation of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Telemachus cannot blame the suitors for his father's death. If he discovered Odysseus was dead, however, he could take vengeance on behalf of his father's house for the suitors' extreme violations of ξενία ("hospitality" or more specifically "the rights of a guest"). Telemachus does not consider this a plausible option; he instead further denies himself the opportunity to relate to Orestes' actions by bringing Odysseus into his construct of happiness, deflecting attention from himself to his father.

Telemachus subtly associates himself with his father's epithet πολύτλας ("much-enduring") by choosing to imitate his father's power to endure immense suffering (τετλάμεν, "endure," 3.209). The image of the gods "spinning happiness" (ἐπέκλωσαν θεοὶ ὄλβον) Telemachus employs in 3.208 appears in similar constructions in Alcinous' prompting of

²⁵ Austin, 47.

²⁶ A. Gottesman, "The Authority of Telemachus," *Classical Antiquity* 33, no. 1 (2014): 31, doi: 10.1525/ca.2014.33.1.31.

Odysseus' past at 8.579–80, in the cowhand Philoetius' remarks to the disguised Odysseus at 20.194–196, and in the *Iliad* at 24.525–526 as Achilles grieves alongside Priam.²⁷ It is noteworthy that this phrasing often appears with sweeping pronouncements. Alcinous alludes to the epic proportions of the Trojan War within the context of the war's entertainment value, but implicit in that interest is the grand scale of the war's loss and brutality. Philoetius' disdain that misfortune should ever befall kings immediately identifies him as an ally of Odysseus, as he shows compassion that enhances the dramatic irony of their encounter. In recalling his father and mourning Patroclus, Achilles equates mortality with pain and immortality with a lack thereof. Telemachus' usage of this formula, then, colors his pronouncement as a "general truth" that cannot be refuted.

Telemachus bonds himself to his father, and thus to his father's story, in a mutual failure to access the "happiness" given by the gods (ὄλβον, 3.209). Just as Odysseus' ability to endure suffering until he can take action characterizes him, Telemachus defines his endurance as accepting his lack of power until his circumstances change. This unifying factor, however, dissolves upon Odysseus' return, and consequently, the resolution of his suffering. Odysseus' eventual arrival reveals the gulf between father and son; Telemachus and Odysseus' sufferings are fundamentally different because Telemachus did not (and could not) participate in the Trojan War. Odysseus' endurance was born from the brutalities of war and the misfortunes of his delayed νόστος. The suffering Telemachus endures, conversely, continues in the form of his contentious social and political status that increasingly becomes a greater barrier between himself and his father.

²⁷ The verb ἐπικλώθω ("to spin," and thus often translated as "to allot") appears ten times in the *Odyssey* and once in the *Iliad*. While my analysis focuses on how the verb is used in constructions that bewail the unhappy fates gods assign to mortals, it is also used in neutral and positive contexts. The verb usages in the *Odyssey* I do not investigate in my argument are when the gods allow Odysseus to begin his νόστος (1.17–18), when Menelaus mentions Nestor's long life and respectable sons as signs of his happy fate (4.207–211), when Odysseus responds to Tiresias' prophecy (11.139–140), and when Eumaeus recounts Odysseus' false Cretan tale to Telemachus (16.62–64).

Book IV: Turn us to our beds

Wissmann aptly notes that “Telemachus must undergo the same experience as his father in order to become like his father— πολύτροπος,” an epithet that “implies both character and rhetorical skill.”²⁸ Menelaus, a prototypical orator alongside Odysseus and Nestor, facilitates Telemachus’ education when he arrives in Sparta and recounts the Achaeans’ utilization of the Trojan horse. Amidst this rhetorical cultivation, Telemachus reveals himself as a perceptive listener who understands that Odysseus’ κλέος does not reside in his military feats during the Trojan War, but in his νόστος:

Ἀτρείδῃ Μενέλαε διοτρεφές, ὄρχαμε λαῶν,
 ἄλγιον: οὐ γάρ οἱ τι τάδ’ ἤρκεσε λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον,
 οὐδ’ εἰ οἱ κραδίη γε σιδηρῆ ἔνδοθεν ἦεν.
 ἀλλ’ ἄγετ’ εἰς εὐνήν τράπεθ’ ἡμέας, ὄφρα καὶ ἦδη
 ὕπνω ὑπο γλυκερῷ ταρπώμεθα κοιμηθέντες. [4.291–295]

Menelaus, son of Atreus, cherished by Zeus, leader of men, it is so much the worse: for these things did not ward off mournful ruin from him, even if his heart within him was made of iron. But come, turn us to our beds so that we may at once lie down and have our fill of sweet sleep.

Telemachus is implicitly aware of how the denial of Odysseus’ victory is the program of his νόστος; he dwells on Odysseus’ greater failure to return home rather than the magnitude of the exploit itself.²⁹ Telemachus does not express wonder or amazement at Menelaus’ recount or

²⁸ Jessica Wissmann, “Athena’s ‘Unreasonable Advice’: The Education of Telemachus in Ancient Interpretations of Homer,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 49 (2009): 422–23, <https://grbs.library.duke.edu/article/view/1241>.

²⁹ Telemachus exclaims that it would have been better had his father died in Troy, since then he would have κλέος:

ἐπεὶ οὐ κε θανόντι περ ὧδ’ ἀκαχοίμην,
 εἰ μετὰ οἷς ἐτάροισι δάμη Τρώων ἐνὶ δήμῳ,
 ἢ ἐ φίλων ἐν χερσίν, ἐπεὶ πόλεμον τολύπευσεν.
 τῷ κέν οἱ τύμβον μὲν ἐποίησαν Παναχαιοί,
 ἠδέ κε καὶ ᾧ παιδί μέγα κλέος ἦρατ’ ὀπίσσω.
 νῦν δέ μιν ἀκλειῶς ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο:
 οἴχετ’ ἄιστος ἄπυστος, ἐμοὶ δ’ ὀδύνας τε γόους τε
 κάλλιπεν. [1.237–43]

I would not mourn his death if he had been killed in the land of Troy with his comrades, or had died in the arms of his friends, after he finished the war. Then the Achaeans would have built a tomb for him, and he would have carried back glory for his son. But now hurricanes have swept him away, unsung—he is gone

ask further questions, but instead seeks joy in the nothingness of sleep. Whereas the Phaeacians are captivated by Demodocus' telling of the episode in Book 8 (8.514–520), Telemachus disregards this borderline-mythic tale as he continues to distrust his proximity to his father. As he continues to learn about Odysseus without truly knowing him, Menelaus' fantastic story further cements Telemachus' internal belief that Odysseus is an intangible figure—not just an absent father or ruler, but a nonentity entirely. Wissmann observes that the traits intended for Telemachus to imitate are not explicitly stated.³⁰ While Nestor mentions Odysseus' clever nature (3.120–23) and Menelaus describes him as one “who for my sake endured many toils” (ὄς εἴνεκ' ἐμεῖο πολέας ἐμόγησεν ἀέθλους, 4.170), neither of these men specify Odyssean characteristics for Telemachus to absorb into his self-understanding. This uncertainty puts the integrity of Odysseus' κλέος in a precarious position, as its incomplete nature prevents Telemachus from consigning it to himself.³¹ These traits instead become qualities for Telemachus to expect from his father rather than indicators of who or what *he* should become.

Conclusions

Telemachus' behavior in the *Telemachy* falters between self-assertion and hesitation as he navigates the newfound freedom Athena's call to action in Book 1 affords him. Page writes: “Athene has kindled a flame in the ashes of Telemachus' despair: what seemed unalterable is now suddenly in suspense, what was stagnant is now a stream in motion.”³² In accepting the comparison Athena draws between himself and Odysseus, Telemachus must simultaneously assume the maintenance of his family's integrity (1.222–223; 228–229).³³ This accession, however, entails Telemachus complying with a patriarchal system that both ordain him as his

unseen and unheard, and he left me both pain and grief.

³⁰ Wissmann, 425.

³¹ Petropoulos, 28.

³² Denys Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 60.

³³ Petropoulos, 23.

father's successor and disempowers him, preventing him from crafting and claiming a heroic identity.³⁴ These opposing forces drive Telemachus into a static state that contrasts with Odysseus' eventual νόστος. Whereas Odysseus overcomes the suffering he endures on his journey, Telemachus' return to Ithaca concludes with a blossoming independence pitted with unanswered questions. While Athena's instigation of his journey is instrumental in his personal development, there is no justification for why Odysseus' absence impedes his growth. The progression and reversal of his self-realization while in Ithaca, Pylos, and Sparta ultimately lead to a disquietude that enhances the emotional intensity of his reunion with his father in Book 16, where Telemachus' attempt to distance himself from the image of his father continues.

³⁴ Petropoulos, 79.

Chapter 2: Telemachus (and Odysseus) Returns

Books 15 and 16 of the *Odyssey* return to Telemachus' narrative after the narratological shift to Odysseus' departure from Calypso's island Ogygia and the recounting of his wanderings to the Phaeacians from Books 5 to 13. Telemachus departs for Ithaca from Pylos with the fugitive prophet Theoclymenus (15.222–300), and upon his return, reunites with the swineherd Eumaeus and his father, albeit disguised as a Cretan beggar (16.1–59). Odysseus delays his revelation of his identity to his son through a careful employment of dramatic irony and emotional appeals that climaxes with Telemachus' tearful recognition after Odysseus physically transforms and persuades him of his fatherhood (16.154–212). This moving reunion enables both father and son to formulate and actualize a plan for avenging Penelope and their wealth (16.213–320).

