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ODYSSEUS'S NOSTOS AND THE ODYSSEY'S NOSTOI: RIVALRY WITHIN THE EPIC CYCLE¹

ELTON T. E. BARKER · JOEL P. CHRISTENSEN

THAT Odysseus's nostos is one among many is explicit from the beginning of the narrative. "All the others had escaped sheer death" (ἐνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες ὅσοι φύγον ἀίπυν ὄλεθρον, 1.11), Homer recounts, "while he alone still longed for his nostos" (τὸν δ' οἷον, νόστου κερημένον, 1.13). Though other instances of escaping "sheer death" (αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον) relate merely the hope for enduring a threat,² here for once it refers to an actual survival, making Odysseus's difference from the rest even stronger.

At one level this early contrast anticipates tension that is felt throughout the poem.³ From the first, Odysseus is marked out as exceptional. Here, as elsewhere, his suffering is emphasized, because he is still deprived of his "homecoming day" (νόστιμον ἤμαρ). Evading sheer death involves not only escaping from the war or the dangers of the sea (πόλεμόν τε πεφευγότες ἤδ' ἐθάλασσαν); even once Odysseus has arrived home "he won't there have escaped his trials" (πεφυγμένος ἦεν ἀέθλων). Nostos means returning safely *and* securing one's home. An object comparison is Agamemnon, whose ill-fated nostos is insistently recalled.

At another level the poem's opening contrast also evokes alternative possible paths of song. Throughout, the *Odyssey* is alive to *other* nostoi, whose potential for generating narrative (or kleos) is enacted not only by the Ithacan bard, Phemius, but also by the Trojan War veterans themselves, Nestor and Menelaus.⁴ Even in the opening divine assembly, the gods look not to the tale that the poem announced, but instead ruminate on Aegisthus's murder of Agamemnon and the vengeance meted out by young Orestes.⁵ The recuperation and aggrandizement of Odysseus through comparison to other heroes is clearest in the Nekyia of book 11 where Achilles speaks *Odysseus's* language of fathers and sons and where even Heracles acknowledges their experiences as somehow equivalent.⁶ The multiplicity of nostoi tales even extends to this narrative, as if there were other versions of, or at least other ways of telling, *this Odyssey* – "from *some* point, Muse, sing...".

By referring to these heroes, and especially by reciting their tales, the *Odyssey* positions itself in and against rival nostoi traditions. Such an agonistic – at home both to Greek cul-

¹ A portion of this paper was originally presented at the Bryn Mawr Classics Colloquium and benefitted from the discussion. Gratitude is also due to Sheila Murnaghan, Erwin Cook and Christos Tzagalis. Some of the research was supported by a Center for Hellenic Studies Fellowship.

² Usually after some kind of divine revelation: *Il.* 14.507; 16. 283; cf. *Od.* 22.43

³ On how lines 11-13 establish typical motifs of nostos-narratives: DANEK 1998, pp. 37-38; cf. WEST 2013, p. 247. MINCHIN 2001, p. 175 interprets the poem as a whole suggesting "a new concept of heroic song", while PUCCI 1998, pp. 11-29 views the epithet *polytropos* as signalling the multifaceted nature of this epic and, perhaps, its lack of closure. On how *Od.* 1.3 anticipates different Odysseuses: PERADOTTO 1990, p. 76.

⁴ For a summary of the *Nostoi*: DAVIES 1989, pp. 77-83. The fragments are few and unimpressive: DAVIES 1988, pp. 66-71; cf. BENARBÉ 1996, pp. 93-105. For extensive commentary: WEST 2013, 244-87; cf. SEVERYNS 1928, pp. 370-417; HUXLEY 1969, pp. 162-173. FOWLER 2013, pp. 545-568 details the evidence of nostos-narratives in the early mythographers.

⁵ *Od.* 1.19-26. The opening twice separates one from others: just as Odysseus is the sole hero still separated from home, so too Poseidon is the sole god apart from Olympus where the *others* contemplate the fate of one of those heroic *others* (ἐνθ' ὅ γε τέρπετο δαιτὶ παρήμενος· οἳ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι, 1.26).

⁶ On the Odyssean Achilles: EDWARDS 1985. On Heracles in Homer: BARKER - CHRISTENSEN 2014.

ture in general and to the poetics of epic – facilitates the appropriation of figures, motifs and themes from the mythopoetic tradition in the service of the needs of this epic and this hero.¹ For example, alternative Odysseys may be glimpsed in other works and later commentators. Aristarchus records that in some traditions Telemachus goes from Sparta to Crete in search of news of his father.² Potentially more challenging, Hesiod records that Odysseus allegedly left multiple children to Circe and Calypso, one of whom, a certain Telegonus, was apparently responsible for killing his father unwittingly, as if playing Oedipus to Odysseus's Laius.³

In this paper we explore some of the ways in which our *Odyssey* engages with these other nostoi traditions and how they help prepare for and glorify Odysseus's return home. The process of telling nostoi tales in Ithaca, Pylos and Sparta dramatizes for the audience the selection and presentation of homecoming narratives, whose metapoetic potential is clear – *nostos* signifies both a homecoming and a *song about* homecoming.⁴ Since this process is in part a contemplation of which Odysseus is needed in this narrative, emphasis lies on how his story compares to possible versions both of nostoi narratives and of different Odysseys. In turn, part of this process reveals how both storytellers and *audience members* participate in a selection of different aspects to create the Odysseus they want. We focus in particular on how Telemachus negotiates these other nostoi, not always successfully, but always with a view to learning about the role he is to play in this epic. These other nostoi narratives are not only put at the service of the *Odyssey* to anticipate the content and structure of the monumental tale to come, as we will argue; they also help demonstrate what is at stake in narrating and experiencing nostos.

ORDERING THE EPIC COSMOS

What the Epic Cycle is and how it should be thought about is a typical starting point for talking about the *Odyssey's* nostoi.⁵ Proclus's summary in the Venetus A manu-

¹ On rivalry as central to the relationship of the Homeric epics' poetic to each other: PUCCI 1987, pp. 41-43; TSA-GALIS 2008; and to their appropriation of earlier poetic traditions: BARKER - CHRISTENSEN 2008 and 2011. MARKS 2002 applies similar arguments to the relationship between the *Cypria* and archaic epic. On agonism in Greek literature: GRIFFITH 1990; BARKER 2009. On the poet as a competitor: COLLINS 2004.

² The scholia read τινές “πέμψω δ' ἐς Κρήτην τε.” καὶ ἡ Ἀθηναῖα ἀλλαχοῦ (284) “πρῶτα μὲν ἐς Πύλον ἐλθεῖ καὶ ἔθεν δ' ἐς Κρήτην παρ' Ἰδομενεῖα ἀνακτα. ὁ γὰρ δεύτατος ἦλθεν Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων”, which WEST (2013, p. 249) consider as evidence of the existence of variant Odysseys. AHL and ROISMAN 1995, pp. 19-21 discuss these details as reflexes of the oral tradition in rebutting scholars (both ancient and modern) who claim that Homer “did not know” these other traditions.

³ For the births of Latinus and Italus from Telemachus and Telegonus: Hyg. *fab* 127; cf. GANTZ 1993, 712. The authenticity of Hesiod 1011-1018 and the implication of this genealogy for notions of ethnicity and culture in Italy: MALKIN 1998, pp. 180-191. The Panhellenic nature of the Homeric epics as an essential aspect of their difference from the (more local?) Cyclic poems: NAGY 1999 [1979], pp. 7-9. GRIFFIN 1977 interprets that difference as an identifier of quality; cf. DAVIES 1989, pp. 8-9. This argument, largely based on limited fragments and problematic testimonies, is more about the differences between a reconstructed ‘Epic Cycle’ and the Homeric poems once they have been textualized: BARKER 2008; cf. BURGESS 2001. GRAZIOSI and HAUBOLD (2005, p. 18) emphasize rather the “fundamental and striking consistency of language and compositional technique” displayed among the poems of Homer, Hesiod and the Epic Cycle.

⁴ See NAGY 1999 [1979], 97; MURNAGHAN 2002, p. 147. On *nostos* as “return to life and light”: FRAME 1978; and as “salvation, not death”: BONIFAZI 2009.

