

Regarding Penelope

FROM CHARACTER
TO POETICS



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MOTHER

PENELOPE is the source of suspense in the *Odyssey*. In shaping her character, Homer raises alternative plot possibilities by inviting his audiences to construct parallels with Klytaimestra and Helen and other female characters, and by supporting an ongoing male conversation about whether she will wait for Odysseus's return or marry beforehand. These possible plots exist alongside what will become the dominant plot: the story of a husband returning and reclaiming his faithful wife. One plot, in which Penelope first marries a suitor and then has to face Odysseus, remains a possibility until the *Odyssey* is nearly over.

The males who converse about Penelope include Odysseus, the shade of Agamemnon, the suitors, and Telemakhos. Agamemnon advances the idea of Penelope as the virtuous woman, her husband's salvation, the very opposite of his wife Klytaimestra. The immortals will fashion a song of grace for her, he predicts, and Penelope's fame for virtue will not perish, while the other, the daughter of Tyndareos, will have a hateful song among humans, because she devised evil deeds (in killing him, her wedded lord) (24.192–202). But Agamemnon, who appears to proclaim the last word on infidelity, is hampered by his narrow perspective on women, his bitter personal experiences in Argos and his consequent negativity toward even a faithful wife. Regarding female betrayal, he is intractable. The suitors, too, distort Penelope's image: she is alternately an object of desire, a vehicle to power, or a temptress weaving and plotting their destruction. Odysseus is more magnanimous and flexible. His *homophrosunê* ("like-mindedness") principle for a good marriage seems to admit a measure of risk: the wife (especially if she resembles him) may act to fulfill her own desires, which may not coincide with his own. What of Telemakhos? What are his images of Penelope?

To the maturing Telemakhos¹ the image of his mother assumes successive shapes. During his maturation journey, for example, Penelope—a rock of her son's trust and border of his world—becomes a near stranger, a potential betrayer of their household, held in suspicion and kept in the dark.² For

him, devaluing his mother coincides with cultivating a new masculinized ideology—two processes that comprise two psychosocial phases in a boy's development to manhood. I shall examine these phases cross-culturally and in terms specific to the ancient Greece of Homeric times.³

Focusing on the development of Telemakhos helps illuminate his vision(s) of Penelope through those moments where their stories intersect. As Telemakhos changes and the category "woman" changes for him, Penelope as a member of that category changes, too.

Adolescence

"Adolescents, without knowing it, are going through a period of mourning for the passionate attachments they felt in childhood to parents whom they then perceived as perfect," writes Kaplan in *Adolescence: The Farewell to Childhood*. They abandon these infantile object images, mourn their loss, hunger for new objects and experience a temporary gap that they fill through relations to same-sex peers; eventually they replace primary (internalized) love objects, their parents, with new objects and life partners.⁴

Adolescence is more than a way station between childhood and adulthood. "It is that critical point in a human life when the sexual and moral passions come to fruition and attain maturity. It is then that the individual passes from family life into cultural existence." In adolescence, "various themes interweave and influence one another: fantasy and reality; past, present, and future; internal life and external actuality." Kaplan sees adolescence as a "kind of emotional battleground on which past and future contend for their respective rights." It is "the most highly elaborated drama of the passage from one realm of existence into another." In sum, she concludes (19):

In bidding farewell to childhood each adolescent must make decisions, as to how much of the past and which of its aspects will be allowed to prevail into the future. These decisions are not arrived at overnight. Before the future can make itself felt, many backward movements occur. Adolescence represents an inner emotional upheaval, a struggle between the eternal human wish to cling to the past and the equally powerful wish to get on with the future. The purpose of adolescence is not to obliterate the past but to immortalize what is valuable and to say farewell to those items of the past that stand in the way of a full realization of adult sexual and moral potentials. Saying farewell entails considerable grief and longing. In that regard the adolescent is like a mourner, but a mourner who at first only dimly realizes

what it is she is losing. What the adolescent is losing, and what is so difficult to relinquish, are the passionate attachments to the parents and to those dialogues that had once been the center of infantile existence.

For boys⁵ in a patrilineal, patrilocal society, this highly elaborated drama entails several crucial tasks illuminated by current anthropological studies of male initiation rituals and by psychoanalytic descriptions of the adolescent transformation. As the boy becomes a man, he undergoes not a mere transition but a transformation. Of Van Gennep's classic three-phase sequence—represented by rites of separation, rites of the *limen* or *marge*, and rites of aggregation—Victor Turner elaborates the middle phase as a realm with few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. He describes liminality as a "realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise." The neophytes are in a condition of "ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories." Victor Turner refers to the liminal period as an "interstructural phase in social dynamics."⁶

Building on Victor Turner's understanding of the "betwixt and between" phase, Terence Turner reformulates the sequence. First he qualifies and critiques Victor Turner's notion of "inter-structure" or "anti-structure": as "an integral part of *processes of structuring*," liminal rites are as "structural" as the lower-level classifications that they mediate. In maturation rites, the main classificatory terms at the lower level are "boy" and "man." These are mediated as the neophyte or "passenger" moves upward, on a vertical axis, to a phase at which "boy" and "man" cease to be mutually exclusive categories. That is, the same actor participates in both. As his adolescent transformation takes place, "a relationship of feedback or reciprocal interdependence of an asymmetrical and dynamic type" exists between the upper and lower levels. Seen from the perspective of the lower levels, the upper levels "stand in relation of becoming to being, generalized potential to specific realization, dynamic to static, and transcendent to imminent." The upper levels are the "indispensable, generative ground of the system, a source of powers of a higher order, a domain of relatively uncontrollable and therefore dangerous powers." Their realized, static, imminent dimensions are grounded in the social reality of a given culture, what Van Gennep had called the social *tendances sous-jacentes* and *nécessités sociales* that constitute the sociological context of the *rite de passage*.⁷

My slanted or staircase coil—a teleological model for boys developing into men—includes a "double series of separations."⁸ It corresponds to (and

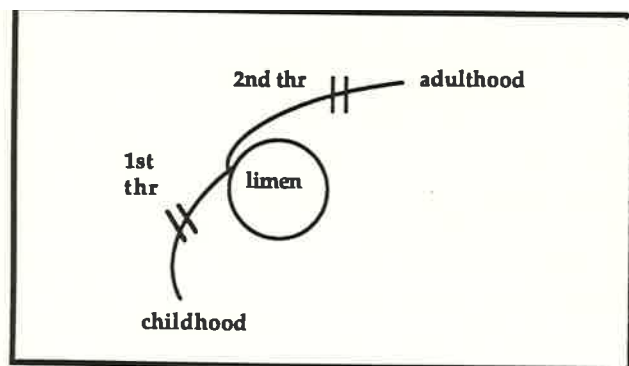


Figure 4

attempts to represent) Terence Turner's double axes (horizontal and vertical).⁹

We can formulate this model of adolescent transformation as a generic story. At the first threshold the boy radically detaches himself from his mother and the female-dominated world of his childhood. At the *limen* or threshold proper, he identifies with his father and his father's world and absorbs ancestral traditions, rehearsing and eventually consolidating his role as a male adult. Finally, at the second threshold, secure in his masculinity and his cultural roles, he prepares to embrace the legitimate, nonincestuous female as a new love object, a partner in a new household.¹⁰ That actual move will occur in Adulthood, which Telemakhos never attains in the text.¹¹

In a patrilocal, patrilineal culture, the liminal "world without women" phase of development, during which the boy consolidates his maleness and rehearses his adult male roles, extends far into adulthood and is reflected in adult male activities such as hunting, war, and athletics.¹² In such societies, ritual may enable the boy to complete these masculinizing tasks. In a literary context, whenever a youth at puberty leaves his mother (and motherland), journeys, cross-dresses, engages in (ritualized) homosexuality, hunts like a woman, hunts with maternal kin, avoids women for a time, faces an ordeal, is wounded or scarred, is cleansed and healed, and returns home with gifts, the aggregate of sequential symbolic acts suggests initiation.¹³

Several individual maturations are enacted or narrated in the *Odyssey*. The most conventional and ceremonial belongs to Odysseus¹⁴ and is narrated when Eurykleia sees Odysseus's scar as she bathes the beggar before the hearth (19.392–466). By returning to the transformative moment in

Odysseus's life-history, his successful boar hunt, just when Odysseus is renewing his selfhood and manhood, the narrator reminds us who Odysseus is.¹⁵ At birth, his maternal grandfather Autolykos arranges for his grandson, when he reaches puberty (*hēbēsas*, 410), to visit him in his home on Mt. Parnassos. Time elapses and Odysseus comes of age. At his grandfather's, in the company of the sons of Autolykos, his maternal uncles, the young Odysseus participates in a boar hunt—an initiation ritual par excellence.¹⁶ He is wounded, but he dispatches the boar. The sons of Autolykos heal his wound with salves and incantations, and all his maternal relatives send him off with gifts. On returning to Ithaka, Odysseus recounts his adventure to his rejoicing parents.