Telemachus' and Odysseus' respective returns create a strange liminal space in the epic, where both of their claims to authority are upended and unstable. With the knowledge he gains from Nestor and Menelaus, Telemachus begins to demonstrate independence and wield authority upon his return to Ithaca, as seen through his interactions with Theoclymenus and Eumaeus. Once Odysseus reveals himself as Telemachus' father, however, Telemachus must begin to submit to Odysseus and relinquish the possibility of embracing power. In this chapter, I will explore how Telemachus wrestles with and implements his newfound authority in Books 15 and 16. In Book 15, I will discuss the manifestation of Telemachus' growth from Books 1 through 4 during his conversation with Theoclymenus. In Book 16, I will consider how Telemachus' and Odysseus' reunion influences the basis for their familial relationship; because of their parallel journeys and hardships, both conceive of possession and power differently and must confront one another's differences.

Book XV: I will tell you everything exactly

Telemachus' exchange with Theoclymenus is crucial to analyze because it is one of the few (or perhaps the only) interactions Telemachus has with a character without any connection to Odysseus. It is also Telemachus' first full opportunity to establish his newfound maturity: after respectfully negotiating *ξενία* with Menelaus and Helen (15.120–82), and later again with Nestor through Peisistratus (15.183–221), Telemachus now wields *ξενία* by assuming the authoritative role of host for a suppliant. Telemachus takes the initiative without the guidance of a mentor, whether the respected elders Menelaus and Nestor, the divine Athena, or his accomplished peer Peisistratus.

As Telemachus pours libations in preparation for his departure from Sparta for Ithaca, Theoclymenus approaches him as a suppliant and questions who he is, where he comes from, and where he is going. Telemachus answers honestly:

τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.
 ἐξ Ἰθάκης γένος εἰμί, πατήρ δέ μοι ἐστὶν Ὀδυσσεύς,
 εἴ ποτ' ἔην: νῦν δ' ἤδη ἀπέφθιτο λυγρῷ ὀλέθρῳ.
 τοῦνεκα νῦν ἐτάρους τε λαβὼν καὶ νῆα μέλαιναν
 ἦλθον πειυσόμενος πατρὸς δὴν οἰχομένοιο. [15.266–70]

Stranger, I will tell you everything exactly. I am from Ithaca, and my father is Odysseus, if he ever lived... by now he has died a miserable death. For this reason I gathered my companions and sailed on my dark ship to seek news of my absent father.

In my first discussion of Telemachus' use of the phrase *μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω* ("I will tell you everything exactly") in Chapter 1, I explored how his candor distinguishes him from his father, whether as a sign of his moral character or his naiveté. Whereas his first application of the formula distanced him from Odysseus, his second employment of the phrase embraces Odysseus' fatherhood, and consequently, his position as his son. Just as in his first exchange with Athena-Mentes in Book 1, Telemachus chooses to honestly reveal his intentions to a stranger.

However, Telemachus is a more mature and self-assured individual than he was in Book 1, and his speech reflects his growth. Notably, Telemachus claims Odysseus is his father but remains pessimistic about the nature of his death. The present active indicative ἐστίν (“is,” 15.267) conveys a newfound confidence and self-ownership absent from the impossible wish construction ὄφελον ἔμμεναι (“would that I now be”) in 1.217. Telemachus now embraces the knowledge that he is Odysseus’ son, regardless of whether he is alive. De Jong mentions this and further notes that Telemachus “uses the nostalgic εἴ ποτ’ ἔην (γε), ‘if ever he (really) existed’ motif” employed by Penelope in 19.315 and Laertes in 24.289.³⁵ The motif is often employed not only for those who have died but more generally for circumstances that have changed for the worse.³⁶ Although Telemachus has moved toward believing that Odysseus is real rather than abstract or mythical, he maintains a pessimistic outlook characteristic of others who knew Odysseus. In repeating such a sentiment, Telemachus accepts his mother’s words he rejected before the *Odyssey* began, and identifies himself both as a sympathetic advocate, and distinctively, as a future ally.³⁷

The exchange continues:

τὸν δ’ αὖτε προσέειπε Θεοκλύμενος θεοειδής:
 ‘οὕτω τοι καὶ ἐγὼν ἐκ πατρίδος, ἄνδρα κατακτὰς
 ἔμφυλον: πολλοὶ δὲ κασίγνητοὶ τε ἔται τε
 Ἄργος ἀν’ ἰππόβοτον, μέγα δὲ κρατέουσιν Ἀχαιῶν.
 τῶν ὑπαλευάμενος θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν
 φεύγω, ἐπεὶ νῦ μοι αἴσα κατ’ ἀνθρώπους ἀλάλησθαι.
 ἀλλὰ με νηὸς ἔφεσσαι, ἐπεὶ σε φυγὼν ἰκέτευσα,
 μή με κατακτείνωσι: διωκόμεναι γὰρ οἴω.’
 τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:
 ‘οὐ μὲν δὴ σ’ ἐθέλοντά γ’ ἀπόσω νηὸς εἵσης,
 ἀλλ’ ἔπευ: αὐτὰρ κεῖθι φιλήσεται, οἷά κ’ ἔχωμεν.’

³⁵ Irene J. F. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 373.

³⁶ De Jong, 374: “Helen’s marriage to Menelaus (*Il.* 3.180); Nestor’s youthful prowess (*Il.* 11.762); and Hector (*Il.* 24.426).”

³⁷ See the discussion in Chapter 1 on 1.214–220.

ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας οἱ ἐδέξατο χάλκεον ἔγχος,
καὶ τό γ' ἐπ' ἰκριόφιν τάνυσεν νεὸς ἀμφιελίσσης:
ἄν δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς νηὸς ἐβήσετο ποντοπόροιο.
ἐν πρύμνῃ δ' ἄρ' ἔπειτα καθέζετο, πὰρ δὲ οἱ αὐτῷ
εἶσε Θεοκλύμενον: τοὶ δὲ πρυμνήσι' ἔλυσαν.
Τηλέμαχος δ' ἐτάροισιν ἐποτρύνας ἐκέλευσεν
ὄπλων ἄπτεσθαι: τοὶ δ' ἐσσυμένως ἐπίθοντο. [15.271–88]

Godlike Theoclymenus answered him: “I also left my homeland—because I killed a kinsman. His brothers and friends in horse-breeding Argos are many, and they have great power over the Achaeans. I avoided death from them and fled dark fate, since now it is my destiny to wander among men. But I beg you as a fugitive, set me on your broad ship so that they might not kill me, for I think they are hunting me.” Observant Telemachus addressed him: “I will not push you away if you wish to sail on my balanced ship, but follow us so that you will be welcomed, whatever we can offer.” So he spoke and took his bronze spear and laid it on the deck of the curved ship. He boarded the sea-faring ship, then sat at the stern; Theoclymenus sat beside him and the crew unbound the stern. Telemachus urged his companions to fasten the tackle and they eagerly obeyed.

Just as Odysseus provided refuge to Antinous’ father Eupheithes in Ithaca after Eupheithes allied with Taphian pirates (16.424–30), Telemachus now extends that same mercy to Theoclymenus, thereby enacting a kingly duty. Martin extensively analyzes the application of the epithet θεοειδής (“godlike”) to both Theoclymenus in this passage and to Telemachus in 1.114. He notes that the attribution of the epithet to Telemachus in 1.114 implicates him in the same personality as the infamous Paris in the *Iliad* (3.39–45). However, the epithet applied to Theoclymenus is entirely justified through his status as a seer, one capable of receiving the supernatural insights of the gods. Telemachus’ proper extension of ξενία, then, distinguishes him from the chief suitors who fail to do so, Antinous and Eurymachus, who also share this epithet.³⁸ When Telemachus is described again with this epithet soon after at 16.20, it is clear that the understanding of the epithet has shifted to accommodate his maturation.

This scene also provides an instructive parallel to Telemachus’ departure from Ithaca with Athena-Mentes in Book 2 (2.405–29). Whereas Telemachus began his journey sitting by

³⁸ Martin, 368–73.

Athena's side (2.416–18), Telemachus is now the one to sit at the stern and fully command his ship. Telemachus' command over his sailors is almost superficial at the start: it is Athena disguised as Telemachus who enjoins them to his cause and receives a ship for him in the first place (2.382–87). While the crew obeys his commands at the start of his journey (2.422–29), only now does he act as both host *and* captain. The imperative ἔπευ (from the verb ἔπομαι, “follow,” 15.281) signifies that Telemachus is not only extending ξενία to Theoclymenus but governing it. Telemachus takes Theoclymenus' spear just as he took Athena-Mentes' in Book 1 (1.121 and 1.126–29), now fully assuming the role of host as a mature young man.³⁹ Telemachus has complete control over the situation and demonstrates he is capable of taking on the responsibilities of others without the direct influence of other authority figures, just as a king would.⁴⁰

It is worth noting that these scenes employ the same “ship embarking” formula for his departure from (2.422–29) and return to Ithaca (15.287–94). The repetition of this framework invites us to examine these passages in tandem and consider how the variations in the formula reveal Telemachus' growth. The first variation occurs with τοὶ δ' ὀτρύνοντος ἄκουσαν (“and the men heard his encouragement,” 2.423) and τοὶ δ' ἐσσυμένως ἐπίθοντο (“and the men obeyed eagerly,” 15.288). The verbs ἄκουσαν (from ἀκούω, “hear”) and ἐπίθοντο (from πείθω, “persuade”) have different connotations that reflect the evolution of Telemachus' leadership. Whereas ἄκουσαν suggests a surface-level willingness to comply as befits their profession as sailors, ἐπίθοντο implies they view Telemachus as a competent leader and trust in his commands. The use of the participle ὀτρύνοντος (from ὀτρύνω, “hasten” or “encourage”) in Book 2

³⁹ De Jong, 371.