⁵ WEST (2013, p. 1) concedes that “the term ἐπικός κύκλος is not attested before the second century CE” but insists that the concept (and even terminology) existed prior to Aristotle. DAVIES (1989, pp. 1-5) is less certain. Alexandrian interest in the Epic Cycle is widely assumed, but this largely takes the form of discussion of variant accounts from “the younger poets”; the term *neoterói* is not always equivalent with *Kuklikoi*, however: SEVERYNS 1928, pp. 29-59, 69-70. Scholarly use of the description “Epic Cycle” can be slippery. It can indicate: (1) the entire history of myth in epic form (starting with the *Theogony* or something like it); or (2) the series of poems that tell the Trojan War narrative (starting with the *Cypria* and ending with the *Odyssey*). Sometimes this includes heroic poems from other

script,¹ combined with other mythographic and scholarly testimonies, provides the names of poets and poems that allegedly make up the total narrative breadth of epic, which together tells the story of the past – or what Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold have called “cosmic history”.² This long view allows us to see epic poems as foundation narratives that map out the world from its origins (the *Theogony*), through the death of the race of the heroes (in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) to the present day (the *Works and Days*).³

Critical in this view for our reading is their orality. During composition-in-performance, the audience piece together the broader contexts of each song from its resonant components. For a later *readership*, however, these connections to these other stories and versions would no longer be active and activated.⁴ Even a cursory comparison will show that in some ways it is clear that Proclus used the *Odyssey* to make his summary;⁵ but some information is obviously drawn from elsewhere.⁶ Rather than seeing the Homeric poems as primary in this epic cosmos, it is perhaps better to regard them as rivals to other poems and traditions, glimpses of which are afforded by the Hesiodic remains,

traditions (Theban), and sometimes not: see BURGESS 2011, p. 184; WEST 2013, pp. 2-4; FANTUZZI and TSAGALIS 2014. Even a simple glance at extant epic fragments reveals a range and variety not easily conformable to these cycles. SEVERYNS uses a wider label (“Les Légendes Cycliques”) to include tales of the Danaids, Aegimus and Minyad (1928, pp. 177-195).

¹ For the records of Photius and Proclus: DAVIES 1989, pp. 1-5; BURGESS 2001, pp. 16-21; WEST 2013, pp. 1-15; and FANTUZZI - TSAGALIS 2014. Still unsurpassed as a commentary on Proclus is SEVERYNS 1938. On the relationship between Proclus and the epic cycle: BURGESS 2001, esp. pp. 16-18.

² See GRAZIOSI - HAUBOLD 2005, especially 38-39 where they specify that the cyclic poems in general are part of this process. FANTUZZI - TSAGALIS 2014 note that nearly all *epos* is ascribed in the archaic age to Homer. Cf. the view of Photius 319a30-34 who describes the Epic Cycle as a series of poems that begins with the story of Gaia and Ouranos and ends with Odysseus's death at the hands of his son Telegonus, who fails to recognize him. For PURVES 2010, pp. 77-89 the act of misrecognition points to the ultimate end of epic, in some ways prefigured (albeit differently) in our *Odyssey* through the prophecy of Teiresias, who foretells yet more wandering for Odysseus beyond the limits of the poem until a native of these far off lands mistakes his oar for a winning fan.

³ GRAZIOSI - HAUBOLD 2005. Assuming a correspondence between Proclus and the contents of a reconstructed epic cycle is difficult, especially since what we have in fragmentary form diverges from what we find in Proclus. It is also clear from the summary of Proclus in Venetus A that details may have been left out or altered because it was presented as an introduction to Homer: DAVIES 1989, pp. 6-7. Herodotus records different details for the *Cypria*'s return voyage of Paris than Proclus (2.117): BURGESS 2011, p. 185; cf. MARKS 2002. MÍGÚÉLEZ-CAVERO 2013, pp. 52-56 shows the lack of evidence that Triphiodorus “knew and used the Epic Cycle”: even in late antiquity sources for myth were from summaries not widely circulated poems apart from the two Homeric epics.

⁴ BARKER 2008.

⁵ Compare Proclus's summary about the disagreement between the Atreids (Ἀθηναῖ Ἀγαμέμνονα καὶ Μενέλαον εἰς ἔριν καθίστησι περὶ τοῦ ἔκπλου. Ἀγαμέμνων μὲν οὖν τὸν τῆς Ἀθηναῖς ἐξίλασόμενος χόλον ἐπιμένει) with the description of the same event in the *Odyssey* (μήνιος ἐξ ὀλοῆς γλαυκῶπιδος ἠβριμποάτρης / ἦ τ' ἔριν Ἀτρεΐδῃσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔθηκε; 3.135-136 and οὐδ' Ἀγαμέμνονι πάμπαν ἐήνδανε· βούλετο γὰρ ῥα / λαὸν ἐρυκακῆειν ῥέξει θ' ἱεράς ἐκατόμβας, / ὡς τὸν Ἀθηναίης δεινὸν χόλον ἐξάκασαιτο, 3.133-5). SEVERYNS (1928, p. 370) simply writes “ce début des nostoi imitait le récit de Nestor dans l'*Odyssee*” (cf. HUXLEY 1969, pp. 162-163; WEST 2013, pp. 248-249), while SCAFOGLIO (2004, p. 294) supposes a mutual reciprocity between a singular nostos poem and our *Odyssey*. WEST (2013, p. 18) argues that a “cyclic” approach starts with Aristotelian schools if not with Aristotle himself (*Poet.* 1459a37) when he makes distinctions between the *Cypria* / *Little Iliad* and the *Iliad* / *Odyssey* (18); cf. PFEIFFER 1968, pp. 227, 230). Both WEST and Pfeiffer (1968, p. 73) assume that Aristotle is using *kuklos* in the same way as later Alexandrian scholars use *kuklikos* at *Soph. El.* 110 171a10 (ὁ δὲ ὅτι ἡ Ὀμήρου ποιήσεις σχήμα διὰ τοῦ “κύκλος” ἐν τῷ συλλογισμῷ) and *Analyt. Post A* 12 b 32. FANTUZZI - TSAGALIS 2014 isolate six distinct stages for the evolution of the Epic Cycle, beginning with myth in general and terminating in the form summarized by Proclus for *readers* of Homer after passing through various degrees of textual fixity and authorial attribution.

⁶ The *Odyssey* refers to the homecomings of Philoctetes (3.190) and Idomeneus (3.191-192) whereas Proclus does not; in turn Proclus details the return of “Calchas, Leonteus and Polypoites” (who appear in the *Iliad*: DAVIES 1989, p. 77) and the burial of Teiresias, which WEST locates in a “Colophonian local tradition relating to the Apolline oracular site” (2013, p. 254). See also Apollod. *Epit.* 6.2 and Tzetzes on Lycophron 980. Proclus also has Achilles's ghost appear to Agamemnon. It is fairly obvious why our *Odyssey* – which features the ghost of Achilles at important moments in books 11 and 24 – might leave him out of the account of the Atreids' strife.

various scattered fragments, and the subject matter of later commentators.¹ In this, the *Suda*'s record, which implies that there were multiple poets of multiple nostoi narratives, is attractive given the multiform nature of myth and the spread of Greek culture from the archaic age into the Roman period.²

What concerns us here, then, is not whether a lost epic by a man named Apias or Agias named either the *Nostoi* or "the return of the Atreids" (ἡ τῶν Ἀτρειδῶν κάθοδος) is an important intertext for our *Odyssey*; assuming a specific lost poem, does little to aid in the interpretation of our *Odyssey*.³ We want to avoid the implication that these nostoi tales, occupying the shapes of poems as we would know them or even possessing the narrative outlines claimed for them by Proclus, shaped our *Odyssey*.⁴ That is something we simply do not and cannot know.⁵ Rather than trying to recuperate an original text, we are interested more in tracing the reception of different nostoi tales in the *Odyssey*, and investigating the role that the *Odyssey* plays in shaping the subsequent tradition. Our concern is not to try to 'reconstruct' supposed lost narratives but to investigate the ways in which the *Odyssey* represents nostoi motifs, phrases and traditions.

In earlier work we have used oral-formulaic theory to argue that it is advantageous not to treat other archaic poets and genres as responding to the Homeric epics in a hierarchical "top-down" model; rather, poets like Archilochus use the same linguistic and mythical repertoire to engage in poetic rivalry with Homer, a Homer who is just as responsive and appropriative of these other 'poets' and genres as they are of him.⁶ Other scholars have argued that assuming priority for either the Homeric epics or the Cyclic poems deprives both traditions of complexity and delimits the aesthetics of epic poetry too severely.⁷

What we would like to emphasize most in mentioning these approaches is that everything in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* functions for the advancement of *these particular epics*. With this principle in mind, we read the *Odyssey*'s use of rival traditions *intratextually*, examining how they are engaged in this poem's development of meaning and exploration

¹ Tsagalis (2008, pp. 67-68) explores the engaging notion that the *Odyssey* may allude to poems that formed after it; his argument shows how oral poetry necessarily reflects rival song traditions in the performance that creates a single text from "veriae lectiones on the level of myth" (68). For a thorough treatment of the *Odyssey*'s citation of itself and use of other traditions from a largely neoanalytical perspective: DANEK 1998 (pp. 1-7 for the introduction "Odyssey und epische Tradition"; and *passim* for the commentary). PAGE saw the *Odyssey*'s "inconsistencies and imperfections" (1955, p. 16) as a result not of the contributions of different authors but of attempts to blend elements from different folk-tale traditions.

