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*“We men are wretched things, and
the gods, who have no cares them-
selves, have woven sorrow into the
very pattern of our lives. You know
that Zeus the thunderer has two
jars standing on the floor of his
palace in which he keeps his gifts,
the evils in one and the blessings in
the other. People who receive from
him a mixture of the two have
varying fortunes, sometimes good
and sometimes bad; though when
Zeus serves a man from the jar of
evil only, he makes him an outcast,
who is chased by the gadfly of
despair over the face of the earth
and goes his way damned by gods
and men alike.”*

Homer, Iliad

the Suitors to try and fail to draw it says

My friends, I cannot draw it: let someone else take it. Many noblemen will this bow deprive of life and breath, since it is better to die than to live on and fail in our purpose.

(21.152-54)

That speech, evidently designed for the sake of its ironic opening, is truer than the speaker knows.

Homer's Use of Imagery, Symbols, and Formulas

Cedric H. Whitman

Anyone who reads Homer is immediately struck by his frequent use of formulas (or formulae), perhaps the most common literary device employed in oral poetry. In this context, a formula is a stock phrase or description that expresses a given idea and that is regularly repeated in the course of the narrative. Perhaps the most obvious examples in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the many epithets, terms or phrases used to characterize persons or things, such as the "rosy-fingered Dawn," the "swift-footed Achilles," and the "far-darting Apollo." Homer also used formulas to express simple, often-repeated actions, such as sitting ("So speaking, he sat down") or initiating a speech ("He spoke these winged words"); or to describe physical conditions and appearances, such as that of mortally wounded warriors ("Night wrapped his eyes"). In this essay, Cedric H. Whitman, former professor of Greek at Harvard University and noted Homeric scholar, discusses how Homer employed formulas and other symbolic devices to create vivid mental images of the legendary heroic age depicted in his epic poems.

Modern criticism tends to find the essence of poetic speech in metaphor, and to regard the art of poetry as primarily imagistic, while the more external elements of the form, meter, rhyme, and even the other rhetorical figures, are purely secondary. If this view is true, a serious question arises about Greek poets, especially Homer: how to account for the power of a poet who has always been found so singularly lacking in metaphor? It has been estimated that

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there are only twenty-five real metaphors in the whole first book of the *Iliad*, which has six hundred and eleven lines. At the rate of one metaphor in each twenty-four-and-a-half lines, few poems would be effective. Either metaphor cannot be so central, or else Homer has been overestimated. But there is a third alternative, that Homer may be indeed more metaphoric than has been thought. The directness of Homer's language is striking, but it is very far from the directness of prose. If it lacks metaphor in the modern sense, it is nonetheless a tremendous imagistic texture, and metaphoric in the sense that all language is, in a way, metaphoric. In order to make clear what is meant, it will be necessary to explore the meaning of metaphor and of poetic speech in general. It must also be borne in mind that in Homer we are dealing with an oral, traditional style, and that the problem therefore differs somewhat from the problem as found in written literature. This is not to say that the poems do not exhibit many of the virtues found in written literature; they do. Even a purely literary approach reveals many of their profound vistas. But the question of metaphor well illustrates the limits of the method. In the Homeric epic we have to deal with something which established many of the literary assumptions of Western culture, but which in its oral, traditional origins was modally different from all subsequent poetry.

Even on the surface, Homer is by no means lacking in figurative language. The most evident kind is, of course, the great epic simile, rising like a prismatic inverted pyramid upon its one point of contact with the action. Metaphor occurs, though sparsely: when fighters fall, they "sleep the brazen sleep," or "night wraps their eyes." The Achaeans are subdued by the "scourge of Zeus." The somewhat mysterious "bridges of war" may be metaphor. . . . Homer is unique in the ability to call things by their right names—helmet, ship, or shield—and make them strike the ear as rich and strange. Thus what might be called the "first level" of the poems, the rational, factual level, has an intense beauty of its own, which perhaps partly explains Homer's appeal to children. In any case, it makes him the most sensuously vivid of all poets; whatever extended implications may exist, it is never necessary to grasp these before one can feel the poetic fire of a scene. The simplest statements of fact or action have a compact vitality and immediacy which put all naturalistic

modes of realism to shame. For all his scarcity of the more familiar types of figurative imagery, except simile, Homer's lines are as sharply imagistic as it is possible to conceive; all is clear, pure, and detailed. What is the secret of such a poetic method, which seems to do without so many of the poetic modes of other literature . . . ? To answer the question, one must examine the components of the epic style itself, and see in what way it is related to the imagistic and symbolic procedures of poetry in general.

IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

It is not easy to find satisfactory definitions for the terms "symbol" and "image" as used in literary criticism. In general, however, the poetic symbol is a word or phrase which carries a larger meaning than that which it denotes, and this larger meaning is determined and limited by the contextual associations of the work in which it stands. . . . An image, on the other hand, is primarily a word or phrase devised to evoke sense impression, visual, auditory, or any other. Images may, and easily do, become symbols by association. . . . But the first function of an image is a direct appeal to that part of the mind which recognizes sense-experience. . . .

It is by means of the image and the poetic symbol, as defined above, that language is made presentational. Any word alone may be imagistic, except perhaps colorless modal auxiliaries, and any word may be a poetic symbol, hence presentational. But when a group of grammatically related words become presentational, it is because some technique has been employed to suppress their grammatical symbolism in favor of a presentational symbolism. The importance of the time element is consequently also diminished, since the sense of evolving thought is transcended by the imagistic unity of the total phrase. The techniques which so tend to identify groups of words with artistic rather than logical syntax are familiar: metaphor and the other figures, departure from colloquial order of words, actual omission of some grammatical factor which can easily be understood, meter with its effect of contrapuntally modifying the normal sound of words, rhyme which tends to emphasize sound over sense, and finally diction itself. For when we praise a poet's choice of a right or inevitable word, we must remember that it is chosen in reference to the poem's artistic end, and not for its dictionary meaning. Language thus used becomes

imagistic and symbolic in a new sense. As a picture of a cat is a symbol of a cat, but not a definition of a cat, so too poetic language is a symbol of the thing represented, but not its definition. . . .

Any word, therefore, even the indefinite article, may become symbolic in a poetic scheme, that is, it may contribute presentationally and not merely grammatically to that scheme. Imagery does so in that its very diction, carefully selected, prompts a unified, though perhaps highly complex and articulated, sensory response. Symbols, in the full sense of poetic symbols, do so by virtue of their accumulated contextual meanings in the poem. To illustrate: in the first book of the *Iliad*, the image of fire occurs in the burning pyres of those dead of the plague. It is simply an image, and a vivid one. But in the course of the poem fire takes on a host of associations, and becomes in a sense the symbol of the chief action of the poem. Such a process is possible only in an art which employs a medium where meaning is both denotative and connotative. In spite, therefore, of the grammatical, discursive problem, words, with their specific denotative force and their power of almost infinite semantic expansion through connotation, offer perhaps the richest soil of all for artistic symbolism. Synonyms, for instance, by virtue of identical denotation, and even homonyms, or near-homonyms, through similarity of sound, may both contribute to the symbolic structure.

USING FORMULAS AS AN ART FORM

To return now to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: it has sometimes been felt that the formulaic, oral style which Homer inherited from the epic tradition could not, since it was not his own creation, have anything to do with his genius, which was to be sought instead in his departures from oral method. But besides the fact that we cannot point to a single certain departure from the method, it must be said that Homer's genius is profoundly involved with the traditional style, and we shall not understand his unique power without first understanding the aesthetics of the style itself. . . .

One of the chief characteristics of the epic formula is that it regularly occupies a given metrical position in the hexameter [verse containing six measured feet, or beats, per line]. The proper name with its epithet is many times more frequent at the end of a line than at the beginning. The word

"hand" is very frequent in the *Iliad*; in the nominative or accusative plural, if modified by "invincible," it invariably closes the line; but the phrase "in his hands" always begins the second foot of the hexameter. A glance at the Homeric concordance could multiply examples of such practice almost to infinity. A formula is, in fact, a semantic unit identified with a metrical demand, and it is a testimony to the extraordinary strictness and economy of the singers that there are so few duplications, or formulaic alternatives with the same meaning and metric. There are a very few exceptions, and certainly a word changes position more easily than a phrase does, but in general both words and phrases are fixed in definite metrical positions.

Another peculiarity of the epic formula is the semantic unity of its parts. This is especially true of noun-and-epithet combinations, such as "Agamemnon king of men," "swift-footed horses," and "rose-fingered dawn." These are not meant to be heard analytically, but more as names given in full; they are the equivalents of Agamemnon, horses, and dawn, and, often repeated, fall on the ear as units. Yet they are ornamental units also, and richer than the mere nouns alone would be. Furthermore, such unity is not confined to phrases involving nouns with epithets. The battle books of the *Iliad* abound with a bewildering variety of formulae, all metrically different, but all conveying the fall of a warrior who has his death wound: "his limbs were loosened," "he seized the earth with his palm," "night wrapped his eyes," "his armor rattled upon him" (as he fell), and a great many others. All frequently recur, and once their meaning is known, the ear no longer distinguishes the words so much as accepts the phrase whole. "So speaking, he sat down" crystallizes to a single image. Some formulae even fill whole lines, yet their essential unity is not lost: "Thus he spoke, and brandishing hurled a long-shadowing spear." One may break this down into words, but one tends to read it, or hear it, simply as one expression, embodying the act of ceasing to speak and hurling a long spear. The line is a unity, and even the strongly imagistic word "long-shadowing" does not dominate its force, which is kinetic and narrative. The mind's singularly unified response to the formula is observable in the beginning student's frequent ability to translate a formula correctly, though he may have forgotten which word means what. The process can extend even to those passages

of many lines, such as the descriptions of a feast, launching a ship, or arming for battle. Such nonanalytic unity of meaning also is functional in origin. The singer wanted a phrase with a certain meaning and devised it; once devised, it could be reused, but only as a whole. To break it up or alter it was possible, but then one made another whole. The formula, not the word, was the epic unit. And the same is true of the longer repeated scenes. They might be lengthened or shortened, but they were units, to be used as such.

One might, therefore, describe the epic formula as an artificially devised unit of semantic, grammatical, and metrical functions. As such, it has clearly transcended the discursive function of speech, and has become a vividly presentational medium, in short, an art form. Whether or not a given formula embodies an actual metaphor, it is nevertheless always imagistic, and appeals directly to the senses. Its artificially devised union of metric and meaning subordinates its grammar and suppresses the time sense, so that from the materials of a discursive symbolism has been made a building block of a presentational symbolism. The formula is functional, therefore, not merely in the sense that it assists in creating verse, but also because it is a sort of poetic atom, a fragment of technically transformed speech whose structure is already that of art, not logic. . . .

FORMULAE THAT KEEP GAINING WEIGHT

On the other hand, since everything in the epic is formulaic, though highly varied formulaic speech, the functional aspect cannot in the large be the determining factor. Functions are functions of something, and in this case, of the poet's intention. The oral poet, like any other, must plan his lines, and he must have some notion of what the end will consist of when he sings the beginning. . . . The problem in oral composition was to . . . adjust the building blocks of the poetic speech with reference to association and design.