⁴⁰ The characters that immediately come to mind are Athena, Penelope, Eurycleia, and Eumaeus; however, a convincing argument can be made for the inclusion of the suitors and Odysseus' memory. While I do argue that Nestor and Menelaus' hospitality inform Telemachus' behavior toward Theoclymenus, he does not perfectly imitate them, as I will note later in my analysis.

emphasizes *Telemachus* giving commands, whereas the adverb ἐσσυμένως (“eagerly”) in Book 15 intensifies the *sailors’* willing obedience. The differing weight of these modifiers illustrates how the sailors have come to recognize Telemachus’ authority not only as a gift imparted by the goddess Athena but as a personal characteristic he has confidently claimed and learned to wield. Athena’s delivery of a favorable wind also appears in both variations, albeit in different locations. In Book 2, this component appears at the beginning of the “ship embarking” formula (2.420–21), while in Book 15, it appears at the end (15.292–95). This alternative framing serves to mark the shift in Telemachus’ agency and competency as an authoritative figure.

Gottesman argues that Telemachus secures authority by exercising his control over ξενία.⁴¹ Telemachus’ decision to host a wandering exile anticipates his opportunity to host his disguised father:

ἄλλως μὲν σ’ ἂν ἐγὼ γε καὶ ἡμέτερόνδε κελοίμην
 ἔρχεσθ’· οὐ γάρ τι ξενίων ποθή· ἀλλὰ σοὶ αὐτῷ
 χεῖρον, ἐπεὶ τοι ἐγὼ μὲν ἀπέσσομαι, οὐδέ σε μήτηρ
 ὄψεται· οὐ μὲν γάρ τι θαμὰ μνηστῆρσ’ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ
 φαίνεται, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπερωῖω ἰστὸν ὑφαίνει.
 ἀλλὰ τοι ἄλλον φῶτα πιφαύσκομαι ὄν κεν ἴκοιο,
 Εὐρύμαχον, Πολύβοιο δαΐφρονος ἀγλαὸν υἷον,
 τὸν νῦν ἴσα θεῶ Ἰθακήσιοι εἰσορόωσι·
 καὶ γὰρ πολλὸν ἄριστος ἀνὴρ μέμονέν τε μάλιστα
 μητέρ’ ἐμὴν γαμέειν καὶ Ὀδυσσεύος γέρας ἔξειν.
 ἀλλὰ τὰ γε Ζεὺς οἶδεν Ὀλύμπιος, αἰθέρι ναίων,
 εἴ κέ σφι πρὸ γάμοιο τελευτήσῃ κακὸν ἦμαρ. [15.513–24]

I would invite you to come to our home, for there is no lack of hospitality there, but it would be worse for you, since I will be absent and my mother will not see you. She does not appear in the house among the suitors, but weaves at her loom from her upper room. But I will tell of another man whom you could supplicate: Eurymachus, the illustrious son of warlike Polybus. Ithacans behold him like a god. He is by far the best man and yearns to marry my mother and possess Odysseus’ kingship the most. But only Olympian Zeus who dwells in the heavens knows if he will fulfill on their behalf an evil day of marriage.

⁴¹ Gottesman, 33.

Just as Telemachus is ashamed of the state of his palace when Athena-Mentes arrives (1.119–20), Telemachus expresses embarrassment for his mother’s behavior and his inability to protect Theoclymenus from the suitors while he is gone. However, this embarrassment can be further interpreted as a recognition of Penelope’s situation as he attempts to claim his position as his family’s κύριος (the adult male who was the master of the household) now that he has returned home. The κύριος, as most clearly conceptualized as early as classical Athens, was responsible for the guardianship of his wife, children, and the unmarried women who resided in his house.⁴² In this context, however, Telemachus does not specifically assert himself as Penelope’s husband,⁴³ but instead in a more general role as her caretaker. Odysseus’ return disrupts Telemachus’ initial, albeit unsteady, step into this role

This dilemma also anticipates Telemachus’ indecisive response to how he will show hospitality to the beggar Odysseus (16.70–77). Notably, Telemachus here initially defers ξενία to Eurymachus rather than rejecting the suitors entirely, as he will with the disguised Odysseus (16.85–90). Unlike his reception of Athena-Mentes in Ithaca, where he expresses disdain for the suitors’ behavior (1.159–62), Telemachus disregards their boisterous and disorderly banqueting and goes so far as to extend his hospitality to Eurymachus’ home.⁴⁴ However, Telemachus later changes his mind and instructs his companion Piraeus to care for him (15.539–46). This reassessment demonstrates the stops and starts of Telemachus determining how to wield ξενία and assert his leadership. His extension of hospitality to Theoclymenus is an anticipatory doublet to Odysseus’ arrival; it is a trial of ξενία that he passes, signaling his readiness to meet his father.

⁴² Barbara Levick, “Women and Law,” in *A Companion to Women In the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 98–99.

⁴³ I am specifically arguing against Petropoulos’ notion of “the symbolic resolution (or better yet, the successful suppression) of the Oedipal complex” discussed particularly during the bow contest, but also applicable here. See Petropoulos, 98.

⁴⁴ Cedric Hubbell Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 251.

Steve Reece presents the possibility of Theoclymenus being a vestige of an alternative narration of the *Odyssey*, where Telemachus sails to Idomeneus in Crete rather than Menelaus in Sparta. There in Crete, Telemachus meets with his father and plans their stratagem, which involves Odysseus disguising himself as the soothsayer Theoclymenus for the return journey to Ithaca.⁴⁵ Reece draws his evidence for this version from Odysseus' false tale to Eumaeus in Book 14,⁴⁶ using the outline of Odysseus' tale to demonstrate how "the character of Theoclymenus [acts] as a virtual doublet of Odysseus."⁴⁷ This is an attractive consideration since it further strengthens the *Odyssey*'s and the *Oresteia*'s parallel narratives; just as Orestes returns to Argos in disguise, so too does Odysseus disguise himself in both this alternative version and our standard narrative.⁴⁸ However, this divergent telling erases the importance of Odysseus' and Telemachus' separate returns. Telemachus' entrusting of Theoclymenus with Piraeus parallels his reception of Odysseus in Book 17, where he instructs Eumaeus to take Odysseus to the city while he informs Penelope of his own return (17.6–15). Both scenes reveal his confident command of ξενία: before Telemachus announces his return to Ithaca, he ensures his guest enters the city with a trusted escort.⁴⁹

Although Theoclymenus never discloses himself as a seer, he interprets the augury:

‘Τηλέμαχ’, οὐ τοι ἄνευ θεοῦ ἔπατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις
 ἔγνω γάρ μιν ἐσάντα ἰδὼν οἰωνὸν ἔοντα.
 ὑμετέρου δ’ οὐκ ἔστι γένος βασιλεύτερον ἄλλο
 ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης, ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς καρτεροὶ αἰεὶ.
 τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:
 ‘αἶ γὰρ τοῦτο, ξεῖνε, ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἶη:

⁴⁵ Steve Reece, "The Cretan *Odyssey*: A Lie Truer Than Truth," *The American Journal of Philology* 115, no. 2 (1994): 158. doi: 10.2307/295297.

⁴⁶ I mention this scene briefly in Chapter 1 in my analysis of Book 1.

⁴⁷ Reece, 163.

⁴⁸ Albert B. Lord, "The *Odyssey*," in *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd ed. Ed. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 164.

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_LordA.The_Singer_of_Tales.2000.

⁴⁹ Lord, 170. Lord further writes: "These two scenes look like multiforms of the same theme, and it is not surprising that scholars have sometimes thought that Theoclymenus is a duplication of Odysseus."

τῷ κε τάχα γνοίης φιλότητά τε πολλά τε δῶρα
 ἐξ ἔμευ, ὡς ἄν τις σε συναντόμενος μακαρίζοι.’ [15.531–38]

“Telemachus, the bird did not fly on the right without divine aid, for I perceived that it was a bird of omen. No other family in the land of Ithaca is more royal than yours; in fact, you all will always be powerful.” Observant Telemachus addressed him: “Stranger, would that this prophecy be fulfilled; then you would quickly know great love and many gifts from me, so that any man who meets you may bless you.”

De Jong observes that Theoclymenus’ explanation implies the suitors’ (especially Eurymachus’) attempts to marry Penelope and seize Ithaca’s throne will be in vain.⁵⁰ De Jong further describes his prophecy as “a fitting conclusion to the *Telemachy*,” as it confirms Telemachus is both presently ready to reunite with his father and is worthy to become Ithaca’s heir.⁵¹ However, Theoclymenus’ omen does not specify Telemachus as Ithaca’s king but perhaps suggests Odysseus will forever maintain his title, conforming to the constraints of the poem. The ambiguity of the pronoun ὑμεῖς (“you all,” 15.534) conforms to the obscure manner of the seer’s speech: Theoclymenus neither explicitly places power in either Odysseus’ or Telemachus’ hands, nor outright proclaims Telemachus as Odysseus’ successor. The dubiety of his prophecy remains unresolved at the conclusion of the epic, both for the characters and the audience; after slaughtering the suitors, Telemachus’ and Odysseus’ fates are unknown and undefined.

Book XVI: Telemachus embraced his noble father and mourned

Telemachus’ treatment of Theoclymenus prepares the audience for his reception of his disguised father. Eumaeus greets Telemachus upon his arrival as though he were his own son (16.11–21); only after Telemachus honorably declines Odysseus’ seat and graciously receives Eumaeus’ hospitality does he question the stranger before him (16.42–59).

⁵⁰ De Jong, 382.

⁵¹ De Jong, 383.