Orestes' confrontation with Aigisthos, mentioned five times in the *Odyssey*, three to Telemakhos,¹⁷ marks his moment of achieving manhood. Secretly back from an exile his mother had imposed, having reached *hēbē*, Orestes kills the murderer of his father together with his hateful mother and buries both. With this single act he avenges his father, reclaims his patrilineal rights in Argos, and eliminates through matricide the maternal threat. Orestes shares his victory with the Akhaian community, from whom he wins lasting glory: already his feat is told far and wide by Zeus, Athena-Mentes, Nestor, and Menelaos (quoting Proteus). Communal acceptance of Orestes as an adult and a hero normalizes his otherwise anomalous maturation, which includes an extreme form of alienation from the female—matricide.¹⁸

Kingship and marriage crown the maturation of Neoptolemos.¹⁹ He has succeeded Akhilleus as king of the Myrmidons (4.9) and, when Telemakhos arrives at Sparta, Hermione is about to depart to become his bride (4.3ff). As Odysseus tells the Phaiakian hosts at 11.504–40, he informed the shade of Akhilleus in the Underworld how Neoptolemos won his manhood in battle, fighting like a full-fledged warrior:

But after we had sacked the sheer citadel of Priam,
with his fair share and a princely prize of his own, he boarded
his ship, unscathed; he had not been hit by thrown and piercing
bronze, nor stabbed in close-up combat, as often happens
in fighting. The War God rages at all, and favors no man.

11.533–37

Odysseus depicts Neoptolemos as *askēthēs* ("unscathed"), *out'* . . . *beblēmenos* ("not hit"), and *out'* . . . *outasmenos* ("not wounded"). This emphatic triple negation contrasts sharply with the focus on Odysseus's wound and scar in his maturation tale (19.449–51, 455–58, 464–65, and 24.331–35), espe-

clausily when considered in light of the importance of scarification in most puberty rites; we may speculate that perhaps sons of deceased fathers, like Neoptolemos and also Orestes, need not suffer a symbolic death through wounding. The Akhaian community accepts Neoptolemos's kingship and his marriage to Hermione, contracted with Menelaos at Troy (4.4–7).

The only details about Peisistratos of Pylos are that he lives in his father's house, unmarried (3.401). Homeric Greek even has a word describing his state: *ēitheos*, of uncertain derivation, means "a youth just come to manhood, but not yet married" (*LSJ*). Upon his return, this will be Telemakhos's status as well.

All these maturations provide internal paradigms for the maturation of Telemakhos, but his is the only one we experience from the youth's own perspective and as he experiences it. His transformation feels less stylized and ritualized than those of his father or his age-mates, and far less than most puberty rites recorded in ethnographic reports. Nevertheless, though not a formal ritual, his maturation reflects the dynamic structure of initiation.²⁰

Telemakhos abandons childhood, crosses a threshold into the marginal realm where he undergoes an adolescent transformation, and begins to cross a second threshold toward embracing full adulthood.²¹ He moves across and upward in a spiral, as diagrammed above. At his first threshold, he leaves his mother and soon is incorporated into an environment away from home, where his transformation will occur. At his second threshold, he begins separating from that environment physically (by returning home) and psychologically. Separations are retrospective, incorporations prospective. Between each set of retrospective and prospective activities, he touches base with what he is leaving. At the first threshold, in a safe context and to a sympathetic male listener, Nestor, Telemakhos divulges his ineptitude; at Pylos and Sparta, he behaves like a royal son. Later, at the second threshold, in a moment of regression he mistreats the wayward handmaids: his brutality exceeds his father's instructions and suits the "world without women" mentality or phase.

Such "benign regressions" help Telemakhos progress toward adulthood.²² Moreover, the locus of his maturation is appropriate to his special circumstance, the fact of his father's prolonged absence and his own need, as the son of a long-absent father, to recover and internalize his father's image—an activity more usual in early childhood than in adolescence.²³ In Blos's psychoanalytic terms, the son first experiences dyadic bonding with his father just before latency, in a period epitomized by the young son seeking his father's blessing; only then can he experience the characteristic

hostility toward his father and attraction toward his mother prominent during puberty.²⁴ Surrogate fathers who sustain the fatherless son on his path to manhood help him to recover the image of his absent father and thus to experience a dyadic bonding even in the father's absence.

That adolescence was not a way station but a phase in its own right is clear from the occurrence of adolescent transformation in ancient puberty rites in a sacred realm, away from the ordinary domain. For Telemakhos, the sacred realm is the land of his father's war companions and the land of paternal, patrilineal traditions.²⁵

Telemakhos travels from the island of Ithaka to the Peloponnese and then back home. The pathway of his psychic journey consists of sequential developmental phases (as outlined above) wherein he confronts adolescent tasks.²⁶ At each phase, the feminine image (which includes the image of his mother) changes. After he returns to Ithaka, he recollects the time "when I was a child." But the more he asserts "now that I am grown-up," the more we distance ourselves from him and contextualize him in his family as a son on the brink of maturity whose self-evaluation slightly exceeds his actual circumstance. From taking the son's perspective, we return to the parents', and this is accomplished in part by a new move: from experiencing Telemakhos subjectively to experiencing him as an object seen by others.

Consider this anthropological description of rites of passage in New Guinea, one among many I might have chosen to illustrate elements in Telemakhos's transformation:

The myth begins with two boys living with their mother. She is knotting a string net bag and accidentally drops her bone netting awl through a crack in the house floor. When the boys are sent under the house to retrieve the awl, they inadvertently catch sight of their mother's genitalia. Thinking that what they see is something to eat, perhaps a fuzzy rodent or marsupial, they repeatedly call out to her to give it to them. The mother, greatly disturbed by this impropriety, decides to leave her children and hide in another village. She arranges a subterfuge so the boys will not immediately discover her absence, but they eventually realize she is gone and are greatly dismayed.

The boys try to determine where their mother has gone by using a divination technique that involves shooting grass-stem arrows in various directions. If an arrow is fired in the direction traveled by the person being sought, it flies in a straight line; but when an arrow is shot in any other direction, it circles back and strikes the archer in the genitalia. After shooting many arrows and receiving an equal number of blows to their genitalia, the boys fire off the last remaining arrow. Fortunately, it does not return,

indicating the boys have found the direction in which their mother has gone, so they set off in search of her. By nightfall they still have not found their mother, so they decide to sleep in the ground nest of a large bird. The next day, they are discovered asleep in the nest by an old man who has come into the forest to collect the eggs of this bird. He pulls the boys out of the nest, dusts them off, and takes them back to his village. There he puts them into the men's house, but he does not inform his wife, who is, in fact, the mother of the boys. He does, however, tell her to make the various kinds of arm and leg ornaments that are worn by initiated men. The old man wants to make the boys strong young men, so he does all the things involved in the second ritual, decorates them with the new ornaments, and finally brings them out of the men's house to show his wife, declaring them to be his sons. Although the ritual has transformed them from boys to young men, they are recognized by their surprised mother, and the four of them dance together, singing a song composed by her.

In the final segment of the myth, the young men are working in the garden of the old couple, cutting branches from a large tree. Unknown to them, two sisters see them in the tree, and finding them attractive, each selects one for a husband. They mark their choice by placing bone awls in the ground at the base of the tree. When the young men climb down, they step on the awls, driving them deeply into their legs and causing much pain and bleeding. This painful bleeding induces further growth in the young men. Eventually, they recognize the young women as possible mates, and the myth concludes with their marriages.²⁷

Newman and Boyd, who record and summarize this myth, regard it as an Awa paradigm for male initiation that places the ritual associated with it in the broader context of a sequence of events. The mythic sequence, as they elaborate it, begins with the boys' separation from their mother, continues through their incorporation into the men's house, and includes their consequent transformation into young men. There follows a painful bloodletting event connected with the identification of their mates and leading to marriage. The myth gives no details from any of the rituals that occur during the period bounded by it; nevertheless, as Newman and Boyd point out (1982), it alludes to all but one of these rituals and demonstrates their continuity by placing them in a single developmental sequence.

Farewell to Childhood

Before we encounter Telemakhos as "the first to see Athena" (1.113), we overhear the goddess tell Zeus her plan to rouse Odysseus's son and em-

bolden him to act. She will stir him to assemble the citizens and confront the suitors who slaughter his sheep and cattle, and she will convey him to Sparta and Pylos to ask after his father's homecoming and to win noble glory (1.88–95). Athena's appraisal of the situation in Ithaka in Odysseus's absence shapes our perspectives on the coming events. We know with certainty, before encountering him, the outcome of Telemakhos's journey.

Athena's Visit

Our attention shifts from Olympos to Ithaka as Athena approaches. Before she comes, Telemakhos sits among the suitors, as usual, without hope—his posture when he first spots the goddess disguised as Mentès (1.114 and 118). He is imagining his noble father and wondering if ever, coming back, he would "cause the suitors to scatter, and hold his rightful place (*timên*) and be lord of (*anassoî*) his own possessions" (115–17). Athena's arrival interrupts these musings.

During the visit Telemakhos spatially separates himself from the suitors, and this signals the onset of his development.²⁸ After greeting her, "he drew a painted bench next her, apart from the others" (132). Then he holds his head close to his guest's, so the others might not hear (157).²⁹

What Telemakhos tells his guest reflects his initial immaturity. For example, he pronounces Odysseus dead "on the mainland, or . . . in the wash of the breakers" (162). He fantasizes his return, then rejects the fantasy (163–68). Mentès asks: "Are you, big as you are, the very child of Odysseus? / Indeed, you are strangely like about the head, the fine eyes" (207–8). Telemakhos replies: "My mother says indeed I am his. I for my part / do not know. Nobody really knows his own father (*gonon*)" (215–16). When Mentès assures him that savage men keep his father against his will but that he will come back, because he has many resources, Telemakhos reminisces about how the household used to prosper when Odysseus was at home, "but now the gods, with evil intention, have willed it otherwise, / and they have caused him to disappear" (234–35). He imagines alternative, more glorious deaths for his father—in Troy or among known friends (236–40), but as it is, he says, the stormwinds snatched him away ingloriously (*akleîôs*) (241).