Another example of the use of a common formula in an uncommon way can be found in the *Patrocleia* [the section of the *Iliad* dealing with Patroclus's heroics and death], where Patroclus, attempting to scale the Trojan wall, confronts Apollo, and rushes at him, "equal to a god." The phrase is traditional enough, but here it takes on more than a merely honorific force. Patroclus is struggling with Apollo, and, as appears later, he is anything but Apollo's equal. Yet

the poet has made it clear just before that Patroclus' great burst of courage is due to the direct inspiration of Zeus, and that this inspiration is yet a "calling unto death." The heroic association of divine valor with death involving a god is implied in the epithet, which moreover recalls Patroclus' first moment of involvement in the action which led to his death. This is the moment when, summoned by Achilles, he comes out of his tent "equal to Ares," and "it was the beginning of his woe." From here on till his death, Patroclus' epithets take on a divine context. One might multiply instances, but at the risk of seeming to isolate special moments of propriety, and obscuring the all-important fact of Homer's consistent felicity in the arrangement of formulae. Each one that seems singularly well chosen depends for its effect on hundreds of lines of texture which have prepared it. No one, for instance, can fail to notice the effect of the common phrase, "glorious gifts" which ends the *Patrocleia*, as the immortal horses of Achilles, "glorious gifts" from the gods to Peleus, carry the charioteer Automedon to safety, leaving Patroclus dead on the field. Its commonplace ring now takes on a peculiar irony, since all Achilles' glorious gifts hereafter will be vain and stale, mere commonplaces of his heroic position. Here it is almost impossible to draw the line between the poet and the style itself, yet the effect is there, an effect of terrible bitterness. Indeed, the whole line, unnecessary for the action alone, seems to have been added to emphasize the connection of Achilles with the Olympians who have espoused his cause and permitted the death of his friend. In Homer's scheme, instead of wearing themselves out, the formulae keep gaining symbolic weight, like rolling snowballs. Achilles is often compared to a lion, but when he strides out the door of his tent "like a lion" after threatening Priam, the image reflects in particular the helpless king's view of him; it cannot, in that moment, remain mere epic ornament. Even such a cliché as the rose-fingered Dawn, who mounts Olympus, passes from the functional to the symbolic by constant reference to the airy world of the gods . . . against which the deadly human drama is played. As one critic aptly remarked, everything becomes symbolic in the hands of a good poet. . . .

USE OF COMPLEX WEATHER SYMBOLISM

The relation between certain of Homer's scenes and the image contained in a formula is sometimes so close and ex-

PLICIT that some episodes seem to be scarcely more than formulae acted out like charades. In the fourth *Odyssey* Menelaus relates how he was confined by adverse winds in the island of Pharos for twenty days, until the sea nymph Eidothea came to his rescue. He asks her which of the gods "shackles and binds him from his path." The last two words of the formula recur, with a slight change, in *Odyssey* 5, where Athena stills the winds which have shipwrecked Odysseus: "Then she bound the paths of the other winds." The metaphor of being "bound" or prevented from a journey by adverse winds, or, as in English, *wind-bound*, is reversed into an image of binding the paths of the winds, which is the function of a benign and favoring deity. So far, we meet here only formulaic variations on a basic metaphor. But in Book 10 of the *Odyssey* the metaphor becomes action, a little scene:

And he [Aeolus] stripped off the skin of a nine-years ox,
Wherein he bound the paths of the blustering winds . . .
And tied them in my hollow ship with a shining string
Of silver, that not even a little might breathe through . . .

What was originally a figure of speech is acted out, with the winds literally tied up in a bag with a silver string, which the companions later undo, in one of their occasional moments of insubordination. The episode comments eloquently on the psychological interpretation of metaphor and magic, poetic speech and poetically conceived action.

Again, the description of Odysseus' landing in Phaeacia and meeting with Nausicaa strikingly illustrates how a single formula with its image not only may underlie and mingle with the action, but also may externalize or objectify the internal states of the characters and embrace a dramatic situation whole. After the struggles of the shipwreck, the hero, exhausted, half-conscious, and vomiting brine, crawls ashore at the river mouth, in a place free of stones, where there was "a shelter from the wind." The passage is full of an overwhelming sense of relief and salvation, but it arises not from anything Odysseus says about it, but from the nature of the things which he encounters. Of these—the land itself, the slackened stream, the lack of stones—none is so central to the feeling of benignity as the image of windlessness, the cessation of all rough elements. The winds have had their will in the shipwreck. One of the two things Odysseus still fears now is that the wind will blow cold at dawn if he sleeps on the shore; and he seeks the thicket of wild and domestic

olive, "Which neither the force of the damp-blowing winds / Pierced, nor the flashing sun struck with his rays, / Nor the rain poured through." There he falls asleep, like a spark hidden under ashes. This is logical enough, but it is also magical. A spark under ashes revives with wind, and presently there are winds; but with a subtle change. Homer is immersed in images of peace and safety, the focus of which is to be Nausicaa, herself an image of tender nurturing, peace, and every blessing of civilization. She cannot be a wind. At the beginning of Book 6, she is asleep, like Odysseus, but Athena, summoning her to his aid, comes into her safe chamber, through the closed doors, "like a breath of wind." This wind which rushes toward the bed of Nausicaa is a pre-saging token of the impact which the experienced, weather-beaten Odysseus is to have upon the sheltered Phaeacians, especially Nausicaa, an impact which is vividly dramatized in Book 8. This wind has action and danger in it, nicely imaged in the simile of the weather-beaten lion, when Odysseus comes out of the bushes toward the princess and tells her how wind and water brought him to Scheria. By contrast, Phaeacia, the land blessedly remote from all enemies, is a windless paradise: "Assist his bath," says Nausicaa to her friends, returning to the formula which keeps repeating itself, "where there is shelter from the wind." It is scarcely a wonder, in such an elaborate complexity of weather symbolism, that when Athena finally leaves Nausicaa in charge for the moment, she goes to an Olympus which, though it is much unlike the gods' dwelling as described elsewhere in Homer, is very like the safe thicket where Odysseus sleeps: "Neither by wind is it shaken, nor ever wet by rain, / Neither snow comes near it, but verily clear sky / Cloudless expands, and a white gleam spreads over all." It is a mistake to think that Homer has climbed in this vision of supernal tranquility to a nobler conception of the divine kingdom than he had in the *Iliad*. He is simply following the course of his imagery, and developing in action and description the vision which is most briefly caught in the formula, "where there was a shelter from the wind." . . .

The episodes just described, however, contain a great deal more than the images mentioned, and, of course, not every scene can be read backwards into a formula. The character of Nausicaa, for example, is a chef-d'oeuvre [masterpiece] quite apart from her symbolic function in the rescue of

Odysseus. Her own existence as a poetic creation, a paradigm of the day on which a girl becomes a woman, is an especially appealing example of the genius of the Greek artist for generalizing upon the individual without destroying individuality. But all Homer's characters are equally universalized individuals, and his scenes for the most part dramatize them for their own sakes, within the limits of a totally conceived heroic world. Thus, though the poetic image is the genesis of the dramatic or narrative scene, their dimensions and functions differ.

HIS WHOLE WORLD A METAPHOR

Yet many of Homer's scenes, apart from their relation to formulae, are just as traditional poetic units as the latter, and doubtless all are modeled to a degree on types. The battle books of the *Iliad* offer a dizzying variety of small combat scenes, whose recurrent motifs are combined and recombined into ever new situations, whose circumstances, like life itself, are always different, yet always coincide with others at certain points. It is a formal design corresponding to, but not specifically imitating, the natural world. Crystallized and formulaic, its life is not naturalistic but generic, its realism is classical, not that of photographic illusionism. The battle books, for instance, have been mistakenly neglected, for quite apart from their intimate connection with the whole structure, they better illustrate in one way Homer's skill with the oral style than do the more famous parts of the poem. Traditional as they are, Homer narrates them as images in a whole design. . . . When formulae are combined and recombined as they are in Homer's battle scenes, it is like the falling of glass chips in a kaleidoscope. Patterns constantly are formed, always with consistency of color, and always with pieces of the same shape, yet always different and always luminous with surprise. No matter how many are combined, the imagistic impact of formulae is not lost provided they are chosen with relevance to the total design which is aimed at. The poet's mind herein acts like the mirror in the kaleidoscope, constantly rounding the fall of formulae into an organic, larger unit.

The outlines of the larger units are, of course, determined by plot and character. . . . Thus the famous scene between Andromache and Hector has been finely analyzed as an interlocking of two main images, the world of man and the

world of woman, which are hopelessly separate save for the unifying presence of a child. This is one view and an important one. But there are also many other ways of looking at it, for when an image is dramatized, it can never again be compressed; it exists in its own right as a scene, an image, but a kinetic one, an image of humanity in action.

But to speak of "images of humanity" leads to the most general considerations, and the question of Homer's ultimate intention as an artist. No mere analysis of the tools and technique of a poet can explain his power. The structural elements of epic, scene, simile, and formula subserve a total concept which in Homer's case is a vision of the heroic world of the past. Like all else Homeric, it is in part traditional, the keepsake of generations of bards, the long memory of the "glories of men." But it is also molded anew by each new hand for each new poem. It differs a little, though only a little, in the *Odyssey* from what it was in the *Iliad*, and hence it is always a creation, or a re-creation, never a mirrored imitation. It reflects nothing exactly, for it comes to being through the formulae which are . . . formalized units standing at a remove from reality in order to present it imagistically. It took centuries to forge this medium, and the pieces date from every generation of singers from the fall of Troy, or before, to the eighth century. Hence it arises that Homer's world is not the Mycenaean world, nor the world of the eighth century. It is the epic world, a visionary structure whose chief pillar is the heroic aspiration. Within that structure, all the elements fit, though they may not correspond precisely to anything outside it. . . . In Homer, every shield, even Ajax's big one, is the universal heroic shield, seen through centuries of admiring retrospect. It is "towerlike," or "equal all round," or "well turned" interchangeably, not because Homer forgot which kind of shield Ajax was carrying on a certain day, but because the only shield his Ajax ever had was an epic shield, symbolic of all that a heroic shield must be. It is a shield-metaphor, which changes with perfect unconcern from a Mycenaean body-shield to a round hoplite shield, reflecting any shape which had crept into the conventional speech by sometime being glorified in action. A completely plastic conception, the Homeric symbol, shield . . . is always a metaphor, and in Book XVIII of the *Iliad* it undergoes a tremendous expansion and becomes a metaphor of the whole heroic world. . . .

Homeric Honor and Cultural Values

J. Frank Papovich

Like other classical scholars who have attempted to teach Homer's epics to modern high school and college students, J. Frank Papovich of the University of Virginia has found that first-time readers of Homer are often disturbed by or confused about the strong preoccupation with war and warlike values displayed by many of the characters in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In this essay, Papovich explains how he attempts to show his students that the value system of the society Homer depicted was very different than those of later cultures, including our own. For most people in Homeric society, he says, life revolved around the noble households of strong warrior chiefs and the kinsmen and followers under their protection; and war was a vital necessity for maintaining the social standing and honor of these rulers. It is essential to consider the unique cultural context of Homeric values, Papovich insists, "for if we fail to understand the original intentions in the Greek text, we may fail, in large part, to understand the text at all."

"With blood and muck all spattered upon him," Hektor leaves the battle raging on the plains of Troy and returns to the city, where he finds Andromache with their infant son at her breast. Together they speak of the horrors of war and the harsh specter of her enslavement by an Achaian warrior. Hektor reaches out to his son, who shrinks in fright from his dreadfully armed father. Then, in what seems a momentary respite from the terror of their world, Hektor removes his plume-crested helmet, tenderly jostles his now quieted son on his armed breast, and prays to the Olympians:

Zeus, and you other immortals, grant that this
boy, who is my son,

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How the *Odyssey* Differs in Shape and Character from the *Iliad*

C.M. Bowra

Since ancient times, scholars have remarked on the differences in style and spirit between the two epic poems traditionally attributed to Homer. This has led some to speculate that the works were composed by different authors; however, a majority of modern scholars tentatively accept the single author thesis, proposing that the *Odyssey's* generally less heroic, more lifelike tone reflects changes in Homer's style due to his advancing years, the more passionate *Iliad* being a work of his youth. This essay, by the highly respected classical scholar C.M. Bowra, former vice-chancellor of Oxford University, focuses on the shape and character of the *Odyssey*, exploring the differences, as well as some of the similarities and connections, between it and Homer's earlier epic.

The *Odyssey*, like the *Iliad*, begins with an invocation to the Muse:

Tell, Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered far indeed, when he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy. He saw the cities of many men and knew their minds, and many were the sorrows which he suffered in his spirit on the sea, when he tried to win his own life and the return of his companions. But not even so, for all his desire, did he save his companions; for they were destroyed by their own insolence, when they ate the cattle of the Sun Hyperion; and he robbed them of the day of their return. From what point you will, goddess, daughter of Zeus, speak to us also.