² Νόστος: ἡ οἴκαδε ἐπάνοδος. παρὰ τὸ τῆς πατρίδος ἡδύ. ἢ ἡ ἀνάδοσις τῆς γέυσεως. καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ δὲ οἱ τοὺς Νόστους ὑμνήσαντες ἐπονται τῷ Ὀμήρῳ ἐς ὅσον εἰσὶ δυνατοί. φαίνεται ὅτι οὐ μόνος εἰς εὐρισκόμενος ἔγραψε νόστον Ἀχαιῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τινες ἕτεροι. Huxley (1969, p. 163) sees multiple nostoi-poems as likely deriving from "an elaborate tradition".

³ On the attribution of an epic *Nostoi* to Apias: DAVIES 1989, p. 77. Athenaeus cites from a poem that he calls "the return of the Atreids" ἡ τῶν Ἀτρειδῶν κάθοδος (399A), which HUXLEY 1968, pp. 167-168 sees as a different poem, though not DAVIES (1989, p. 82: and "most scholars"). West (2013, p. 247) speculates that the return of Atreids formed the basis for a single nostos poem. If a poem called the *Nostoi* existed, it ignored Odysseus's wanderings; but his travels were certainly reworked in lost tragedies: GANTZ 1993, pp. 707-708.

⁴ DAVIES 1989, pp. 4-5; MARKS 2002, pp. 3-4.

⁵ We do know that episodes from myth that appear in our *Odyssey* were popular long before the textualization of the epics. The wide circulation of the wooden horse lithos or the variety of Cyclops blinding episodes make this clear: SNODGRASS 1998; cf. ANDERSON 1997; BURGESS 2001; WEST 2013, p. 3. For the continuity of the epic cycle through the *Tabulae Iliacae*: SQUIRE 2011, pp. 82-94.

⁶ BARKER and CHRISTENSEN 2005; Cf. BARKER and CHRISTENSEN 2008, 2011 and 2014. On oral-formulaic theory: BARKER 2005. See also LORD 1960; FOLEY 1992; 1999; and 2002; GRAZIOSI - HAUBOLD 2005; KELLY 2010.

⁷ For the compositional influence of other poems as proposed by proponents of Neoanalysis: KAKRIDIS 1949; KULLMANN 1960 and 1984; DANEK 1998; CURRIE 2006. On its contributions to the analysis of Homer more generally, see e.g. BURGESS 2001; MONTANARI - RENGAKOS - TSAGALIS 2012.

of its themes.¹ Of course, because of the highly echoic and resonating character of narratives derived from an oral tradition, nothing within the poem can exist purely without engaging with the putative traditions without. In its original performance contexts, ancient epic relied upon the repetition of language and themes from other performances for the creation of dynamic meaning.² Our investigation of the way the *Odyssey* deploys and uses other nostoi narratives is essentially an experiment in returning some of this echoic life to the fossilized record of the performance, preserved by the text of our *Odyssey*.

SPINNING RIVAL TALES

Before investigating the broader nostoi tales embedded within the *Odyssey*'s opening movement, it will be helpful first to look at two examples, which directly shape our understanding of Odysseus and his narrative: the rival tales spun by husband and wife about Odysseus's deeds at Troy and the example of Agamemnon's failed nostos. While Helen and Menelaus's stories are not strictly nostoi, they contribute to the creation of Odysseus and the education of Telemachus and they are important to questions regarding the relationship between the *Odyssey* and tales outside the *Odyssey*. For their part, the different versions of Agamemnon's nostos most clearly reveal the active shaping of a story according to the needs of the present circumstance and in particular the narrator's engagement with his audience.

Odysseus at Troy

The open-ended nature of Odysseus's tale and his identity is central in the two competing accounts offered by the unhappy couple to Telemachus and his travelling companion, Peisistratus (4.219-234).³ In her opening gambit Helen concedes that it is impossible to tell all the stories that relate to Odysseus.⁴ This nod to the multiplicity of Odysseus's tales invites the audience to consider the Odysseus being offered to them and stands in marked contrast to the implied specificity of the demonstrative *keinos*⁵ used repeatedly to refer to Odysseus. *That* Odysseus prompts the question: *which* Odysseus?⁶ Significantly, however, the picture of Odysseus presented in these tales not only impacts on the story-

¹ In another paper (2014), we suggest that while *intertextuality* might be appropriate for describing meaningful repetitions of words, themes or plot patterns in fixed narratives, its emphasis on *texts* is not entirely apt for the echoic context of oral epic poetry. Nevertheless, scholars have successfully used the language of literary interpretation for discussion Homer: PUCCI 1987 and TSAGALIS 2008; CURRIE 2006 uses the term *allusion*, to bring out the author's conscious choice in moments of 'quotation'. On *intertextuality* as marking the interplay between two texts without positing any claims regarding authorial intention: D. Fowler (2000); cf. LYNE 1994.

² Egbert Bakker's recent use of the terms 'intertraditionality' and 'interformularity' helps to convey both the complexity of this process and its polysynchronous (diachronic and synchronic) axes. See BAKKER 2013; cf. TSAGALIS 2014; BARKER - CHRISTENSEN 2014.

³ On other evidence for Helen's trip to Egypt: DANEK 1998, pp. 101-105. On how the "open-ended perspective" of the *Odyssey* might point to post-Odyssean narratives: TSAGALIS 2008, pp. 76-82.

⁴ πάντα μὲν οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μνησσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω, / ὅσσοι Ὀδυσσεύος θαλασίφρονός εἰσιν ἔεθλοι, 4.240-41. For de Jong this *recusatio* motif has an "expressive function, indicating the *mass* of narrative material" (2001, p. 103, our emphasis), while Ford (1992, pp. 72-77) suggests that similar passages imply the need to be selective and thus privilege some information of other. The issue of selectivity may be reflected in the choice of diction: the earlier εἰκότα (238) used to describe what Helen *does* select HEUBECK, WEST and HAINSWORTH gloss as "suited to the occasion" (1988, p. 208). While the E scholion interprets this as meaning "the truth" (ἀληθῆ), others understand it as ἕμοια γὰρ καὶ προσήκοντα τῇ τέρψει and ἄρμοδια καὶ πρέποντα (Schol. in *Od.* 2.239 ex.): see PONTANI 2010, p. 251.

⁵ DE JONG 2001, p. 73 calls the use of *keinos* to refer to Odysseus "typical" as a pronoun used to refer to an absent person. Earlier she notes that: "fifty-nine out of a total of eighty-nine instance...concern him".

⁶ The nostoi recounted about Odysseus at the beginning of the *Odyssey* present us with a series of Odysseuses and interrogate the very nature (and limit) of identity: PERADOTTO 1990, 151-161.

teller's view of "which Odysseus" is important to them; the impact also extends to who they are themselves.

The duelling narratives of husband and wife explicitly draw attention to the different Odysseuses on offer, which both helps prepare for and anticipate the Odysseus who is coming home.¹ Helen's Odysseus is a man of disguise who crept into Troy as a beggar to spy on the Trojans (4.235-264) and escaped the notice of all – bar Helen herself, of course.² This is the crafty disguised beggar of the *Odyssey's* Ithacan episodes. Clearly, one of the functions of Helen's story is to help prepare our expectations. But there are repercussions for Helen herself in this selection. He inspired in her a desire for to return *home* (αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ ἤδη μοι κραδίη τέτραπτο νεέσθαι / ἅη οἴκόνδ', 4.259-260). In recognising Odysseus, Helen importantly also remembers *who* she was and *where* she wanted to be. According to Helen, after this she was happy to be going back home to her husband and daughter.³

Menelaus's very different recollection also carries the implication that these storytellers find the "Odysseus" they need *and* see themselves in the model that they reconstruct. Menelaus starts out by casting *himself* as a wayfaring sufferer, the way our epic casts Odysseus (3.267-268). But, rather than emphasizing his trickiness, Menelaus notes the way Odysseus restrained the men in the horse – including Diomedes and Menelaus himself – from falling for Helen's impersonation of their wives. This is not just a more *manly* Odysseus – he closes the mouth of Anticlus forcefully; he is a type of safeguard against other people's tricks (here Helen's).⁴ More importantly he is a leader who safeguards the execution of this trick (the wooden horse) and, perhaps symbolically, a figure interested in and capable of controlling speech, even narratives, as he countermands Anticlus's desire for his wife. In important ways this sets us up for suspense and even disappointment when Odysseus tells his own tale of failing to bring his men home and failing to control his *own* voice (when fleeing Polyphemos' cave). Again, *this* Odysseus is selected both as the one the external audience may desire and the one this speaker does. Helen's claim that in Odysseus she remembered who she was is answered in her husband's implication that Odysseus helped defend them against who she really is.

Agamemnon's nostos

The disastrous homecoming of Agamemnon, so well known to us from Aeschylus's plays, is less thoroughly treated in the *Odyssey* than it might first appear, and certainly less uniformly. In general terms it is no surprise why the *Odyssey* returns time and time again to the story of Agamemnon's fateful return and his son's retributive deeds. This *nostos* stands in clear comparison and contrast to the *Odyssey*: Odysseus could be the new Agamemnon, Penelope the new Clytemnestra, Telemachus the new Orestes. Indeed, its occurrences in the *Odyssey* reveal a multiformity where its emphasis changes depending on the context, the teller of the tale, and the audience listening to it.