De Jong notes that Odysseus does not experience a delayed recognition of anyone in his household, contrary to the phased recollections of the rest of the characters.⁵² Odysseus identifies his son upon seeing him (16.11–12), which informs the entirety of their first encounter and establishes the foundation for the dynamics of their relationship. After Telemachus refuses to host the disguised Odysseus in his palace due to the current dire circumstances (16.69–89), paralleling his conversation with Theoclymenus discussed above (15.513–24), Odysseus responds:

ὦ φίλ', ἐπεὶ θὴν μοι καὶ ἀμείψασθαι θέμις ἐστίν,
 ἧ μάλα μευ καταδάπτει' ἀκούοντος φίλον ἦτορ,
 οἷά φατε μνηστῆρας ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάσθαι
 ἐν μεγάροις, ἀέκητι σέθεν τοιούτου ἐόντος.
 εἶπέ μοι ἠὲ ἐκὼν ὑποδάμνασαι, ἧ σέ γε λαοὶ
 ἐχθαίρουσ' ἀνὰ δῆμον, ἐπισπόμενοι θεοῦ ὀμφῆ,
 ἧ τι κασιγνήτοις ἐπιμέμφεαι, οἷσί περ ἀνὴρ
 μαρναμένοισι πέποιθε, καὶ εἰ μέγα νεῖκος ὄρηται.
 αἶ γάρ ἐγὼν οὕτω νέος εἶην τῷδ' ἐπὶ θυμῷ,
 ἧ παῖς ἐξ Ὀδυσῆος ἀμύμονος ἠὲ καὶ αὐτός:
 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' ὀράσθαι,
 ξείνους τε στυφελίζομένους δμῶας τε γυναῖκας
 ῥυστάζοντας ἀεικελίως κατὰ δώματα καλά,
 καὶ οἶνον διαφυσσόμενον, καὶ σῖτον ἔδοντας
 μὰψ αὐτως, ἀτέλεστον, ἀνηγύστῳ ἐπὶ ἔργῳ. [16.91–111]

Friend, surely now it is right for me to speak. It pains my dear heart to hear you say that the suitors contrived such wicked things in your palace against your will, being such a great man. Tell me if you are willingly overpowered or if men throughout the land hate you, driven by the voice of a god. Do you find fault with your brothers, whom a man trusts to fight for him even if a great quarrel arises? Would that I was young in spirit or the son of blameless Odysseus, or Odysseus himself! Immediately then another man could cut my head off if I could not become an evil of all those men after I go to the hall of Odysseus, son of Laertes. If they overpowered me while alone, I would rather die, being killed in my palace than forever watch these vile deeds: striking strangers,

⁵² De Jong, 386–87.

disgracefully dragging female slaves about the beautiful palace, drawing off wine and wantonly devouring food, endlessly and without care.

Odysseus notices the flicker of Telemachus' subconscious and utilizes it to his rhetorical advantage. His self-association with Telemachus, and ironically with Odysseus, responds to Telemachus' motific fear of being "one versus many."⁵³ In doing so, he advances the paradigm of being receptive to strangers by anticipating how the suitors will inflict their abuse of hospitality on him. Odysseus' fabricated persona condemns "striking strangers" (ξείνους τε στυφελιζομένους, 16.108), foreshadowing how he will endure Antinous' abuse after Odysseus reveals himself to Telemachus and commences his vengeance (17.462–65). Odysseus thus effectively identifies himself as Telemachus' ally, if not the sole instrument of his family's rescue, before he reveals his true identity.

His first words to Telemachus signal why he unmask himself to Telemachus first: He "needs a partner for his secret scheming," one that will maintain his hidden identity and steadfastly obey his orders.⁵⁴ His exhortation recognizes Telemachus' potential but places the true transformational power into his own hands. Odysseus implicates a hierarchy of power he later enforces, fulfilling Telemachus' earlier wish that Odysseus would be the one to overcome the suitors (1.113–17).

Telemachus responds:

τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.

⋮
 ὧδε γὰρ ἡμετέρην γενεὴν μούνωσε Κρονίων:
 μῦνον Λαέρτην Ἀρκείσιος υἱὸν ἔτικτε,
 μῦνον δ' αὖτ' Ὀδυσῆα πατὴρ τέκεν: αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
 μῦνον ἔμ' ἐν μεγάροισι τεκῶν λίπεν οὐδ' ἀπόνητο.
 τῷ νῦν δυσμενέες μάλα μυρίοι εἶσ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ. [16.113, 117–21]

⁵³ De Jong, 393.

⁵⁴ De Jong, 387.

Stranger, I will tell you everything exactly. ... Zeus made our family a solitary one: Arcesius begot his only son Laertes, and he begot his only son Odysseus. Odysseus begot me, his only son, and got no benefit from me after he left me in his palace. Now an infinite number of enemies are in my house.

This employment of the phrase μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω ("I will tell you everything exactly") provides insight into Telemachus' perspective on his familial status and his leadership capabilities. The verb ἀπόνητο (from ἀπονίναμαι, "benefit from," 16.120) is often used in the context of personal relationships and suggests a dual sense of utility and enjoyment.⁵⁵ Its negation intimates that the object of one's benefit is something someone should rightfully enjoy, but does not due to the current circumstances. In this instance, Telemachus emphasizes how Odysseus left for the Trojan War before Telemachus was of any age a father could enjoy with his son; he missed not only his infancy but his childhood and young adulthood, leading to Telemachus' sense of isolation and neglect. As a consequence of his absence, Odysseus had no opportunity to shape Telemachus into an ideal son, particularly one capable of singlehandedly confronting such a complex political and social problem.

⁵⁵ My analysis of this verb is supported by its usage in the *Iliad*. In Book 11, Nestor employs this verb when he concludes telling his tale of his cattle raid with the Eleans to Patroclus (11.655–761). Nestor's reminiscence contrasts how as a youth his bravery earned him and the Eleans victory against the Epeians, whereas Achilles' courage will only benefit himself:

αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς
οἶος τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀπονήσεται· ἦ τέ μιν οἶω
πολλὰ μετακλαύσεσθαι ἐπεὶ κ' ἀπὸ λαὸς ὄληται. [11.762–64]

But Achilles alone will benefit from his valor, though I think that he will lament too late when the entire army is destroyed.

The verb appears again in Book 24 during the exchange between Priam and Achilles (24.468–676):

μὴ πω μ' ἐς θρόνον ἴζε διοτρεφὲς ὄφρα κεν Ἔκτωρ
κεῖται ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἀκηδῆς, ἀλλὰ τάχιστα
λῦσον ἴν' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδω· σὺ δὲ δέξαι ἄποινα
πολλά, τά τοι φέρομεν· σὺ δὲ τῶνδ' ἀπόναιο, καὶ ἔλθοις
σὴν ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν, ἐπεὶ με πρῶτον ἔασας
αὐτόν τε ζῶειν καὶ ὄρᾶν φάος ἠελίοιο. [24.553–58]

Do not ask me to sit down while Hector lies unburied in your camp. Deliver him swiftly to me so that I may see him with my eyes, and accept my great ransom, which we will bring to you. Enjoy it, and may you bring it to your native land, since from the first you let me live and see the light of day.

Telemachus' and Odysseus' reunion is a striking and emotional scene that frames this complicated dynamic of their father-son relationship from the outset:

τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς:
 'Τηλέμαχ', οὐ σε ἔοικε φίλον πατέρ' ἔνδον ἔόντα
 οὔτε τι θαυμάζειν περιώσιον οὔτ' ἀγάσθαι:
 οὐ μὲν γάρ τοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐλεύσεται ἐνθάδ' Ὀδυσσεύς,
 ἀλλ' ὄδ' ἐγὼ τοιόσδε, παθὼν κακά, πολλὰ δ' ἀληθείς,
 ἦλυθον εἰκοστῶ ἔτει ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.
 αὐτάρ τοι τόδε ἔργον Ἀθηναίης ἀγελείης,
 ἣ τέ με τοῖον ἔθηκεν, ὅπως ἐθέλει, δύναται γάρ,
 ἄλλοτε μὲν πτωχῶ ἐναλίγκιον, ἄλλοτε δ' αὐτε
 ἀνδρὶ νέῳ καὶ καλὰ περὶ χροὶ εἶματ' ἔχοντι.
 ῥήϊδιον δὲ θεοῖσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν,
 ἡμὲν κυδῆναι θνητὸν βροτὸν ἠδὲ κακῶσαι.
 ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας κατ' ἄρ' ἔζετο, Τηλέμαχος δὲ
 ἀμφιχυθεὶς πατέρ' ἐσθλὸν ὀδύρετο, δάκρυα λείβων,
 ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ὑφ' ἴμερος ὄρτο γόοιο:
 κλαῖον δὲ λιγέως, ἀδινώτερον ἢ τ' οἰωνοί,
 φῆναι ἢ αἰγυπιοὶ γαμψώνυχες, οἷσί τε τέκνα
 ἀγρόται ἐξείλοντο πάρος πετεηνὰ γενέσθαι:
 ὥς ἄρα τοί γ' ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἶβον.
 καὶ νῦ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυσ φάος ἠελίοιο,
 εἰ μὴ Τηλέμαχος προσεφώνεεν ὃν πατέρ' αἶψα:
 'ποίη γὰρ νῦν δεῦρο, πάτερ φίλε, νῆϊ σε ναῦται
 ἦγαγον εἰς Ἰθάκην; τίνες ἔμμεναι εὐχετόωντο;
 οὐ μὲν γάρ τί σε πεζὸν οἶομαι ἐνθάδ' ἰκέσθαι.' [16.201–24]

Shrewd Odysseus replied to him and said: “Telemachus, it does not suit you to marvel at your father who is at home, nor to be too greatly amazed, for another Odysseus will not come here—but here I am, just as you see me. After suffering evil and wandering many places, I returned in the twentieth year to my native land. But this is the work of Athena the forayer, who makes me of whatever sort she wants, for she is strong enough. Before I resembled a beggar, but now I am a young man wearing beautiful garments. It is easy for the gods who hold broad heaven both to glorify a mortal and to afflict him.” So he spoke and sat down, and Telemachus embraced his noble father and mourned, shedding tears, and aroused in them both a desire to lament. They cried shrilly, more than thronging birds of prey with crooked talons, sea eagles or vultures, whose young were taken by a hunter before they were able to fly—so they pitifully shed tears under their brows. Now the sun would have set with them still weeping if Telemachus had not addressed his father: “Dear father, what kind of ship and what sailors brought you to Ithaca? Who did they profess themselves to be? For I do not think that you came here on foot.”