These fluctuations and uncertainties suit a youth who has not yet begun to mature. Though his heart is "deep grieving within him" (114) and he wants news of his father (135), Telemakhos is uncertain, at first, as to how to proceed. Should he criticize Penelope for her equivocation (249–50)? Should he see the suitors as criminals? Telemakhos is not clear. As long as he is attached, childlike and uncritical, to his mother, he remains "one of the

geese in her entourage. In Erikson's terms, he has not yet developed a moral code by which to judge their misbehavior; instead, he accepts their presence and even dines with them. Refusing their company thus marks a radical change in his attitude toward them and indeed toward his mother.

Athena-Mentes speaks to Telemakhos in ways that could alleviate his pain and release him from childhood dependencies. Her fib that savage men constrain Odysseus (1.197–98) shields him from seeing his father's absence as a desertion. She reassures him that Odysseus "will not long be absent" (203); and by acknowledging their strange resemblance "about the head, the fine eyes" (208), she bolsters his confidence in his lineage.³⁰ Athena validates his unspoken longing for his father's return when she exclaims: "How great your need is now of the absent / Odysseus, who would lay his hands on these shameless suitors" (253–54); "they all would find death was quick, and marriage a painful matter" (266). Thus, before she inspires him toward maturation, Athena accepts his reliance on his father as his rescuer and sympathetically hears his outcry. Only then does she shift her discourse, with a maxim: "Yet all these are things that are lying upon the gods' knees: / whether he will come home to his vengeance (*nostêsas apotisetai*), here in his household, / or whether he will not" (267–69). She instructs Telemakhos to assemble the Akhaian warriors and tell the suitors to scatter (274); to bid Penelope, if she wishes to marry now, to return to her father's palace;³¹ to equip a ship and go to Pylos and to Sparta to ask about his father; and, if he hears that Odysseus lives, to wait another year. Otherwise, he should marry off Penelope and kill the suitors "by treachery or open attack" (294–96). In short, Athena-Mentes sets various options before Telemakhos and warns him not to cling to his childhood:

You are no longer of an age to do that.

Or have you not heard what glory was won by great Orestes
among all mankind, when he killed the murderer of his father,
the treacherous Aigisthos, who had slain his famous father?

So you too, dear friend, since I can see you are big and splendid,
be bold also, so that in generations to come they will praise you.

1.297–302

Encouraged, Telemakhos acknowledges the courtesy of his guest, whose words are "what any father would say to his son. I shall not forget them." (1.308) Athena departs miraculously, like a bird, and leaves in his spirit determination (*menos*) and courage (*tharsos*); "he remembered his father / even more than he had before, and he guessed the meaning, / and his heart was full of wonder, for he thought it was a divinity" (1.321–23).

The disguise the goddess assumes in Ithaka suits her role as catalyst for Telemakhos's maturation. As Mentes, and later as Mentor, she is an ideal father-symbol; her presence and his ability to recognize and gradually use her enlarge him. Later he will acquire more etiquette toward divinity; for now, obedience and recognition suffice.

Several events at the assembly mark Telemakhos as his father's son. For Homer's audience, Athena's presence signifies that, like his father, he has the goddess's favor. She begins to relate to him as later, in Book 13, to Odysseus, though her attitude toward Telemakhos is more that of a "mentor."³² In addition, at 2.14, at the assembly, he sits in his father's seat, assuming his role, and the elders make way before him, acknowledging him as his father's successor.

Telemakhos's prayer to Athena at 2.262–66, once the assembly disperses, signals his new receptivity to her influence, because prayer is a more active turning toward deity than mere recognition of divine presence. This prepares for her departure as a vulture at Pylos (3.371–73) and her appearance to him undisguised, as he lay wakeful, before his departure for Ithaka (15.9ff). The goddess increasingly manifests herself to him as he comes of age.

After Athena's Visit

The visit of the goddess has immediate impact: Telemakhos begins to mature. He disengages himself from his mother and the dependencies of childhood with characteristically adolescent abruptness. In a tone that reflects an exaggerated claim to dominance, and not an indifference to Akhaian suffering, he chides his mother; bidding her not to blame the poet for singing of the sad return of the Danaans (350), he proclaims emphatically, "Mine is the power in the household" (359).

Telemakhos forewarns the suitors that he will ask them to disperse at a public assembly the following day (372–75). He says that, if they refuse, he hopes they perish unavenged (*nêpoinoi*) in his household (380). For the first time, he understands that they deserve to perish and that, if he slaughters them, he should pay no penalty.³³ To Antinoös's retort, that he hopes Zeus never makes Telemakhos their king, "though to be sure that is your right by inheritance" (387), Telemakhos accedes too readily (394) on the grounds that his father is dead. Contrast the bolder behavior of Orestes and Neoptolemos, who actively claim their legitimate kingships. Nevertheless, his insistence on being lord (*anax*) of his household and his servants (397) differs from his earlier attitude, in his daydream, when he assigned Odysseus that

προσφύγει (cf. 1.117: *anussai*). Eurymakhos denies that anyone, against his will and by force, will drive Telemakhos from his holdings (403–4); thus Eurymakhos designates himself as the youth's protector. The mounting tension between Telemakhos and the suitors, which culminates in the futile ambush, further estranges Telemakhos from their company and their society, and, because they are wooing Penelope, he is excluding himself from that scene as well.

In the earliest example of appropriating a paternal trait, Telemakhos dissembles to Eurymakhos about his guest, denying that he has heard any news of Odysseus (414).³⁴ Homer exposes the dissemblance: "So spoke Telemakhos, but in his heart he knew the immortal goddess" (420; cf. 323). Like the Olympian conversations in Books 1 and 24, this statement helps the audience evaluate Telemakhos's progress.

From this point on, Telemakhos experiences a pendular rather than linear approach toward adulthood. His speech to the assembly mingles a child's appeal for help with a stirring call to action. He complains that there is no man in Ithaka such as Odysseus was "to drive this curse from the household"; he would defend himself, he asserts, "if the power were in me" but he is not "well seasoned in battle" (2.58–62). He tells those assembled of the great evil caused by the suitors, who beset his mother "against her will" (50) and "shrink from making the journey to the house of her father / Ikarios" (52–53), and who loiter in Odysseus's house and waste his substance.

No longer

are the things endurable that have been done, and beyond all decency my house has been destroyed. Even you must be scandalized and ashamed before the neighboring men about us, the people who live around our land; fear also the gods' anger, lest they, astonished by evil actions, turn against you.

2.62–67

Telemakhos invokes Zeus and Themis, "Law" (68). Earlier he established that Odysseus ruled "kind to you, like a father" (47); now he sarcastically insinuates that Odysseus must have wronged the people of Ithaka, in return for which "you do me evil / in setting these [suitors] on me" (73–74). His sarcasm emanates from a new sense of justice. Still, Telemakhos closes by again professing helplessness: "But now you are heaping me with troubles I cannot deal with." (79)

The speech is a rhetorical tour de force. It evokes pity and virtually obligates those assembled to support him in his present misfortunes or at least

to refrain from acts of ill will. Antinoös's rebuke, in which he crudes the "high-spoken intemperate Telemakhos" (85) for trying to turn public opinion against them, attests to its efficacy. For the very first time, a suitor sees Telemakhos as a threat. Antinoös, blaming Penelope, suggests he send her back to Ikarios, to marry "any man her father desires and who pleases her also." (114) Telemakhos refuses to force her against her will to remarry (130–36), fearing his mother's Furies and the resentment of the people.³⁵ Using the same language as at 1.374–80, he again threatens the suitors with a prayer that, if they persist in spoiling his patrimony, they "may perish in this house with no payment given" (2.145). Eurymakhos chimes in, first rebuking the seer Halitherses because he roused the young man and then pressing Telemakhos to force his mother to remarry. Eurymakhos threatens never to pay back the wealth consumed, for "we fear no one, / and surely not Telemakhos, for all he is so eloquent" (199–200). Telemakhos's answer is decisive and balanced: "I no longer entreat you in these matters, nor speak about them, / since by now the gods know about this, as do all the Akhaians" (210–11). His task was to make public their offenses. Now he requests a ship and companions and announces that if he learns of his father's death, he will give his mother to a husband (218–23).

In this exchange Telemakhos confronts the suitors as oppressors who would thwart his new burst of energy. They are presently the only authority in Ithaka: no one in the community restrains or opposes them, and they fear no one. It is impressive that Telemakhos—backed by Mentos, Mentor (the human), and a growing sense of self—stands up to their force. He emerges from this first combat unscathed. His verbal *aristeia* anticipates his later confrontations with the suitors when he eludes their ambush (Book 15); when he hosts his father as beggar and spars with them (Books 17, 18 and 20); and when, at the bride-contest, he outstrips them with his father's bow and then, joining Odysseus, defeats them in battle (Books 21 and 22).

As Telemakhos repudiates the suitors, they change from "siblings" (as subjects of the fatherly king, Odysseus) to rejecting "fathers." Their negativity toward his maturation starkly contrasts with the positive reactions of gentle Odysseus to his son's growth.³⁶ As surrogate fathers escorting Telemakhos on his pathway, the suitors serve as Odysseus's foil.

Telemakhos demonstrates a new ability to lead. Though uncertain of his father's status and whereabouts (2.218–23), he presents himself to Antinoös as full-grown and he even threatens him (312–17). Aboard ship, with Athena-Mentor close by, he orders his companions to row; in heeding his order, they respond to him as their king (422–23).

