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their different ways the two epics also move on a deeper and more universal level, on which the miseries and exaltations of heroic experience become a device for exploring the universal realities of man's struggle for self-validation under the immortal and carefree gods.

FURTHER READING

The quarrel in *Iliad* 1: Wilson (2002), Slatkin (1991). *Gilgamesh* and the Near Eastern background to Greek heroism: accessible version by George (1999), and the full edition, George (2003); Haubold (2002). Mortal pain versus divine ease: Griffin (1980), Pucci (2002). Hesiod's world-view: Clay (2003), Nelson (1998), Tandy and Neale (1996), Most (1997). Fame and status among Homeric warriors: Zanker (1994), van Wees (1992). Hector and his death: Redfield (1975). Achilles and his death: Muellner (1996), Schein (1984), Crotty (1994). Fury in Homeric warfare: Whitman (1958), Padel (1995), Clarke (1995b), Loraux (1995). Vengeance and justice in the *Odyssey*: Rutherford (1986) and (1991–3); Clay (1983), Kearns (1982).

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NANCY FELSON AND LAURA SLATKIN

Gender and Homeric epic

We are never outside what the anthropologist Gayle Rubin has taught us to call a 'sex/gender system': it is the task of cultural critics – anthropologists, literary scholars, classicists, archaeologists – to specify the components and dynamics of such systems as they take cultural form, whether in societies or in artefacts like poems.¹ Sex, sexuality, gender, reproduction, production and ideas about all of these are structurally linked in any society; consider, for example, Lévi-Strauss's meditation on exogamy – the exchange or 'traffic in women' between social groups, fundamental to human communities thus far – as the foundational requirement for any human traffic, for society itself. Over the last thirty years scholars and activists have greatly refined our understanding about sex, sexuality and gender: a sex-gender system is not simply about men and women, nor even about 'masculinity' vs. 'femininity', or 'homosexuality' vs. 'heterosexuality'. Each of these categories has a history and a cultural specificity; it is a truism worth repeating that sexuality, gender and ideas thereof are culturally variable. Yet just as the linguist Émile Benveniste observed that nowhere do we find a human society without language, so we might also say that nowhere do we find a human society without a sex-gender system (however debated, brittle or fragile) – some way of organising sexual dimorphism, reproduction and child-rearing. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are informed by the same sex-gender system that structures the entire Greek mythological tradition. Yet each epic represents aspects of this system with differential specificity. The two Homeric epics diverge from one another in the roles they assign, for example, to conjugal harmony or disharmony within their respective plots. The *Iliad* moves from

¹ Rubin (1975) and Butler (1990) give crucial, far-reaching analyses of gender as an institution. Rubin's essay, in particular, provides an astute reading of Lévi-Strauss's influential argument, in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, that the exchange of women between social groups organises the interactions necessary for the creation of culture.

a quarrel over a woman to an unexpected resolution of a quarrel between two men over a (male) corpse. In addition, the *Iliad* makes vivid the devastation that war wreaks on communities – on warrior brotherhoods and on households, both inside Troy and, implicitly, back home, for Achaeans and Trojan allies alike. Inside Troy, Hector, Andromache and Astyanax epitomise the household that the war will soon utterly destroy, in a sense representing all the families to be fractured by the Trojan War. The *Odyssey* moves in the opposite direction, reconstituting the family unit, as wife, husband and son overcome diverse obstacles and reunite in Ithaca. Penelope at the palace surmounts the pressures brought upon her by the suitors during her husband's long absence; Odysseus triumphs over a series of impediments and challenges on his journey; and Telemachus overcomes his stagnation by completing his voyage to the Peloponnese and back. For the marital couple at Ithaca, the resumption of marriage provides closure, albeit provisional, to each of their tales.

When dealing with epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we find ourselves in the world of the cultural imaginary, a zone of representation both profound and complex. We should note that genre – epic, for example – refers both to a socio-historical form and is a relational term: the properties of ancient epic are thrown into relief, for example, when juxtaposed with those of lyric or of tragedy. So too 'gender' is a term that evokes both the socialisation of sexual difference and the relational binaries that typically get installed in the name of that socialisation (e.g. male vs. female, masculine vs. feminine, active vs. passive). Despite their efforts, scholars have been unable to mine the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* in any easy way for historical evidence of the way of life of the early Greeks; what the poems do offer, however, are elaborate, powerful representations of communities at war, of individuals at risk – men, women, gods and goddesses, working out their very different fortunes in a universe in which *kleos* (glory) is the highest value, competition the norm, strife ever-present, like-minded marriage an ideal for the *oikos* (household), male solidarity the ideal for the warrior class, and desire ever beckoning, ever disturbing.

It is of course an act of strategic but, we hope, illuminating artifice to explore ancient epic in terms of gender. Inasmuch as Homeric epic conjures up a total world, the gendering of its conflicts, contradictions and values informs both the social order represented (and disturbed) within the poems and the metaphysical – indeed ideological – orders there limned. A complete reading of Homeric epic in light of its sex-gender system necessarily exceeds the bounds of this essay: in the following pages we confine our discussion to epic representations of gender roles in the *human* domain, briefly touching on the way the gods both shape and analogically reproduce the

human experience of this system.² We will explore, among other matters, the paradigmatic structure of triangulation that results when two or more men contend over one woman; the significance of the bonds of alliance among men, especially as foregrounded in the *Iliad*; and the apparently alternative, complementary sphere of the *oikos*, with its idealised marital bond embodied in the notion of *homophrosynē*.

Gender and the *Iliad*

Not Helen but another woman is the contended prize between two men as the *Iliad* opens. Not the Trojans fighting Achaeans but Achaeans fighting among themselves: this is, in the first instance, the context for Achilles' wrath. The catastrophic conflict that initiates and propels the *Iliad's* narrative until the point at which Patroclus dies is not the Trojan War but the strife between two allies, Agamemnon and Achilles, both of whom lay claim – on different grounds – to the same woman, Briseis. As each hero asserts the legitimacy of his competing prerogative, the terms of their dispute outline fundamental tensions at the heart of the social structure depicted in the epic. A struggle over honour, the opening struggle also alerts us to the interaction between the institution of war and the institution of gender – a dynamic that drives the poem's unfolding.

The fatal conflict over Briseis is provoked by an even earlier dispute over a woman we never meet, as it were, face to face. Of Chryseis, the priest's daughter – whose father pleads unsuccessfully for her, then invokes Apollo to compel her return – we see nothing but her receding back, as Agamemnon finally, grudgingly, is obliged to return her. But shadowy – almost anonymous³ – as she is, contention over her sets in motion at the outset of the poem a dazzling and disastrous chain of events. Agamemnon speaks to Achilles before the assembled warriors:⁴

Now once more you make divination to the Danaans, argue
forth your reason why he who strikes from afar afflicts them,
because I for the sake of the girl Chryseis would not take
the shining ransom; and indeed I wish greatly to have her

² Gender relations among divinities differ markedly, though they occasionally reflect and comment upon human relations and gender roles. Characterised as the gods are by endogamy and (in some cases) by parthenogenesis, they serve to highlight the rules (such as the prohibition against incest) that regulate human social interactions.

³ The name Chryseis means simply 'daughter of Chryses'.