¹ On this exchange: OLSON 1989; DE JONG (2001, pp. 101-102). Penelope was not faithful in all traditions; in some she was sent back to Ikarios, her father; in others, Odysseus killed her: GANTZ 1993, p. 713; cf. DANEK 1998, pp. 106-107. The *Odyssey's* commentators HEUBECK, WEST and HAINSWORTH (1988, pp. 208-209) discuss how these tales relate to the "Cyclic Epics by Lesches and Arctinus".

² Helen's tale seems to refer to t when Odysseus stole into the city to take the Palladion: DANEK 1998, pp. 108-110.

³ DE JONG notes that Helen's desire to return home is confirmed in the *Iliad* (2001, p. 103).

⁴ Aristarchus athetized this line because Anticlus isn't in the *Iliad* (so, the detail must come from the Epic Cycle: SEVERYNS 1928, p. 64).

The story is first introduced by the gods, by no less a figure than Zeus.¹ In an opening declaration that appears in some way to be programmatic, Zeus puts the blame for the evils that men suffer squarely on their shoulders: "Mortals are always blaming the gods. They say that evils come from us but they have pains beyond their fate because of their own recklessness" (ὦ πόποι, ὅϊον δὴ νῦ θεοὺς βροτοὶ αἰτιόωνται. / ἐξ ἡμέων γὰρ φασὶ κακ' ἔμμεναι· οἳ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ / σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόνον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν, 1.32-34).² To make his point Zeus introduces the comparison of Aegisthus, thereby activating the nostos of Agamemnon that consistently haunts Odysseus's return throughout. But Zeus is less concerned with the nostos tale itself than he is with how such tales *should be read*: Aegisthus deserved his fate since he failed to read the warnings from the gods. Odysseus's companions, who have already been described by the narrator in similar terms, and the suitors, who soon will be, are similarly condemned.³ From the beginning this particular nostos is expressly shown to serve as a paradigm. But *as a paradigm* it goes through various transformations.

When asked by Telemachus for news of his father, Nestor provides versions of Agamemnon's nostos that set out different ways of thinking about its relationship to the *Odyssey*. First of all he introduces the tale as *already* well known (3.193-204). Using exactly the same collocation that Telemachus uses of his father, Nestor proclaims that they would have heard how "Aegisthus devised for Agamemnon woeful doom" (ὥς τ' Αἰγισθοῦ ἐμήσατο λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον, 194). And it looks initially as if it is going to be a straightforward comparison to Telemachus's situation, as if his father were dead and/or his mother were the adulteress. He calls on Telemachus to "be brave so that men in the future may speak well of him" (καὶ σύ, φίλος, μάλα γὰρ σ' ὀρώω καλὸν τε μέγαν τε, / ἄλκιμος ἔσσο', ἵνα τίς σε καὶ δηλιγόνων ἐν εἴπη, 3.200).⁴

Yet, the *Odyssey* not only steers away from this kind of nostos; it also hints at alternative ways of telling this nostos.⁵ When Nestor again returns to Agamemnon's example at the end of his account of nostoi, it is in the context of providing Telemachus with information about Menelaus. But Nestor has little to say about Menelaus, other than the fact that it was Menelaus's absence that enabled Aegisthus to plan a great deed. Rather, the focus remains on Aegisthus, who is described as living the life of leisure, while the rest of the Achaeans toiled at Troy. Moreover, he is the one to corrupt Clytemnestra, who was initially resistant to his advances, by abandoning the bard, posted by Agamemnon to protect his wife, on a desert island. In this version, Aegisthus comes across as akin to the suitors, living it up in Odysseus's absence; this Clytemnestra a possible model for Penelope, once her tricks are exhausted. But this version too will fail to perform as an adequate model for the *Odyssey*, whose Penelope *will* flirt with the suitors (and under the watchful (and approving) eye of her disguised husband: *Od.* 18.205-283), and whose poet – the singer of this tale – won't be so easily removed from the scene.

¹ Katz suggests that where the Atreid theme threatens to "displace" the *Odyssey* at the epic's beginning, at the end (in the second Nekyia) Odysseus's story displaces and replaces Agamemnon's (1991, 193). Hernandez (2000, p. 356) sees the pattern pervading even into the Cyclops episode.

² This extends to Aegisthus, though the connection is odd (ὥς καὶ νῦν Αἰγισθοῦ ὑπὲρ μόνον Ἀτρεΐδαο 1.35). On the thematic importance of these lines for the *atasthalia* of the suitors and the theology of the *Odyssey*: DANEK 1998, pp. 41-42; cf. OLSON 1995, pp. 205-223. CLAY 1983 denies that Zeus's statement is programmatic for our Odysseus; cf. VAN DER VALK 1949, p. 243 and MARONITIS 1973, p. 95. In contrast, Cook (1995, pp. 34-37) argues that Zeus "tacitly assumes a causal link between human suffering and crime" (p. 34): rescuing Odysseus is an attempt to make amends.

³ On the *Odyssey*'s ethical outlook: KATZ 1991. For a discussion of the philosophical importance that Zeus emphasizes that Aegisthus was *warned*: Cook (1995, pp. 32-33).

⁴ Aristarchus athetized this line (cf. HEUBECK - WEST - HAINSWORTH 1988, p. 172 *ad loc.*), but, even if it doesn't logically flow from what Nestor has said, it sets up the following exchange.

⁵ For a survey of the abortive succession narrative that adds tension to the epic: MURNAGHAN 2002, pp. 138-139.

Menelaus's version, which caps his nostos narrative offers yet a different way of thinking about Agamemnon's nostos and the *Odyssey*. Menelaus emphasizes how his brother successfully avoided the dangers at sea and makes it back home. Yet his arrival does not escape the notice of Aegisthus's watchman and he is slaughtered along with his companions. Once again the possible intersections with Odysseus's tale are clear, particularly the joy that the hero experiences making it back to his homeland (*Od.* 13.259-260). But Odysseus's own arrival back on Ithaca is carefully framed by Athena, who tempers his joy with caution and steels his purpose for further trials ahead, which will involve *him* ambushing his would-be usurpers (*Od.* 13.392-428).

In each case different speakers use the paradigm of Agamemnon's nostos to elicit rather different example. This shows the influence of the context, as well as the concerns of the teller of the tale and the horizons of the audience.¹ This process points to the potential of any paradigm to fail because of the instability of its message but also anticipates and prepares us for the multifaceted and polysemic nature of the tale in which the retelling of Agamemnon's story is embedded.² The *Odyssey* far exceeds any attempt to put a limit on its signification by comparison to some other nostos tale and by doing so warns us of its own protean nature.

PERFORMING NOSTOI

The first four books of Odysseus's nostos anticipate his return through the story of Telemachus's search for his father and, in particular, the production of other nostoi tales.³ Using charged diction, common motifs and thematic resonances, the *Odyssey* presents multiple contexts for the singing of homecomings. We learn with Telemachus not only about the latest news of his father but also about the nostoi of his comrades-at-arms from Troy. Thematically the narratives provide points of connection between father and son,⁴ facilitate Telemachus' maturation,⁵ and introduce famous characters from the Trojan War tradition into a post-war narrative. Each scene establishes and advances the poetics of homecoming narratives; each scene also represents an increased length, complexity and obvious engagement with the wider (and being established) tradition of *nostoi*, culminating, of course, with Odysseus's *apologoi*.

For the rest of this paper we will consider the contexts of the telling of *nostoi* and what they can tell us about the production and reception of these tales. By paying close

¹ For a list of the episodes relating to Agamemnon: de Jong (2001, pp. 12-14); and a summary: GANTZ 1993, pp. 664-667. KATZ 1991 explores how "the House of Atreus" story functions in the narrative as part of an internal polemic (33); cf. MARKS 2008, 17-35; Olson (1995, pp. 24-42) similarly emphasizes the paradigmatic importance of the Atreid tales for both the story of the *Odyssey* and for the production and reception of narrative; cf. FELSON-RUBIN 1994, pp. 95-107. For Murnaghan (2002, pp. 146-148), the Orestes theme does not fit well into the *Odyssey's* needs.

² On the failure of exemplarity: GOLDHILL 1994, incidentally illustrated by the *Odyssey's* use of comparanda to Penelope.

³ A chief interpretive task for any audience of the epic is to figure out what exactly is going on in these books and how they are important to the epic as a whole: KATZ 1991, pp. 29-33. Murnaghan (1987, pp. 165-166) notes that the *Telemachy* reinforces and anticipates Odysseus's disguise by developing a connection between "storytelling and absence".

⁴ Athena (13.422) reveals to Odysseus that Telemachus had to win fame of his own. For Clarke (1963, p. 44), Nestor and Menelaus act as surrogate father figures who introduce Telemachus into the heroic world.