At Nestor's palace in Pylos, Telemakhos finds sympathy for his plight, receives paternal advice, and hears exemplary stories about his family heritage and from the Akhaian heroic tradition. At first, he hesitates to speak publicly (3.22–24), but Athena-Mentor spurs him to try (3.14–20, 26–28, and 75–78). When he asks Nestor about his father's dismal destruction (88–95), the old statesman relates other homecomings and ends with Agamemnon's:

You yourselves, though you live apart, have heard of Atreides,
how he came home, and how Aigisthos devised his wretched
death; but Aigisthos too paid for it, in a dismal fashion.

3.193–95

Nestor next incites Telemakhos to be brave like Orestes, "so that men unborn will speak well of you" (196–200). The quest for future glory, a heroic value, seems new to Telemakhos, who has had no father to tell him of heroic deeds.³⁷ Nestor stresses a son's role once his father has perished, but adds that Odysseus might still return and punish the suitors (216–17), or that Telemakhos himself might, with Athena's help (218–24). Telemakhos professes incompetence (226–28) and ignorance of divine power (228) and assures Nestor that Odysseus has lost his homecoming (241–42). A sympathetic Nestor advises him to avoid Menelaos's mistake of prolonging his absence from home (313–16). This advice situates Telemakhos as a potential hero within the heroic tradition, for his safe return and restoration of order in Ithaka will be a *nostos* and a *tisis*, a "return" and a "vengeance," celebrated in song.

Sparta: Menelaos

At Sparta (4.1–619 and 15.1–281) Telemakhos continues to see and hear exemplary stories and to receive paternal advice from an audience sympathetic to his troubles. He witnesses, firsthand, the aftermath of a marital betrayal. While Helen dallied in Troy, Menelaos begat a bastard son, Megapenthes (4.11–12), who seems to epitomize the sorrow Helen's absence caused: four times his name ("Great Sorrow") is collocated with "Helen," as if he is her responsibility.

Much of the discourse in Sparta centers on the royal wealth. Telemakhos, understandably overwhelmed, likens the palace to the halls of Zeus and feels religious awe (*sebas*, 75). Menelaos insists that because he lost his brother, he rules (*anassō*) joylessly over his possessions (90–93). Because, for

Telemakhos, preserving his household possessions is a supreme value, it matters that he sees a Menelaos who, despite recovering Helen, despite wealth, despite even his blessed afterlife, is not content. The youth remains nonetheless an "intoxicated admirer" of Menelaos's circumstances.³⁸

From his visit in Sparta, Telemakhos gains information and gathers exempla, positive and negative. First he hears a recent report that Odysseus is still alive (4.555–60). Later, Menelaos introduces him to his father's heroism—his endurance and self-restraint and leadership—in the story of the Trojan horse (271–89), which also exposes Helen playing the role of every man's wife (279). Quoting the Old Man of the Sea, Menelaos relates other RETURNS: Aias died for impious boasting; Agamemnon was killed in ambush, while feasting, by Aigisthos; Odysseus is forcibly held by Kalypso, without ships (492–560). He attributes his own delayed homecoming to his failure to sacrifice to the gods (472). Fittingly, he hands Telemakhos a goblet for libations.

Helen, Klytaimestra, and Penelope

Before his trip, the themes of a mother's adultery or abandonment of her offspring never occurred to Telemakhos. On his journey, however, he encounters two legendary mothers and adulteresses: Helen, now restored to her husband's home and bed, and, through stories, Klytaimestra. Their life events alert him to the class of mothers and wives who stray.

Helen's presence in Sparta, both physically and as a topic in the stories told, is enigmatic. Helen, now restored, *seems* the picture of domesticity. As she emerges from her bedroom, she is "like Artemis of the golden distaff" (4.122), perhaps as focalized by Menelaos and Telemakhos rather than by the authoritative Homer.³⁹ In an extended description (125–35), she appears amidst her spinning equipment, gifts from an Egyptian hostess, which include a golden distaff and a silver workbasket with wheels underneath. Perhaps she spins the wool as she converses (133–35), enhancing the household wealth.⁴⁰ The surroundings are so opulent that Telemakhos, upon his arrival, compares the palace to the court of Olympian Zeus (74–75). Indeed, Helen and Menelaos resemble Hera and Zeus.

All this is a misleading appearance. Helen, although resettled and redomesticated, has left some scars on the household of Menelaos. Traces of the disruption she caused by abandoning her husband and daughter undermine her present, apparent domesticity. She herself has had no children since Hermione, and Menelaos has fathered a bastard son, Megapenthes, "Great Sorrow." Her story and her husband's are at cross purposes.⁴¹ Their marriage is not based on *homophrosunē*, though they do not openly quarrel

the way that *Homerosynic* Zeus and Hera do in the *Iliad*. In fact, Helen scarcely reacts to Menelaos's corrections and oblique criticisms; she has already drugged the drinks to eliminate pain (4.229ff) and she bids them all to "take their delight in stories" (*muthois terpesthe*, 239).⁴²

Helen is never reduced to "the cause of evils." She remains an undaunted figure whose very presence in Sparta gives voice to a slightly less damning attitude toward the adulteress than Agamemnon's. A "weaver of plot," as in the *Iliad*, and hence she contributes to her own self-presentation; but she cannot completely control the image of discord that Telemakhos forms from taking in first her tale and then her husband's.⁴³

Meeting the infamous Helen and hearing two Helen stories help Telemakhos envision what disasters mothers and wives can cause their families. Only by knowledge of a woman's sexual potential can he understand the dangers lurking at home and eventually choose a promising mate.

Athena's Warning

To a Telemakhos who had already eloquently pleaded with his host not to detain him, Athena, now in her own person, urges:

Telemakhos, it no longer becomes you to stray off so far from home, leaving your possessions behind and men in your palace who are so overbearing. You must not let them divide up and eat up all your substance, and make your journey a vain one. So urge Menelaos of the great war cry with all speed to give you conveyance, so you will find your stately mother is still there at home, since now her father and her brothers are urgent with her to marry Eurymakhos. He is outdoing the rest of [the] suitors in the giving of gifts, and has been piling up presents to win her. No property must go out of the house, unless you consent to it. For you know what the mind (*thumos*) is like in the breast of a woman. She wants to build up the household of the man who marries her, and of former children, and of her beloved and wedded husband, she has no remembrance, when he is dead, nor does she think of him. For yourself, when you come back, you should turn over everything to whichever one of the serving women seems to be the best one, until the gods show who is to be your honored wife.

15.10–26

Athena's advice reaches receptive ears; in a sense, she voices his own apprehensions about his mother. His new knowledge that some mothers do

forsake their husbands and children for a lover makes him suspicious toward Penelope. By emphasizing the danger to Telemakhos's patrimony, Athena expresses a widespread societal fear that a mother's betrayal could thwart the patriline forever. Athena plays on the very themes that the examples of Klytaimestra and Helen bring home to Telemakhos.

Helen's Gift

As Telemakhos departs, Helen addresses him, holding a robe in her hands:⁴⁴

I too give you this gift, dear child: something to remember (*mnêma*) from Helen's hands, for your wife to wear at the lovely occasion of your marriage. Until that time let it lie away in your palace, in your dear mother's keeping; and I hope you come back rejoicing to your own strong-founded house and to the land of your fathers.

15.125–29

Helen's departure gift may be seen as apotropaic magic. Wearing a robe from Helen's hands may "inoculate" Telemakhos's future wife against the temptations of adultery, because Helen has strayed from her hearth and returned. Perhaps her own wayward sexuality, now tamed, is woven into that garment, which may serve as a talisman for fidelity for Telemakhos's future wife.

As one who transgressed boundaries and is reclaimed, Helen is a potent, second-threshold figure, and she presides over Telemakhos's transition to adult sexuality and marriage. Her words and gift, which accentuate Telemakhos's ripeness for marriage, mark Helen as a figure bidding him to move on and licensing him to marry.

Coming right after the suspicious Athena, Helen in her farewell reframes Penelope for Telemakhos, helping to free her from the blame that Athena had just heaped upon "mothers who remarry." Helen recommends giving Penelope the woven garment for safekeeping, whereas Athena had warned him to turn everything over to a servant woman whom he could trust. In a sense, Helen "heals" Telemakhos from any psychological damage caused by Athena's speech about mothers who betray.

In Ithaka

Telemakhos arrives, by Athena's instructions, at Eumaios's hut, where he enjoys an intimate filial reunion with the swineherd. There he meets the

beggar (Odysseus), who “yielded him place as he entered” (16.42). The youth checks him, setting a tone of cooperation between them. Soon the beggar reveals himself as Odysseus and assures his skeptical son that “no other / Odysseus than I will ever come back to you” (203–4). Father and son embrace and mourn for the time stolen from them (215–19). Together they plot to slaughter the suitors. At 16.303 Odysseus enjoins Telemakhos to keep his identity secret, even from Penelope, and the two go separately to the palace. Telemakhos (remembering Athena’s warning) charges Peiraios with looking after his gifts from his travels and attending to his guest, Theoklymenos.