⁴ All translations of Homer are from R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago 1961) and *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York 1967).

in my own house; since I like her better than Klytaimnestra
my own wife, for in truth she is no way inferior,
neither in build nor stature nor wit, nor in accomplishment.
Still I am willing to give her back, if such is the best way.
I myself desire that my people be safe, not perish.
Find me then some prize that shall be my own, lest I only
among the Argives go without, since that were unfitting;
you are all witnesses to this thing, that my prize goes elsewhere.
(1.109–20)

Agamemnon declares that his position as supreme commander of the Achaeans means that he must not remain without a *geras* – prize – and requires that he find a replacement, now that he is constrained to return Chryseis to her father. His expression not only of his reluctance to relinquish Chryseis, but of his preference for her over his own wife initiates a crucial epic motif – that of the instability of marriage and of the *oikos*. Agamemnon's explicit, provocative juxtaposition of Chryseis with Clytemnestra raises the spectre of infidelity and of the uneasy co-existence of concubinage and married domesticity⁵ – perils that reverberate from the prehistory of the *Iliad*'s plot to its distant aftermath. Equally far-reaching, the leader's assumption of the overriding privilege of his supremacy threatens to undermine the bonds among allies, the communal spirit of the interdependent collectivity of fighting men – their ethos of structural equality – and to redirect the forces of competition within the cohort. Instead of mobilising against Trojans, these contending Achaeans are on the verge of unleashing calamitous forces of competition and strife against themselves.

At the opening of the *Iliad*, then, Agamemnon fatally disturbs a fragile economy of reciprocal battlefield honours and benefits, as he lays pre-emptive claim to yet another share or portion. He also upsets, and by upsetting lays bare, a precariously balanced set of relations among *philoí* – warrior comrades. To Achilles' objection that all the prizes have been shared out and that Agamemnon must now defer his until Troy has been sacked, Agamemnon replies:

I take no account of your anger. But here is my threat to you.
Even as Phoibos Apollo is taking away my Chryseis.
I shall convey her back in my own ship, with my own
followers; but I shall take the fair-cheeked Briseis,
your prize, I myself going to your shelter, that you may learn well

⁵ On Clytemnestra's regular association with the theme of infidelity, see n. 51 below. For a dramatic example of the disastrous presence of a *pallakē* – concubine – within the household, see Phoenix's autobiography at *Iliad* 9.447–77.

how much greater I am than you, and another man may shrink back
from likening himself to me and contending against me.

(1.181–7)

The confluence of desire, strife and gender signalled here – the competition between men conducted through women – recapitulates the aetiology of the Trojan War; at the same time it dramatically rehearses just how this endless repetition is enacted. The struggle over Chryseis entails the struggle over Briseis, both of which follow upon the struggle over Helen.⁶ Structurally speaking, then, we see that disputes among men – whether allies or enemies – entail disputed traffic in women. If marriage is the peaceful exchange of women among men, war is its violent counterpart.⁷

These serial contests over women early in the poem all converge in the climactic speech in Book 9, in which Achilles articulates the structural relationship among them as he refuses Agamemnon's propitiating gifts:

But I say that I have stormed from my ships twelve cities
of men, and by land eleven more through the generous Troad.
From all these we took forth treasures, goodly and numerous,
and we would bring them back, and give them to Agamemnon,
Atreus' son; while he, waiting back beside the swift ships,
would take them, and distribute them little by little, and keep many.
All the other prizes of honour he gave the great men and the princes
are held fast by them, but from me alone of all the Achaians
he has taken and keeps the bride of my heart. Let him lie beside her
and be happy. Yet why must the Argives fight with the Trojans?
And why was it the son of Atreus assembled and led here
these people? Was it not for the sake of lovely-haired Helen?
Are the sons of Atreus alone among mortal men the ones
who love their wives? Since any who is a good man, and careful,
loves her who is his own and cares for her, even as I now
loved this one from my heart, though it was my spear that won her.
(9.328–43)

Here Achilles collapses the categories of wife and war prize, in favour of a claim to Briseis based not on power (like Agamemnon's) but on affection. He frames his account through a series of questions whose logic encompasses an implicit as well as an explicit critique: first, if the abduction of Helen was an outrage, how is the seizing of Briseis any different? and second, if the

⁶ Note the parallel phrasing: *Helenēs henek'* (9.339), *heineka kourēs* (19.58), underscoring the structural iteration.

⁷ For example, when Achilles proposes to abandon the war and return to Phthia, marriage appears as the alternative: Peleus will find a wife for him (9.394–7).

Atreides' love of their wives justifies starting a war to retrieve them, and if Agamemnon prefers his war prize to his wife, then if Achilles loves *his* war prize, isn't Achilles entitled to keep her? Implicitly challenged here as well is the value system by which Agamemnon's offence in appropriating Briseis can be remedied by offering Achilles *more* women. At the same time, Achilles foregrounds affection as the basis for prizing a woman – a value that does not submit easily to the logic of equivalence, to substitution.

In this crucial speech Achilles does more than argue the legitimacy of his claim to Briseis; he offers as well a critique of the broader exchange-logic animating war and a meditation on its apparent cause – traffic in women as a medium of contended honour among men. What, ostensibly, is being protected or defended in this war? Marriage, aristocratic honour, civilised behaviour? Not *woman* (the ideological phantasm) nor *women* (the diverse assortment of female humans) but the gendered institution that secures patriliney: *marriage*.

Yet if war announces itself as a defence of marriage and the broader aristocratic arrangements it supports, paradoxically war also destroys households and annihilates families. The heroes whom the *Iliad* celebrates have committed themselves to activity that is thus simultaneously social and anti-social, at once allied with the professed values and institutions of warring communities and deeply destructive of them.⁸ Preoccupied not only with war but with contending explanations and evaluations of war, the *Iliad* encourages us to see war both as the noblest venture and the most destructive endeavour, as – in more contemporary terms – a masculinist tragedy inflicted on both sexes. Even more remarkable, the poem bestows upon its hero this critical consciousness of war, its costs and its glories. Undertaken by men, organised by sworn oaths, war nevertheless implicates the larger social order, its institutions, its values – not least its gendered norms.

The core impetus for epic conflict, as Achilles' speech discloses, is Helen – the 'originally' contended woman – the cynosure for this conflict, the gendered nucleus of strife par excellence. What in fact is Helen the paradigm for?⁹ As justification for why men should wage war for a decade, her erotic aura is so overwhelming that even the Trojan elders acknowledge its irresistibility; yet she herself makes an effort to resist *erōs*. On the one hand, then, she is the contended object, the prize whose seizure prompts battle, according to the warriors' own ideological representations; on the other hand, she

is in Iliadic representation a speaking subject, a human being given voice in the epic, a woman who exceeds the meanings men have made of her, even as her sisters in captivity (Briseis) and marriage (Andromache) are given epic voice.¹⁰ Representing both the alienated condition of a Briseis and the assimilated condition of an Andromache, Helen's speech is introspective, questioning, critical and self-critical, regretful, realistic.¹¹

Chryseis, a contested figure moved by male agents among her various roles – daughter, concubine, slave, protégée of Apollo – enters and departs the poem wordlessly; yet a significant number of female characters in the poem, even apart from the ever-loquacious female deities, speak eloquently and at length. Their speech most often takes the form of mourning. To women is traditionally assigned the ritual care of the dead, and in particular the performance of funeral lament, one of the few sanctioned modes of women's speech in antiquity.¹² In the context of lament, Andromache, Hecuba and even Briseis – in addition to Helen – each recounts her particular share of the ordeals of war and her disappointed hopes.¹³ For each, these hopes are defined by husband and children; and only in Helen's case is there any sense – even if fraught with ambiguity – of autonomous agency in relation to her expectations.¹⁴ The sorrows of bereaved women and the grief of warriors at the loss of their comrades and brothers are similarly expressed in tears and groans,¹⁵ but the heroes' mourning is regularly accompanied by active responses of anger and vengefulness, as well as pity, and often by an acknowledgement of responsibility.¹⁶

The conversion of emotion into action seems to be the proper prerogative, but also the obligation, of men. If men's anger is channelled into (even as it is called forth by) warrior activity (just as *mēnis* launches this epic song), women's anger is so foreign to Iliadic representation that it almost never appears, as if it were, or should be, unimaginable. The anger of various goddesses, however, is a potent threat (as are, later, the infuriated women

⁸ See the valuable discussion of the death of Simoeisios in Schein (1984) 73–5.