This first exchange shapes Odysseus' and Telemachus' first impressions of one another, albeit in drastically different ways. The metaphor reinforces this dichotomy: the imagery of birds losing their young is a familiar image invoked during laments for the dead,⁵⁶ especially by a parent who lost their child. Here in Book 16, the situation is reversed; it is Telemachus who moves father and son to weep in a delayed reaction to Odysseus' (false) death, just as he learned to cry for his father after learning of his character from Menelaus (4.113–16). Odysseus in turn laments Telemachus' childhood and young adulthood that he, as his father, neither experienced nor influenced. Telemachus, who thus far has been developing his identity independently, is now placed in the position of the baby bird, who must “learn to fly” through Odysseus' example. The verb γενέσθαι (from γίγνομαι, “become,” 16.218) encapsulates the nature of Telemachus' experience and how Odysseus must respond to it. Telemachus lived this period of “becoming” without Odysseus, and now that Odysseus has reunited with his son, he desires to restore the time “before [Telemachus] became winged” (πάρος πετεηνά γενέσθαι, 16.218) that he missed.

⁵⁶ From the multiple bird similes throughout the *Odyssey*, the closest comparable simile is used by Penelope to describe her anguish in Book 19:

ὡς δ' ὅτε Πανδαρέου κόρη, γλωρηῖς ἀηδῶν,
καλὸν ἀεΐδῃσιν ἔαρος νέον ἴσταμένοιο,
δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκνοῖσιν,
ἦ τε θαμὰ τρωπῶσα χέει πολυηχέα φωνήν,
παῖδ' ὀλοφυρομένη Ἴτυλον φίλον, ὃν ποτε χαλκῷ
κτεῖνε δι' ἀφραδίας, κοῦρον Ζήθιοιο ἀνακτος, [19.518–23]

As when the daughter of Pandarus, the pale green nightingale, beautifully sings when early spring begins, perching on the thick leaves of trees, she pours out her many-toned voice, mourning her beloved child Itylus, the son of lord Zethus, who she slew in folly with bronze...

A similar lament scene that expresses an impossible wish for what could have been if not for the person's untimely death occurs in Euripides' *Trojan Women* between Andromache and her infant son Astyanax (740–79). Andromache employs a similar simile:

τί μου δέδραζαι χερσὶ κἀντέχῃ πέπλων,
νεοσσὸς ὡσεὶ πτέρυγας ἐσπίτνων ἐμάς; [750–51]

Why have you grasped me with your hands and cling to my robe, nestling like a young bird beneath my wings?

Telemachus' perspective of their father-son dynamic is complicated: after maturing and gaining independence without his father's influence, he must now negotiate his newfound place parallel to Odysseus' established authority. Odysseus' perspective, in contrast, is uncomplicated; as Telemachus' father, he desires the opportunity to play the role of a nurturing father and guiding mentor.

Conclusions

Books 15 and 16 mark a critical shift in how Telemachus and Odysseus operate as respective characters. For Odysseus, while he has physically returned to his native land, his νόστος remains incomplete. He must now confront how his disappearance upended not only his power and wealth, but his relationships with others, both with "insiders" (Penelope, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Laertes) and "outsiders" (the suitors and their families). Odysseus left an orderly Ithaca but returned to it immersed in chaos. Telemachus, conversely, has only known Ithaca's political uncertainty and the disquietude of his household. When he returns from Pylos and Sparta, he is equipped with the knowledge of his father necessary to take action against the suitors, whether his father will aid him or not. When Odysseus reunites with his son and Telemachus meets his father for the first time, both encounter the real rather than the idealized or imagined individual. Their later cooperation rests on the knowledge and authority they have separately accumulated during their journeys, both of which manifest in their joint vengeance against the suitors.

Chapter 3: The Contest, the Slaughter, and the Aftermath

The final six books of the *Odyssey* mark both the climax of Telemachus' grasp on his authority and Odysseus' desire to reinstate himself as king, thus completing his νόστος. With Odysseus' identity now revealed to Telemachus and a vengeance plan prepared, both father and son must work in tandem to restore order to their home and leadership in Ithaca. By now, it is clear that Telemachus' growth is neither linear nor nonexistent: he is neither a fully-fledged leader like his father nor the helpless boy he was at the start of the epic. In aiding his father to remove the suitors from the palace, Telemachus not only proves himself as a competent ally but as a young man capable of fulfilling his role as Odysseus' son. Telemachus' prowess, however, is not recognized as a sign of worthy succession, but instead as a form of submission to Odysseus' authority. The ambiguity of this development conveniently hinders Telemachus from completing his maturation and thus prevents him from advancing from prince to king. In this final chapter, I aim to demonstrate how Telemachus continues to assert his independence despite becoming instrumental to Odysseus' plot.

Book XIX: This is the custom of the gods who hold Olympus

Odysseus initiates his revenge plot against the suitors in Book 19 by first enlisting Telemachus to remove the weapons throughout the palace and hide them (19.1–13). Notably, Odysseus instructs Telemachus on how to speak to the suitors if his actions arouse their suspicion (imparting on him a characteristically Odyssean skill), but the narrator reveals that Odysseus considers Telemachus as a passive agent of the divine will rather than his co-conspirator: “So godlike Odysseus remained in the hall, devising murder for the suitors *with Athena*” (αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐν μεγάρῳ ὑπελείπετο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς, / μνηστήρεσσι φόνον σὺν Ἀθήνῃ μερμηρίζων, 19.1–2, emphasis added). This distinction between Telemachus' and Athena's aid is

most readily apparent in Telemachus' expressed wonder at her influence and Odysseus' subsequent censoring:

δὴ τότε Τηλέμαχος προσεφώνεεν ὄν πατέρ' αἶψα:
 ὦ πάτερ, ἦ μέγα θαῦμα τόδ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρώμαι.
 ἔμπης μοι τοῖχοι μεγάρων καλάι τε μεσόδμαι,
 εἰλάτιναί τε δοκοί, καὶ κίονες ὑψόσ' ἔχοντες
 φαίνοντ' ὀφθαλμοῖς ὡς εἰ πυρὸς αἶθομένοιο.
 ἦ μάλα τις θεὸς ἔνδον, οἷ σὺρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσι.
 τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς:
 ἴσθα καὶ κατὰ σὸν νόον ἴσχανε μηδ' ἐρέεινε:
 αὕτη τοι δίκη ἐστὶ θεῶν, οἷ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν. [19.35–43]

Telemachus suddenly addressed his father: “Father, I see this great wonder with my eyes. The palace walls, the beautiful niches, the pine beams, and the lofty pillars appear to my eyes as if kindled with fire. Truly one of the gods, who hold broad heaven, is in the house.” Shrewd Odysseus answered him: “Silence—check your mind and do not ask any questions. This is the custom of the gods who hold Olympus.”

Telemachus' dialogue here recalls his expressed wonder at Menelaus' wealth:

φράζεο, Νεστορίδη, τῷ ἐμῷ κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ,
 χαλκοῦ τε στεροπὴν καὶ δώματα ἠχήμεντα
 χρυσοῦ τ' ἠλέκτρον τε καὶ ἀργύρου ἠδ' ἐλέφαντος.
 Ζηνός που τοιήδε γ' Ὀλυμπίου ἐνδοθεν αὐλή,
 ὅσσα τάδ' ἄσπετα πολλά: σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα. [4.71–75]

Peisistratus, pleasing to my heart, look at the gleam of bronze, gold, amber, silver, and ivory throughout the echoing palace! This is like the court of Olympian Zeus within, so immense is all of this wealth. Wonder holds me as I behold it all.

In Book 4, Telemachus' amazement initiates Menelaus' discussion of Agamemnon's fate at the hands of Orestes. It is this expression of curiosity that provides an entry point for Menelaus' telling of his journey to Egypt and Agamemnon's death. Whereas Menelaus feeds Telemachus' curiosity by acknowledging his observance and responding in kind, Odysseus is dismissive and demanding. De Jong notes that Odysseus expresses similar admiration for Alcinous' palace (7.81–135), simultaneously underscoring the similarities between father and son while highlighting Telemachus' lack of experience with the outside world.⁵⁷ Odysseus

⁵⁷ De Jong, 92.

addresses this lack of experience in his rebuke, which further recalls how he dealt with Diomedes, Menelaus, and Anticlus during the Trojan Horse ploy (*Iliad* 4.280–90). By treating his son as a subsidiary soldier, Odysseus views Telemachus as an agent of the gods rather than an individual.

This exchange is one of the clearest realignments of their power structure. Odysseus, who has encountered the conduct and deeds of the gods numerous times throughout the Trojan War and during his wanderings, does not have the patience to entertain his son’s wonder at Athena’s aid. Whereas Odysseus is familiar with Athena’s favor, Telemachus only encountered the goddess for the first time shortly before Odysseus’ return.