At the palace, Penelope questions Telemakhos about his journey, and he reports selectively, not mentioning Klytaimestra’s betrayal, all the while emphasizing that he is telling her the whole truth (17.108). The suitors mistreat Odysseus, and Telemakhos keeps his father’s identity secret. He fathers Odysseus, hosting the “beggar,” who depends on him like a son. The dependency of the beggar upon his host gives Telemakhos a chance to practice his eventual role as master of the household. Father and son collude and play off each other, and as they share the secret of their mission Penelope is kept in the dark. They function as a dyad (like the twins, in the New Guinea myth, in the men’s quarters). As if in dress rehearsal, Telemakhos completes his maturation and puts into practice all he has learned at Pylos and Sparta. At 20.129–33 he complains to Eurykleia about Penelope’s judgment in neglecting the stranger-guest in their house: “Impulsively (*em-plêgdên*) she favors the wrong man, the worse one / among mortals, and lets the better man go, unfavored” (*atimêsas*, lit., “dishonoring him”). Telemakhos’s critique follows easily upon Athena’s warning and hint that Penelope will marry Eurymakhos. Eurykleia immediately absolves her mistress and sets Telemakhos straight: “child, do not find fault with her this time. She is blameless (*anaition*)” (20.135).

Still playing host and master while his father remains disguised, Telemakhos presides at the bride-contest for Penelope’s hand. He addresses his mother’s suitors:

Ah, how Zeus, the son of Kronos, has made me witless.
My own beloved mother, though she is sensible, tells me
that she will forsake this house and go away with another;
and then, in the witlessness of my heart, I laugh and enjoy it.
But come, you suitors, since here is a prize set out before you,
a woman; there is none like her in all the Akhaian country,
neither in sacred Pylos nor Argos nor in Mykene,

nor here in Ithaka itself, nor on the dark mainland.
You yourselves also know this; then why should I praise my mother?
But come, no longer drag things out with delays, nor turn back
still from the stringing of the bow, so that we may see it.
I myself am also willing to attempt the bow. Then,
if I can put the string on it and shoot through the iron,
my queenly mother would not go off with another, and leave me
sorrowing here in the house; since I would still be found here
as one now able to take up his father’s glorious prizes.

21.102–17

With his father present, “containing” the situation and diffusing the potential danger of incest, the son attempts the bow. He playfully “competes” for Penelope:⁴⁵ if he wins, he can “have” his mother at home, and he will be man enough to run the household with her in it. He plays out the alternate plot for which his journey prepared him: his father is dead, he is master, his mother stays with him and remains in his charge. Earlier he sat with her suitors, as if one of them; now (in a mock competition) he tries to outdo them for her hand.

Telemakhos stands (literally) on the threshold and attempts the bow:

Three times he made it vibrate, straining to bend it, and three times
he gave over the effort, yet in his heart was hopeful
of hooking the string to the bow and sending a shaft through the iron.
And now, pulling the bow for the fourth time, he would have strung it,
but Odysseus stopped him, though he was eager, making a signal
with his head.

21.125–30

By the emphasis on his desire to string the bow and by the three futile attempts before the fourth “successful” one, Homer conveys not only Telemakhos’s incredible physical strength but also the intensity of his desire. The youth wants to prove his manhood and hereditary mettle—to himself, the suitors, and his father. That he yields to his father’s nod is extraordinary. The plot could easily have gone otherwise! The son’s obedience, at a contest for the hand of his father’s wife, has a powerful oedipal ring. Why does Telemakhos yield?

Telemakhos and his father have been a cooperative team since they reunited. From the yielding of chairs to each other at their first encounter to their shared plotting against the suitors, Odysseus has been the gentle father and Telemakhos the obedient son. Now they are at a crossroads, like Laios

and Odysseus, the every father and son. As a pair, they are the opposite of Laios and Oedipus. Telemakhos, by not insisting on stringing his father's bow, chooses not to subvert or supplant Odysseus. He thereby provides a new paradigm for coming of age. It is more manly, his action asserts, to cooperate with your father than to compete with him.⁴⁶

Circumstances would differ if the father were either dead or missing. In his presence, the son is obligated not to displace ("murder") him but feels an urge to do so. This passage offers a model for life in how father and son can have it both ways. In the safety of his father's presence, the son begins reintegrating the female world, which includes the world that his (now safe) mother occupies. This is an experience he had been prepared for by meeting Helen and receiving her departing words and gift. In the contest, he also rehearses winning himself a bride.

Torturing the Maidservants

Telemakhos's treatment of the maidservants is brutal. Odysseus had commanded:

Then, after you have got all the house back in good order,
lead all these maidservants out of the well-built palace
between the round-house and the unfaulted wall of the courtyard,
and hew them with the thin edge of the sword, until you have taken
the lives from all, and they forget Aphrodite, the goddess
they had with them when they lay secretly with the suitors.

22.440–45

But Telemakhos, embracing the task, announces:

I would not take away the lives of these creatures by any
clean death, for they have showered abuse on the head of my mother,
and on my own head too, and they have slept with the suitors.

22.462–64

Then he strings them up like thrushes or pigeons "so their heads were all in a line, and each had her neck caught / fast in a noose, so that their death would be most pitiful" (470–71). The slaughter of the suitors concludes with the mutilation of Melanthios the goatherd.

What Odysseus prescribes and what Telemakhos accomplishes are not the same. Homer uses this discrepancy to emphasize that Telemakhos's development is still incomplete. The youth has only begun to incorporate the female other. In the uncomfortable threshold space between wanting

sexuality and not yet possessing a legitimate partner, he goes too far in condemning the wayward maid-servants.⁴⁷ The mentality of the "world without women," to which Telemakhos regresses as he rages at the maidservants, allows him to vent this rage unpenalized. He feels assaulted, and feels his mother assaulted, by their illicit behavior with the suitors in the royal palace. Perhaps the Akhaian, and Homeric, societies condone his brutality. No one is there to protect the maidservants or to speak on their behalf. There is a notable absence of any attempt to avenge their brutal deaths. Thus they are asymmetrical with their paramours, the suitors, whose death does provoke such an attempt at revenge: the suitors are male and aristocratic, the maidservants female and lower-class.

Telemakhos enjoys his retaliation. By venting his frustration and outrage for past wrongs, he in effect appropriates—even invents—a benign Penelope. For the wayward maidens stand as metonyms for Penelope. They represent a part of her self that had endangered Telemakhos and was felt to undermine him (witness Athena's hostile warnings at 15.20–26). Now they become scapegoats for a Telemakhos moving toward marriage. He needs to reintegrate and internalize a non-menacing (detoxified) mother-image before he can freely marry. The palace is cleansed; so too is the image of mother and wife.⁴⁸

Telemakhos Excluded

Telemakhos identifies emphatically with his father. After the two of them have slaughtered the suitors and cleansed the palace, Telemakhos observes his mother's reluctance to embrace his father and chides her:

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

23.97–103

She responds:

My child, the spirit (*thumos*) that is in me is full of wonderment,
and I cannot find anything to say to him, nor question him,
nor look him straight in the face. But if he is truly Odysseus,

and ne nas come home, then we shall find other ways, and better,
to recognize each other, for we have signs that we know of
between the two of us only, but they are secret from others.

23.105–10

Odysseus adds, with a smile:

Telemakhos, leave your mother to examine me in the palace
as she will, and presently she will understand better;
but now that I am dirty and wear foul clothing upon me,
she dislikes me for that, and says I am not her husband.
But let us make our plans how all will come out best for us.
For when one has killed only one man in a community,
and then there are not many avengers to follow, even
so, he flees into exile, leaving kinsmen and country.
But we have killed what held the city together, the finest
young men in Ithaka. It is what I would have you consider.

23.113–22

Totally identified with his father, Telemakhos scolds his mother harshly. As a son defending his father's rights, he has little sympathy at all for her. Yet it is she (not her husband) who first deflects her son's verbal assault. Telemakhos concentrates all his previous impatience with her (over her ambiguous behavior with the suitors, which did endanger his life) in a pointed query, Do you accept my father? Her reassurances give him a needed limit: Don't think you can dominate a woman. His father immediately reinforces her stand and smiles because he understands the youth's impatience and essential immaturity. Dexterously, he deflects his son from intruding on their reunion: he invents an excuse for his wife's hesitation ("I am unseemly"); then, so to speak, he refocuses his son on their activities as a dyadic team.⁴⁹ In this manner he insists on his prerogative, as the husband, to negotiate privately with his own wife.

Telemakhos learns—first from his mother, then his father—that parental interactions (both sorrows and joys) need not include him. He must soon leave the nest, no longer enfolded in the family triangle. Moreover, he can identify with his father only up to a point: he cannot replace him for Penelope. Both parents set limits. Odysseus—characteristically gentle toward his son—eases Telemakhos onward, outward, away from reinclusion in the family unit.

To be sure, Telemakhos does not understand Penelope's (or any woman's) complexity. He is ignorant of the secrets of his parents' marriage-bed, just as he is of courtship—despite rehearsing the role of suitor in the contest for his

mother's hand. Perhaps he still believes that a woman must yield to her husband and not have a stubborn will of her own. Nevertheless, he is on the verge of a new understanding, and Odysseus's distinctive attitude toward a woman with whom he is "like-minded" supplies the son with a model.

The text refrains from revealing the outcome of Telemakhos's life-story. We last glimpse him fighting alongside his father and grandfather—the culmination of his second adolescent task. Here the text stops short, before depicting any tension from having two masters for one household. Of course, in Odysseus's lineage, a precedent for stepping aside gracefully has been set already by Laertes (see chapter 4, note 36).