⁹ In the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, the courtship of Helen sorts out the Achaeans and forms the basis for their allegiance to the Atreidae in the expedition against Troy. On the logic of wooing as a volatile, agonistic practice, see Slatkin (2006).

¹⁰ On the idea of a contested woman who nevertheless has a voice and a subjectivity, see the insightful discussion by King (2001); also Wohl (1998) xiii–xxxvi and Dué (2002).

¹¹ On Helen's discourse of self-reproach, see Worman (2001) 19.

¹² On female lament, see Vermeule (1979) 14–17; Loraux (1990); Easterling (1991); Holst-Warhaft (1992); Alexiou (2002).

¹³ It is with the laments of Andromache, Hecuba and Helen for the dead Hector that the poem closes, at 24.723–75. On Briseis' mourning see King (2001).

¹⁴ On the ambiguity of Helen's options and her relationship to Aphrodite, see Suzuki (1989) 36–40.

¹⁵ See the discussion in Monsacré (1984) 158–96.

¹⁶ On pity necessarily involving action on the part of Iliadic warriors, see the helpful analysis in Kim (2000) esp. 35–67.

in tragic drama);¹⁷ yet while women and goddesses share certain predicaments as female beings, they are not identically situated vis-à-vis their male peers.¹⁸ To state the obvious: while Athena (for example) may exercise her various divine prerogatives, with the exception of Hecuba in Book 24, there are no angry, active women in the *Iliad* – although there is mention of Amazons (3.189; 6.186), a female warrior population that implicitly shadows and inverts Iliadic structures and norms.

How entirely the lives of Iliadic women are circumscribed by the fortunes of their families and defined by their husbands is expressed with particular lucidity by Andromache, whose affective bonds are all encompassed by her relationship to her husband:

Hektor, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother,
you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband.
(6.429–30)

Here Andromache collapses category distinctions – in a sense even more radically than Achilles in Book 9 – as she characterises the completeness of her dependence on Hector, anticipating and attempting to forestall his death and its irremediable consequences for her. But unlike Achilles, she has no recourse in her distress – apart from Hector, the defender of his city. Hector envisages for his son a future as an admired warrior at 6.475–81; Andromache more realistically paints a darker picture.¹⁹ She delivers her lament for her husband, as it were, in stages – beginning even before he dies.²⁰

¹⁷ Aphrodite, for example, is enraged at Helen at 3.413–17; Hera's anger, directed sometimes at the Trojans, sometimes at their divine supporters (and shared by Athena), menaces Olympian harmony, but only in the human realm are its effects potentially disastrous, as when she is willing to offer up even the cities under her protection – her favourites – in order to see the Trojans destroyed, at 4.51–6.

¹⁸ Zeus's claim at 4.34–6 that Hera would eat the Trojans raw, so enraged is she at them, is echoed by Hecuba's wish at 24.212–14, that she could sink her teeth into Achilles' liver for what he has done to her son – an extraordinary expression of fury on the part of a (mortal) female. See Loraux's crucial account of the connection between maternal anger and grief (1990).

¹⁹ See Segal (1971a) on Andromache's understanding of her situation.

²⁰ Andromache's prediction of what both she and Astyanax will have to undergo, once Hector has been killed, takes the form of the lament delivered by a female relative after a hero's death; and the poem explicitly acknowledges her proleptic mourning, although Hector is still alive:

So they mourned in his house over Hektor while he was living
still, for they thought he would never again come back from fighting
alive, escaping the Achaian hands and their violence.
(6.500–2)

Confronted with Andromache's grief and her diction of radical dependence, Hector responds with an acknowledgment of their 'divided world':²¹

Poor Andromache! Why does your heart sorrow so much for me?
No man is going to hurl me to Hades, unless it is fated,
but as for fate, I think that no man yet has escaped it
once it has taken its first form, neither brave man nor coward.
Go therefore back to our house, and take up your own work,
the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaidens
ply their work also; but the men must see to the fighting,
all men who are the people of Ilion, but I beyond others.

(6.486–93)

A divided world is divided along many axes, not least gender: the dream of marital harmony, of good union between the sexes, breaks precisely along the fault-lines of sexual strife that the *Iliad* everywhere takes as its background mythic understanding. Yet as much as the *Iliad* locates its origins in the violation of an *oikos*,²² it devotes many lines to the representation of a loving marriage put under duress by the war designed to defend marriages. Through its portrayal of the family of Hector – aged parents, brothers and sisters, but above all, wife and child – the poem demonstrates the costs of the larger cultural system of which Hector is at the same time champion and victim.

The intimate conversation, or *homilia*,²³ between Hector and Andromache in Book 6 – all the more precious for its unlikelihood²⁴ – adds increased poignancy to the emblematic rendering, later in that book, of Andromache as the wife who prepares to welcome her husband home, not knowing that she is already a widow. It is a mark of Iliadic strength and complexity that it imagines the counter-spirit to its own reigning value, *kleos*: with Hector and Andromache the poem develops a countercurrent, imagining an alternative

²¹ See Katz (1981) on the 'divided world' – a discussion that nuances, even as it describes, the gendered division of roles and attributes in the poem. Note the structural obstacles to *homophrosunē* between Hector and Andromache. Although Andromache actually ventures strategic military advice, her counsel is ignored or dismissed by Hector, who directs her to return to 'women's work' (6.490–3). Note, too, that after the sack of a city, the destinies of men and women remain divided, despite Andromache's claim at 22.477–81 that she and Hector 'were born to a single destiny' (*aisa*).

²² I.e. the household of Helen and Menelaus, violated by Paris.

²³ This conversation is re-evoked in Hector's own self-ironising fantasy of an *oaristus*, a private 'chat' with Achilles at 22.122–30.

²⁴ As Christian Wolff observed (oral communication), the poem underscores the exceptional quality of the encounter between Hector and Andromache by narrating it as a meeting that almost did not take place: neither is where the other expects her/him to be; they meet at the ultimate moment, just as Hector is about to walk through the Scaean gates for the last time.

universe of sustained adult relations and of continuity; its destruction is equally at the heart of the poem's pathos, and its powerful residue is carried into the *Odyssey*.

Hector's speech in Book 6 foresees the destruction of Troy but also, with great tenderness, the endless grief of his widowed wife:

For I know this thing well in my heart, and my mind knows it:
there will come a day when sacred Ilium shall perish,
and Priam, and the people of Priam of the strong ash spear.
But it is not so much the pain to come of the Trojans
that troubles me, not even of Priam the king nor Hekabe,
not the thought of my brothers who in their numbers and valour
shall drop in the dust under the hands of men who hate them,
as troubles me the thought of you, when some bronze-armoured
Achaian leads you off, taking away your day of liberty,
in tears; and in Argos you must work at the loom of another,
and carry water from the spring Messeis or Hyperesia,
all unwilling, but strong will be the necessity upon you;
and some day seeing you shedding tears a man will say of you:
'This is the wife of Hektor, who was ever the bravest fighter
of the Trojans, breakers of horses, in the days when they fought about Ilium.'
So will one speak of you; and for you it will be yet a fresh grief,
to be widowed of such a man who could fight off the day of your slavery.
But may I be dead and the piled earth hide me under before I
hear you crying and know by this that they drag you captive.