Book XXI: He hoped in his heart to string the bow

Book 21 contains the most tense and most anticipatory scenes of the *Odyssey*: Penelope’s commencement of the bow contest, which culminates in Odysseus’ victory and the initiation of his slaughter, which formally begins in Book 22. The contest’s careful structuring not only foreshadows the coming bloodbath but emphasizes the precarious situations of both Telemachus and Odysseus as they implement their plan. Whereas Odysseus must preoccupy himself with maintaining his disguise, Telemachus must operate as a mediator, utilizing not only his knowledge of the palace and the suitors’ behavior but also his awareness of Odysseus’ true identity. Telemachus demonstrates he possesses knowledge Odysseus does not—that of the motivations and temperaments of the suitors—and wields it to secure Odysseus’ triumph. From the outset, Telemachus is instrumental to the contest’s execution:

ἦ καὶ ἀπ’ ὤμοιϊν χλαῖναν θέτο φοινικόεσσαν
 ὀρθὸς ἀναΐζας, ἀπὸ δὲ ξίφος ὄξυ θέτ’ ὤμων.
 πρῶτον μὲν πελέκεας στήσεν, διὰ τάφρον ὀρύξας
 πᾶσι μίαν μακρὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ στάθμην ἴθυνεν,
 ἀμφὶ δὲ γαῖαν ἔναξε: τάφος δ’ ἔλε πάντας ἰδόντας,
 ὡς εὐκόσμως στήσε: πάρος δ’ οὐ πώ ποτ’ ὀπώπει.

στῆ δ' ἄρ' ἐπ' οὐδὸν ἰὼν καὶ τόξου πειρήτιζε.
 τρις μὲν μιν πελέμιξεν ἐρύσσεσθαι μενεαίνων,
 τρις δὲ μεθῆκε βίης, ἐπιελπόμενος τό γε θυμῷ,
 νευρὴν ἐντανύειν διοϊστεύσειν τε σιδήρου.
 καὶ νύ κε δὴ ῥ' ἐτάνυσσε βίη τὸ τέταρτον ἀνέλκων,
 ἀλλ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀνένευε καὶ ἔσχεθεν ἰέμενόν περ. [21.118–29]

Telemachus shrugged his purple cloak off his shoulders, started right up, and slung his sharp sword off his shoulders. First, he dug a trench and stood all the axes in a long, straight line, then stamped down the earth around them. Amazement seized everyone watching, since he placed the axes in good order without seeing them before. He went and stood upon the threshold and made trial of the bow. Three times he struggled as he strove to draw the bow and three times he relaxed his grip, although he hoped in his heart to string the bow and shoot an arrow through the axes. And now he would have drawn back the bow and strained it with all of his might a fourth time, but Odysseus nodded up and stopped him, eager though he was.

De Jong notes that Telemachus' attempt to string the bow parallels that of the suitors',⁵⁸ but notably, he is the only contestant besides Odysseus who speaks more than once during his trial of the bow. This distinguishing factor places Telemachus in a prominent position, demonstrating that he is the most capable of matching his father's strength and skill.⁵⁹ If, however, the order of the suitors' attempts follows the order in which they were served their wine (from least to greatest importance, 19.140–42),⁶⁰ then Telemachus receives a curious placement. The suitors are slaughtered in reverse order once Odysseus obtains the bow (22.69–98, 266–68, 283–86, 292–96, and 310–29), and consequently, Telemachus must be “slaughtered” last, albeit not in a literal sense. While de Jong suggests that Odysseus' denial “is presumably a desire to deceive his opponents about the true strength of his main helper,”⁶¹ Thalmann notes that in Homer's honor-based society, a son who successfully surpassed his living father “would mean the father's disgrace because the family's hierarchy would be overthrown.”⁶² It is for this reason that

⁵⁸ De Jong, 511: “(i) preparations (taking off clothes, heating the bow, inspecting the bow); (ii) taking up of position; (iii) attempt; (iv) speech in which failure or success is acknowledged; (v) putting down the bow; and (vi) sitting down again.”

⁵⁹ Beck, *Homeric Conversation*, 82.

⁶⁰ De Jong, 511.

⁶¹ De Jong, 511.

⁶² Thalmann, 211–12.

Odysseus nods up (ἀνένευε), a gesture wordlessly indicating one's refusal.⁶³ Athena responds with the same gesture in the *Iliad* when she denies Theano's prayer for Troy's safety from Diomedes (6.311); likewise, Zeus does not answer Achilles' prayer that Patroclus "return safe from the battle" (σῶον δ' ἀνένευσε μάχης ἔξαπονέεσθαι, *Il.* 16.252), and later, Achilles employs it as he chases Hector around the walls of Troy:

λαοῖσιν δ' ἀνένευε καρῆατι δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς,
οὐδ' ἔα ἰέμεναι ἐπὶ Ἑκτορι πικρὰ βέλεμνα,
μή τις κῦδος ἄροίτο βαλῶν, ὃ δὲ δεύτερος ἔλθοι. [*Il.* 22.205–207]

Godlike Achilles nodded up with his head to the soldiers and did not permit them to throw their sharp javelins at Hector, lest any man strike him and win glory, and he comes second.

Odysseus' use of this gesture in this passage carries the same sentiments as Achilles' employment in Book 22. Just as Achilles restrains his subordinates, Odysseus restrains his son, and in doing so, both heroes dictate the fate of who receives κλέος: themselves. The repeated formula of mentioning the third and then the fourth attempt of something often reveals this imposition of control, whether from humans or the gods; it is on the fourth attempt that one *could* attempt something, if not for an intervention.⁶⁴ Immediately after the *Iliad* passage above, it is on Achilles and Hector's fourth lap around Troy that Zeus places their fates on his golden scale and initiates the fight culminating in Hector's death (22.208–13). Similarly, Telemachus would have strung the bow on his fourth try if not for Odysseus' signal of denial. Comparing these scenes

⁶³ Richard John Cunliffe, "ἀνανεύω," in *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 33.

⁶⁴ In the *Odyssey*, this formula is also used to describe how Penelope has deceived the suitors for nearly four years by weaving and unraveling Laertes' funeral shroud (2.89, 19.152, and 24.142). One wonders how the events of the *Odyssey* would unfold differently if Penelope had been able to successfully maintain her ruse. In the *Iliad*, Diomedes attempts to kill Aeneas four times but is driven back by Apollo (5.436–39); Patroclus attempts to take Troy four times, but is driven back by Apollo (16.702–6); Patroclus is injured (and almost killed) by Apollo's blow and Euphorbus' spear during his fourth charge upon the Trojans (16.784–817); Achilles fails to kill Hector four times, leading him to slaughter other Trojans for the time being (20.445–54); and Asteropaeus attempts to pull Achilles' spear from the ground four times, but Achilles kills him before his fourth and final attempt to break it (21.176–79). Each of these scenes contain the possibility for a different outcome for a soldier's life or death.

reveals the implicit gravity of Odysseus' action and Telemachus' inaction. Odysseus claims the κλέος of both the bow contest and the initiation of the slaughter, and in doing so, divorces Telemachus from that κλέος. This suggests that if Telemachus *had* strung the bow, a narrative-defying consequence would have occurred. Telemachus could either succeed or fail in three ways: (1) he could win the contest and begin the slaughter, thereby substituting for Odysseus; (2) he could succeed at stringing the bow and hitting the target but fail to initiate a successful slaughter, resulting in Telemachus and Odysseus' deaths; or (3) he could succeed at stringing the bow but fail to hit the target, creating an uncertain and hostile scenario the poet must then somehow rectify. Any of these outcomes would ultimately rob Odysseus of κλέος and further complicate his and Telemachus' joint effort to restore order to Ithaca.

The poet instead places Telemachus in the same adversarial position as the suitors and thus presents Odysseus as the only man worthy and eligible to claim power. Thalmann pointedly summarizes the precarious ambiguity of his condition: He “must prove himself a worthy ally and successor to his father but cannot be allowed to outdo or succeed him.”⁶⁵ Telemachus “is implicitly his father’s rival as well as ally” in the sense that he must compete to maintain his own social identity while simultaneously cooperating with his father’s plan to reestablish his place in the family hierarchy.⁶⁶ Although he proves to the audience, to his father, and to himself that he is capable of stringing the bow, and thus justifies himself as a worthy successor, he willingly submits to the reinstatement of his subordinate position as Ithaca’s prince rather than the king.⁶⁷ By participating in the contest first, Telemachus grants Odysseus true prepotency of the situation, who participates last.⁶⁸ This, however, does not equate to him willfully relinquishing the

⁶⁵ Thalmann, 214. See also Georg Wöhrle, *Telemachs Reise: Väter und Söhne in Ilias und Odyssee oder ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der Männlichkeitsideologie in der homerischen Welt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), <https://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2000/2000.12.13/>.

⁶⁶ Thalmann, 206.

⁶⁷ Thalmann, 217.

⁶⁸ Thalmann, 213.

authority he has managed to accumulate; it is his sustained presence that allows him to regain control of the bow so that Odysseus can possess it.⁶⁹ Gottesman notes that “it was on Telemachus’ authority alone that the beggar was given a shot, over the objections of everyone,” an authority granted through Athena’s disguise. Telemachus’ knowledge of this setup allows him to utilize his hospitality “to create a space where he could assert his authority before his adversaries and to force them to recognize it despite themselves.”⁷⁰

It is critical to note that while Odysseus is understood to be the plan’s primary architect and to have control over the authority Telemachus can exert, the suitors are unaware of this subterfuge, and thus perceive Odysseus and Telemachus as a more equal and harmonious pair than in reality.⁷¹ This is made evident when the ghost of Amphimedon recounts their slaughter to the ghost of Agamemnon:

οὐδέ τις ἡμείων δύνατο κρατεροῖο βιοῖο
νευρὴν ἐντανύσαι, πολλὸν δ’ ἐπιδευέες ἦμεν.
ἀλλ’ ὅτε χεῖρας ἴκανεν Ὀδυσσεύης μέγα τόξον,
ἔνθ’ ἡμεῖς μὲν πάντες ὁμοκλέομεν ἐπέεσσι
τόξον μὴ δόμεναι, μηδ’ εἰ μάλα πολλ’ ἀγορεύοι:
Τηλέμαχος δέ μιν οἶος ἐποτρύνων ἐκέλευσεν.