This presents several surprises. Unlike Achilles at the start of the *Iliad*, the hero of the *Odyssey* is not named but called 'the man of many devices', which indicates that his story is familiar, and this is confirmed by the last words when the

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Muse is asked to 'speak to us also'. But the familiar story is outlined in a peculiar way. The fantastic adventures of Odysseus are inadequately, almost deceptively, suggested in the reference to cities and minds; almost the only city seen by him is the capital of Phaeacia, and minds are not what he marks in the Cyclops and other monsters. Next, the emphasis on his struggle to save his own life is fair enough and anticipates some of his bravest efforts, but he hardly does so much to secure the return of his comrades. He looks after them, but he takes risks with their lives, and more than once he is the cause of their loss. Finally, not a word is said about the Suitors and the vengeance on them. They occupy more than half the poem and provide its central theme. The opening lines of the *Odyssey* are much less apt and less relevant than those of the *Iliad*. . . .

A SEQUEL TO THE *ILLIAD*

The material of the *Odyssey* differs greatly from that of the *Iliad* and gives it a different character. While the *Iliad* tells of the 'glorious doings of men' and is heroic in the sense that heroes struggle against other heroes, the *Odyssey* uses a less specific and less exalted material. Its stories are ultimately fairy-tales or folktales, and are unheroic in the sense that the unquestionable hero Odysseus is faced not by his equals but by his inferiors or by monsters. In its own compass it displays two kinds of narrative. Books 1-4 and 13-24 tell the age-old tale of the Wanderer's Return and his vengeance on the Suitors who devour his substance and try to marry his wife. In this there is not much fantasy or marvel. . . . The two parts differ greatly in matter, scale, temper and outlook. The second consists of stories so ancient that they seem to have been polished and perfected by constant telling, while the first class, which deals with stories hardly less ancient but of a different kind, has a less confident and less accomplished, even more experimental and more tentative, air.

The *Odyssey* serves in some sense as a sequel to the *Iliad*. No doubt there were many such sequels, especially in the creative heyday of oral song. The tale of Troy had many consequences, and among these were the adventures of Odysseus. In time he became the chief of the surviving heroes, and his return the most famous of many. Once a figure becomes known for certain qualities, appropriate adventures, with which he may originally have had no connexion, are attached

to him and marked with his personal imprint. Odysseus seems from the start to have been 'wily' and 'much-enduring', and stories which turned on williness or endurance were annexed to him. The relation of the *Odyssey* to the *Iliad* is obvious throughout. The past in retrospect is seen to have been disastrous, the story of 'evil Ilium not to be named', words which do not occur in the *Iliad* and suggest a shift of attitude towards the Trojan War. At the start of the *Odyssey*, when the gods discuss the fate of Odysseus as he languishes on Calypso's island, they turn at once to the fate of his old comrade, Agamemnon, who has been murdered by his wife and her lover, and this broaches the topic of what happens to the heroes of Troy. The audience knows all about the Trojan War and can take any reference to it. So now it lies in the background as they hear about Odysseus and Ithaca.

FAMILIAR CHARACTERS REAPPEAR

In the *Odyssey* certain characters appear who have played a substantial part in the *Iliad* but need not necessarily play any part in the return of Odysseus. When Telemachus sails off to find news of his father, he visits first Nestor at Pylos and then Menelaus and Helen at Sparta. Nestor is just the same as in the *Iliad*, garrulous, generous, helpful, even wise. Actually he contributes very little to Telemachus' knowledge of his father, and Homer shows a flicker of playful malice when Telemachus, eager to embark on his ship at Pylos and get home, decides to do so without seeing Nestor, since this would waste a lot of time, and sends the young Peisistratus to fix things with him. Menelaus is a less marked personality than Nestor, but he shows the kingly qualities which we expect from him, and especially loyalty to the son of his old friend Odysseus. More striking is Helen, who makes only a few appearances in the *Iliad* but in all of them reveals the pathos of her doom and her desire to escape from it. Her capacity for affection is clear from what she says to Priam, to Hector in his lifetime, and about him after his death. The whole adventure with Paris has been a sorrow and a disaster for her, but she has not been able to avoid it. Now she is back with Menelaus at Sparta, happy and at peace. She recalls without distress episodes from the war, but the scope of her character is revealed when she sees that Menelaus and his guests are distressing themselves with reminiscences, and mixes a drug which she has brought from Egypt and

which deadens pain and sorrow. She has learned from her sufferings, and the tenderness which is already hers in the *Iliad* is turned to new purposes.

Odysseus himself in the *Odyssey* is an enlarged and elaborated version of what he is in the *Iliad*. His main qualities there are cunning and endurance. He keeps his head when others lose theirs, notably after Agamemnon's ill-judged test of the army's morale. He is throughout a notable leader, resourceful and brave. In the *Odyssey*, where he is far longer on the stage, some of his qualities are turned in new directions. First, his cunning is tested in unfamiliar conditions, as in the cave of the Cyclops, where he takes on some qualities of a folk-hero and sustains them quite convincingly. Secondly, his need for cunning is enforced by his own recklessness. It is his fault that he is trapped in the cave of the Cyclops, since he has insisted on entering it, and equally it is his fault that he seeks out Circe's dwelling by himself. Thirdly, his abundant appetites, known from his taste for food and drink in the *Iliad*, are extended in the *Odyssey* to living with Circe and with Calypso, not perhaps in entire satisfaction but still competently. Lastly, the warrior of the *Iliad* becomes the returned wanderer of the *Odyssey* and needs all his powers of decision, command and improvisation. These he amply displays. . . . Odysseus in the *Odyssey* is a magnified version of Odysseus in the *Iliad*, but he remains substantially the same man and recognizable in his main being.

A FINAL CURTAIN FOR THE HEROIC AGE

Finally, there are in the *Odyssey* two passages where Homer presents ghosts of the dead, and each includes some chief figures of the *Iliad*. At 11.385-567 Odysseus, at the end of the world, summons ghosts with an offering of blood, and among those who appear are Agamemnon, Achilles and Aias. All three have died since the end of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon has been murdered by his wife, in marked contrast with Odysseus, whose faithful Penelope holds out bravely against the Suitors. His story emphasizes the dangers that await those who return from Troy, but sheds no new light on his personality. Aias, in a brief appearance, adds a new dimension to his simple character in the *Iliad*, for in the interval he has killed himself because his honour has been wounded by Odysseus. Odysseus does his best to appease him, but Aias takes no notice and makes no answer. The most striking fig-

ure is Achilles, for his words complement by contrast what he says in Book ix when momentarily he rejects the heroic life. Now he knows what he has lost, for he would rather 'work on the land as the serf of a man with no property, with no great means of life, than reign over all the perished dead'. His only consolation is to know that his son Neoptolemus is already a stout warrior. These three ghosts form a link with the *Iliad*, and when Odysseus speaks to them he speaks to his peers, as he does nowhere else in the *Odyssey*.

More mysterious is 24.1-204, where the ghosts of the Suitors are escorted by Hermes to the land of the dead and met by some heroes of the *Iliad*, notably Achilles and Agamemnon. Though the passage is thought to be a later addition, at least it has a part in the whole plan of the *Odyssey*. Achilles hears of his own death and funeral from Agamemnon; at it the Muses sang and the ceremony is a fitting climax to a heroic life. To this the Suitors present a complete antithesis. Their ignominious deaths are the proper end to their squalid careers. In this passage the poet seems to have aimed at more than one effect. First, when he makes Agamemnon say that Odysseus is indeed fortunate to have a wife like Penelope and very unlike Clytaemnestra, he emphasizes a subsidiary theme of the *Odyssey*, but does not gain much by it. Secondly, the parade of the ghosts of Troy, in which Patroclus, Aias and Antilochus are named as well as Achilles and Agamemnon, provides a final curtain for great figures of the *Iliad* and of the heroic age. Their place here recalls them at the end of a long story, and the renewed attention paid to them brings various themes together in a last bow. Thirdly, there is a real contrast between the death and glory of Achilles, immortalized in song, and the miserable careers of the Suitors, who are at the other extreme from the true nobility of the heroic ideal. Whoever composed this passage, must have felt that the *Odyssey* must be brought into contact with the *Iliad*, and this he did by stressing what real heroes are. . . .

HOMERIC MONSTERS

The sources of the *Odyssey* are different from those of the *Iliad* and the difference explains some of its character. If it deals with marvels and monsters, so to a smaller extent does the *Iliad*. In both poems gods interfere with the course of nature. When Aphrodite spirits Paris away from the battlefield or protects Aeneas, it is not very different from when Athene

covers Odysseus with a mist in Phaeacia or changes his appearance to prevent him being recognized. Though the *Iliad* contains the remarkable scene when the horse of Achilles speaks to him, it is because Hera has for this one occasion given it a human voice, and this is well within the power of the gods. The *Odyssey* differs when its marvels are not caused by the gods but belong to the world of legend. The wind-bag of Aeolus, the transformations of Circe, the summoning of ghosts at the end of the world, the monstrosity of Scylla, are outside human experience and do not belong to the strictly heroic world of the *Iliad*. In face of them Odysseus conducts himself heroically, as when he insists on hearing the Sirens' song but forestalls disaster by getting himself lashed to the mast. But the monsters which he has to face are outside both human and heroic experience.

Homer evidently saw this and tried to bring his monsters as near as possible to humanity, to relate them to it, and even in some degree to humanize them. This is certainly the case with the Cyclops, who despite his single eye, his bulk 'like a wooded peak of tall mountains', and his cannibalistic gluttony, is made real by his pastoral life, by his care for his flocks, by his affection for his ram. He is hideous and horrible, but not outside comprehension. Comparable in some respects to him is the queen of the Laestrygonians. She lives in a rocky fjord, and all looks easy until the scouts of Odysseus entering her palace, 'saw a woman as big as a mountain-peak, and they hated her'. She grabs one of them and plans to make her supper of him. She is of the same loathsome breed as the Cyclops, but since he has recently received full treatment, she is deftly conveyed in a short sketch. The Sirens, despite their gift of song which lures men to death and the bones of decaying bodies round them are careful to do no more than invite Odysseus to listen to them on the latest subjects of song. The exception to this realism is Scylla, who is a monster among monsters, aptly and fully described, with her twelve feet, her six necks, each with a head and three rows of teeth; she seizes six men from the ship of Odysseus and eats them while they are still crying for help and stretching out their hands, so that Odysseus comments:

That was the most piteous thing that I saw with my eyes of all that I suffered searching out the ways of the sea.

Scylla must be descended from tales of sea-monsters, of giant krakens and man-slaying cuttle-fish, and perhaps because

she has some basis in fact Homer feels that he must describe her exactly. She is far from ordinary, and yet one small touch brings her into the compass of living things—her voice is like that of a puppy. It is quite unexpected and almost absurd, and it is just this that brings it home. The monsters of the *Odyssey* are clearly visualized. Their horror comes not from vagueness but from clearly imagined actions and the menace of a horrible death which they offer. The only approximation to them in the *Iliad* is the Chimaera:

It was a divine creature, not of human race, in front a lion, in the rear a snake, and in the middle a goat, and it breathed the terrible strength of flaming fire.

Description is reduced to the barest essentials, but the Chimaera emerges clearly. This is the Homeric way of looking at monsters, and it is fully developed in the *Odyssey*. It is quite different from the shapeless horrors which the long northern night gives to its dragons.

REALISM

This controlling realism informs most parts of the *Odyssey* and gives much of its special flavour. It accounts for a certain quiet poetry which is not very noticeable in the *Iliad*, but makes the *Odyssey* friendly and familiar. It finds poetry in quite unassuming and humble subjects, as when Telemachus goes to bed and Euryclea folds his clothes and hangs them on a peg, or his ship sets out in the evening and the wind fills the sail and the dark waves resound about the stern. Life in the palace, despite the disruption caused by the Suitors, follows a routine, and there is a quiet dignity in the reception of guests, the laying out of tables, the scrubbing of them with sponges. In making his raft Odysseus shows a high technical accomplishment, and the mere making has its own interest. . . .