(6.447–65)

In his sympathetic imagining of Andromache's grievous future, Hector gives priority to marital devotion over even filial or warrior bonds. Yet that sympathy is conditioned by loss and grief, and the oddly contorted temporality of its expression – alternately prospective and retrospective – seems to elide any hope of its enjoyment in the present. In the *Iliad*, male and female domains and fates are profoundly separate, however much individuals may care for each other. Although Helen anticipates attaining (negative) renown among future generations,²⁵ the poem's cherished value, *kleos*, is something Iliadic women cannot earn, given their limited agency, and this disparity

²⁵ Weaving her tapestry, Helen generates a competing vision of epic as a 'battle fought over me', thus shifting attention to herself as maker and subject – not just object – of epic song and the fame it confers. Her weaving thus commemorates the woman of many men, the woman who generates a second bride-contest for the sake of her: the Trojan War.

renders men and women mutually unknowable,²⁶ their portions fundamentally incommensurate.

The *Iliad* privileges cohesiveness among the fighting men above other lateral ties. In the situation of Achilles – and the countless young warriors who will never return to reciprocate the care of parents and dear ones – the *Iliad* highlights the radiance and charisma of the hero who gives his all and dies in the bloom of youth; the trope of the 'beautiful death', still ideologically powerful in the classical period, is fully developed here.²⁷ The battlefield creates its own community among those whose valour and loyalty earn them *kleos*.²⁸ Warriors on the battlefield are united in a bond created not by a common cause but by their dependence on each other for their very lives; it is their *philoï* (friends) who must rally them, protect them, avenge them, and – far away from loved ones – give their bodies to the funeral pyre.²⁹ Achilles and Patroclus epitomise that bond; theirs is the most fully elaborated in the poem, but is by no means unique.³⁰ In the battle books in particular, we are introduced to numerous pairs of friends (or actual brothers, like Ajax and Teucer, or more distant relatives like Glaucus and Sarpedon) whose devotion to each other is the specific occasion for their heroic attainments. The *Iliad* narrates countless instances of fighters entering the fray specifically on behalf of their companions-in-arms; this is in fact the primary motivation for entry into battle in any given, local moment of the fighting.³¹

In a sense, we might say that the fighting cohort celebrated in the *Iliad* represents an alternative paradigm of social relations, parallel to the *oikos* in importance, and more stable. The *Männerbund* formed by the solidarity of the fighting host, the warriors' fidelity to their imperilled comrades, offers a model of allegiance free from the frailties and vulnerabilities of the domestic household:³² no fighter in the *Iliad* displays the inconstancy of a Helen or the treachery of a Clytemnestra. The only scene in the poem in which a warrior

²⁶ As an example of intersubjective impasse, at 6.473–81 Hector imagines that Andromache would be pleased to think of Astyanax as a fighter, risking his life to bring back bloody spoils.

²⁷ Loraux (1977); Vermeule (1979) 145–63; Vernant (1982). ²⁸ Haubold (2000) 100–43.

²⁹ The rhetoric of encouragement is often a dare that takes the form of a gendered taunt: e.g. 15.561–661. Such exhortations, regularly accompanied by the battle cry 'Shame!', derive the courage of warriors from a contrast to the implied cowardice of women; cf. 2.235. On the conventions of battlefield exhortations see Latacz (1977) and Irwin (2000).

³⁰ On Iliadic *philotēs*, see Sinos (1980), Nagy (1979) 103–11 and Kim (2000) 56–67.

³¹ See the indispensable analysis of Fenik (1968).

³² On the ideology of the *Männerbund*, see Sinos (1980), Murray (1982) and now especially Ferrari (2002) 113–14, with bibliography.

is betrayed on the field of battle is in Book 22, when Athena, leading Hector on to his death at Achilles' hands, masquerades as his brother Deiphobus; at the moment Hector realises that he has been abandoned, he knows it could only have been by a god. He has been tricked, so to speak, by his faith in the *Männerbund*. Yet among its bitter paradoxes, the social code that unites the warriors both creates and subverts the powerful attachments between *philoi*; thus the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles (who asserts in Book 1 that the war is about loyalty and reciprocal obligations) sends many noble heroes to Hades, including, finally, Patroclus.

Only after Patroclus' death do the Achaeans re-constitute themselves as allied brothers-in-arms. It is striking that the resumption of the bonds among *philoi* seems structurally to require the expulsion and rhetorically imagined elimination of a woman. Unsettling to modern readers has been Achilles' seeming renunciation of Briseis in his speech of reconciliation with Agamemnon:³³

But now, when all the Achaians were in one body together,
Achilleus of the swift feet stood up before them and spoke to them:
'Son of Atreus, was this after all the better way for
both, for you and me, that we, for all our hearts' sorrow,
quarrelled together for the sake of a girl in soul-perishing hatred?
I wish Artemis had killed her beside the ships with an arrow
on the day when I destroyed Lyrnessos and took her.
For thus not all these too many Achaians would have bitten
the dust, by enemy hands, when I was away in my anger.
This was better for the Trojans and Hektor; yet I think
the Achaians will long remember the quarrel between us.'

(19.54–64)

Just as Achilles identifies Helen, at 9.339, as the source of the conflict between Trojans and Achaeans, here he specifies Briseis (although he never speaks her name) as the cause of the discord between himself and Agamemnon. His repudiation of her is equally and at the same time a repudiation of that quarrel, and marks his relinquishing of the wrath that created the poem's primary subject.³⁴ Yet if Achilles' wrath has ended, that of the Danaan fighting force is re-fueled, as the poem proceeds to narrate, carrying us through the death of Hector to the imminent destruction of Troy. As Achilles had predicted, the poem enacts the remembrance not only of his wrath but also of the terrible allotment of death and glory that is the song of *kleos*.

³³ On this passage, see Suzuki (1989) 24–7.

³⁴ See Nagy (1979) 79–81 on the '*transfert du mal*', as Achilles' enmity shifts from Agamemnon to Hector.

Under the sign of *nostos* (return), however, Homeric epic offers an alternative vision in which the divergent shares and divergent experiences of men and women can be reconciled. The *Odyssey's* theme of successful *nostos* gains force from the many failed, thwarted or renounced homecomings that are the groundwork of the *Iliad*.

Gender and the *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey* moves in the opposite direction from the *Iliad* and exists in a complementary relationship to it. As a poem of recuperation, it privileges as its overarching categories the *oikos* and the institution of marriage, which are secured by the hero's *nostos*. A husband and a wife reunite in a marriage that is symbolised by their steadfast marriage-bed, its construction a reliable and private sign between them.³⁵ The poem attributes their attainment of reunion to their individual *mētis* (ingenuity), a trait that the resourceful patron goddess Athena both fosters in them and herself embodies.³⁶ With a comparable ingenuity, the poem guides its audiences towards fervently desiring that reunion, which will restore order in Ithaca and also recover for the Ithacan household, at least in part, the losses exacted by the Trojan War. Thus the *Odyssey* performs a kind of reclamation of the *oikos* that requires the wife's sexual fidelity but also the husband's successful return and successful elimination of all competitors for his wife.

A poem that celebrates ingenuity, the *Odyssey* might be read as a series of ingenious plans, their collisions and their unfolding: from Odysseus' outwitting of the Cyclops, to Circe's provisional ensnaring of the hero to Odysseus' test with the bow, to Penelope's bed-test, the *Odyssey* presents male and female figures scheming, thinking, collaborating and outwitting. Odysseus and Penelope, in particular, as consummate schemers, overcome every obstacle to reunion – a horde of unruly young suitors (for Penelope) and (for Odysseus) a series of female 'detainers' (along with other threats to his return) as well as the challenge, once home, of ridding his household of the suitors and winning Penelope over.

The *Odyssey*, as if in conversation with the *Iliad*, invites reflection upon the impact of the war and the warrior's absence on the wife left behind. The poem asks: Who will take charge of the *oikos* and *polis* in his absence?