⁵ CLARKE 1967, 43 notes that ancient critics saw the *Telemacheia* as a form of *paideusis*, cf. HEITMAN 2005, pp. 58-62. For AUSTIN 1969, this education took the form of learning how to deceive. On Telemachus's journey as an initiation ritual: FELSON-RUBIN 1994, pp. 67-91. MARTIN 1993, pp. 232-239 explores how Telemachus's use of formulaic language in his speeches serve to characterize his maturation. As THALMANN (1998, p. 207) notes, however, there is something incomplete about this process: his journey is carefully organized and guided by Athena and his maturation is reversed, paused or stunted by his father's return (noted well by MURNAGHAN 1987, pp. 36-37.) For a recent discussion of the purpose of the *Telemachy*, see PETROPOULOS 2011.

attention to their composition and reception in performance, it is instructive to see how the epic frames and characterizes these other *nostoi* narratives.¹ In particular we will see that Odysseus's story is marked off as more grievous and lamentable principally because of its suspension – that is to say, its lack of closure.² This tour, by establishing Odysseus's *nostos* as the only one still to be open, helps to establish a hierarchy, where the *Odyssey* gradually silences all other *nostoi* in a performance of the last song being sung.

Phemius's nostalgic song

From its beginning the *Odyssey* marks out homecoming as a genre for careful attention. When we first meet Odysseus's wife and son among the suitors, Phemius "sings the grievous homecoming of the Achaeans, which Athena accomplished for them from Troy" (τοῖσι δ' αἰοιδὸς ἄειδε περικλυτός, οἱ δὲ σιωπῆ / εἴατ' ἀκούοντες· ὁ δ' Ἀχαιῶν νόστον ἄειδε / λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, 1.325-327).³ The comparison to the outer frame of the narrative – Odysseus's *nostos* tale – is clear, as demonstrated by the reaction of the suitors, who are, unsurprisingly, revelling in the tales of the difficult homecomings of the Achaeans from Troy. They at any rate readily make the connection to Odysseus, where they equate his continued absence with his death, a tale already completed and all ready to be told.⁴ Significantly, however, Homer stages a debate over the reception of Phemios's song that addresses precisely this question of closure and what *nostos* narrative means, as Penelope attempts to redirect the bard's song, before being silenced by her son.

Telemachus's assertive judgement picks up on the "one versus the many" theme trailed in the proem: "for Odysseus wasn't alone losing his homecoming day in Troy," he pronounces, "but many of the other mortals too lost theirs" (οὐ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς οἶος ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ / ἐν Τροίῃ, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι φῶτες ὄλοντο, 1.354-355). Scholars are right to point to the growing maturity of Odysseus's son, as he finds his voice in the community for the first time (after his initial coaching by Athena). "Speech is man's business," he concludes authoritatively, in an echo of Hector's famous pronouncement in the *Iliad*, "war is a man's business", which he similarly used to silence the woman in his life – the replacing of speech (*muthos*) for war signals the *Odyssey*'s refocusing of importance. Thus we see Telemachus assuming his role as the man of the household, praising the bard and, accordingly, putting his mother in her proper place. And this maturation is something that we'll see more in evidence as we consider Telemachus's responses to the *nostoi* tales of Nestor and Menelaus.

¹ HEUBECK - WEST - HAINSWORTH acknowledge the importance of the other *nostoi* tales as the *background* for Odysseus's tale (1988, p. 116). AHL and ROISMAN (1995, pp. 27-42) present a nice, albeit selective, discussion of the Homeric use and omission of other narrative details.

² The hero's absence is the point: it creates suspense to establish a different type of relationship with the audience and drives the plot – the absence, as Van Nortwick puts it, causes the narrative to be "shaped by the need for restoration" (2009, p. 4). On Odysseus's disguise and the distortive power of storytelling: MURNAGHAN 1987; KATZ 1991. The *Odyssey* is well known for its interest in poetry and itself as "a poetic product": LOUDEN 1999, p. 50; cf. p. 147.

³ Athena's anger, important in other *nostoi* traditions, is downplayed in the *Odyssey* where she is meant to play a "positive role": DE JONG 2001, p. 35. Later Nestor recites the homecoming of the Achaeans (3.132), but there he attributes agency to Zeus as well. On the comparison: DANEK 1998, p. 59. The schol. at *Od.* 1.327 explains that some attribute Phemius's inspiration to the sudden departure of Athena whose transformation was witnessed by Telemachus (319-324).

⁴ Phemius's song (erroneously) describes Odysseus's death: AHL and ROISMAN 1995, pp. 30-31; it is definitely *not* the *Odyssey*: MURNAGHAN 2002, p. 144; it "evokes by a play of mirrors... our position as readers of Homer's *Odyssey*": PUCCI 1987, p. 196.

Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on Penelope's initial response to Phemius's tales, which also ironically tends to be overlooked in the scholarship. Her silencing by scholars occurs in spite of the fact that her description of the song as painful (ταύτης δ' ἀποπαύε' αἰοιδῆς / λυγρῆς) draws on the narrator's own description of Phemius's painful nostos (ὁ δ' Ἀχαιῶν νόστον αἰεὶδε / λυγρόν).¹ For Penelope, Phemius's nostos song gives her unsurpassable grief (πένθος ἄλαστον), precisely because it prompts her to remember her husband (ταύτης δ' ἀποπαύε' αἰοιδῆς / λυγρῆς, ἥ τέ μοι αἰὲν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ / τείρει, ἐπεὶ με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον, 1.340-342).² Instead, Penelope asks for some other of the "deeds of gods and men" with which the bard can charm mortals, a phrase that probably looks away from all nostoi-narratives altogether (Φήμιε, πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλλα βροτῶν θελκτῆρια οἶδας / ἔργ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τὰ τε κλείουσιν αἰοδοί, 1.337-338).³

Over the course of its narrative, the *Odyssey* presents something of an economy of pleasure, signalled with some clarity by uses of the verb *τέρπειν*. Gods and heroes alike derive pleasure from feasting (e.g. 1.25, 1.422, 4.27), conversation (4.239), athletic competition (4.626 and 17.168) and sex (5.227). But it is the suitors and the Phaeacians who especially enjoy song.⁴ A few critical instances help us understand the systemization of pleasure and pain better. Menelaus depicts himself as "delighting his mind with grief sometimes" (ἄλλοτε μὲν τε γόω φρένα τέρπομαι),⁵ although the case of "that man" Odysseus also brings him unforgettable and everlasting anguish (τῷ δ' ἄρ' ἔμελλεν / αὐτῷ κήδε' ἔσσεσθαι, ἐμοὶ δ' ἄχος αἰὲν ἄλαστον / κείνου, ὅπως δὴ δηρὸν ἀποίχεται, οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν, / ζῶει ὁ γ' ἦ τέθνηκεν, 4.107-110). Penelope also describes her days as pleased by grieving and lamenting (ἤματα μὲν γὰρ τέρπομ' ὀδυρομένη γοόωσα, 19.513-14). Yet not all grief can be pleasurable. Odysseus's grief at hearing the songs of the end of the siege of Troy causes so much discomfort among the rest of his song-loving audience that they cannot take any enjoyment from the song themselves (8.91-92 and 8.542).

Central to this tension are Eumaeus's words of invitation to Odysseus when he asks that they "take pleasure in recalling our horrible griefs to one another since a man may also take pleasure in his grief afterwards when he has suffered and gone through so many

¹ The enjambment of the adjective *λυγρόν* arguably signals difference from Odysseus's *nostos*, which is never described with this term, though Telemachus does use it to describe what he supposes is his father's death (3.87; 93; 4.292, 323). The scholia weakly gloss *λυγρόν* at 1.327 as "χαλεπόν" and *ὀλέθριον*, although one adds a more ethical comment: *ὅτι ἀτάκτως καὶ μωρῶς καὶ διχα φρονήσεως ἐπανεστράφη*: PONTANI 2007, p. 168. Louden (1999, p. 151 n.45) suggests that *lugra* (drawing on 11.369) may be something of a "technical term" for song content.

² Cf. MURNAGHAN 1987, p. 155. The adjective *ἄλαστον* has a special connection with Odysseus's separation from home: Menelaus feels "unsurpassable grief" over Odysseus' plight (4.108; on which, see below); Eumaeus for Telemachus in Odysseus's absence (14.174). Provocatively, however, *alaston penthos* is also used of Eupheithes for his son's death, the suitor Antinous (24.423). In the *Iliad*, Zeus sees Thetis as suffering *penthos alaston* (24.105). For grief over children, see Rhea's reaction to Cronus eating their offspring (Hes. *Th.* 467). The glosses provided by the scholia – namely *ἀλάθητον*, *ἀνεπιλάθητον* and *οὐδ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιλαθέσθαι με* – open up the phrase to the resonance of memory and fame: PONTANI 2007, pp. 177-178. This tale brings inescapable grief, the type of grief that does not need to be reinforced and re-established by poetic narrative.