The same kind of realism can be seen in the characters. We have marked how Odysseus is developed from his old self in the *Iliad*, but he is the only character of any complexity, and that is because legend insisted upon a more than common personality. The others go their own way, and make their individual mark. At the start Telemachus is only a boy, and conscious of it. But he wishes to assert himself, even though he lacks the authority and the experience to do so. His voyage to Pylos makes a man of him. On it he settles his own decisions, and, when he comes back to Ithaca, he is ready for action, and follows and helps his father. Penelope

presents rather a special problem. Legend marked her as prudent, and she has kept the Suitors off for ten years, not merely by the stratagem of the web but by other postponements and evasions. Despite long hours of tearful lamentation for her lost husband she keeps her courage, and her sudden appearances among the Suitors reduce them to momentary acquiescence, which cannot all be ascribed to good manners. Her prudence makes her suspicious, and that is why she is so slow to recognize Odysseus as her husband. She and Telemachus are supported by the swineherd Eumaeus and the old nurse Euryclea, and though the first claim of these is their unswerving loyalty to their master, they display an innate nobility in their response to the demands made of them. The party of Odysseus on Ithaca is homogeneous in that it is held together by loyalty to him and hatred of the Suitors. It contains no very powerful personality except the great man himself, but its members are sufficiently distinctive to set him in a full perspective. . . .

HOMER'S SETTING SUN

In general the *Odyssey* lacks the sustained splendour of the *Iliad*, has fewer overwhelming moments and a less demanding conception of human worth. The slaughter of the Suitors provides a thrilling climax but lacks the profound pathos of the death of Hector, while the cold, vengeful anger of Odysseus is not comparable to the fiery, devouring passion of Achilles. All is set in a lower key, and this may be due to the nature of the subject and the traditional treatment of it. Folktales and fairy-tales, even tales of injured wives and revengeful husbands, need not summon the same powers as the wounded pride of Achilles or the fate of Troy. The *Odyssey* has moments of breathless excitement and moving pathos, but its normal level is less stirring and closer to ordinary experience. Even if tradition was partly responsible for setting this tone, there may be an additional reason for it in the poet's desire to compose a poem nearer to the life that he knew and to the events of every day. By combining these with impossible adventures and enthralling marvels he could set them in a new and brighter light. [The third-century A.D. Roman philosopher Cassius] Longinus thinks that this difference between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is due to the poet's advancing years, and he makes a good observation when he says:

Accordingly, in the *Odyssey* Homer may be compared to the setting sun, whose greatness remains without its intensity. He does not here maintain so high a level as in those poems of Ilium. His sublimities are not even sustained and free from sinking; there is not the same profusion of passions one after another, nor the supple and public style, packed with inventions drawn from real life. (*On the Sublime* 9.13)

Homer's Accurate Depiction of Seafaring in the *Odyssey*

Ernle Bradford

Because the *Odyssey* depicts many years of sailors' wanderings through both charted and uncharted seas, the work contains numerous references to and descriptions of ships, oars, sails, prevailing winds, beachings, and other aspects of ancient seafaring. This essay by Ernle Bradford, a classical scholar noted for his fine biography of Cleopatra, is an excerpt from his book *Ulysses Found*, a fascinating study of the Mediterranean islands and sailing routes that may have, through sailors' tales, given rise to many of the stories Homer told in the *Odyssey* (note that Bradford uses the Roman name for Odysseus—Ulysses). Comparing modern Greek and Italian sailing vessels, geographical locations, and known prevailing winds with those described in the *Odyssey*, Bradford shows that much of Homer's portrayal of ancient sailors, ships, and seafaring was accurate.

The island of Tenedos lies a bare two miles off the coastline of Asia Minor. Between the island and the shore the fast-running current still sluices down from the Dardanelles, just as it did when the Greeks set sail from Troy. Now known as Bozcaada, it is one of the only two Turkish islands in the Aegean and is of little importance today. Indeed, its whole history has been a happy one—happy in that it has hardly featured in the bloody chronicles of the Aegean, except on the one famous occasion when the Greeks pretended to abandon the siege of Troy. When, on the instructions of Ulysses, the Greeks had burned their camp and retreated to their boats as if in defeat, it was towards Tenedos that they set sail. It was nightfall when they left, and on the following

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morning the Trojans coming out from their city found the Greek camp burned and deserted, and only the mysterious wooden horse left behind on the shore in front of Troy. The Trojans looked seaward, but there was no sign of the enemy fleet, so they assumed that the Greek ships were already hull-down, bound for their homeland. Little did they know, as they dragged the horse across the sun-dried land and into the walls of Troy, that the Greek fleet was lying concealed behind the low bulk of Tenedos. . . .

On the night when Ulysses and the other Greeks emerged from the belly of the wooden horse to open the gates of Troy, Agamemnon and the fleet rowed silently back from their shelter behind Tenedos. They beached their ships, and made their final victorious assault on the sleeping city of their enemies. It is likely that the Greeks anchored their fleet in the small bay just south of Yukyeri Point. It is still a good anchorage for small vessels, with a bottom of sand and weed, and a beach protected from the north by a small headland on which now stand the ruins of an old fort. Even though the coastline may have changed a little during the past three thousand years, it was probably here that the Greek fleet was drawn up during the siege of Troy. The low peninsula still provides shelter from the prevailing winds and the current runs more slowly at this point. Out in the centre, between Tenedos and the mainland, it can run as fast as two-and-a-half knots, a considerable hazard for ships which under sail or oar are unlikely to have made more than four or five.

It was from this beach that Ulysses embarked with his comrades after the sack of Priam's capital. Behind them the city on the plain still smoked, and the ruined walls collapsed with a sighing fall. A south-easterly wind was blowing, hot off the mainland, as they hauled in the sleeping-stones which served them for anchors and cast off the stern hawsers that they had made fast to rocks on the beach.

SHIPS WITHOUT NAMES

For ten years Ulysses was now condemned to wander the scrolled waters of the Mediterranean, knowing dawn and sunset always to the same background of sea-smell, and pitch-pine, and wet wood. Even the places where he was detained during his travels were no more than small anchorages, humped shoulders of rock, scrub and trees, from which the sea was always visible. His ship, which in those years he grew

to know better than other men know their houses, was similar in some respects to the Viking craft which in later centuries were to cross the North Sea and the Atlantic—and even make their way into those warm stretches of the Mediterranean around Sicily, where Ulysses was now destined to sail.



PRECAUTIONS TAKEN BY ANCIENT SKIPPERS

In this excerpt from his famous book, The Ancient Mariners, scholar Lionel Casson describes some of the dangers early Mediterranean sailors faced and how they tried to avoid them.

Whether under sail or oars, working these ships was strenuous, uncomfortable, and dangerous. They were much less sturdy than the robust craft of the Vikings, and the Greeks were correspondingly far less bold than those reckless sea raiders. When Nestor, for example, sailed home from Troy, his first leg was fifteen miles to the island of Tenedos, his second an all-day run of fifty to Lesbos. Here he held a full-scale conference of his captains to plot the next course. With great trepidation he elected to strike out straight across the open sea instead of island hopping, made it safely to the southern tip of Euboea—and, on landing, set up a great sacrifice to Zeus, “thanking him for crossing that vast stretch of sea,” all of one hundred and ten miles. Usually skippers stuck to the shore, sailing from one landfall to the next. When they had to travel at night they steered by the stars, but they avoided such voyages as much as possible. They much preferred to put in at evening, running the vessel smartly up a beach or, if there was none handy, throwing over the stone anchor in some shallow protected cove; this gave an opportunity to refill the water jars as well as to provide a night’s sleep for all hands. On top of all these precautions, they limited their sailing to the time of year when the weather was most dependable, putting their boats in the water at the beginning of spring, around April, and hauling them out in October or so, when the fall set in. Practically all maritime activity, whether peaceful or warlike, was squeezed into the period between these months, and this remained more or less the case throughout the whole of ancient times.

... The ship of Ulysses has no recorded name. Some authorities ... have seen in this evidence that the writer of the *Odyssey* had little knowledge of, or interest in, the sea and seafarers. Nothing could be further from the truth, for the

anthropomorphic habit of giving ships names is comparatively modern, although it is true we have record of ships' names in classical times. I have sailed out of Trapani and the Aegadian islands west of Sicily in recent years, in boats similar to those which the Homeric heroes used, and found on them only the official registration numbers which they were compelled to carry by the Italian Government. . . . Like the Homeric vessels they are open boats, shallow-drafted and keel-less, designed for being run up on beaches. Yet these 20th-century fishermen still go a hundred miles or more to fish the rich banks off the North African coast. They have a central rudder—something that Ulysses did not have—and sometimes, but not always, a compass.

The number of men to each boat in Ulysses' squadron probably varied, but it seems unlikely that many of them were powered by more than twenty oars, ten to each side. This would necessitate a minimum crew of twenty, but since for long periods in the Mediterranean a vessel must be constant under oars, each one almost certainly carried at least a double complement. The rowers could thus take watches. But, quite apart from ensuring a change of men, such a system would have been necessary to make certain that there were always fresh men available to provide landing parties when it came to the piracy that was an integral part of the Homeric chieftain's life. Presuming that Ulysses left Troy with twelve ships, the same number which he had brought with him from the islands, it seems reasonable to assess the total number of his force at about five hundred men. There could have been more, for some of the ships might have been bigger than others, but on this matter Homer is silent.

'SWIFT,' 'HOLLOW,' AND 'BLACK'

Greece was well-forested in those days and particularly rich in pine. Pine has always been a good wood for the planking and masting of ships, although oak is preferable for keels and frames, and may well have been used. Common epithets which are applied to ships in the Homeric poems are 'swift', 'well-balanced', 'hollow', and 'black'. 'Swift' in these terms is clearly used to distinguish a war-galley from the more beamy trading vessel. "Well-balanced" is still a nautical term for any vessel that handles well, particularly when it is applied to a sailing vessel. 'Hollow' will surely mean an open boat, or one that is not decked-in. This was basically true of

the Homeric ship, except that it would seem to have had a partially-enclosed section at the bows and stern. The forepart was no doubt used as a storage space, and the afterpart was where the master, the helmsman, and other people of note had their quarters. There was no truly enclosed cabin, such as one finds even in a small modern yacht. The Homeric ship was designed for short passages. Whenever possible, it was beached at night while the crew went ashore, made their fire for a meal, and slept out in the open, in a near-by cave, or sometimes under the mainsail which could be spread over a tent-like arrangement of oars.



ODYSSEUS BUILDS A BOAT

This passage from E.V. Rieu's translation of the Odyssey, in which Odysseus fashions the craft he will use to leave Calypso's island, is the earliest description of shipbuilding in literature.

Twenty trees in all he felled, and lopped their branches with his axe; then trimmed them in a workmanlike manner and trued them to the line. Presently Calypso brought him augers. With these he drilled through all his planks, cut them to fit across each other, and fixed this flooring together by means of dowels driven through the interlocking joints, giving the same width to his boat as a skilled shipwright would choose in designing the hull for a broad-bottomed trading vessel. He next put up the decking, which he fitted to ribs at short intervals, finishing off with long gunwales down the sides. He made a mast to go in the boat, with a yard-arm fitted to it; and a steering-oar too, to keep her on her course. And from stem to stern he fenced her sides with plaited osier twigs and a plentiful backing of brushwood, as some protection against the heavy seas. Meanwhile the goddess Calypso had brought him cloth with which to make the sail. This he manufactured too; and then lashed the braces, halyards, and sheets in their places on board. Finally he dragged her down on rollers into the tranquil sea.

The adjective 'black', so often applied to the ships, must certainly mean that they were tarred as a protection against wind and weather. The warm waters of the Mediterranean, then as now, were a favourable home for worm—the sinister, wood-loving *teredo* among others. Now tar has been used as a preventive against worm since the earliest days of naviga-

tion, and Ulysses was fortunate that one of the islands which came under his sway had its own natural pitch lake. 'Well-wooded Zacynthos' as it was always called, the modern Zante, lies about twenty miles south of Ithaca. Its pitch lake was first recorded by Herodotus in the 5th century B.C., but it is reasonable to assume that it had been in use since man first discovered the efficacy of pitch as a wood preservative. . . .