³⁵ On the bed's immovability and indissolubility see especially Zeitlin (1996) 19–52 and the scholiast ad xxiii.288, ed. Dindorf. On the reunion itself see Murnaghan (1987), Winkler (1990) 129–62, Katz (1991), Doherty (1995) and Felson (1987) and (1994), with additional bibliography. Russo (1982), Pedrick (1988) and Wohl (1993) are helpful on specific aspects of the reunion.

³⁶ Slatkin (1996) esp. 234–37.

How will the patriarchal domestic economy work, or not work, when the patriarch is gone, perhaps never to return? Will it survive? What are the obligations of the wife? Perhaps in response to the catastrophes associated with the Trojan War, the *Odyssey* minimises the importance of the *Männerbund*. There is no viable cohort of men in the entire poem. Odysseus has arrived home alone, moreover, having lost every single member of his crew: he did not sustain solidarity with them, did not succeed in protecting their homecoming, and was (in short) not a successful leader.³⁷ Ironically, the collectivity of unruly suitors forms the only cohesive cohort in the epic. They have banded together for unheroic purposes, however: to deplete Odysseus' household, court Penelope, ambush Telemachus and finally to defend themselves at the bow-contest. The violence that Odysseus perpetrates against them ends up eliminating the aristocratic princes; moreover, Odysseus and his small band of four 'would have killed them all, and given none of them | homecoming' (thus devastating his own populace), had not Athena, backed by Zeus, intervened with both sides (xxiv.528–48). Athena's intervention in Ithaca recalls her staying of Achilles' hand at *Iliad* 1.193–222 in a comparable case of strife over a woman, like the strife that launched the Trojan War.

The *Odyssey*, far from providing a competing paradigm of social relations, as discussed above, or questioning marital relations as the basis of order and stability, puts marriage at the centre – for its human characters at least³⁸ – and idealises it. The poem proposes the kind of reciprocal marriage that Odysseus sets before Nausicaa when he asks the gods to grant the Phaeacian princess

a husband and a house and sweet agreement
in all things, for nothing is better than this, more steadfast
than when two people, a man and his wife, keep a harmonious
household; a thing that brings much distress to the people who hate them
and pleasure to their well-wishers, and for them the best reputation.
(vi.181–4)

Such a marriage based on sweet agreement – *homophrosunē* (like-mindedness) – and on keeping a harmonious household *homophroneonte* (both being like-minded') is tested and amplified in the course of the *Odyssey* before it is ultimately secured in Book xxiii. Its differential impact on enemies and well-wishers coincides with Odysseus' vision of an ideal kingdom

³⁷ Haubold (2000) 100–43.

³⁸ On gender in the Song of Aphrodite's Adultery (viii.266–366), see esp. Newton (1987); for further bibliography, Felson (1994) 134–5.

he sets it forth in his 'reverse simile' when he later compares Penelope to a just and pious king whose people prosper under him (xix.107–14).

The presence of 'reverse similes' invites audiences to imagine permeable (even interchangeable) gender roles and spheres of activity as an alternative to the traditional 'divided world', which these similes invert and indeed interrogate.³⁹ They exist in tension with the assertive directives of certain male speakers, in both poems, who invoke the divided world by ordering a woman to go into the house and take up her own work of weaving and to leave to men such activities as warfare, story-telling, escort or the bow.⁴⁰ In comparing Penelope's fame to that of a blameless and god-fearing king (xix.107–14), Odysseus envisions the sort of flourishing kingdom he has just encountered in Scheria, his last stop before arriving at home. There his guide (Athena in the form of a young girl) gives an elaborate description of Arete that anticipates what Odysseus will find in Ithaca when he shortly returns. Athena describes the Phaeacian queen as remarkable in status and versatile in pursuits, by virtue (in large part) of the way 'Alcinoos . . . gave her such pride of place | as no other woman on earth is given | of such women as are now alive and keep house for husbands'.⁴¹ This singling out of Queen Arete raises the question of whether Odysseus will bestow a comparable honour on Penelope, and whether Penelope will turn out to be equally, or even more, remarkable.

The *Odyssey* explores the edges of its paradigm of reciprocal marriage by presenting divine and immortal females who pursue Odysseus and openly express the desire to wed him. This subset of the Adventures introduces into the text the tale-type of divine lovers and their mortal consorts who, traditionally, pay dearly for their pleasures. Odysseus not only survives the danger/pleasure of sleeping for a year with Circe and for seven with Calypso,⁴² and of listening to the Sirens, whose song is fatally seductive for mariners, but he even incorporates these adventures into his triumphant survivor's tale. Significantly, he never loses his *menos* (life-force) – unlike the emasculated mortal lover of the love goddess in traditional stories of this

³⁹ Foley (1978) 7–26. Examples include viii.523–31, where Odysseus is like a woman weeping over the body of a husband lost in war, and xxiii.233–40, where Odysseus is as welcome to Penelope as land to ship-wrecked men.

⁴⁰ Three male characters invoke the divided world in this way, using slight variants of the same formulaic language: Hector to Andromache at 6.490–3, Telemachus to Penelope at 1.356–9 and xxi.350–3; and Alcinoos to Arete at xi.352–3.

⁴¹ At vii.66–74 Athena presents Queen Arete as a paragon of womanhood who ventures into the world of men.

⁴² At v.14–15 and 153–5 the text calls attention to Odysseus' reluctance to be Calypso's bedmate – even before he rejects her final proposal, at v.206–10, to be 'lord of this household | and be an immortal'.

type.⁴³ Nor does he express the accompanying misogyny of the mortal love evident, for example, in other traditions, as in Gilgamesh's rebuke and rejection of Ishtar. In fact, because he declines Calypso's repeated proposals of 'marriage' and yet (unlike Gilgamesh) does not incite her rage, Odysseus will escape the disasters that typically befall such lovers.⁴⁴ He ultimately rejects, after experiencing it, the quintessential male fantasy of sharing a bed, and a life of luxury, with a goddess. Far from refuting Calypso's claim to surpass Penelope in build and stature, Odysseus concedes it, saying Penelope is 'mortal after all, and you are deathless and ageless' (v.218). Nevertheless, he tactfully insists on 'his day of homecoming, whatever suffering may lie ahead' (v.215–24).

Odysseus' choice of a mortal wife is a choice to be mortal and a choice not to abandon epic heroism and sacrifice immortal acclaim.⁴⁵ And Odysseus formulates his belief in like-minded marriage among equals only after his years with Calypso. Disenchantment with an unequal partner precedes (and implicitly shapes) the conversation in which he politely communicates to Nausicaa that he is not her equal and not her match.

Through these potent and dread goddesses, the poem represents forms of female desire filtered through the ideological requirements of *nostos*, examining the nature of that desire and the consequences of its denial or provisional fulfilment. Both Circe and Calypso manage their lives independently of husbands: a mortal consort, should they acquire one, is more erotic object than partner, and they have no offspring. Despite much dissimilarity, their independence resonates with Penelope's involuntary self-reliance over the twenty years of Odysseus' absence.

The human version of the 'detaining goddess' is the Phaeacian princess – nubile, desirous of a husband, and savvy like her mother, perhaps even a younger version of Penelope herself.⁴⁶ But the hero has just declined Calypso's offer, and the life of ease on Scheria carries a similar threat to his return and to the preservation of his *oikos*. Odysseus' refusal to remain on Scheria and marry the princess attests to his determination, and readiness, to return to Penelope. By not pursuing Nausicaa or her maidens, by not behaving like the ravenous lion to which he is compared (v.130–8), Odysseus reassures the maiden that she and her companions are safe. His civility

contributes to the mutual respect and admiration in their eventual parting exchange at viii.457–68, which itself exhibits a measure of *homophrosunē*. As with Queen Arete (a thoroughly domesticated yet empowered human female), these figures illuminate aspects of Penelope as the eventual idealised partner of Odysseus. The exposition of their subjectivities resonates with the query of Odysseus to his mother's shade in the Underworld: 'What does Penelope want? What is she thinking?' (xi.76–9).