Overview

By the time he returns to Ithaka and eludes the suitors' ambush, Telemakhos is independent of his mother and identified with his patriline. On his journey he had continued the task begun under Athena-Mentes of piecing together an image of his father and reinforcing the notion, "I am my father's son." As he increasingly identifies with this father image, he also absorbs the cultural tradition, especially the Trojan War saga; and through rehearsals at the courts of Nestor and Menelaos, he consolidates his various roles as a man. Some of this is "recovery work": he had never known his father, and Homer ingeniously shows him making up for lost time. Athena-Mentes, Athena-Mentor, Nestor, and Menelaos all function as surrogate fathers for Telemakhos. Homer develops a synonymy between "You look like Odysseus; you are his son" and "You can attain adulthood and be like Odysseus."⁵⁰

Helen as a second threshold figure resembles the transplanted mother in the New Guinea myth who makes the ornaments for her two sons and composes songs that celebrate their rite of passage. Structurally speaking, Helen is Penelope transplanted to Sparta: she is transitional between the incestuous mother and a legitimate love object, sexualized but still tabu. She has no son of her own and, in a sense, adopts Telemakhos. She is Aphrodite, but Hera and Artemis as well. What Telemakhos could not imagine his mother doing, Helen has done—leaving her husband and their child for another man. Her sister Klytaimestra went even farther—abandoning her husband for a lover, sending her son away, and murdering her husband on his return from Troy. Though Penelope never in fact abandons Telemakhos, her entertainment of the suitors and her pending purported marriage to Eurymakhos suggest, for the youth, similar threats.

By the time Athena verbalizes the impact of second marriages on children

of the first (15.20–24), Telemakhos is firmly situated in the world without women and can tolerate, without disintegrating, utter separation from a mother who is hateful (*stugerê*, 3.310). He has internalized his father's image; hence, once he hears from Athena that Penelope plans to remarry, he believes he can and will restore order in Ithaka, even in the face of a hostile mother and step-father. He returns to Ithaka expecting to punish the suitors and take charge of his father's household all on his own.

There is a discrepancy, then, between Telemakhos's expectations and what he finds upon his return. When he eludes the ambush, he delays his "ordeal" in one sense, but in another, he circumvents it. Upon recognizing and embracing his father in Eumaios's hut, he knows he no longer needs to be the Ithakan Orestes. Hence he relinquishes that role (though it survives, in a weakened form, in his fervent desire to string his father's bow). In their subsequent actions together, the two recapitulate what Telemakhos did on his trip. Now the real father, not surrogates or representatives, leads the son to assume his diverse adult male roles, giving him subtle pointers on survival and triumph. This gentle father (*êpios*, as others call him⁵¹) caringly does not eclipse his son. When, much later, at 24.506–15, Laertes, Odysseus, and Telemakhos fight together against the suitors' relatives, Homer displays the extraordinary power and unity of the patriline. There seems, at least at that moment, to be space at the crossroads for three men of three generations.

As for acquiring a new love object, twice Homer indicates that Telemakhos will marry. Athena mentions a time when "the gods show who is to be your honored wife" (15.26). Helen gives Telemakhos a departure gift, a keepsake (*mnêma*) from Helen's hands, "for your wife to wear at the lovely occasion / of your marriage" (15.125–27). Telemakhos has not only heard of Klytaimnestra's unwifely betrayals but has met Helen, the reformed adulteress, in person and received a robe woven by her hands.

At the contest, safe in his father's presence and liberated from dependence upon Penelope, Telemakhos explores the possibility of equaling his father. Indeed his father "holds" him as he experiments with the paternal bow and arrow.⁵² Even in this erotically charged context, at an event specifically designated as a bride-contest for his mother's hand, Telemakhos can speak playfully about his mother's desirability and announce it publicly to the suitors; for he is confident that his father's presence precludes his carrying off the prize. Despite his strong desire, and his ability to string the bow, Telemakhos refrains. The son chooses not to act against his father's will and not to displace him. At this crossroad, Telemakhos achieves the second task of his adolescent transformation without having to slay his father.⁵³

After the slaughter of the suitors, whatever residue of rage Telemakhos felt against a potentially hateful mother is vented on the twelve treacherous maidservants, who function as metonyms for Penelope. This act of vengeance cleanses him of animosity toward women and rescues him from the misogyny of an Agamemnon. His inexperience amplifies his resentment of women who give their favors freely—not to him, but to the suitors. And the ideology that dominates this wartime atmosphere of a "world without women" seems to sanction his act of vengeance.

Finally, when Telemakhos scolds his mother for not greeting his father, he pushes his identification with Odysseus to its limits. Penelope explains her ways and mentions the private signs that she and his father share. Odysseus, interrupting, diverts his son's energies to the "men's work" in the palace. Thus Telemakhos returns to his second task, as Odysseus's apprentice, and politely defers to his father's expertise. Both parents, by excluding Telemakhos from their reunion, catalyze his further development. Eventually, when he finds his own wife, he will leave their household and cease to be part of that original triangle.

Through Telemakhos's filter we see the image of Penelope change. And we see the making of a masculine ideology and then its dismantling. We come to experience the dangers—real and imagined—of a mother's betrayal, whether through brazen adultery or a simple lack of staying power. This in turn necessitates the formation of an ideology (in Telemakhos as he develops to manhood and in us as we accompany him) in which a wife's departure through remarriage or adultery before her son comes of age will erode the patriline and thereby undermine the community's stability. Both Penelope and Helen have this destructive potential, and Klytaimnestra actually did undermine Agamemnon's patriline when she yielded to Aigisthos. Only matricide could reestablish order and restore Orestes to his rightful place. We have seen Agamemnon fixate on the issue of a wife's betrayal. Telemakhos consolidates the same attitudes but, unlike Agamemnon, promises (in the future, beyond the text) to enlarge his understanding of the complexity of women.

The story of Telemakhos is nested in the larger story of his parents' reunion. Hence Telemakhos's ideology, which the audience witnesses in its formation, is contextualized within a larger ideology based on conjugal *homophrosunê*. Because that larger ideology is both endorsed and enacted by Odysseus, it prevails in the world of the text.

comparison of a weeping Odysseus to a woman weeping over the body of a husband lost in war (8.523–31), the comparison of Penelope's reputation (*kleos*) to that of a blameless king whose land and people prosper under him (19.108–14), and the comparison of the joy of Penelope at welcoming her husband to that of a shipwrecked sailor first spotting land (23.233–40). H. P. Foley (1978) discusses these passages in light of gender relations in the *Odyssey*. (See note 36 above.)

⁴⁰Penelope's trick of the marriage-bed is a verbal trap (a lie) in which she ensnares her husband. The chase scene on the clasp may anticipate that entrapment, if we allow that Odysseus can be the fleeing fawn and Penelope the attacking hound.

⁴¹Though sympathetic toward the sorrowing Penelope, Odysseus still holds onto his disguise.

⁴²On the ingenious notion that the maturation story, though told by the narrator, represents the focalization (or consciousness) of the character Eurykleia, see de Jong (1985).

⁴³Odysseus's request for an aged and virtuous woman to wash his feet may suggest a desire to be recognized; at the least, it teases Homer's audience.

⁴⁴Odysseus sees the utility of a bow-contest for Penelope's hand. Cf. his remarks at 3.215–25 about himself as an archer on Skheria, which likewise occurred in a quasi-courtship context, in the competition with younger athletes as if for Nausikää's hand. His triumph among the Phaiakians foreshadows his triumph on Ithaka, using his own bow. The opportunity that Penelope's proposal affords him to display his excellence at archery appeals to Odysseus, not to mention the chance to express his *mêtis*.

⁴⁵On reciprocity between Odysseus and Penelope at the beginning of Book 20, see Russo (1982:4–18 and 1992 at *Odyssey* 20.57–58).

⁴⁶On eye-contact between lover and beloved as the erotic stimulus par excellence, see Halperin (1985:192n.36 and 1989:267 and 268–69).

⁴⁷Both on Skheria and in Ithaka, Odysseus competes against men in their prime and wins. At 19.93–88 and 23.115–16, he himself refers to his dirty appearance as cause for his mistreatment by Melantho and rejection by Penelope, respectively, and at 8.181, in Skheria, he mentions his sorry physical state due to hardships and age. His angry response to Penelope's hint that someone moved their bed, that no mortal man could move it, not even one being in his prime (187: *oude mal' hêbôn*), is an oblique reference to her youthful suitors, his competitors.

⁴⁸We hear nothing from characters of Odysseus's first wooing of Penelope. We know that her father Ikarios, Tyndareos's brother, provided bridal gifts (*hedna*, cf. 2.277–78), which will accompany Penelope if she returns to her father's home; also that, following patrilocal tradition, when Odysseus won her he led her from Parassus to the home of his fathers in rugged Ithaka. There he built their unique marriage-bed from an olive tree, and Penelope bore him a son and heir.

⁴⁹Aristotle's *Ethics* 1158b12–29 (Bk. 8, Ch. 7) affirms the possibility of *philia* between husband and wife despite their inequality.

¹On Telemakhos's education and maturation, see Austin (1969 and 1975:273n.1); Belmont (1967, on similarities between Telemakhos and Nausikää); Brinkman (1952, on the integration of Telemakhos's inner psychology with the external and mythical); Calhoun (1934); Clarke (1963 and 1967); Delebecque (1958); Heubeck (1954, on Telemakhos in Sparta and Odysseus in Skheria); Millar and Carmichael (1954); Rose (1967); Rüter (1969, on psychological comparisons of the journeys of Telemakhos and Odysseus); Thornton (1970); Whitman (1958:341n.13); and Woodhouse (1930:212ff). On the *kleos* of Telemakhos, see Jones (1988).

²Telemakhos will never again experience unanimity with Penelope. But, the narrative implies, he will experience it someday in his own household and with his own wife.