The Greek ships had been many years away from their home ports by the time that the siege of Troy was over, and one can only conclude that they brought with them large quantities of dried pitch for recaulking and anti-fouling. Under the hot sun of the northern Aegean, and in the luke-warm waters of midsummer, not a ship would have survived if they had not been carefully maintained by carpenters, shipwrights, caulkers and riggers. No doubt they made fires on the beaches and, once a year, melted down great slabs of pitch for repainting and preserving their vessels. (I have found worm in my own pine-planked sailing boat after only twelve months in the Mediterranean.)

Ulysses' ship is also sometimes described as 'blue'. No doubt her topsides above water were painted indigo, one of the earliest natural colours used by Mediterranean peoples. It is more than likely that she also had the 'oculus' or 'eye' painted on either bow. This custom which survives in the Mediterranean to this day derives from the ancient Egyptian Eye of Ra, the Sun-God, which was painted on their vessels many centuries before the Homeric period.

HOMERIC OARED GALLEYS

Such was Ulysses' home then, a swift, well-balanced, hollow, tarred boat, with probably ten oars a side. She carried one mast, almost certainly a fir spar, from which she set one square sail. The sail itself may have been of linen or papyrus, both of which materials the Egyptians had been exporting for centuries. There is a reference to a rope of papyrus in the house of Ulysses, but whether his sail was papyrus or linen, it is almost certain that his cordage will have been of papyrus and in some cases of leather. The sail was only set in moderate winds, and not expected to stand up to the strains which seamen would later demand from canvas.

The mast was movable, as is the case in many Mediterranean sailing boats to this date. It was housed in a sort of three-sided tabernacle and could be manhandled down so

as to rest in a cradle in the stern. Supported by stays fore and aft, the mast will not have been very tall, since it needed only to support a square sail on a simple wooden yard. Quite large fishing and trading boats in the Gulf of Genoa and elsewhere use a similar type of mast and rigging to this day. When in harbour, the mast is invariably lowered to reduce top-weight and thus make the motion of the boat more comfortable for the men on board. I have no doubt that Ulysses and his men, when at anchor, often took their siestas—as I have done myself—under the shadow of the sail stretched across the lowered mast.

The oars, like the mast, will have been of fir and would seem to have been very broad in the blade—at least if the Homeric comparison of them to ‘winnowing-shovels’ may be taken at its face value. Quite apart from anything else, this would certainly account for the difficulty they often seem to have experienced in rowing against the wind. There were no rowlocks in the modern sense of the word. The oars were worked either over the gunwale, or through small ports in the ship’s side against thongs of leather. Most Mediterranean boatmen, from the Aegean to the Tyrrhenian Sea, still prefer wooden thole-pins and a leather or rope grommet to metal rowlocks. . . .

The oared galley, which was the type of ship directly descended from those of the Homeric period, survived in the Mediterranean right into the 18th, and even the early 19th, century. The oared sailing vessel did not, in fact, disappear until very recent years when the advent of the mass-produced diesel engine gave the Mediterranean fishermen an alternative to oars during the long calms of mid-summer. For centuries after the English and the Scandinavian races had discarded oared vessels they were still in active use in the Mediterranean. The last naval action in which the oared galley predominated was the battle of Lepanto in 1571. . . . The galleys of Ulysses were a great deal smaller than [these]. . . . Under sail, and running free with the wind from abaft the beam, they may sometimes have made six knots or more. In view of Ulysses’ later adventures with wind and weather, whirlpools and tidal streams, it is important to bear in mind how slow and small was the craft that he was sailing. Things which are simple and of little or no moment to a modern ship would have been terrifying and dangerous hazards to a sailor of the Homeric period. Quite apart from the

size and comparative inefficiency of his craft, the early mariner was without chart or compass. He was venturing in a world where all was strangeness and mystery. It can hardly come as a surprise if his voyage came to be emblazoned with myth and fantasy by bards and storytellers.

FREE MEN, NOT SLAVES

If I have compared Ulysses’ ship to a small galley, the men who pulled the oars were far from being galley-slaves. They were freeborn Greeks from the islands, and there was no conception at that time of the oar bench being a fitting place only for a slave. Ulysses refers to them as his ‘friends’, his ‘companions’, and his ‘comrades’, and there is never any suggestion that they were even of a lower caste than the hero himself. Centuries later, the Greeks who manned the galleys and defeated the Persian fleet at Salamis were all free men. It would seem that the galley-slave was a much later conception. . . . But, as anyone who has ever pulled an oar under the hot Mediterranean sun knows well, the degree of physical fitness and endurance required for long periods at the oar is immense. Whether one is a slave or not, the hardness of the life remains much the same. Jean Martelle de Bergerac, who was a French galley-slave in the 17th century, left some vivid descriptions of the life. ‘Picture to yourself six men chained to a bench naked as they were born, one foot on the stretcher, the other lifted and placed against the bench in front of him, supporting in their hands a vastly heavy oar and stretching their bodies backwards while their arms are extended to push the loom of the oar clear of the backs of those in front of them. . . . Sometimes the galley-slaves row ten, twelve, even twenty hours at a stretch, without the slightest rest or break.’ Now Ulysses’ companions were not slaves, and the oars they handled were much smaller than those which de Bergerac was describing, yet there is no doubt that there were occasions when they had to row for many hours without a break. . . .

AN ILL-FATED VOYAGE

In a more or less open boat, with no charts or navigational instruments, and largely dependent upon the strength of the oarsmen, it was natural that the Homeric sailors should stick close to the shore whenever possible. At the first sign of approaching bad weather it was their custom to look for a

suitable shelving beach, run the boat ashore, and wait until the danger was past and the sea had subsided.

When Ulysses and his ships left Troy it is more than likely that they made straight for Tenedos across the narrow strait. They would certainly not have ventured directly into the open sea south of the island, and it is probable that they made first for the anchorage at the north-eastern tip of Tenedos, where the fishing village of Bozcaada now stands. There was certainly a south-easterly blowing when they set sail, for in Book XI of the *Odyssey* Ulysses tells how 'the same wind that drove me from Troy brought me to Ismarus, the city of the Cicones.' Now the Cicones lived on the southern shores of Thrace, on that part of the mainland which faces across the sea towards the island of Samothrace. Their land lies north-west of Troy, so a square-sailed ship would need a south-easterly wind to be 'driven' to their shore. Something one cannot know is whether Ulysses had always intended to sail north and raid the Cicones. Perhaps in his opportunist's way he decided that the wind should not be wasted and that, while he and his men were in the northern Aegean, they might just as well do a little more looting before sailing home. . . .

Unfortunately, what should have been no more than a profitable diversion on the way home turned to disaster. The seal of ill-luck was set upon Ulysses' voyage from the very beginning.

Crime and Punishment in the *Odyssey*

George Dimock

The concept of retribution or penalty for serious wrongdoing constitutes one of the central themes of Homer's *Odyssey*. The most obvious example is the way the hero, Odysseus, must undergo years of wandering, loss, and suffering to satisfy the anger of some gods, particularly Poseidon, who feel they have been slighted. In this essay, George Dimock, a teacher of the classics at Smith College, explores other examples of crime followed by punishment in the *Odyssey*, including the episode in which Odysseus's men eat the sun god's cattle, the encounter with the uncivilized Cyclops Polyphemus, and the climactic confrontation with the suitors. Dimock makes the relevant point that there are also instances in the poem in which evil goes unpunished, suggesting that Homer was not so naïve as to believe that good will *always* triumph over bad.

Punishment for most of us is a word loaded with emotion. For a long time people in our culture have been intensely aware of many all-pervasive authorities: God, the church, the law, the government, society, our parents, all of which seem only too easy to anger and whose hostile reactions, that is, punishments, seem only too effective and painful. Greek literature on the whole is comparatively free from this degree of nervousness about authority, and that is one of its major attractions. Still, very early in its history there appears something very close to, in fact I would say identical with, what we mean by "punishment," and the place it appears is in Homer's *Odyssey*. As might be expected, what Homer has to say about it is not without interest.

If one were to ask, "What is the *Odyssey* about essen-

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tially?" one would have to reply, I think, that it is about evil, evil in the sense of all those things about life which we don't like: toil, suffering, danger, the hostility of man and nature. Odysseus is introduced at once as the Great Sufferer:

The man sing, Muse, devious, full of resources,
driven all over the world when he sacked sacred Troy.
Many men's cities he saw, and knew what man's mind is;
many too were the evils his heart endured on the waters,
keeping his ghost from Hades and bringing his men safe
homeward.
Yet his men he could not save, hard though he tried to
protect them:
their own weakness of mind brought them their undoing.
Fools! They ate the cattle of Helios, god of the Sun—
ate; and the god took from them the day of their
homecoming.

This introduction suggests both evil and human responsibility for it. We may reflect that Odysseus would not have suffered at least these particular evils if he had not made the long and dangerous journey to sack sacred Troy; his men, for their part, certainly would have done better not to eat Helios' cows. They unquestionably, and possibly Odysseus as well, were punished, and that is our topic.

THEIR PUNISHMENT SEEMS RIGHT

The eating of the Sun's cattle, in fact, when we come to it in the course of the poem, turns out to afford a remarkably complete example of what I think we mean by punishment. Not only is there the angered authority and the hostile reaction, but there is the suggestion that the authority is right and just, and that the offending action could and should have been avoided. The Sun, as Homer tells the story, seems a beneficent being who would be quite right to carry out his threat to shine among the dead if Odysseus' men were allowed to get away with their disrespect for him, for their crime is portrayed as a choice of death over life. Their ring-leader Eurylochus says that even if Helios and the other gods really are going to sink them, he would prefer to end it all with one gulp of sea water than to spin out the pain on the desert island where they find themselves. So they eat Helios' cattle. They turn their backs on life, and if people are going to do that, we feel, the Sun might as well go and shine among the dead. Their punishment seems right. Furthermore, as I have said, it could have been avoided. Eurylochus and his

friends were told what would happen, and at first resisted the temptation to eat the cattle. It was only as a result of their second and worse thoughts induced by hunger that they decided that perhaps, after all, they might get away with it. . . .

For similar reasons, Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors is not a murder, though it is sometimes called one. The suitors, wilfully blind, put their own heads in the noose. Very likely their wooing of Penelope was legitimate in the beginning, but from the first moment that we see them they are already in the wrong. They have taken over an absent man's house in despite of his wife and son. To be sure, they partly regard this as a way of putting pressure on Penelope to marry, and in the assembly they try to give it some color of legitimacy; but it is not legitimate. Their only answer to Mentor's charge of violence is the threat of force: "Even though you outnumber us," says Leiocritus in effect, "do you really want to fight about a dinner? We can play the 'superior numbers' game too. If Odysseus himself should come and try to chase us out, we would kill him." The assembly allows itself to be cowed, and it does seem as though the suitors might get away with it. Besides, it is so pleasant and convenient for them to spend the days feasting in Odysseus' house while they wait for Penelope to make up her mind. When she does, their announced plan, at least if Telemachus can somehow be got rid of, is to let her and her chosen husband keep the house while they divide the rest of the property. Obviously this is not a legitimate sequel to a legitimate wooing and wedding. . . . The suitors know they are wrong. . . . They refuse to believe that the gods are on the side of right against might, and as a result they enact for us that spectacle with which we are only too familiar, of unprincipled power behaving with what seems to be impunity. They should of course have known better, and it should be no surprise when punishment catches them after all. . . .

EVIL IS NOT ALWAYS PUNISHED

The *Odyssey* then, I think, is saying something important about a phenomenon which we may legitimately call crime and punishment. Homer's poem suggests that there is an order in events which assists what we instinctively feel to be the right and punishes what we feel to be wrong, regardless of the apparent distribution of power. Like Odysseus, we feel that individual men, high or low, strong or weak, are to be

respected. Telemachus' very helplessness in the presence of one-hundred-eight hairy-chested suitors wins our sympathy and heightens our sense of outrage. We are glad when the gods' decree, his own enterprise, and his father's strength and cunning vindicate him.

Two questions remain: first, satisfactory as all this is, isn't it rather naïve of Homer to suggest that the good are rewarded and the bad punished in what we are accustomed to regard as a wicked and rather more complicated world; and second, what about the suggestion that Odysseus too may be being punished?