While Odysseus is pondering the state of Penelope's *noos* (intention), Homer's audiences know that she is at a critical juncture. She has, strictly speaking, returned to the liminal phase of courtship, to the threshold of womanhood. But her situation is complicated and problematic. It is ten years since the fall of Troy, and though the destinies of other warriors have become the topic of song (i.325–7), no one knows whether her husband is alive or dead. At home in Ithaca, moreover, several events have recently converged: Telemachus is grown, enabling her to remarry (according to Odysseus' parting words at xviii.269–70),⁴⁷ and her 108 suitors, who have been wooing her for more than three years, have caught her in a delaying tactic – the famous ruse of the loom – and are pressing her all the more urgently. The uncertainty about Penelope's marital status intensifies this moment of crisis even as it multiplies her options: she might remarry and either commit adultery (if Odysseus is alive) or wed an inferior man (if she is a widow). If she holds out and waits, she might either contrive a successful reunion (if Odysseus returns) or might (if he is dead or lost or permanently detained) further antagonise her spurned suitors. Already, they violate her household and are attempting, without success, to ambush and murder her son.⁴⁸ For Penelope, then, the stakes are high and timing is all-important: a false move on her part will endanger not only her own status and reputation but her husband's safety as well, should he come back. At jeopardy is the very integrity of the *oikos* to which her warrior-husband hopes to return and which it is her responsibility, as a wife, to safeguard.⁴⁹ Everything depends, then, on what she does and on what type of wife she turns out to be.

The poem places Penelope's dilemma within a set of comparable scenarios that help define the sex-gender system within which she operates. The governing situation of the *Odyssey* draws on wartime stories familiar to

⁴³ See Giacomelli (1980) on the semantics of *menos* in Greek poetry.

⁴⁴ Calypso herself cites three couples – Dawn and Orion, Demeter and Iasion, and herself and Odysseus – in her complaint at v.118–28; cf. *Hymn. Ven.* 202–38 for a similar catalogue. In a humorous precursor the Akkadian Gilgamesh catalogues at length Ishtar's discarded and ruined lovers (*Gilgamesh*, Tablet 60).

⁴⁵ On the refusal of Odysseus, see Vernant (1996) esp. 187–8, and Schein (1996) 3–31.

⁴⁶ Van Nortwick (1979); also Wohl (1993) and Felson (1994) 46–8.

⁴⁷ On the question of who will be the guardian of Penelope once Telemachus comes of age, see Katz (1991) esp. 35–9.

⁴⁸ On the set of narrative options for Penelope, see Felson (1994) 7 and Katz (1991). An additional ambiguity as to where home will be if she remarries arises from the speculations of various suitors (e.g. at i.275–8 and 292).

⁴⁹ See Katz (1981) 19–44 and n. 21 above.

Homeric audiences, from the *Iliad* and from the surrounding mythological tradition, in which the wives of absent warriors are vulnerable, their lives volatile. The poem introduces two wives – Helen and Clytemnestra – who highlight the challenges and choices Penelope faces by modelling the fundamental question: ‘Could she turn out to be like either of them?’⁵⁰ Their stories, as depicted within the poem, set forth a range of possibilities for the wife who has been left to her own resources: still married, still desiring, besieged by others who desire her, sometimes the woman succumbs. The choices of Helen to run off with Paris and of Clytemnestra to yield to the persuasion of Aegisthus⁵¹ (each in the absence of her husband) throw into sharp relief Penelope’s decision to remain faithful. Like these two notorious adulteresses, Penelope is a much-desired bride.⁵² Like them, she has no male guardian nearby. Yet of the three – who are all objects of desire and, to different degrees, desiring subjects as well – only she staves off ruinous *atē* (folly). She alone is *periphron* (circumspect), *ekhephron* (of enduring mind) and can be self-protectively *apistos* (untrusting) (XXIII.72) and hard-hearted (XXIII.97), in ways that protect her from self-deception and make her effective in her schemes and plans.⁵³

The other problematic triangles have both been resolved, in one fashion or another, by the time the story of the *Odyssey* begins: Helen is retrieved and returned to Sparta⁵⁴ and all members of the Argive triangle – Clytemnestra, Aegisthus and Agamemnon – are dead. At Ithaca, however, the courtship by 108 suitors continues to threaten the marital reunion once Odysseus is home, until he annihilates every one of them at the contest. The courtship not only tests Penelope’s intelligence and steadfastness but also orients her toward (re)marriage by relocating her in the sphere of Aphrodite tempered by Artemis.⁵⁵ This aligns her with all the *parthenoi* who are wooed by suitors and at the same time with her desired and long absent husband, who as her

first suitor will win her (and win her over), first in a contest and then in a test that she devises.⁵⁶

The *Odyssey* draws on mythic tradition and engages dialectically with the *Iliad* in its portrayal of its characters. In the case of the ‘polytropic’ Odysseus of epic tradition, the poem selectively highlights his skills as a warrior, an orator in the assembly and a crafty trickster but makes all these traits serve a domesticated and socialised Odysseus who heads his own *oikos* in Ithaca. His self-designation in the *Iliad* as ‘father of Telemachus’ (2.260; cf. 4.354) and characters’ recollection of him as *ēpios* (‘gentle’)⁵⁷ provide materials for the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*, whose drive to return home competes with his curiosity to learn about the minds of men (1.3) through risky adventures. In his orientation to family and fatherhood Odysseus differs from Agamemnon, who returned from Troy with Cassandra, and brought her as a *pallakē* (concubine) into the household.⁵⁸ Odysseus, in contrast, has affairs but always elsewhere and always with goddesses – affairs he does not bring home.⁵⁹ As a result, his sexual adventures do not disrupt the *oikos*: the fact that he narrates these escapades to Penelope (as earlier to the Phaeacians) indicates that they do not constitute a violation of societal norms and in this poem they threaten neither patriarchy nor patriliney.

The poem distances Odysseus from his erotic liaisons through the intervening ‘reunion’ with the goddess Athena – always, in myth, a compelling alternative to the goddess/mortal lover paradigm (see above, pp. 00). It times the hero’s first open encounter with his patron goddess (who has played such a pivotal role in plotting out his return) after the Adventures, upon his arrival at home, transported by the Phaeacian sailors. It situates the meeting at the boundary between ‘over there’ and ‘here at Ithaca’. Athena’s acknowledgement of their affinity and like-mindedness has the impact of securing Odysseus’ identity as a hero of *mētis*: their meeting looks backward to his survival on his journeys and forward to his new challenge, namely to resolve

⁵⁰ On paradigms for the epic bride see Slatkin (2005).

⁵¹ Clytemnestra represents the extreme case of the wife who will not wait but instead beds her husband’s enemy. Always associated with the theme of infidelity in mythic tradition, she is notoriously transgressive in every Odyssean account of her actions.

⁵² As her suitor Eurymachus tells her: ‘you surpass all women | for beauty and stature and for the mind well balanced within you’ (XVIII.248–9).

⁵³ At III.266 Nestor attributes ‘virtuous thoughts’ to Clytemnestra before Aegisthus seduces her. On Helen’s ways of knowing, see esp. Bergren (1981) 201–14.

⁵⁴ The tensions in the reconstituted Spartan *oikos* are revealed by the juxtaposition of dissonant Trojan War stories; see especially Bergren (1981) 201–14, Olson (1989b) 387–94, Katz (1991) and Worman (2001) 119–37.

⁵⁵ On the interplay of Artemis and Aphrodite in the character of Penelope, as at XIX.53–4, see Felson (1994) 36–7.