³Greek *hêbê*, "youthful prime, youth" (LSJ), usually refers to that moment when pubescent growth peaks. Youths who come of age in Greek stories attain a critical moment at what I have termed the second threshold. This moment is marked, in boys, by the growth of the beard.

On stages of development in the society of classical Athens, especially in relation to the growth of the beard, see Golden (1984:318–19). Eyben (1972) gives a broad overview of antiquity's view of puberty—the age span and physiological characteristics. He cites Galen and Hippocrates, for example, as concurring that puberty lasts from age 14 to age 25; others place the upper limit at 21, the age Telemakhos has just attained or will shortly.

Mark Golden points out (personal correspondence, April 1988) that *hêbê* can also be thought of as a period, a time of transition:

The matter is complicated by the different kinds of *hêbê*: the *hêbê* of the scientists and life cycle theories, marked by puberty at 14; the *hêbê* celebrated in ritual, set somewhat later (perhaps so that all boys involved would in fact have reached puberty); and the *hêbê* marked by admission into the citizen community (at 17 or 18 at Athens).

⁴Kaplan (1984), throughout her book, skillfully incorporates the contributions of Freud, Bowlby, Mahler, Winnicott, Erikson, and Bos into the story she formulates of adolescent transformation. Her approach is compatible with that of the British School of Object Relations.

⁵My discussion is limited to the maturation of heterosexual men.

⁶V. Turner (1967:93–111).

⁷T. Turner (1977).

⁸Van Gennep (1960:82). In his model, rites of passage have three phases: separation, transition (or *marge*), and aggregation; or preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. I insert a doorway between preliminal and liminal (first threshold) and another (second threshold) between liminal and postliminal.

My work with William Sale on initiation (Felson-Rubin / Sale 1983b and 1984) was

maintained by an effort to appropriate for analyzing ritual the important concept of a fixed sequence of plot elements (or functions), as developed by Propp (1968) and modified by Bremond (1973) and others.

⁹T. Turner (1977:67–68).

¹⁰The youth will also reappropriate his mother, now desexualized and no longer his genital mother. Puberty rites seem to sublimate the oedipal hostility prominent during adolescence.

¹¹Certain types of activities, which previous scholars assign to the threshold proper (*limen*), occur at my first and second thresholds.

¹²On the concept of a “world without women” as a developmental stage or even a societal fixation, see Vernant (1981) and Katz (1983). On Herakles and Ares and all-nale festivals and clubs as features of ancient Greek society, see Jeanmaire (1939) and specially Loraux (1989).

¹³The most comprehensive work on ancient Greek initiation rites remains Jeanmaire (1939); see also Brelich (1969), Vidal-Naquet (1968 and 1981), and Burkert (1972).

T. Turner (1977) treats initiation rituals as an intersection of the individual and the communal. Herdt (1981:especially 232–39) describes male initiation among members of a tribe of New Guinea in a way consonant with my understanding of the ancient Greek rites of Crete and Athens. He sees their male initiation rites as designed to convert small, puny boys, attached to their mothers, into virile and aggressive warriors. The practice of ritualized homosexuality, specifically fellatio, wherein male semen is ingested as “mother’s milk,” facilitates the growth of maleness in the boy.

The initiation rites of ancient Greece, as documented in Jeanmaire and Brelich, give no evidence for assigning such a prominent role to fellatio as in the New Guinean rite, though the role of homosexuality and cross-dressing may well serve the same function. That is, this particular feature (fellatio) may well be culture-specific. But at an abstract level (i.e., without the specific, concrete fillers), the sequence that Herdt ascribes for the Sambia resembles what I propose for ancient Greek youths.

¹⁴Odysseus’s boar hunt with his maternal uncles is communal and ceremonial. Its ceremonial nature is evident in Autolykos’s designation of puberty (*hēbēsas*) as the moment for the journey, the role of maternal kin, the ritual healing, the journey and return home, the gifts, and the celebration with his parents upon his return. The ceremony is an individual rite of passage, not a communal one, but it integrates Odysseus into his mother’s kinship group.

¹⁵De Jong (1985) ascribes the reminiscence triggered by the scar to Eurykleia. On Odysseus’s name and his identity, especially in relation to the boar hunt, see Dimock 1956 and 1989:256–60).

¹⁶Compare the boar hunt recounted at *Iliad* 9.539–99, where Meleager fights his maternal uncles over the boar-hide, his trophy in an initiatory hunt, which he inappropriately gives to Atalanta. On the inverse parallel between Meleager’s fateful maturation rite and the successful one of Odysseus, see Felson-Rubin/Sale (1983b and 1984).

Jeanmaire (1939) discusses the Calydonian Boar Hunt as an initiatory hunt. Vidal-Naquet (1968 and 1981) distinguishes initiatory hunts from adult hunts and considers only inverted hunts—at night with nets—to be initiatory. He sees the Calydonian boar hunt as a hunt involving the adult heroes of Greece.

Inverted hunts, in the Felson-Rubin / Sale model, are regressive reversions to childhood (feminine) practice, comparable to cross-dressing, which may be understood as a regressive enfolding of the self in the clothing of the mother. Vidal-Naquet (1968:158) sees dressing up as a woman only as “a means of dramatizing the fact that a young man has reached the age of virility and marriage.” For him, cross-dressing is significant only in its opposition to adult dress: “It is not the kind of disguise which is important, rather the *contrast* which it underscores.” A deficiency in Vidal-Naquet’s analysis is its lack of an explicit model of male psychosocial development from boyhood, by stages, to manhood. The inverted hunt occurs, in the spiral model, at the first threshold, while the so-called “adult hunt” occurs in adolescence proper, when the boy is consolidating his male self by rehearsing adult male roles.

¹⁷Telemakhos hears the story at 1.298–302 (Athena-Mentes), 3.232–35 (Athena-Mentor), 3.254–312 (Nestor, at Telemakhos’s request), 4.90–93 (Menelaos), 4.512–37 and 546–47 (Menelaos, quoting Proteus’s tale told him in Egypt).

¹⁸Stories of the exile of the parricide are stories of abnormal, failed maturation: the community demonstrates its rejection of the parricide by sending him into exile. Examples from the *Iliad* are Phoenix and Patroklos’s father and from the *Odyssey*, Eumaios and the father of Antinoös.

¹⁹Vernant (1974) explicitly correlates the outcome (*telos*) of female maturation (marriage) with that of male maturation (prowess in war).

²⁰Eckert (1963) enumerates initiatory motifs in the *Telemakheia* but does not compare Odysseus’s and Telemakhos’s maturations. Odysseus’s encounter with the boar parallels his son’s repeated encounters with the suitors. Odysseus’s journey to Autolykos (whereby he consolidated his female lineage) resembles Telemakhos’s to Pylos and Sparta (whereby he internalized his male identity). Whereas Autolykos and his sons hosted the young Odysseus, healed him, gave him gifts, and bade him farewell, Nestor, Peisistratos, Menelaos, and Helen accomplish this for Telemakhos. And whereas Odysseus recounted his whole adventure to united parents who welcomed him home and rejoiced at his return, Telemakhos returns to parents still apart. He gives a negligible account to his father, at their first reunion after twenty years. To Penelope, now a potential threat, Telemakhos tells an elliptical version of his journey and is conspicuously silent on the topic of Klytaimestra’s betrayal.

²¹I focus only on those phases of development relevant to Telemakhos. The *Odyssey* does not inform us about his childhood or his full adulthood; hence I put all childhood developments under one category and all adulthood developments under another.

²²These benign regressions resemble Mahler’s “rapprochement” during the first individuation: the child repeatedly returns to her mother for reassurance, between ventures outward (Kaplan 1984:88–94). Balint (1968) formulates the notion of benign

and maternal regression; see Winnicott (1971: especially 145–46) on immaturity as an essential element of adolescence.

Erik Erikson's staircase model (1959 and 1982) of the crucial stages of life allots adolescence a place of its own. He segments a human life into the following eight phases, each producing a psychosocial strength (capitalized): Infancy (HOPE), Early Childhood (WILL), Play Age (PURPOSE), School Age (COMPETENCE), Adolescence (FIDELITY), Young Adulthood (LOVE), Adulthood (CARE), and Old Age (WISDOM). FIDELITY emerges from the struggle during Adolescence between Identity and Identity Confusion, LOVE from the struggle during Young Adulthood between Intimacy and Isolation.

Kaplan (1984) argues that adolescence is not (as many have thought) a mere recapitulation of the first individuation but is a phase in its own right. She shows that, although the first individuation provides a mental archetype for the second, the second (as a second occurrence) occurs in a different context from the first. Compare now, in poetry, the second occurrence of an item in anaphora is never mere reiteration but takes place in a different context from the first by virtue of following it in time (Rimmon-Kenan 1980).

Overlooking the normality of psychological regression has led many to misread Telemakhos's character.

²³Often, in puberty rites of patrilocal societies, the land of the mother's kin is the locus for the boy's transformation to adulthood. This land can mediate between childhood and adulthood because it partakes of features of both: of the female-dominated childhood (through the mother) and of the male-dominated adulthood through the boy's maternal male relations). Telemakhos, however, goes not to the land of his mother but to that of companions of his father; there, Helen (whose father, Menelaos was Penelope's uncle) mediates between his childhood and adulthood.

²⁴Blos (1979 and 1985) relies on extensive case studies for his formulation of the phases of adolescent development. His allegiance to the drive theory model, even in his most recent work, makes it difficult to appropriate his terms. I have not ventured to translate them into my language except in a rudimentary borrowing.