As for the first question, as soon as we begin to think about it, we see that Homer is not naïve. For one thing, evil is not always punished in the *Odyssey*. The Laestrygonians are at least as savage and, as Homer makes clear, as loathsome in their behavior as the Cyclops is. They too eat his men. But they are not punished; instead they destroy Odysseus' fleet, all but his own ship. Similarly there is nothing he can do about Scylla if he wishes to escape Charybdis. Odysseus, like the rest of us, has to face up to the experience of evils which are simply too strong for him. Evil is not always punished.

Secondly, when justice does triumph, Homer makes it seem reasonable and natural that it should. . . . Take the case of the Cyclops, who is brought low by the disadvantages inherent in his own savage lawlessness. In the first place, recognizing no need for restraint, he drinks too much. Secondly, without law or any restraining norms of social behavior, the Cyclopes are unable to live together or to develop any of the techniques of civilization, especially those which involve cooperation. As Homer says, they neither sow nor reap. They cannot travel about in the world for they do not know how to make boats. Nor, so long as they behave as they do, is their life likely to be enriched by the visits of others, a point explicitly made to Polyphemus by Odysseus. No wonder then that Polyphemus has neither the experience nor the imagination to conceive how a tiny weakling like Odysseus can harm him. He does not know the power of brains and technique even though he has a certain cunning of his own. The result is that the weakling Odysseus by securing the cooperation of other weaklings like himself succeeds in boring out the Cyclops' eye, using a technique which, as Homer explicitly says, is part of the civilized art of

ship-building. Odysseus' triumph then is not arbitrary. Uncivilized savagery, however great its brute strength, is at an obvious disadvantage against civilization through its very lawlessness, and Homer tells the story in such a way as to make us specifically aware of this.

RIGHT IS MORE APPEALING THAN WRONG

The suitors, by contrast, are civilized; yet they too, in spite of their superiority in numbers, suffer from inherent disadvantages. Fittingly, one of these is the opposite one to the Cyclops'. They are too civilized. Though they have set themselves against the laws and customs of their human society, they cannot do it thoroughly enough to succeed, for they are too squeamish. In particular, they do not kill Telemachus when they have the chance. As we have seen, the minute the suitors' ambush failed it was clear to Antinous that they would either have to kill Telemachus at once, or give up their fatal wooing. . . .

[But] the suitors neither accept the logic of the course they have embarked on and kill Telemachus, nor do they give up that course. They do not even consult the gods, but instead continue on their fatal way. Though they are at least partly and part of the time conscious that they have undertaken to oppose the laws of gods and men, children of civilization that they are they cannot make their opposition thorough enough to succeed. . . .

Another point which Homer makes in the case of the suitors is that right is just plain more appealing than wrong; it is, after all, the way people think things ought to be and be done. In view of this fact the suitors should not be as surprised as they are at Telemachus' success in bringing off his trip to Pylos and Sparta. In the assembly in the second book they are confident that even with Mentor and Halitherses on his side he will be unable to win enough support to put a ship in the water, but they are grievously mistaken. Their anxious questions once they discover he has gone accentuate this:

Tell me the truth; when did he go and who were the followers he had with him? The pick of the town, or was it his own hired help and house slaves? He could have done that. Tell me this truly also; I want to know clearly: by force, you not willing, he took your black ship, or willingly was it you gave what he asked for?

Only now do they discover their error. Noëmon answers:

I myself willingly gave it. What would anyone else do,
supposing a man like that, with all those cares on his soul,
should ask it? To refuse a favor like that would be hard.

Because Telemachus is a victim of violence and injustice, people like Noëmon are more ready to help him. Right, especially in the underdog, is more appealing than wrong. It is not long before the suitors themselves are afraid that it will win out altogether. . . . Evidently Telemachus, even without Odysseus, has managed to make one-hundred-eight suitors afraid of him, and Homer makes this seem reasonable. Apparently right has considerable advantages on its side.

HOMER'S MORALITY

Yet when all is said and done Homer does suggest that the gods interfere on the side of right; that the good man is, in our terms, luckier than the bad one. Odysseus in the Cyclops' cave is conscious of divine help: perhaps Polyphemus suspected something, he says, and so brought the rams inside the cave the night he was blinded, or perhaps the gods impelled him to. In any case, it was lucky, for the rams provided the means of escape. And again, Odysseus feels it was very lucky that his men's nerve did not fail at the crucial moment of boring out the Cyclops' eye. He does everything he can to keep their spirits up himself, but even so when the moment comes, he gives the credit to the gods. Similarly in the slaying of the suitors, Athene's help, though slight, is crucial. Here we must admit a fundamental difference between Homer's picture of the world and our own, for we cannot accept, as he does, the idea of divine interference with the natural course of events. Yet at a still more fundamental level I think we will find ourselves in agreement with him. What made the difference between punishment and mere revenge, we recall, was the feeling that the final authority was the gods, or Zeus. Odysseus' sense that he had not done it all himself was what kept him from vaunting above the slain. Conversely, the blind wilfulness of those who commit crime in the *Odyssey* consists ultimately in their failure to recognize anything superior to their own will. They do think they "do it all themselves." "We are much stronger than the gods," says the Cyclops in his ignorance; and, "Don't ever, yielding to foolishness, talk so big again," says Odysseus' cowherd to the suitor he has just killed; "let the gods have

the say-so, for they are much stronger." The point is that whether or not heaven "really" intervenes in particular cases, right is stronger than anybody. Homer has not, after all, given us a false picture of the world.

Herein lies the refutation of the charge sometimes made that the morality of the *Odyssey* is the morality of the concentration camp, that Odysseus' right to his possessions, his family, and his kingdom, and above all his right to punish the suitors, is simply the right of the stronger, of superior military effectiveness. What keeps this from being true is Odysseus' own recognition that there is something in the world bigger, more powerful, and more important than he is, something which makes the rules and in one way or another enforces them. Cyclopes, suitors, and Nazis, on the other hand, all operate on the assumption that their own will, individual or collective, is supreme; that there is no reason to refrain from doing anything they wish which seems within their powers; that accordingly the weak and hungry, guests, suppliants, and beggars never need to be respected. On this point, there is no question that the poem sides with Odysseus and against the concentration camp. Homer's morality, I think we must conclude, is ultimately neither repugnant nor naïve.

Why Does Wise Penelope Act So Rashly?

Frederick M. Combellack

In most of the scenes in which Penelope appears in the *Odyssey*, Homer presents her as a wise woman, in many ways the intellectual equal of her husband, the shrewd Odysseus. Yet, as Frederick M. Combellack, professor emeritus of classics at the University of Oregon, points out, in the passages in which she interacts with the disguised Odysseus, thinking him to be a beggar, she shows signs of having made a rash and seemingly needless decision. She has made up her mind that she may as well go ahead and marry one of the suitors, despite having recently learned that her long-lost husband might at that very moment be back in Ithaca. Attempting to explain this apparent discrepancy in the text, Combellack offers the views of some leading Homeric scholars, as well as his own.

Homer defines Penelope for us in a series of repeatedly emphasized pairs: her main qualities are her beauty and her prudence. Her deepest prevailing emotions are longing for her husband's return and loathing for the thought of a second marriage. Her main activities are weeping and sleeping. Of course, she weaves, like all of Homer's women, but nothing much is made of this. She has no scene corresponding to the picture of Helen coming into her great hall with her maids, her silver work basket, and her blue wool. We are not even told anything about the pattern in her cloth, as we are told in the *Iliad* that Helen's weaving showed the battles of the Greeks and the Trojans. This is the more remarkable in that her weaving of Laertes' shroud is an important element in the background of Homer's story. But even this is kept in the background, and it is not until the very last book of the

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poem that we are told that this piece of cloth was large and shone like the sun or the moon.

ODYSSEUS IN BEGGARLY GUISE

Our problem concerns the character of Penelope, her situation, and one of her actions, as these are portrayed in the *Odyssey*. If the relevant evidence is to be clearly before us, we must examine in some detail some parts of the poem. In Book 19, after Odysseus and Telemachus have removed the arms from the hall, Penelope, looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite, leaves her room, comes into the hall, and sits by the fire on a chair decorated with ivory and silver, a chair made by the craftsman Icmalius. The scene has been impressively set for the long-postponed first conversation between Penelope and Odysseus, an Odysseus still in the beggarly guise imposed upon him by Athena. The rest of the book is given over to this scene.

The beggar makes a fine impression on Penelope, convincing her that he entertained Odysseus for a fortnight in Crete twenty years earlier. Before, she had regarded him only with pity; now he will be a respected friend. Having won her confidence, the beggar then announces that he just recently heard that Odysseus is close to Ithaca. Indeed, he would have arrived some time ago had he not decided to go to Dodona [site of the famous religious oracle dedicated to Zeus] to ask whether he should return to his native land openly or in secret. The beggar swears an oath that Odysseus will very soon be home. . . . "I could well wish that this would happen," says Penelope, "but I think Odysseus will not come home now."

After the longish episode of the footbath (during which Penelope sits distracted by Athena), Penelope speaks again to the beggar, this time in more intimately personal terms. She describes her own miseries during these long lonely years and then turns to the presently pressing problem: should she continue as she has been, staying with her son and watching over the property, or should she marry the best of the suitors? While Telemachus was a child, he kept her from marrying again, but now the pressure from him works the other way; he is concerned about the property which the suitors are destroying.

She then asks the beggar to interpret her dream of the eagle who came and killed her flock of geese and then, as

she wept over the dead geese, returned and told her that the geese were really the suitors and that he who was an eagle is now her husband Odysseus. The beggar sensibly replies that Odysseus has himself interpreted her dream for her in the only possible way. "Dreams are hard to interpret," says Penelope, "and those that come through the ivory gate are deceitful. Those that come through the horn gate are reliable, but I don't think my dream came from there."

It is at this point that Penelope announces that tomorrow she will leave Odysseus's home. She will set the contest of the bow and the axes, and the winner of the contest will take her away from the beautiful, wealthy home, "which I think I shall remember even in my dreams." Odysseus urges her to set the contest (and well he might); and Penelope, after a few gracious words to the beggar, goes up to her room and cries herself to sleep.

WEAVING THE SHROUD

This scene in Book 19 is enough in itself to make us ask why it is that Penelope, who has waited so long, and who regards a second marriage with such horror, makes up her mind to choose a second husband, when she has just been thinking about this remarkably clear dream (we are not told when she had the dream) and has just received from the apparently reliable beggar the assurance under oath that Odysseus will very soon be home.

There is reasonably clear evidence in the poem that Penelope has long been under considerable pressure to marry again and that this pressure has very recently been greatly increased. Once or twice in the poem we are told that her father and her brothers are eager for her to marry. Some three or four years ago, when Telemachus was about seventeen and might be felt to be at least approaching manhood, there had apparently been a vigorous effort to get her to marry. To avoid marriage, she had hit upon the device of Laertes' shroud, and it would seem that the agreement had been that if the suitors would wait until the weaving was finished then Penelope would, on completing the shroud, choose a second husband. For three years Penelope enjoyed a kind of precarious security, weaving by day, unraveling by night, until her trick was discovered because of the treachery of one of the servants. That the trick worked so long says more for the cleverness of Penelope than for the intelligence

of the suitors. . . . We must conclude that Odysseus's arrival in Ithaca followed close upon the completion of the shroud. At the time of the opening of the *Odyssey*, Penelope has very recently finished the weaving, at most only a week or two ago, very possibly only a few days ago. I do not know whether the fact that the weaving has just been completed should make us feel that Penelope should be more willing or less willing to put off the hated decision for another week or so. I should expect that, if anything, a fortnight's delay might seem more reasonable under the very recently increased pressure than if she had already delayed for some time. . . .

THE PROBLEM WITH PRUDENT PENELOPE

Another factor which is relevant to our judgment on Penelope's conduct is the prophecy of Theoclymenus. Earlier on this very same day on which Penelope makes her decision, she had been told under oath by the prophet Theoclymenus that Odysseus was actually in Ithaca planning evil for the suitors. Penelope courteously replies, "I could certainly wish that what you say might be true. If so, you would receive such gifts from me that anyone who met you would say that you were a lucky man."