⁵⁶ Woodhouse (1969) discusses the *Odyssey*’s adaptation of several traditional folk-tales. See also Page (1955) 1–2, with references, on the folk-tale of the returning hero.

⁵⁷ Evidence for a traditional ‘domestic’ Odysseus comes from a story in the *Cypria* (summarised in Phot. *Bibl.* 319a21): a reluctant warrior, he tried not to join up in the expedition to Troy by feigning madness, but he revealed his sanity when, on the advice of Palamedes, the embassy threatened to harm his infant son. At 2.260 and 3.354 Odysseus calls attention to himself as ‘Telemachus’ father’. Moreover, several characters remember him as ‘a king gentle as a father’ (II.47 and 234 and V.12) or as having gentle ways (XI.202–3).

⁵⁸ Laertes, in contrast, ‘for fear of his wife’s anger’, refrained from sleeping with Eurycleia, whom he ‘favored in his house as much as his own devoted | wife’ (1.429–33).

⁵⁹ Alternate traditions assign offspring by Odysseus to both Calypso and Circe and later to the Thesprotian Callidike; see Phot. *Bibl.* 319a21 for the *Telegony* and Hes. *Theog.* 1.101–13.

the triangle that threatens his *oikos* and his safe *nostos*. As such, she can provide a bridge for Odysseus between his erotic liaisons, which seem to occur outside of human time, and his very human erotic encounter with Penelope.

Once back in Ithaca, Odysseus makes trial of his wife, investigating and asking questions (XIII.333–6), instead of immediately making her his confidante. In this, he follows the advice of Agamemnon's shade but also of Athena,⁶⁰ who reinforces Agamemnon's warning with her emphatic command (XIII.306–10) to 'tell no one of all the men and women | that you have come back from your wanderings', including Penelope. Odysseus' secrecy with Penelope, as he maintains his disguise, gives him a strategic advantage over her: he can observe her, incognito, as she interacts with the suitors, and in this way play a role in her tale. This enables him, an eyewitness, to interpret her actions from the vantage point of a self-confident suitor and to assume, as he watches her solicit gifts from the suitors, that 'her mind has other intentions' (XVIII.272–80).

At the pair's first face-to-face encounter⁶¹ – a climactic moment in their renewal of contact – Penelope announces her plan to hold a bride-contest (570–80) and essentially to give herself away in marriage.⁶² This decision has every appearance of a new *mētis* (plan): it comes upon her suddenly, like the ruse of the loom (a 'brainstorm' she has just related to the stranger). It indicates, moreover, that she is in charge of herself, not subject to any male guardian, and that she is indeed being won over by the stranger/Odysseus,⁶³ who seizes upon the proposal as an opportunity not only to win her from the suitors and reclaim his *oikos* but to engage them in a heroic battle and prove, once again, his manhood and his entitlement to Penelope. Yet at

the contest Penelope is the one who places the event before her suitors (XXI.67–79), intervenes in their wrangling (312–19) and bids them give the stranger the bow (336). In fact, until she departs at XXI.354, sent back to her quarters by Telemachus, Penelope is a major force in implementing the restoration of her marriage. She remains in charge until the close of the second interview: there, after telling her impatient son (XXIII.109–10: 'we have signs that we know of | between the two of us only, but they are secret from others'), she inflicts her test on Odysseus. This final *mētis* – a seemingly casual order to a servant to move outside for the beggar 'the very bed that he himself | built' (XXIII.177–80) – provokes Odysseus to retrace the steps of its making and to prove (to her satisfaction) that he is indeed her husband. The trick may be read as Penelope's (playful) retaliation for Odysseus' prolonged secrecy.

Reunited within their *oikos*, the couple enacts *homophrosunē* not only in their love-making in the steadfast marriage bed but in the mutuality of their exchange of tales, which the poem summarises at XXIII.300–41. Each of them has narrated a partial epic, an eyewitness account of personal experiences. The summary that interweaves their separate stories recapitulates (and re-enacts, as it were) the entire *Odyssey*, an epic that includes both adventure tales. In Penelope's segment of 'all she had endured | in the palace' she is the contested bride-prize, the woman over whom the suitors vie first among themselves and then in unwitting competition with Odysseus; she is won by Odysseus after she proves that she stands out for virtue and intelligence; but she also endorses her choice of him, and is won over by him, after she tests him with a *mētis* that allows her to outshine even Queen Arete of Scheria.⁶⁴ Indeed, all the other females that Odysseus has encountered pale by comparison, finally, with Penelope, who fits Athena's very description of a sharp and stealthy figure at XIII.291–2: 'It would be a sharp one, and a stealthy one, who would ever get past you | in any contriving; even if it were a god against you.' Penelope does 'get past' Odysseus with her ruse of the marriage bed. And in the end Odysseus – survivor, adventurer, world traveller, who returns home alone and without his comrades – stands out as much for having an exemplary wife as for being *polumētis* ('devious') and *polutropos* ('versatile').

In retrospect, Penelope comments on the dilemma of a wife left at home, on the precariousness of her virtue. In her 'apology for Helen', and for herself, she reframes her own reluctance to embrace Odysseus as a virtuous act, and one which might have saved her from the plight of adultery had he been

⁶⁰ The shade of Agamemnon stereotypes all women as treacherous on the basis of the special case of Clytemnestra (XI.432–4). Hearing of the adultery of Clytemnestra, Odysseus associates the two sisters as schemers and causes of destruction, but he resists the generalisation to 'all women' (XI.436–9).

⁶¹ This *homilia*, in contrast to the one between Hector and Andromache (see above, pp. 99–100), takes place indoors and at a location that symbolises all that is sacrosanct within the *oikos* and fundamental to its continuation.

⁶² Note the untraditional nature of this move. In the mythic tradition, a maiden (or her father) who determines the rules of the contest for her hand often seems to be trying to avoid marriage by making the contest an 'impossible task'.

⁶³ By obscuring Penelope's degree of certitude about the stranger's identity and by postponing any actual contact between Odysseus and Penelope until the conversation (*homilia*) at the hearth in Book XIX, the poem practises on its audiences the same *mētis* it ascribes to its leading characters. On the *mētis* of the poem see Slatkin (1996); on the strategy of teasing its external audience about the crucial topic of what Penelope knows and when, see Felson (1994) 3–5, 16 and 18.

⁶⁴ Odysseus (as the intimate listener) equates their trials at XXIII.350–3.

someone other than Odysseus. She excuses her hesitation by citing Helen's cognitive error and folly in 'lying in love with an outlander from another country', which Helen would not have done, 'if she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaeans would bring her | home again to the beloved land of her fathers' (xxiii.215–24). This strange apology for Helen reveals that she, Penelope, a wife left at home, realises that she too could have ended up (like Helen and Clytemnestra) as a woman of many men, with two lovers/husbands, or been deluded, perhaps by a god in disguise.

Coincidence of desire allows Penelope and Odysseus to embody the marital ideal of the *Odyssey* as they reclaim their marriage. Their success at reuniting affirms the principle that this husband and wife both maintain their separate spheres and roles, traditionally configured, and (at times) seem to identify across gender boundaries. In this, they match the poem's 'reverse similes' discussed above, which liken Odysseus to a woman 'lying over the body of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people' (viii.522–30) and Penelope to 'some king who, as a blameless man and god-fearing . . . upholds the role of good government . . . and the people prosper under him' (xix.108–14). For audiences receptive to the ideal of marriage with *homophrosunē*, the poem represents a husband and a wife who, having survived individually, now thrive as a couple, keeping 'a harmonious | household; a thing that brings much distress to the people who hate them | and pleasure to their well-wishers, and for them the best reputation'.