³ Pucci (1987, pp. 198-199) suggests that Penelope is looking for a poem of "Iliadic or Hesiodic tradition" – such as, perhaps, the song of Ares and Aphrodite with which Demodocus later entertains Odysseus.

⁴ Delight as a typical response to poetry in Homer: DOHERTY 1995, p. 73. In the few active uses of the verb, Phemius brings delight to the suitors (1.347), Demodocus delight to the Phaeacians (8.45), a singer's special skill is said to be the power to bestow pleasure (17.385), and Penelope invites Odysseus-the-beggar to entertain her (19.590). We later learn that Phemius's patronym is Terpiades (22.330). Cf. PETROPOULOS 2011, p. 43 n. 29 and 49.

⁵ This phrase challenges the scholia: one reads it as meaning that mourning doesn't bring Menelaus grief (ἄρ' οὐ φέρει λύπην), while another sidesteps the issue by glossing this use of *terptomai* as *πληροῦμαι*: PONTANI 2010, pp. 214-215.

things".¹ In these words, perhaps, we find some answer to the question of how grief can be pleasurable and *why* Penelope's pain and Menelaus's anguish are unforgettable. It is in the rehearsal of things past that individuals and communities create identities.² For Penelope and Menelaus, Odysseus's nostos is still an open rupture; it is not yet *past*. Odysseus too cannot help but mourn in book 8 because he has not yet returned home and, with the sea still between him and Ithaca, cannot be sure that he ever will. He can join Eumaeus in pleasure in Ithaca because his tale is one step closer to closure. The epic's final moments of pleasure again look back at the story near its close. In post-coital conversation, Odysseus and Penelope delight in conversations about the past years missed between them (23.301 and 308) – material, which forced both to mourn uncontrollably before, causes pleasure now near the narrative's end.³

The status of nostos narratives is at issue from the beginning of this tale. Penelope's reaction invites the audience to consider how her husband's story is different.⁴ She ascribes to her husband kleos that ranges wide and far, but the act of her remembering causes longing – the story reminds her of what she lacks or, rather, what the story lacks. For Penelope, the grievous song results in new pain because her husband's homecoming narrative is abortive; Odysseus is currently still suffering; his nostos is not yet complete.

Returning to Telemachus, it becomes clear that he feels pleasure because in his mind his father's nostos is complete. Telemachus's judgement seems to identify his mother's involvement in the tale being told as being the problem: Odysseus wasn't the only one who lost his homecoming day (οὐ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς οἷος ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ), so she shouldn't react so personally to the Phemius's nostos song.⁵ For Telemachus, however, his father is categorically dead and can be spoken of along with all the other nostoi heroes who have perished.⁶ His application of the "one versus many" theme ironically denies any difference between his father and the rest.

This is not the only misreading that Telemachus performs here. He also lays the blame for the miserable fate of the nostoi not with the singers but with *Zeus* (οὐ νύ τ' αἰοῖδοι / αἵτιοι, ἀλλὰ ποθι Ζεὺς αἴτιος, ὅς τε δίδωσιν / ἀνδράσιν ἀλφηστῆσιν ὅπως ἐθέλησιν ἐκάστω, 1.347-348). Resonating with Achilles's similar criticism of Zeus (*Il.* 24.527-530), which it may be deliberately recalling), we see here the tendency for men to blame the gods. And it is true, as we will see, that Zeus is considered by others (notably Nestor) as the source of all nostoi. However, as we noted above, in the very first speech of the epic Zeus himself was careful to spell out the stakes, and he expressly rules out this interpretation. *Men* are to blame for the fate that they receive. The audience, privy of course to Zeus's injunction, are invited to reflect on how this double motivation maps out onto cause and effect.⁷ As far as Telemachus is concerned, his naivety in this

¹ νῶϊ δ' ἐνὶ κλισίῃ πίνοντέ τε δαινυμένω τε / κήδεσιν ἀλλήλων τερπόμεθα λευγαλέοισι / μνωμένω· μετὰ γὰρ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι τέρπεται ἀνὴρ, / ὅς τις δὴ μάλα πολλὰ πάθη καὶ πόλλ' ἐπαλήθῃ. (15.398-402). Minchin (2001, pp. 208-209) connects this passage to the mournful responses of both Penelope and Odysseus earlier in the epic. The "personal relatedness" in all three cases is an aspect of successful storytelling that directly increases audience enjoyment.

² On the social aspect of memory: FERNYHOUGH 2012, p. 105 and *passim*.

³ Segal (1994, p. 127) notes the irony and parallelism in the songs of Phemius and Demodocus, which leave one person in pain (Penelope and Odysseus respectively) while bringing pleasure to others. By acknowledging divergent responses to song, "Homer reminds us of the complex dynamics of performance": MINCHIN 2001, p. 207.

⁴ On the *Odyssey's* internal audiences (not including the gods): DOHERTY 1995, pp. 17-19 and chapter 2.

⁵ In using ἀπώλεσε νόστιμον ἦμαρ, Telemachus clearly states that he thinks his father is dead. On this formula: DANEK 1998, pp. 60-61. On Telemachus's desire to hear the story of his father's death: MURNAGHAN 2002.

⁶ MURNAGHAN 2002, pp. 145-146 notes that Telemachus's confidence increases the more he believes in his father's death.

⁷ For the extreme, but previously influential, claim that Homeric man has no concept of self or free will: Snell

is an extension of his lack of agency in Ithaca – the very thing that Athena has come in disguise to address.

Therefore, Telemachus's silencing of his mother raises problematic issues, even as it indicates his first steps towards becoming a man. Indeed, he identifies two additional important themes. When he declares quasi-gnomically that “there's no nemesis for singing the evil sorrow” (τούτῳ δ' οὐ νέμεσις Δαναῶν κακὸν οἴτον ἀεΐδειν, 1.349) of the Danaans”, he introduces another word that is important for referring to the nostoi of the Greeks: “sorrow” (οἴτος) – a term picked up by both Nestor (3.134) and Odysseus himself when he praises the Phaeacian bard, Demodocus.¹ Arguably more telling, however, is Telemachus's third pronouncement: that men love the newest song most (τὴν γὰρ ἀοιδὴν μᾶλλον ἐπικλείουσ' ἄνθρωποι, / ἢ τις αἰὼντεσσι νεωτάτη ἀμφιπέληται, 1.350-351).² If we do choose to understand the *Odyssey* as positioning itself to be not just the newest song but the *last nostos song* (something implied even if partially by the fact that all the other nostoi are in this story time complete), then this invites us to think about how this song is new and what, in this context, newness means.³

As if to prove the point, the *Odyssey* reproduces the generation of nostoi narrative, as we follow Telemachus first to Pylos and then to Sparta. In both contexts we witness not only nostoi in performance but also ways of negotiating nostoi narratives through Telemachus's responses.

Nestor's nostoi

After Telemachus's vain pursuit of justice in the assembly, he takes Athena's second piece of advice and travels in search of news of his father. His travels take him first to Nestor in Pylos, then to Menelaus's palace in Argos. The *Odyssey*'s mars this shift from the poem of war to the poem of return by its use of the formula “once they had put aside their appetite” (e.g. αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο, 3.473). In the *Iliad*, this formula heralds a scene of council;⁴ in the *Odyssey* it preface scenes of guest friendship, as a prelude to storytelling. Telemachus's odyssey to Pylos prepares the ground for Odysseus's son basic development by listening to and learning from accounts of his father's greatness and, above all, by understanding the telling of tales.

After being welcomed to Pylos by Nestor and receiving hospitality, Telemachus announces himself and initiates the activity of storytelling (3.83-101).⁵ Headlining his concern to learn about his father's kleos (πατρός ἐμοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ μετέρχομαι, 3.83), Telemachus draws a distinction between all the other nostoi that they know about (ἄλλους μὲν γὰρ πάντας, πευθόμεθ, 3.86-87)⁶ and that man – his father – whose story has been rendered unknown by Zeus (κείνου δ' αὖ καὶ ὄλεθρον ἀπευθέα θῆκε Κρονίων, 3.90). By distinguishing Odysseus and marking him out for his exceptionality, Telemachus reworks

1960. On causation as a balance between divine providence and man's own attempt to make sense of the vicissitudes of life: LESKY 2004. For bibliography and discussion: GASKIN 1990; HAMMER 2002, pp. 49-79.

¹ The scholia gloss οἴτον as θάνατον or more blandly as δυστυχίαν: PONTANI 2010, p. 180. While the *Odyssey* appears to be reinvesting it with ethical implications, in book 8 the term is used to describe “the homecoming” of the Achaeans as we might expect it: λίην γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἴτον ἀεΐδεις, / ὅσσ' ἔρξαν τ' ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ὅσσ' ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί (8.487-488). For οἴτον as Telemachus's name for “der Heimfahrt der Achaeer”: DANEK 1998, p. 59.