Finally, in her remarks to the suitors in Book 18, Penelope said that when Odysseus left for Troy he told her to marry again if he had not returned by the time Telemachus was bearded.

We may now summarize Penelope's situation at the moment when she announces to the beggar her decision to choose a new husband by means of the bow contest:

Very recently, maybe only a few days ago, she has finished the weaving which enabled her to put off the hated decision for some years. Her father and her brothers have made it clear that they think she should marry again, though we cannot be sure when their influence was first brought to bear. She is herself aware that postponing the marriage is unfair to Telemachus, since it involves a steady depletion of his inheritance. And Telemachus is now at an age when Odysseus told her to marry again, though it is not certain either when he first arrived at this age. These are the factors impelling Penelope to take the step she does, and it must be agreed that their cumulative weight is considerable. None of the factors, however, is of a sort to require her to make an

immediate decision instead of delaying for, say, a week or two if, in addition to her deep-seated reluctance, there are any other factors which counsel a short further postponement. Homer has made the presence of such factors abundantly clear. A few hours ago a prophet has solemnly assured her that Odysseus is actually in Ithaca. This very night, while the beggar has been having his footbath, she has been musing on this dream whose transparent meaning is that the suitors will be killed by her husband. And the beggar, who has impressed her so favorably that he has now become a respected guest and friend, has just solemnly assured her that Odysseus is not far from Ithaca and will very soon be home. An important feature of the statements by the prophet and the beggar is that only a very short time will be necessary to test their truthfulness.

Our problem is distressingly clear: why does the prudent Penelope resolve to marry again at this precise moment when she has no overpowering reasons for an immediate decision and does have these plausible reasons for at least a short delay?

READING BETWEEN HOMER'S LINES

There have, of course, been various attempts to answer this question. One answer has recently been restated by [Homeric scholars Denys] Page and [G.S.] Kirk: Penelope's illogical decision, taken together with some other features of the poem . . . "supports the probability that an earlier version, in which the contest was arranged in full collusion between husband and wife, has been extensively but inadequately remodelled by the large-scale composer." Whether or not we are prepared to accept this theory, we must, I think, admit that it cannot be disproved. Unlike many guesses about what lies back of Homer, this guess is supported by an unusually large number of details in the poem which are otherwise at the least somewhat odd. The oddities have been well discussed by Page and Kirk, and there is no need to rehearse them here.

Among the Unitarians [those scholars who hold that Homer was the sole author] the closest approach to this explanation is probably that in Chapter X of W.J. Woodhouse's *The Composition of Homer's Odyssey*. In Woodhouse's view, Homer has reached an impasse in his plot. "Willy nilly, one or other of the actors in the story must do something, in

order that the whole thing may go forward. If the poet cannot find in his characters what he needs in the way of motive power, he must just contribute it out of his own head." So here, the story must go on, even at the cost of consistency in Penelope's character. For Woodhouse, as for Page and Kirk, Homer's difficulties are rooted in his sources. But for Woodhouse, these are various old "Tales," not a different version of the *Odyssey*.

It was inevitable that solutions such as these should seem to some of Homer's admirers an outrageous aspersion on Homer's craftsmanship. An important element in the derogatory explanation is that in some of Homer's sources, whether earlier "Odysseys" or "Tales," husband and wife are identified to each other before the slaughter of the suitors. We have recently been asked to believe that in our *Odyssey* Penelope really penetrates Odysseus's disguise before she decides on the contest of the bow. This view has been presented in two able articles by P.W. Harsh and the late Anne Amory. I am not sure I have read any suggestion about difficulties in Homer which I should accept with more pleasure than this one, if I thought it were possible. There are, however, two reasons for rejecting it, either of which would be fatal even alone. In the first place, the theory requires us to assume that Homer, regularly the most straightforward and lucid of poets, has chosen to wrap an important feature of his story in a mystery which we can penetrate only by reading between his lines and assuming that he meant things which he did not say. I should think nearly everyone would agree that Homer is not that kind of poet.

The second objection to the theory is contained in Homer's picture of Penelope at the beginning of the next book. After her talk with the beggar, Penelope goes up to her room and weeps for Odysseus until Athena puts her to sleep. (Even this does not seem altogether appropriate for a woman who believes that Odysseus is home.) Book 20 opens with a picture of the sleepless Odysseus, who is finally also put to sleep by Athena. But as he falls asleep, Penelope wakes up. She cries and wails and calls upon Artemis to kill her at once. . . . Better to go down under the earth than to gladden the heart of an inferior man. All this fits perfectly with the Penelope whom Homer has just described, resolved to choose a second husband tomorrow, but hating the thought of it. But Penelope's words are completely incom-

patible with the Harsh-Amory woman who knows that Odysseus is asleep downstairs. . . .

WHAT SHE SHOULD HAVE DONE

We have seen good reason to wonder at Penelope's conduct, but we are not yet through with her. The timing of her resolve to choose a new husband has been much discussed, and many have found her conduct here out of keeping with her character. But there is another aspect of her conduct which is even more inexplicable.

Homer has portrayed for us a woman whose intelligence is frequently emphasized in the poem, and in Book 23 he shows her more than a match for the brilliant Odysseus himself. He has also emphasized that she is under great pressure to marry again. Finally he has made it clear that the thought of a second marriage fills her with such loathing that even death seems preferable. How is such a woman to solve her problem?

Some years ago she hit upon the device of the shroud. She cannot have imagined that this would be more than a delaying action. Indeed, she must have been remarkably sanguine if she expected the delay to be as long as it actually was. This useful device has now lost its usefulness. What can she do next? The obvious answer, I should think, is look for another device. The really amazing thing about the intelligent Penelope's conduct is that it does not occur to her that she has ready to hand another device which will not merely postpone her second marriage, but will solve her problem permanently.

In the storeroom of her palace, there is a splendid bow, an heirloom from the great archers of an earlier generation. It is an extremely hard bow to string. With it Odysseus in the days before the war used to perform a difficult trick of shooting "through the axes" set up in his great hall. There is every reason to believe that no one but Odysseus (and possibly his son) could string the bow and shoot through the axes.

Penelope's problem almost solves itself. All she need do is pretend to the suitors that she has made up her mind to delay no longer. She has not, however, been able to decide which of her many suitors to choose, and so she will allow a contest with her husband's bow to make the decision for her. . . .

This, I suggest, is the obvious solution that should have occurred to the kind of woman Homer has portrayed. Her

failure to think of it has long seemed to me the great defect in the plotting of the *Odyssey*. And Homer could have told the story in this way with only the slightest and easiest changes in the story as it now stands: one or two lines to tell us that Penelope's proposal is a trick and not seriously meant; one or two adding the proviso that will rid the house of the suitors; one or two telling us that after having decided on the pseudo-contest, she woke in the night and was reduced to despair as she wondered if one of the suitors might just possibly succeed. Everything else in the poem can be left exactly as it is. There is no need to tell the beggar that the contest is a trick; the suitors will fail to string the bow; Odysseus will get the bow into his hands, and the suitors will be destroyed. The story told in this form not only saves Penelope from any charge of illogical conduct, but also has a special appropriateness to the extremely intelligent woman we have been assured she is. In the story as we have it, Penelope, the model of cautious, shrewd intelligence, acts on this one occasion like a rash, precipitate fool. It is quite understandable that Homer's readers have often wondered why.

Deception Used for Comic Effect in the *Odyssey*

Reynold Z. Burrows

One of the hallmarks of Odysseus's character is his craftiness and gift for deceiving people. Perhaps the most familiar example of this gift occurs in the *Iliad*, when he conceives the plan for the Trojan horse, which is instrumental in the Greek victory. In keeping with the heroic but often grim tone of the *Iliad*, there is nothing humorous about this use of deception. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, contends scholar Reynold Z. Burrows, formerly of Sweet Briar College, contains many examples of deception used for comic effect. He cites episodes involving Odysseus and other characters, including some of the gods, to support his argument that Homer's ancient audiences found the "dramatic interplay between deceiver and deceived" amusing and entertaining.

Human society, as depicted in the *Odyssey*, is genial and expansive; this is a world of unhurried moments, urbane, lighthearted, and courteous. The exigencies of *timé* or honor are still important, but less consciously so, in this fabled world where *all* is possible and where the goal of life is not glorious death on the battle-field as in the *Iliad*, but to explore and to survive with a passionate determination. Ingenuity replaces brawn, and in this world is far more important, since, indeed, the adversaries Odysseus meets are often superhuman, and he must use his wits to survive. Even in the case of the suitors their very number ranks the slaying with the marvelous, the unbelievable. Odysseus does survive by using his intellectual acuity, and, in particular, his ability to deceive, as for example in the episode of the Cyclops.

Excerpted from Reynold Z. Burrows, "Deception as a Comic Device in the *Odyssey*," *Classical World*, vol. 59, no. 2, October 1965, pp. 33-36. Reprinted by permission of *Classical World*.

DECEPTION A COMIC DEVICE?

When Odysseus lands in Ithaca and is asked by Athena in disguise who he is, the poet tells us that "it (the truth) was on the tip of his tongue, but ever loyal to his crafty nature he held it back." . . . This is the quality by which Homer wishes Odysseus to be identified; this tendency to deceive is not a "motiveless malignity" but an intellectual trademark, so to speak, without which Odysseus would lose his identity.

It was very aptly observed by [French moralist Jean de] LaBruyère in the Seventeenth Century that life is a comedy for the man who thinks and a tragedy for the man who feels. Odysseus is the thinking man *par excellence* in the literature of antiquity and he views his world of romantic adventure with a detachment and objectivity that rarely touches his innermost being, his deepest feelings. He meets vicissitudes with resignation and even with a degree of anticipation, however bitterly he may lament his belated return to Ithaca. But Odysseus seems *most* the thinking man when he is *most* the deceiving man, and consequently the deceptions in the *Odyssey* may be very closely linked with comedy. Furthermore, I believe that, at the same time, this element of deception, so necessary for survival, provides the *chief* source of comic amusement in the *Odyssey*. . . . We certainly know how frequently the device of mistaken identity is used on the comic stage. But in the *Odyssey* the element of deception affords the reader a very special and varied delight. In developing this point we should first inquire briefly and generally into the nature of the comic in Homer's *Odyssey*.

VARIOUS COMIC ELEMENTS

Clearly we must not attribute to Homer a comic intention where there probably was none. Telemachus in Book III of the *Odyssey* is asked politely, in all seriousness, and without any implication of moral opprobrium whether he is a pirate or not. Odysseus boasts to the Phaeacians that he is noble Odysseus and his fame reaches heavenward; there are many occasions when Odysseus moans and groans when beset by real or imaginary dangers, behaving according to the standards of Homer's society: these situations seem comic enough to us, given our cultural values, but it is open to doubt that they appeared so to Homer.

Undoubtedly, elements comic to both Homeric society and to our own do exist in the *Odyssey*, such as the farcical

episodes involving the Cyclops, the Sirens, and Aeolus; the coarse humor of the love of Ares and Aphrodite. There is the high comedy of manners played especially in the scenes with Nestor, Helen and Menelaus, Alcinous and Arete. . . . Knowing so little about the age in which the epic was created we are not in a position to detect satire, political, social, or religious; but the very nature of satire is topical and suggests an immediate context; consequently it would very probably be out of place in a work of such scope, grandeur, and timelessness as the *Odyssey*. One may detect some glimmers of mock epic, perhaps, as in the scene in Ithaca between Odysseus and Athena in Book XIII; in which Athena seems to be a parody and a burlesque of herself: when reproached by Odysseus, she appears somewhat pedestrian and a little silly in her excuses.