When the shade of Agamemnon invokes a song of praise for Penelope for fulfilling the traditional expectations of a virtuous wife at xxiv.192–8, the poem celebrates her *mētis* in the service of the *oikos*. This emphatic bestowal of *kleos* on Penelope, alongside Odysseus, suggests that the *Odyssey* has a dialectical relation to the *Iliad* in terms of the sex-gender system in which they both participate, the system that permeates the tradition to which both these epics belong. Where the *Iliad* celebrates the beautiful death of the warrior and the bonds between men that emerge in the face of war, with all its casualties, the *Odyssey* highlights the efficacy (along with the subjectivity) of the stalwart and non-adulterous wife left behind. To her the poem assigns ingenuity and a capacity to plan. She sustains the *oikos* and protects the continuity of her husband's patriliny and at the same time follows a path by which she actively chooses from among the alternatives laid out before her. In one sense, the poem represents her as no less trafficked than the other women of epic, in another, as herself taking charge of her own trafficking and exhibiting astounding agency, within cultural limits. In the end, the voice of Penelope is the voice of a wife reinstated in an idealised marriage based on *homophrosunē*, a wife at once traditional and full of ingenuity and certainly the match of her polytropic husband.

Although the *Odyssey* might be seen to offer a kind of 'comedy of remarriage',⁶⁵ it also intermittently posits ominous narrative alternatives – its own shadows. The narrative continues beyond the culminating fairy-tale reunion between a mature bride and bridegroom, as the men of the *oikos* join in a second battle – the three-generational combat against the suitors' relatives. Laertes, reinvigorated, rejoices to fight alongside his son and his son's son, all three 'contending over their courage' (xxiv.514–15). His rehabilitation places the continuity of their lineage (*genos*) in the centre; his pleasure sets civic harmony momentarily aside. Just as the three fighters are proving their mettle as Iliadic heroes who heartlessly dispatch their enemies, Athena (backed by Zeus) intervenes. Her very preclusion of further strife and bloodshed, as she instils peace and tranquillity in Ithaca (xxiv.528–48), highlights the even darker, more violent pathway that the epic chose not to take. The shadow comes from what might have happened in Ithaca, had strife been left for the men to resolve. Another detail that radically qualifies the happy ending is the final voyage foretold by Tiresias (xi.119–34) and retold by Odysseus to Penelope (xxiii.267–81). It evokes a number of variant tales in which Odysseus has additional liaisons and fathers additional offspring: traces of these appear in the *Telegony* and the *Cypria* of the Epic Cycle.⁶⁶

Just as the *Iliad* makes a point of acknowledging the values and domestic spaces war will destroy, as when Andromache laments and Achilles longs for home, so too the *Odyssey* resists a simply triumphant closure. The *oikos* is, after all, a political space in which debate mediates difference. In Ithaca the political economy of sex here has left blood on the floor, carnage in the palace. The epic makes plain that the ongoing sustaining of human arrangements and institutions, such as marriage, will require vigilance and violence as well as *homophrosunē*.

Conclusion

Beyond their provisional endings, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* continue to resonate in our classrooms, theatres, memories and political lives. It is not surprising that these epics, and their divergent, powerful articulations of gender and society, should have proved a rich resource for critics, artists and political theorists interested in thinking gender both historically and in its contemporary configurations. It was Simone Weil who famously called the *Iliad* 'the poem of force': the gendered logic of that force is something

⁶⁵ The term is from Cavell (1981).

⁶⁶ See Sacks (1996).

now drawn into sharp relief. The sexual revolution and the rise of gender studies and social theory – very different phenomena yet not unrelated – have had their impact on our readings of epic: how could they not? Perhaps because these poems are such rich, dialogic and even dialectical works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have continued to engage the imagination of artists, particularly those interested in the interface of desire, gender, social roles and social narrative. When Louise Glück wished to explore a contemporary American marriage as it fell apart in her book of poems, *Meadowlands*, she turned to Odyssean personae: Penelope, Telemachus, Circe. Odyssean personae have proven to be extremely versatile in their late twentieth-century incarnations: the Cohen brothers' film, 'O Brother, Where Art Thou?', for example, or Derek Walcott's post-colonial epic, *Omeros*. The *Iliad* has long served as an exemplary text on war: it is no accident that scholars of Vietnam and the first Persian Gulf War looked to the ancient epic as a template for their thinking.

The examples could go on, of course. The point we wish to make is this: inasmuch as these are 'our' epics, or 'your' epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and their respective explorations of gender, will continue to influence the ways we imagine ourselves, our pasts, our communities and our gendered fates. Our sense of the difference of epic difference necessarily reveals, among many other things, our sense of the difference gender makes, 'then' and now.⁶⁷

FURTHER READING

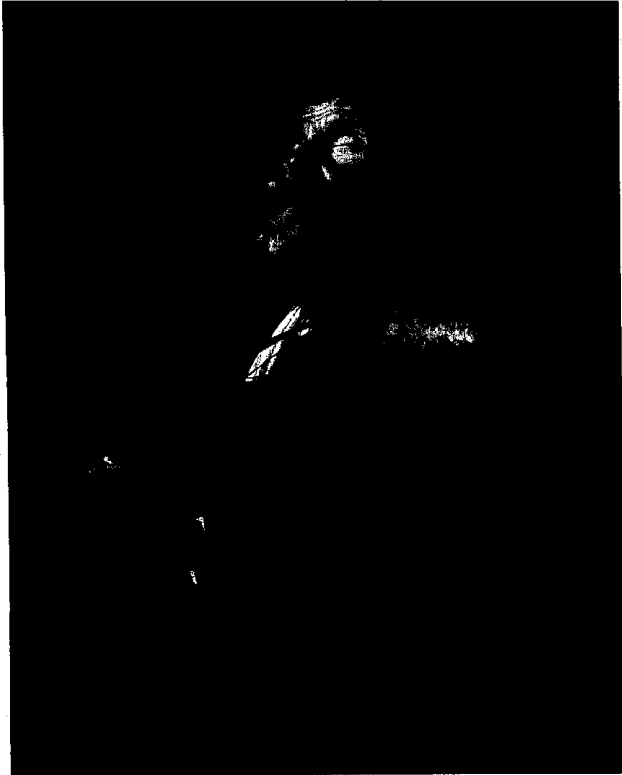
On sexuality and gender in ancient Greece, see Arthur (1973) and (1998); Bergren (1983); DuBois (1988); Ferrari (2002); Foucault (1985); Halperin, Winkler and Zeitlin (1990); Hawley and Levick (1995); Hubbard (2003); King (1998); Lora (1993) and (1995); McClure (2002); Stewart (1997); Winkler (1990).

Among the vast literature on gender theory two seminal works are Butler (1990) and Rubin (1975); see also the essays collected in Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974).

On sexuality and gender in Homeric epic, see Cohen (1995); Doherty (1995); Felson (1994); Foley (2001); Katz (1981) and (1991); Monsacré (1984); Suzuki (1989); and Zeitlin (1996).

Finally, modern/postmodern engagements with this topic include: Bidart (1997); Glück (1996); H. D. (1961); and Walcott (1990), (1993b).

⁶⁷ We are profoundly grateful to several colleagues and friends who read earlier versions of this collaborative effort. In particular, Maureen McLane's invaluable critiques helped to shape and sharpen our thinking about gender theory and its applications to the Homeric poems. Seth Schein, as so often, generously provided sound readings of our interpretations of text he knows so well. We thank, in addition, Erika Thorgerson Hermanowicz, Sara Bershtel and Carolyn Dewald for their timely and constructive suggestions. In addition, each of us thanks her co-author for an invigorating, illuminating, and enjoyable collaboration.



Mattia Preti, *Homer*. Gallerie dell' Accademia, Venice

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