² “The earliest literary criticism in Greek literature”: HEUBECK, WEST and HAINSWORTH 1998 ad loc. As “news”: PETROPOULOS 2011, p. 46-48. Referring to the poem in progress, the *Odyssey*: NAGY 1990, pp. 67-70. Similarly DE JONG calls this an indirect advertisement for the *Odyssey* itself (2001, p. 38)

³ The *Odyssey* as brings to a close the “story of the heroes at Troy”: TRACY 1999, pp. 149-150. Cf. SCHEIN 1984, pp. 37-38.

⁴ BARKER 2009, p. 54 (with n. 42) and p. 63.

⁵ The structure of Telemachus's speech: DE JONG 2001, p. 73.

⁶ DANEK 1998, pp. 77-78.

the opening manoeuvres of the *Odyssey*, while also recognizing Zeus as the ultimate author of all nostoi.¹ Unlike before, when he collapsed the distinction between Odysseus and the other nostoi, here Telemachus makes this difference critical for his request for information. No one is able to say *how his father died*. Using language that the narrator used to launch this poem, Telemachus insists that Nestor “speak out about the painful death of that man” (κείνου λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον ἐνισπεῖν, 3.93), which he follows up with a request for an authoritative narrative (τῶν νῦν μοι μνηῆσαι, καί μοι νημερτέες ἐνίσπεες, 3.101).² Perhaps taking his cue from his mother’s painful response to hearing nostoi, here Telemachus asks for a nostos to address his father’s absence, thereby representing the first of multiple attempts to (begin to) end Odysseus’s story.

Perhaps too this is why, oddly, the narrator observes that it took courage for Telemachus to answer Nestor’s enquiry: τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα / θαρσῆσας. This is no throwaway description, since the narrator emphasizes Athena’s involvement in his encouragement (αὐτῇ γὰρ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θάρσος Ἀθήνη). By asking Nestor for news about his father, Telemachus is certainly taking a risk: his father may be dead (or, not; a revelation that could also upset Telemachus in some readings). Any answer will begin an ending to the tale and force a commitment to action from Odysseus’s son. On the other hand, Telemachus’s interest in kleos also signals a metapoetic concern. However much this might be about Telemachus’s psychology, this is also about the unfolding narrative. It indicates Telemachus’s move from ignorance to knowledge: he’s now actively searching out what’s happened to his father. Before this point, Telemachus considered epic song as entertainment, though even as he was dismissing his mother, he recognised its importance (muthos is a man’s business). But he still has to learn the stakes – what nostoi tales are told and how they are told will influence the action back on Ithaca.

Before answering Telemachus’s request for a nostos tale, Nestor makes three complementary moves that frame the subsequent story and help educate Telemachus in the ways of nostos. First, he treats the Trojan War casualties. He informs Telemachus (and us) of the men who died: Ajax, Achilles, Patroclus and his own son Antilochus – all of whom, save Patroclus, perished in a post-Iliadic world. But, before he continues, he laments the impossibility of ever telling the whole tale, of all the suffering that had happened there (3.113-119). Part of the function of Nestor’s speech is to acknowledge the expansive and indeterminate nature of the whole tale before selecting for us one possible variant.³ By immediately going *all the way back* to the siege of the city,⁴ Nestor identifies one problem with nostos-narratives: where to begin?⁵

¹ Scenes with this motif: DE JONG 2001, p. 8.

² The opening line of the epic (“Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ, 1.1) is echoed by Telemachus’s later request to hear about the Atreids (ὦ Νέστορ Νηληϊάδῃ, σὺ δ’ ἄλληθές ἐνίσπεες, 3.247), and Nestor’s advice for him to enquire from Menelaus (ἐς Λακεδαίμονα δῖαν, ὅθι Ξανθὸς Μενέλαος / λίσσεσθαι δέ μιν αὐτός, ἵνα νημερτέες ἐνίσπη· / ἥεῦδος δ’ οὐκ ἔρεει· μάλα γὰρ πεπνυμένος ἐστίν, 3.326-28). Telemachus uses similar language again to request a full narrative from Menelaus (ἴλυθον εἴ τινά μοι κληθδὸνα πατρός ἐνίσποις, 4.317) and Odysseus uses similarly marked diction when introducing his own nostos tale (εἰ δ’ ἄγε τοι καὶ νόστον ἐμὸν πολυκρηδέ’ ἐνίσπω / ὄν μοι Ζεὺς ἐφῆρκεν ἀπὸ Τροίηςθεν ἰόντι, 9.37-38). The “truth value” of the tales is asserted for Menelaus and Nestor, but *not* in the presentations by Phemius *or* Odysseus.

³ Nestor’s tale is more synoptic than Odysseus’s more personal perspective in the *apologoi*: MARKS 2008, pp. 125-127. He views Nestor’s presentation of the other nostoi as being polemical.

⁴ On Nestor’s name as identifying him as someone who returns others to life and effects homecomings: FRAME 1978, pp. 81-115. Nestor’s characterization as a singer: DICKSON 1995, p. 37.

⁵ “ὦ φίλ’, ἐπεὶ μ’ ἐμνησας οὐζύσος, ἦν ἐν ἐκείνῳ / δῆμῳ ἀνέτλημεν μένος ἄσχετοι νῆες Ἀχαιῶν, ἡμὲν ὅσα ζῆν νηυσὶν ἐπ’ ἡρωιδέα πόντον / πλαζόμενοι κατὰ ληϊδ’, ὅπη ἄρξαιεν Ἀχιλλεύς, / ἡδ’ ὅσα καὶ περὶ ἄστου μέγα Πριάμοιο ἀνακτος / μαρνάμεθ’· ἐνθα δ’ ἐπειτα κατέκταθεν ὄσοι ἀριστοί· 3.103-108)

Chief among the suffering is, of course, Odysseus, who is again singled out. And here Nestor offers a (re)reading of the *Iliad*. We learn that for nine years the Achaeans had been plotting with all kinds of wiles the downfall of Troy – not the impression that one gets from the *Iliad* – and chief among those plotting with wiles: Odysseus. This is the beginning of the epic as a whole exploring *which* Odysseus it will bring home. This Odysseus is the man known for his *metis*, whose planning alongside Nestor brought about the conclusion of the siege.¹

Lastly, with Odysseus on his mind, Nestor turns to Telemachus and recognizes him as his father's son. This is another important moment in the maturation of Telemachus, the first step which Athena (disguised as Mentor) signalled by recognizing a likeness to Odysseus the first time she meets Telemachus on Ithaca. Here, after learning who his guest is, Nestor notices the likeness to Odysseus by looking at him: but it's his *speech* that shows the link. There's something about the way Telemachus speaks that brings to mind Odysseus and, given the importance of speech in this epic, this is a significant judgement.

With this frame in place, we are now in a better position to read Nestor's subsequent nostos story. Nestor starts by observing that he and Odysseus were never in conflict in the assembly or council. These *Iliad* arenas of action (public speaking) are where Nestor locates the disastrous nostos of the Achaeans. The moment of catastrophe comes, moreover, when Troy finally falls. Now it's no longer a war story but about the return: meaning troubles both at sea *and* at home. On the one hand, the strife caused by Athena – itself an Iliadic theme – is enacted through the assembly (the scene where dissent is institutionally sanctioned in the *Iliad*). This is a post *Iliad* tale in terms not just of content but also theme: the assembly is insufficient to resolve the crisis of the community (the Achaeans leaving Troy and the community back home on Ithaca). On the other, Nestor's advertisement of his λυγρός νόστος corrects Telemachus's appeal for news of his father's λυγρός ὄλεθρος. Here we see a dramatized source for that basic principle of the *Odyssey*'s presentation of *nostos*. Social cohesion breaks down in the *effort to return home* that necessarily sets every man apart for himself – every man for himself.

In fact, Nestor's treatment resonates with the epic theme of shared responsibility. Identified again as author of this nostos narrative, "Zeus contrived for them a grievous homecoming", since the Achaeans weren't prudent or just.² While Aegisthus was responsible for not paying heed to the gods, here the problem is how the Achaeans go about assembling and making speeches. The groups split: Agamemnon remains behind to appease the gods while Menelaus leaves: Nestor's Odysseus starts off with Menelaus and then turns back (136-183).³ Odysseus's indecision presents the first rupture in his tale. Nestor, admits his ignorance about Telemachus's father, but continues with the other stories. Odysseus's indecision mirrors the narrative aporia at what to do this man, or anticipates the uncertainty of the stories told about him, or hint at in another way his polytropia.

Key here is the interpretation of the gods' involvement and, in particular, the theme of sacrifice, which lies behind the debate. Menelaus countenances immediate return, while

¹ This picture seems true to the pairing of Nestor and Odysseus in books 2 and 19 of the *Iliad*: SCODEL 2002, pp. 209-210; BARKER 2009, pp. 64-65; CHRISTENSEN 2008.