Blos (1985:4–13) develops the term "dyadic complex" to describe the first two phases (both pre-oedipal) of male development and "triadic complex" to describe the subsequent stages during puberty. The two dyadic phases precede latency. In the first, mother and son form a symbiotic dyad (the archaic or allogender dyad); in the second, father and son are a dyadic unit (isogender dyad) as son seeks father's blessing. In puberty, which follows upon latency, two triadic complexes appear: the positive Oedipus complex" involves attraction toward the mother, the "negative Oedipus complex" hostility toward the father. As Blos points out (5):

This rigid definition of stages is not quite true to life. When we refer to a stage in the sequential order of progressive development, we mean a preferential trend rather than an exclusive presence, taking for granted that the blending and fusion of stages is the rule before a stage-specific mode of object relation is consolidated.

Blos sees "the oedipal father" as "intrinsically fused with the father of the dyadic 'preoedipal' period" (20–24). As adolescence is completed, "the regressive pull to the father of the dyadic phase" combines with the need for individuation from the oedipal, triadic father; a paramount conflict ensues, from the resolution of which the boy moves on to male adulthood.

On the impact of a father's absence on a son's psychosocial development, see Biller (1970, 1971, 1976, and 1981), R. G. D'Andrade (1973) and Lamb (1981).

²⁵Kaplan (1984: especially 81–100) reviews the psychoanalytic literature on adolescence as a recapitulation of the first individuation. She argues that adolescence is "not just a halfway house" and quotes Lincoln (1981) on the present as "not a hairline between 'was' and 'yet-to-be' but a totality filled with history and potentiality." Kaplan rejects a linear model.

²⁶In fictional accounts, as in real-life case histories, these phases overlap; they proceed in neat sequential categories only in our schematizations of them. Moreover, as Blos (1962:52–53) states, "The adolescent may rush through these various phases, or he may elaborate any one of them in endless variations; but he cannot altogether sidestep the essential psychic transformations of the various phases."

²⁷Newman and Boyd (1982:243–44) provide this summary of the rite.

²⁸Seating arrangements are an important code in the *Odyssey*; cf. Telemakhos sitting in his father's seat at the assembly (2.14) and the polite exchange between son and father in the swineherd's hut over who will yield place (16.42–45).

²⁹Winkler (1990: especially 134, 146–49) discusses the role played by gossip in Mediterranean cultures and in the palace at Ithaka.

³⁰Telemakhos's response, that "nobody really knows his own father" (1.2.16), casts a shadow on "faithful Penelope."

³¹Telemakhos is too young and unproven to give his mother in marriage. He is not yet master (*kurios*) of the household (*oikos*). See Lacey (1966:62ff); also Katz (1991:35–39).

³²A balanced relationship with divinity and a special affinity with Athena mark Odysseus's family. His dearness to Athena makes him dear as well to Zeus, before whom Athena argues his case (cf. her speech at 1.48–62 and his response at 65–67). Zeus's favor is equivalent, in epic, to survival. This is evident in the exchange between the ghosts of Akhilleus and Agamemnon in the *Second Nekyia*, where Akhilleus expresses surprise at Agamemnon's pitiful destiny, because "we thought that all your days you were favored / beyond all other heroes by Zeus who delights in the thunder" (24.24–25). Agamemnon responds with a detailed description of Akhilleus's lavish funeral, from which he concludes (92) "You were very dear to the gods." A dishonorable death proves that a hero was dear neither to Zeus nor the other gods.

At 3.218–24 Nestor remarks on Athena's open intimacy with Odysseus and wishes the same for Telemakhos; when Athena departs as a vulture (375–79), Nestor recognizes her presence as Telemakhos's guide.

³³Telemakhos accepts what appears to be the dominant ideology of the *Odyssey*, that criminals such as Penelope's suitors deserve no clemency.

for dissenting as a trait Telemakhos appropriates as he comes of age, see Austin 9); on the prevalence of secrecy and lying as a characteristic of Mediterranean culture, see Winkler (1990:134–37).

This is the first of a series of allusions to the “hateful mother,” a motif that originates in Orestes’ matricide.

Thus the interactions of Odysseus and Telemakhos offer a paradigm of cooperation rather than competition, as an alternative to the paradigm provided by Laios and Oedipus. The unexplained early abdication of Laertes shows that generational conflict (caused by taking up too much space, too long, at the crossroads) is not a family tradition. On the “crossroads theorem,” see Blos (1985:32–36).

The theme of cooperation vs. competition between father and son resurfaces at the end of the contest for Penelope.

When Telemakhos meets Odysseus, he tells him, “I have always heard of your great fame” (16.241). Presumably he would have heard Odysseus’s *kleos* from Phemios, singing the RETURNS, whose content surely had to do with Agamemnon and Odysseus; cf. Hölscher (1989:97–99) and Olson (1989:16n.18). So long as Odysseus is alive, however, his *kleos* remains incomplete.

On the role of fathers in disseminating songs and ethical wisdom through stories to their children, cf. Penelope’s chiding of the suitors at 4.687–89: “nor have you listened to what you heard from your fathers before you, when you were children, / what of man Odysseus was among your own parents.”

Pucci (1987:201–8) elegantly dubs Telemakhos the “intoxicated reader” of the Homeric tradition. As an impressionable wide-eyed youth, Telemakhos is an ideal recipient of the Trojan saga; indeed, he is an even more gullible recipient of this tradition than Alkinoös.

Phikua may suggest that Helen appears like Artemis of the golden distaff to the suitors, namely to the onlookers, Menelaos, Telemakhos, and Peisistratos. Perhaps Helen has manipulated her own image, giving herself the appearance of chastity, as she does in the story she tells her young visitors. (I am grateful to my student, Ashley Johnson, for this point.)

On weaving as the female contribution to the economy, see Jenkins (1985).

On the juxtaposition of their two incompatible tales, see especially Dupont-Roc and Boulluec (1976), Bergren (1981), Goldhill (1988:19–24), Olson (1989:387–94), and Katz (1991:78–79).

On the combination of Helen’s “good drugs” and her “good tale” that “permit Menelaos to recall without pain, what pain might have kept beyond recall,” and that Helen reminded Menelaos of another similar feat of Odysseus, one that violates her own *kleos* and to being *eoikota* (“seemly”),” see Bergren (1981:210).

See Winkler (1990:140): “Menelaos’s Helen and Helen’s Helen are, on the immediate surface, two quite different characters. The one can be counted on for help when Odysseus is in a desperate situation surrounded by enemies, the other actively tries to destroy him and his men.”

Of the twenty-six instances of this formula (*epos t’ephat’ ek t’onomazde*) in the

Odyssey, six address Telemakhos (at 2.302 [Antinoös, laughing], 3.374 [Nestor], 4.511 and 610 [Menelaos], 15.124 [Helen], and 15.530 [Theoklymenos]). Nine instances reflect a speaker’s hostility or contempt, usually with “reproached” (*enenipen*), e.g., at 16.417 (Penelope to Antinoös) and 19.90 (Penelope to Melanthe). The formula is sometimes extended by a phrase connoting “stroked” (4.610 and 5.181) or “clasped by the hand” (11.247).

⁴⁵Austin (1969:61) writes that Telemakhos “practically auctions Penelope off the block” as he pretends to be a child in an amusing game.

⁴⁶Here I draw on Adkins’s terminology (1960) without, however, embracing his evolutionary model of Greek ethical development.

⁴⁷As my son once put it (at age 16), “He wants some, hasn’t got any yet, and resents their giving it to someone else.” Alexander Rubin, with permission.

⁴⁸For Telemakhos, who has emerged from his adolescence, the death of the suitors may represent a self he sheds—a self that depends, even fixates upon his mother’s chastity.

Compare Telemakhos’s encounters with the suitors and the maidservants to Odysseus’s boar-hunt as a maturation rite. At 22.277–78 Amphimedon strikes Telemakhos on the wrist, “and the bronze ripped the outermost skin”; the boar’s gashing of the young Odysseus at 19.449–51 is far more violent and destructive. Telemakhos feels hurt because the maidens “have showered abuse (*oneidea*) on the head of my mother, / and on my own head too, and they have slept with the suitors” (22.463–64). Instead of a wild boar as his adversary, Telemakhos faces murderous suitors, treacherous maidens, and an unpredictable Penelope.

⁴⁹In 19.44–46 Odysseus dismissed his son so that his wife might question him in private. The earlier dismissal prefigures this scene in Book 23.

⁵⁰Even without explicit injunctions to him to act like Odysseus, the stories that Telemakhos hears of Odysseus spur him into action.

⁵¹The formulaic simile “he was gentle as a father” (*patêr d’hôs êpios êen*), occurs three times of Odysseus: at 2.47 (Telemakhos to the assembly), 2.234 (Mentor to the assembly), and 5.12 (Athena to Zeus), and once of Nestor, at 15.152 (Menelaos to Telemakhos and Peisistratos). See Chapter 6, n. 10.

⁵²I am grateful to Joan Sarnat for this point, which is based on Winnicott’s metaphor for therapy: the therapist “holds” (supports, sustains) the patient as a mother her infant.

⁵³On “murdering” the father as an adolescent task, see Winnicott (1971:143–47); others see the adolescent as himself undergoing a symbolic death.

CHAPTER 5

¹Olson (1990) and, more briefly, March (1987) both treat the story of Agamemnon, as I do, from the point of view of the speaker and audience. Olson traces Homer’s use of the Mycenaean saga as part of the process of “manipulative narrative misdirection” (63). He adds Phemios as a teller of the Argive saga when, at 1.325–27, he sings