...
γνωτὸν δ’ ἦν ὃ ρά τις σφι θεῶν ἐπιτάρροθος ἦεν:
αὐτίκα γὰρ κατὰ δώματ’ ἐπισπόμενοι μένει σφῶ
κτεῖνον ἐπιστροφάδην, τῶν δὲ στόνος ὄρνυτ’ ἀεικῆς
κράτων τυπτομένων, δάπεδον δ’ ἅπαν αἵματι θῦεν. [24.170–75, 182–85]

Not one of us was able to string the powerful bow: we were lacking by far. But when the great bow reached Odysseus’ hands, then all of us shouted commands to not give it to him, however much he might speak. But Telemachus alone ordered and urged him. ... It was clear that some helper of the gods was with them: for immediately they pursued us through the palace in their fury and slaughtered us left and right. Unseemly groaning arose as they struck our heads, and the whole floor swam with blood.

⁶⁹ Stanley E. Hoffer, “Telemachus’ ‘Laugh’ (*Odyssey* 21.105): Deceit, Authority, and Communication in the Bow Contest,” *The American Journal of Philology* 116, no. 4 (1995): 517, doi: 10.2307/295401.

⁷⁰ Gottesmann, 55.

⁷¹ Gottesmann, 56.

The suitors, excluded from Odysseus' and Telemachus' shared knowledge, regard Telemachus as the initiator of their slaughter because he enabled Odysseus to participate in the contest. In portraying himself and his companions as hapless victims, Amphimedon strengthens the notion of Telemachus' and Odysseus' mutual cunning. His largely-accurate testimony highlights the unusual nature of the plot: rather than scheming directly with Penelope or immediately approaching his wife upon his arrival, as the suitors assume he did, Odysseus unites with his son, whom the suitors viewed as weak, childish, and incompetent until their deaths.⁷² Only in retrospect and in an attempt to telescope the narrative does Amphimedon realize Telemachus' central role in the conspiracy.

Book XXIII: We will eagerly follow you

While Book 23 primarily focuses on Penelope's gradual recognition of Odysseus, it also prepares the audience for the final confrontation with the slain suitors' families in Book 24, which provides an insight into Telemachus' acceptance of his subservient position within his family. Telemachus interrupts Penelope's budding recognition with his condemnation of her uncertainty (23.96–103), which allows Odysseus the opportunity to propose a solution to the consequences of their violent revenge (23.113–22, 130–40). Odysseus begins his suggestion with the plural subjunctive verb φραζόμεθ' (from φράζω, "let us consider," 23.117), implying a collaborative invitation, but Telemachus instead responds:

αὐτὸς ταῦτά γε λεῖσσε, πάτερ φίλε: σὴν γὰρ ἀρίστην
 μῆτιν ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους φάσ' ἔμμεναι, οὐδέ κέ τίς τοι
 ἄλλος ἀνὴρ ἐρίσειε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.
 ἡμεῖς δ' ἔμμεμαῶτες ἅμ' ἐψόμεθ', οὐδέ τί φημι
 ἀλκῆς δευήσεσθαι, ὅση δύνάμεις γε πάρεστιν. [23.124–28]

Look at these things yourself, dear father: for they say that you have the greatest counsel among men, nor could any other man among mortal men contend with you. We will eagerly follow you, nor do I say that we lack valor, as much as capability is present.

⁷² De Jong, 573.

Heath remarks that “‘wise’ Telemachus acknowledges and accepts his place by telling his father that he will follow him anywhere under any circumstances,”⁷³ but he does not acknowledge the intricacies of Telemachus’ reply. Telemachus employs both φάσ’ (23.125) and φημι (23.127), effectively establishing a “they say” versus “I say” dynamic that recalls his questioning of his father’s relationship with himself at the start of the *Odyssey*.⁷⁴ By now Telemachus has formulated an image of his father with the help of Nestor and Menelaus, but even after their reunion and partnered vengeance, Telemachus requests proof from Odysseus about the exploits he has internalized. He deftly attributes his opinion as belonging to others rather than to himself, effectively challenging Odysseus to prove himself while asserting his own capabilities. Whereas he associates ἀρίστην μῆτιν with Odysseus (“the greatest counsel,” 23.124–25), he claims ἀλκῆς and δύναμις for himself (“valor” and “capability” respectively, 23.128). Telemachus had lamented his lack of both ἀλκή and δύναμις to the assembly at 2.61–62 and his lack of δύναμις to Nestor 3.205; now he reaffirms his possession of ἀλκή in his final dialogue with Odysseus in Book 24, which I will discuss in the following section.

Book XXIV: You will see in this heart no desire to dishonor your family

The *Odyssey* concludes with Odysseus’ final reunion with his father Laertes (24.205–412) and the three generations uniting to confront the outraged families of the suitors (24.413–548). The final exchange between Telemachus and Odysseus, which includes Telemachus’ closing words in the epic, leaves their relationship, and the status of Telemachus’ character overall, in a shadow of uncertainty:

τοῖσι δ’ ἐπ’ ἀγχίμολον θυγάτηρ Διὸς ἦλθεν Ἀθήνη
 Μέντορι εἰδομένη ἡμὲν δέμας ἠδὲ καὶ αὐδήν.
 τὴν μὲν ἰδὼν γήθησε πολύτλας Δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς:

⁷³ Heath, 153.

⁷⁴ See my discussion of 1.214–220 in Chapter 1.

αἴψα δὲ Τηλέμαχον προσεφώνεεν ὄν φίλον υἱόν:
 ‘Τηλέμαχ’, ἤδη μὲν τόδε γ’ εἴσει αὐτὸς ἐπελθών,
 ἀνδρῶν μαρναμένων ἵνα τε κρίνονται ἄριστοι,
 μή τι κατασχύνειν πατέρων γένος, οἷ τὸ πάρος περ
 ἀλκῆ τ’ ἠγορέη τε κεκάσμεθα πᾶσαν ἐπ’ αἴαν.’
 τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΐδα:
 ‘ὄψεαι, αἶ κ’ ἐθέλησθα, πάτερ φίλε, τῶδ’ ἐπὶ θυμῷ
 οὐ τι κατασχύνοντα τεὸν γένος, ὡς ἀγορεύεις.’ [24.502–12]

Athena, the daughter of Zeus, approached them, appearing like Mentor in both body and voice. Much-enduring godlike Odysseus rejoiced when he saw her, and he addressed his beloved son Telemachus at once: “Telemachus, now you will know this, when you yourself approach where the greatest of men are judged as they battle, to not dishonor the house of your fathers. We have always excelled in strength and prowess over all the earth.” Observant Telemachus answered him: “Dear father, if you are willing, you will see in this heart no desire to dishonor your family, as you say.”

Lacey contends that lineal pride was “an element which made the Homeric hero feel obliged to behave in a heroic way.”⁷⁵ Telemachus’ final words, however, are both ones of deference and ones that distance him from his relative position to Odysseus as his leader and father. Telemachus does not employ the collective possessive pronoun “our” family, but a singular “your” (τεόν, 24.512), suggesting that he did not inherit membership into the honor associated with his father’s family. As Petropulos mentions, ἐμὸν γένος (“my family”) would have also fit metrically, but his diction instead admits that he “has not yet been fully incorporated in his father’s γένος,”⁷⁶ and furthermore, although more subtly, that his father’s γένος is not for him to claim for himself. Telemachus’ isolation from his father’s ancestry is especially evident when we consider the fact that Odysseus became king of Ithaca while Laertes was (and still is) alive, signaling that there is no overarching impediment to Telemachus’ complete maturation. Recalling his doubts about his parentage in 1.214–220 and 15.266–70, I emphasized that Telemachus had no father present, let alone any prototypical male figure, to impart κλέος upon

⁷⁵ W.K. Lacey, “The Family In Homeric Society,” in *The Family In Classical Greece*, ed. H.H. Scullard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 38.

⁷⁶ Petropulos, 142, n. 58.

him,⁷⁷ and consequently, the social identity he develops alongside Odysseus is incomplete (and if not for his journey, would have been otherwise nonexistent). Odysseus' use of "we" (included in the first person plural verb *κεκάσμεθα*, from *καίνυμαι*, "to excel," 24.509) therefore, does not hold any personal significance to Telemachus, despite his clear desire to obey his father. This distance solidifies the inevitable fulfillment of Tiresias' prophecy given in Book 11:

θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἀλὸς αὐτῶ
 ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος ἐλεύσεται, ὅς κέ σε πέφνη
 γήραι ὑπο λιπαρῶ ἀρημένον: ἀμφὶ δὲ λαοὶ
 ὄλβιοι ἔσσονται. τὰ δέ τοι νημερτέα εἶρω. [11.134–37]

Death will come to you from the sea, the most gentle of such, which will strike you when you are overcome by comfortable old age and your people around you will be blessed. These things I tell you are infallible.