A DEFT INTERPLAY OF INTELLECTS

But Homer apparently found as the most intriguing ingredient of humor the device of deception, which appears so often in the *Odyssey*; the very frequency with which it occurs would seem to establish it as the supremely amusing and diverting expression of the comic. What was the Greek attitude toward lying and deception? Indeed, we know the delight all audiences feel in watching deception practiced: one feels smug superiority in the possession of knowledge denied to others. Further, the Greeks of antiquity were particularly enthralled by a good story told with effective delivery; in historical times adherence to the truth was often a secondary consideration, as we may judge, for example, from extant speeches of the orators and statements throughout Greek literature showing the paramount importance the Greeks placed on the art of persuasion, *the power to charm*; and we may be sure that the injunctions against falsehoods voiced by the moralists from time to time, although certainly desirable in the instances of political or forensic oratory, were still few and managed to exert little influence. One has only to recall the notorious example of brilliant Alcibiades [the controversial fifth-century B.C. Athenian politician], who, although a proven traitor, succeeded in winning over the affections of his fellow citizens. Evidently his persuasive charm and attractiveness counted for more than the record of his scandalous career. Returning to literary and dramatic fictions . . . judging from the frequency in drama of decep-

tion scenes the average Greek must have derived much whimsical stimulation from this source, and in this respect the Greeks were like precocious children, who sometimes are willing partners in a playful deception because of the delight afforded by the imaginary, the inventive, by a shared intimacy; and when a skillful poet adds dramatic effects, proper diction, careful structure, and an illusion of spontaneity to the deception, the nimble and deft interplay of intellects, we reach something like artistic perfection. A kind of emotional rapport between the spectator and the characters is thus produced, quite outside the sphere of conscious moral considerations, and predicated on the quite correct assumption that beneath the superficial and literal falsehood is found the substratum of universal and poetic truth; and we must not forget that the poet was regarded fundamentally as a teacher.

ODYSSEUS' DEEP-SEA YARNS

We may then apply what we have said about deception portrayed in the drama to deception as we find it in the epic and we may infer a similar delight on the part of the reader or listener. We see that the Homeric gods themselves regularly practice deception, as in Athena's assumption of the form of Mentor and Mentis in the *Odyssey*, and in Hera's beguiling of Zeus in the *Iliad*, sometimes heartlessly and with disastrous results, as in *Iliad* XXII in which Achilles slays Hector aided by Athena who deceives the Trojan in the guise of his brother Deiphobus. Although a powerful device, deception when used in the works of Homer and other poets for the exploitation or undoing of an innocent individual (I omit, of course, the Cyclops), can arouse only indignation. We need only observe how often in the *Odyssey* Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are excoriated for their vile deception of Agamemnon. This, to be sure, has no connection, quite obviously, with the use of guile to produce a *comic* effect. In Book XIII of the *Odyssey* Athena actually praises Odysseus for his attempt to deceive her! "We are both adept at chicanery," she purrs and then proceeds to aid her favorite in his deception and slaying of the suitors.

The deep-sea yarns are unmistakable evidence of Homer's decided preference for the use of deception as a comic technique. All these occur in the last twelve books of the *Odyssey* and are told by Odysseus to Athena: Eumaeus, the loyal

swineherd; Antinous one of the suitors; Penelope, his wife; and Laertes, his father. In some of these he pretends to a Cretan background and these stories have been thought to contain material of pre-Homeric saga which had become embedded in the Homeric poems. Indeed Homer is so intrigued with the comic possibilities of the yarns that he seems reluctant to let go of the idea. These yarns have similar material; if they had all been absolutely the same we could dismiss this similarity as repetitions (perhaps for the convenience of the reciter) such as are found elsewhere in the Greek epic. We might even say that Homer was nodding. But Homer evidently wished to exhibit here in the tales of Odysseus a most



ATHENA PRAISES ODYSSEUS FOR DECEIVING HER

This is an excerpt from the cleverly written scene in which Athena deceives Odysseus while he vainly attempts to deceive her.

Athena now appeared upon the scene. She had disguised herself as a young shepherd, with all the delicate beauty that marks the sons of kings. A handsome cloak was folded back across her shoulders, her feet shone white between the sandal-straps, and she carried a javelin in her hand. She was a welcome sight to Odysseus, who came forward at once and accosted her eagerly 'Good-day to you, sir,' he said. 'Since you are the first person I have met in this place, I hope to find no enemy in you, but the saviour of my treasures here and of my very life. . . . But what I beg of you first is to tell me exactly where I am. What part of the world is this? What is the country called and who live here?'

'Sir,' said the goddess of the gleaming eyes, 'you must be a simpleton or have travelled very far from your home to ask me what this country is. It has a name by no means so inglorious as that. In fact it is known to thousands. . . . My friend, the name of Ithaca has travelled even as far as Troy; and that, they say, is a good long way from Achaea [Greece].'

Odysseus' patient heart leapt up as the divine Pallas Athena told him this, and he revelled in the knowledge that he was on his native soil. He answered her readily enough, but not with the truth. It had been on the tip of his tongue, but loyal as ever to his own crafty nature he contrived to keep it back.

'Of course,' he said, 'I heard tell of Ithaca even over there across the seas in the spacious land of Crete. And now I have come there myself with all these goods of mine, leaving the

complex and varied comic effect, an effect considered at once psychologically engrossing and aesthetically pleasing, involving, as it does, a dramatic interplay between deceiver and deceived; and here too was abundant scope for the colorful depiction of the crafty, imaginative, vivacious, and knavish. With the poet's sure touch are revealed in these five tales the agility and spontaneity of Odysseus' intellect, his sympathetic power, his puckish wit, each tale rather appropriate to the person addressed and to the situation in which it occurs. . . .

The tales all start plausibly with genealogies. Homer has Odysseus pose often in these tales as a Cretan, one of a peo-

other half of my fortune to my children. For I had to take to my heels. I had killed Idomeneus' son, the great runner Orsilochus, who was faster on his feet than any living man in the whole island of Crete. He tried to fleece me of all the spoil I had won at Troy, my wages for the long-drawn agonies of war and all the miseries that sea-travel means, merely because I refused to curry favour with his father by serving as his squire at Troy. . . . I hastily sought out a Phoenician ship, threw myself on the mercy of its honest crew, and with a liberal donation from my booty persuaded them to take me on board. . . . We beat about for a time, and in the night we made this island and rowed the ship helter-skelter into harbour. . . . We all tumbled out of the ship and lay down just as we were. I was so exhausted that I fell sound asleep. Meanwhile the crew fetched my goods out of the good ship and dumped them down on the sand where I lay. After which they embarked once more and set sail for their own fine city of Sidon, leaving me and my troubles behind.'

The bright-eyed goddess smiled at Odysseus' tale and caressed him with her hand. Her appearance altered, and now she looked like a woman, tall, beautiful, and accomplished. And when she replied to him she abandoned her reserve.

'What a cunning knave it would take,' she said, 'to beat you at your tricks! Even a god would be hard put to it.'

'And so my stubborn friend, Odysseus the arch-deceiver, with his craving for intrigue, does not propose even in his own country to drop his sharp practice and the lying tales that he loves from the bottom of his heart. But no more of this: we are both adepts in chicane. For in the world of men you have no rival as a statesman and orator, while I am pre-eminent among the gods for invention and resource.'

ple famous as sea-roving adventurers. The stories he tells deal with elements common to the experience of Odysseus: intrigue, shipwreck, piracy, adventure, a mutinous crew, descriptions of himself and his own adventures, but, rather oddly, there is *nothing* of the supernatural in these tales; there occur no such hair-raising adventures as those with the Cyclops, Aeolus, Circe, Scylla, Charybdis. This is possibly because these latter experiences do not occur in the realm of plausibility, and Odysseus is endeavoring to persuade his listeners of happenings within their understanding.

THE JOY OF DECEIVING

What then of the *Apologue to Alcinous*, Books IX–XII, in which Odysseus tells of his adventures with fabled monsters? Could he in his playful way have concocted these stories of the marvelous just for the Phaeacians, an unearthly people close to the gods and dwelling on the borders of a fantastic world, stories within, so to speak, the limits of *their* own experience, Odysseus knowing as he does “the minds of men”? Is he being “true to his nature” here as well in carrying on a deception of never-never-land people? Only Calypso, the nymph who received him and with whom he stayed for eight years, is not included in the *Apologue*, and it is tempting to follow this reasoning in reaching an understanding of the character of Odysseus and the importance of deception as an element of Homeric humor. . . .

In conclusion, the tendency to deceive, then, that we find first so predominant in Homer is, in the *Odyssey*, consistently employed for an intellectually comic effect, and Homer is at pains to delight us with deception whenever artistically practicable even in the last book, in which Odysseus cannot forego the joy of deceiving his own father Laertes; true, he does desist, but not before the comic trickery has come close to tragedy; and consequently the effect of this particular deception is quite stunning.

CHRONOLOGY

B.C.

CA. 3000–1100

Bronze Age of Greece, in which people used bronze tools and weapons.

CA. 1400–1200

Mycenaean civilization dominates the Aegean sphere and utilizes a syllabary writing script modern scholars call Linear B.

CA. 1250

Date proposed for the Trojan War by fifth-century B.C. Greek historian Herodotus, shown by modern scholars to be essentially correct.

CA. 1200–1100

Perhaps after a period of civil strife among Mycenaean kingdoms, the Dorians, a warlike and culturally backward Greek-speaking people, invade Greece, causing the final collapse of Mycenaean civilization.

CA. 1100–800

Dark age of poverty and illiteracy in Greece.

CA. 850–750

Most likely period in which Homer, traditionally accepted as the author of the epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, lived.

CA. 750–700

The Greeks become literate again, this time employing the Phoenician alphabet.

566

Oral recitations of the Homeric epics become part of Athens’s sacred religious festival, the Panathenaea.

CA. 550-530

Athenian leader Pisistratus commissions a group of scholars to commit the Homeric epics to writing (or perhaps to edit already existing written texts).

CA. 509-508

World's first democracy established in Athens; in Italy, a group of Rome's richest landowners throw out their king and establish the Roman Republic.

CA. 470-450

Athens's so-called golden age, during which it creates a powerful Mediterranean empire, expands its democracy, and builds the Parthenon and other magnificent temples atop its Acropolis.

336-323

Greek conqueror Alexander the Great spreads Greek culture throughout the Near East, including Egypt, where he establishes the city of Alexandria.

CA. 280-150

Zenodotus and other Greek scholars working in Alexandria compare and edit existing and differing versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, eventually creating a standardized "vulgate" version of the epics that survives, with minor changes, into modern times.

146

Having defeated the Greek kingdoms established by Alexander's successors, Rome imposes direct rule on Greece.

A.D.**476**

The Roman Empire ceases to exist as a political entity; in the following centuries, as medieval European kingdoms grow from its wreckage, Homer's epics survive in handwritten copies.

1488

First printed text of Homer's works appears in Florence, Italy.

1870

In an effort to prove that Homer's Troy was a real place, German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann begins digging at Hisarlik, a mound in northwestern Turkey, and discovers

several ancient cities built one on top of another; he eventually concludes that Troy II is the legendary city of the *Iliad*.

1876

Schliemann begins excavations at Mycenae, in southeastern Greece, initiating an age of archaeological discoveries of Mycenaean civilization and reappraisals of Homer's epics.

1922

Homer is popularized for many who have never read his works in Irish author James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, which utilizes the framework and themes of the *Odyssey*.

1932-1938

A University of Cincinnati expedition led by American archaeologist Carl Blegen undertakes a thorough excavation of Hisarlik; Blegen shows that Troy VIIa, rather than Troy II, was likely the Homeric city.

1951

Scholar Richmond Lattimore publishes his highly acclaimed translation of Homer's *Iliad*.

1952

English amateur linguist Michael Ventris deciphers Linear B, showing that it is an archaic form of Greek and therefore that the Mycenaeans, Homer's Achaean heroes, were early Greeks.

1955-1956

Homer receives further popularization in two major films: the Italian *Ulysses*, based on the *Odyssey*, and the American *Helen of Troy*, depicting events from the *Iliad* and other epics from the Trojan cycle.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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Editor's Note: In a poll conducted in the 1980s of seventy-eight professors then teaching Homer in well-known colleges and universities, more than three-quarters of the re-

spondents indicated their preference for the 1951 Lattimore translation of the *Iliad*; Robert Fitzgerald's and E.V. Rieu's versions scored second and third place, respectively. Regarding the *Odyssey*, most preferred Fitzgerald's translation, with Lattimore's and Rieu's versions tied for second place. The other translations listed above are also excellent and widely read.

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