Tiresias makes no mention of who will succeed Odysseus in Ithaca, and Odysseus exits the conversation satisfied with not knowing who his successor will be. Odysseus' ease and the vague conclusion of Tiresias' prophecy allow for the interpretation that Odysseus' death will never come, at least within the confines of the epic itself and the history of its retelling. His *νόστος* "ushers in the restoration of a just society," where his rule ensures Ithaca's perpetual peace and prosperity.⁷⁸ Telemachus' coming-of-age, then, is the initiation of the extinction of Odysseus' lineage and the annihilation of the "sons and brothers" from the neighboring islands (*παίδων τε κασιγνήτων τε*, 24.434).⁷⁹ Telemachus must no longer compete for Odysseus' kingship not only because he has slaughtered the competition, but because Odysseus seemingly will not relinquish it in death, and therefore does not achieve the same epic heroic status as his father. Thalmann aptly concludes:

I contend, therefore, that although the text depicts Telemakhos's maturation in process, it is not completed by narrative's end. While the story lasts, Telemakhos is never allowed

⁷⁷ Petropoulos, 93.

⁷⁸ Petropoulos, 129.

⁷⁹ Petropoulos, 135.

fully to grow up, and it remains uncertain how he ever can. This question is left unresolved, or perhaps more accurately, it simply is allowed to disappear. During the narrative, Telemakhos must be seen as a worthy successor to Odysseus but cannot succeed him.⁸⁰

Martin applies a similar argument to the *Odyssey* more broadly, stating that “the poem itself speaks of the end of a tradition.”⁸¹ Telemachus’ tumultuous and uncertain coming-of-age reflects how “the old world that made the stories pass away with his father’s last voyage onward.”⁸² Despite the journey he takes under Athena’s divine guidance and his attempts to restore order to Ithaca in his father’s absence, “[w]e never see Telemachus perform; he never tells his story.”⁸³ Odysseus’ successful νόστος not only marks the end of Telemachus’ development but the termination of epic poetry’s continuity.

Conclusions

As I outlined in my introduction, multiple scholars have approached my research topic, but have not delved into it in the main bodies of their work. For instance, Beck writes:

The return of Odysseus does not instantly make Telemachus a self-sufficient, independent adult: for the most part it is still Odysseus who makes the plans and arranges events to his own satisfaction. Yet the young man does show real changes as a result of his own travels and the return of Odysseus, beginning with his self-control and self-reliance at the end of the reunion of Book 16.⁸⁴

Heath also observes:

He has become a prince, but not a king. The very moment he comes to full maturity is also the moment his father regains his position of political leader and senior male in the household. ... Telemachus’ journey is not towards complete independence, but to his full position within the family. He is at last his father’s son, fully loyal but capable of independent decisions, speech, and action in support of Odysseus.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Thalmann, 209.

⁸¹ Martin, 381.

⁸² Martin, 381–82.

⁸³ Martin, 382.

⁸⁴ Beck, *Homeric Conversation*, 79.

⁸⁵ Heath, 153.

Austin takes a similar position: “Telemachos is prevented from fully exercising his independent intelligence by the reappearance of Odysseus on the scene. With Odysseus in control, Telemachos is left little opportunity to show his own talent for inventive deceits; he must play the part assigned to him. This subordinate role, however, is a continuing part of his education.”⁸⁶ Gottesman also notes: “Telemachus’ growth into the role of a king, as I read it, is far from being a process that never truly culminates and is therefore superfluous to the poem as a whole. His growth, and our recognition of his growth, also means the return of Odysseus as rightful ruler, one entitled to dispense justice to lawless subjects who do not recognize him.”⁸⁷

Each of these scholars makes these observations in passing without further explanation. Whereas Thalmann remarks that he does not question Telemachus’ developing maturity “for the sake of Telemachos’s intrinsic interest as a character,” I believe such discourse is necessary.⁸⁸ I am not satisfied with the implication that Telemachus’ characterization only serves to highlight the dynamics of parent-child relationships in a “family-centered society.”⁸⁹ To treat his character as such renders him a lack of personhood in a narrative that emphasizes how love, memory, grief, perseverance, and growth are essential to the human condition. Beyond the internal scope of the epic, it also ignores the narrative’s audience. In purely considering how Telemachus supplements Odysseus’ narrative, scholars have failed to consider whom Telemachus’ character might have served. Were boys and young men present during a bard’s oral performance, and if so, would Telemachus’ character resonate with their life experiences?

The concluding books of the *Odyssey* end the narrative with multiple unanswered questions and unresolved scenarios. It is evident that while Telemachus is not the same boy he

⁸⁶ Austin, 57.

⁸⁷ Gottesman, 56.

⁸⁸ Thalmann, 208.

⁸⁹ Lacey, 34.

was at the beginning of the epic, he is forced to return to a similar subordinate position now that Odysseus' νόστος is complete. After completing a journey where he gained knowledge of the world and of his father beyond Ithaca, he sailed back prepared to restore order to his home and leadership to the vacant kingship, even if Odysseus' νόστος remained unfulfilled. However, it is precisely because Odysseus returns that his recent independence cannot fully manifest nor grow any further. For Odysseus' νόστος to be successful, his story must not follow that of Agamemnon, Menelaus, or even Achilles. He must return to a disciplined palace, a loyal wife, and above all, an obedient son worthy of becoming his successor, but not so accomplished that he endangers Odysseus' recently reclaimed authority.

Odysseus' νόστος must thus be twofold: he must win great κλέος in battle and return home to tell of his exploits. For Telemachus, then, the rupture in the domestic sphere must remain temporary, but as long as the disruption remains, he has the freedom to craft his own authority in Odysseus' absence. Once the disruption, manifested in the suitors' presence and Odysseus' absence, is resolved, Telemachus must relinquish the identity of a leader formed through the independent action he developed and embrace the role Odysseus' presence now imposes. While the poem ends with this successful imposition, it does not hide the complexity of Telemachus' experiences. As Heath observes, Odysseus' character is widely recognized for its complexity,⁹⁰ so it is only fitting that Telemachus, as his son, must develop an equally, if not more, complicated persona. While we may never know who Telemachus grew to become after the *Odyssey*, we can affirm his potential and recognize that his experiences contain a story worth being told and examined beyond Odysseus' influence.

⁹⁰ Heath, 144.

Afterword

I first read the *Odyssey* during the Spring of 2020 amid online learning (which was, coincidentally, my first semester of Ancient Greek). While the epic is dedicated to the “much-wandering man” Odysseus (ἄνδρα πολύτροπον, 1.1), I was drawn to Telemachus’ adventure-in-miniature from my first read. My shock and curiosity when I first read the special attention Telemachus received in the first four books were what motivated my research. As a young adult not much younger than Telemachus, I could not help but ask myself: Why does the *Odyssey* begin in the way that it does? Why must Telemachus’ setting forth from Ithaca begin the tale of Odysseus’ long-delayed return? In the first conversation in the *Odyssey* between Zeus and Athena, we recall that Athena delegates Hermes to address Odysseus and Calypso, but declares: “I will go to Ithaca, so that I might prompt his son all the more and set courage in his heart” to assemble the Achaeans, confront the suitors, and seek news of his father in Pylos and Sparta (ὄφρα οἱ υἱὸν / μᾶλλον ἐποτρύνω καὶ οἱ μένος ἐν φρεσὶ θείω, 1.88–95). On the terms of the poem itself, Telemachus’ journey and subsequent maturation are necessary for the narrative’s progression. I could not understand why scholars dismissed Books 1–4 as mere exposition and a belated addition to the epic’s main body when this opening so clearly influences how Telemachus and Odysseus interact with one another.

I initially planned on only analyzing the first four books of the *Odyssey*, and so I immersed myself in my largest translation project to date the summer following my year abroad. However, my research question continued to expand as I repeatedly asked myself: Was Telemachus’ character meant for people like me—young adults finding their place in the world, progressing and reversing along the path to independence as they combat the challenges life throws at them? Did ancient listeners ask similar questions, or were their perceptions of his role

entirely different based on their understanding of what young adulthood was? Did ancient young men see themselves in Telemachus the way I do today? The questions I pose here matured alongside my translations, expanding not only beyond the *Odyssey's* beginning into the remainder of the text but also into the *Iliad*. As the amount of Homeric material I examined continued to expand, I realized that Telemachus had more influence on the *Odyssey's* narrative and its broader themes than I initially thought.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020, my entire perspective on my undergraduate experience changed. Just as I had begun to take my first steps over the threshold of independence, I soon found myself back home on the other side of the country more restricted and isolated than I had ever felt in high school. After enduring online instruction for three semesters, I studied abroad in Rome for two semesters before returning to Holy Cross for my final year. I found parallels between Telemachus' journey and my tumultuous experience of post-secondary education. My perception of the campus I was encouraged to consider "home" dramatically shifted when I returned from that fateful spring break, just as Telemachus' understanding of his home and relationship with his parents altered with the suitors' invasion. When Telemachus journeyed to Pylos and Sparta following a period of uncertainty and helplessness, I made a similar voyage to Rome, where I discovered new facets of myself and gained new knowledge of the world in my interactions with others. By the time I returned to campus, I was not the same person as when I first arrived, and I argue the same for Telemachus. This analysis of Telemachus, therefore, became an indirect reflection on my first four tumultuous years of young adulthood.

My personal narrative has informed my scholarship significantly more than I imagined it would. As I grappled with the perspectives of various scholars and improved my comprehension

and translation of Ancient Greek, I gradually understood that the *Odyssey* is not an unambiguous tale delineated by the definite analyses of scholars, but rather an unapologetically human and creative story that speaks to people in personal and intimate ways. After the vast amount of quantitative work I conducted in preparation for this thesis, I would like to expand my analysis not only to other passages from the *Odyssey*, but also to other narrations of Telemachus' story, such as Dictys Cretensis' *Ephemeris belli Troiani*, François Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse*, and Claire North's characterization of Telemachus in her historical fiction novel *Ithaca*.

One of the treasures of ancient texts is their ability to connect with audiences across time and place. Telemachus, then, was not only proving himself to the internal audience of the epic but to the external audience of those who listened to it and who continue to read it. There is more to Telemachus' story than many notice or recognize, and I hope my research has brought some of these considerations to light.

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