² καὶ τότε δὴ Ζεὺς λυγρὸν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μῆδετο νόστον / Ἄργεῖοισ', ἐπεὶ οὐ τὴ νοήμενες οὐδὲ δίκαιοι / πάντες ἔσαν· τῶ σφραγισμένον πολέες κακὸν οἶτον ἐπέσπον / μήνιος ἐξ ὀλοῆς γλαυκῶπιδος ὀβριμοπάτρης, / ἢ τ' ἔριν Ἀτρεΐδῃσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔθηγε, 3.132-6. The language of this passage recalls the nostos performed by Phemius (1.326-327) and echoes Telemachus's judgment on it (1.355), while adding moralizing from Athena herself (2.282). See DANEK 1998, pp. 86-87. Marks (2008, p. 121) argues that "Nestor references a kind of epic cycle". Nestor's narrative, however, differs from the stories of Menelaus and Odysseus in the pervasive role granted to Zeus (112).

³ On the relationship between Nestor's account, other nostoi and material in Proclus: DANEK 1998, pp. 79-86.

Agamemnon wants to delay to offer sacrifices. Initially we might think that Nestor is favouring Menelaus's choice. Nestor describes Agamemnon's sacrifices as ineffectual and explicitly notes that the lady (Athena) wasn't for turning.¹ (And useless sacrifices may anticipate the futile gestures of Odysseus's men after they slaughter the cattle of Helios.) Yet, the full picture is a good deal more complicated. For Nestor next describes how Odysseus has a change of heart and returns to Agamemnon's army, while Menelaus's nostos was hardly untroubled. In fact, according to Menelaus himself, Proteus told him that it was precisely his *lack of sacrificing* that was the problem (4.472-474). And the old man of the sea even points out that the lesser Ajax may even have avoided his evil doom had he sacrificed. And yet – sacrificing isn't sufficient either, as, Menelaus also later observes, Aegisthus learns to his cost, and as do, of course, Odysseus's companions (a fact already headlined by the proem).

It is only near the end of this first nostos tale that Nestor describes the nostoi of the Trojan War veterans, and then only in passing. The catalogue of heroes hints at the number of nostoi songs that could have been, and probably were, in wide circulation. As Irad Malkin elaborates in *The Returns of Odysseus*, there were many traditions attributing city foundations in Ionia and the west specifically to Nestor and the Pyliaans.² Nestor's recounted wanderings in the *Odyssey* may reflect some of these tales – and yet they actually say rather little about them. Menelaus departs to have his story told elsewhere; Diomedes goes to Argos; Nestor gets home.³ As for the fate of those whom he does not know from autopsy, through hearsay he reports the happy returns of Philoctetes, Neoptolemus and Idomeneus, all heroes whose comparatively easy homecomings are not worthy of elaborated fame.⁴

The disparate responses to this first narrative bring out some of the issues inherent in telling nostoi.⁵ Telemachus responds to the example of Orestes offered to him by Nestor by immediately correcting it. While wishing for them to give him similar strength (205), he denies that they will or have done so (for him or his father). Telemachus observes the lack of fit between the model nostoi told to him and his own situation, even if, as yet, he doesn't recognize the biggest discrepancy – that Odysseus is still alive. In fact, Telemachus ironically acts like his father even as he denies his continued existence, insisting that it is his fate to endure special circumstances (209).

Nestor in turn keeps open the possibility of Odysseus's return by identifying Athena's love for his father. Invoking the multifarious and as yet unresolved nature of his re-

¹ This line recalls Hecuba and the Trojan women praying to Athena in *Iliad* 6, who subsequently turns away from their appeals (*Il.* 6.297-311). While sacrifices are important in the *Iliad*, they are not in themselves a sufficient condition to win a god's favour (Hera first opposes allowing that burial to take place: *Il.* 24.22-76). Odysseus, of course, is immediately recognized in this epic (by Zeus) as someone who makes sacrifices (*Od.* 1.66-67); but sacrifices are insufficient in and of themselves to guarantee (continued) divine support.

² MALKIN (1998, 210-257) discusses the other nostoi narratives. The non-Odyssean narratives were tied to "particular sites", at first to the "periphery", and with much less broad a function than that of Odysseus, though Nestor's Pylos was important in the foundational narratives of Asia Minor and Southern Italy (211). According to MALKIN, Philoctetes, mentioned briefly in the *Odyssey* (3.190, where he returns to Thessaly), is recorded as founding settlements in Southern Italy (215) in a process that saw both the adoption of mythic identities by 'native' populations as a process of integration and the extension of mythical identities as a process of legitimation (226).

³ Diomedes had broad cultural importance, hailed as a founder for cities and forebear for peoples throughout the western Mediterranean (Virgil settles him in Italy): MALKIN 1998, pp. 234-237. On the suppression of details that might cast Odysseus in a bad light in Nestor's narrative of the return of Diomedes, Idomeneus, Neoptolemus and Philoctetes: MARKS 2008, pp. 127-128.

⁴ ὣς ἦλθον, φίλε τέκνον, ἀπειθήης, οὐδέ τι οἶδα / κείνων, οἳ τ' ἐσάωθεν Ἀχαιῶν οἳ τ' ἀπόλοντο. / ὅσσα δ' ἐνὶ μεγάροισι καθήμενος ἡμετέροισι / πεύθομαι, ἢ θέμις ἐστί, δαήσεαι, οὐδέ σε κεύσω, 3.184-187.

⁵ The structure of the conversation among Nestor, Telemachus and Athena facilitates a fresh comparison between the Atreid story and the events in Ithaca: DE JONG 2001, pp. 78-80.

turn, he asks “who knows whether he will pay them back by force, either having come home alone or whether all the other Achaeans will do it” (τίς δ’ οἶδ’ εἴ κέ ποτέ σφι βίας ἀποτείσεται ἐλθῶν, / ἧ ὅ γε μοῦνος ἐὼν ἧ καὶ σύμπαντες Ἀχαιοί;, 3. 216-218).¹ Nestor’s use of “all the Achaeans” marks a reassertion of this narrative’s end, after the suitors’ attempted appropriation of the (Iliadic-martial) label for themselves.² Nestor reintroduces the motif of Odysseus alone, first introduced in the proem but now given a twist. Odysseus, who alone has yet to return, may return alone (though he could also come with the many). Odysseus as “alone” among many will become an important theme in the *Odyssey*.³ How this could occur relates back to Nestor’s identification of Athena’s support. She could make it happen. Athena’s care for Odysseus is critical and, in the epic’s overdetermination of sacrifice, sets out Odysseus as the special one.⁴

And that special care is played out before our eyes. At first Telemachus again resists the attempt to resurrect his father. Instead of being encouraged by news of Athena’s special care for his father, he replies: “I do not think that that *epos*⁵ will be completed; / you speak excessively big” (“ὃ γέρον, οὐ πω τοῦτο ἔπος τελέεσθαι οἶω / λίην γὰρ μέγα εἶ πες· ἄγρη μ’ ἔχει. οὐκ ἂν ἐμοί γε / ἐλπομένω τὰ γένοιτ’, οὐδ’ εἰ θεοὶ ὧς ἐθέλοιεν”, 3.226-228).⁶ Athena (in disguise of course) corrects him emphatically: such things are easy for a god. She also again makes the point that *nostos* is not just about the journey home but what happens when you get there. In this case, it is better to return home and see one’s “νόστιμον ἧμαρ” having suffered greatly, than come home and be killed.⁷

While Nestor prevaricates – Odysseus could return *and* bring back with him all the Achaeans – Odysseus will indeed come back alone, which will be both the measure and the means of his success.⁸ There will be no need for Nestor, Menelaus or indeed any of the other Trojan War heroes. At one level Nestor’s speech is excessively big: Odysseus won’t have the support of all the Achaeans. At another level then Nestor’s *epos* isn’t big enough. This is the tale of one man against the many. As it is, the more Nestor and Athena insist on the possibility of Odysseus’s return, the more Telemachus denies it. Now he declares with certainty that his father is dead: that man no longer has a “true return” (κεῖνῳ δ’ οὐκέτι νόστος ἐτήτυμος, 3.241).⁹ Telemachus’s expectation – that his father is dead because all the other heroes are either home or dead – is conditioned by the tales he knows and the tale he is hearing, which limit his outlook and responses. Or perhaps it is better to conclude that, like his father, he’s not going to be so easily convinced of something without first testing it thoroughly.

For at this point Telemachus changes tack and asks about Menelaus: specifically, why Menelaus did not help protect him and how Aegisthus got away with it. The shift is sud-

¹ For Nestor’s question as indicating other possible traditions: DANEK 1998, p. 89. Zenodotus amended line 217 to *σύ γε* (from *ὅ γε*) to retain greater logic: PONTANI 2010, pp. 77-78. Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (1988, p. 173) like the emendation but concede that confusion in logic befits an old man. Regardless of the reading, the point is that Telemachus in his response doubts both the reality of his father’s return and his own ability to affect his fate.

² BARKER 2009, pp. 102-105.

³ GOLDHILL 2010.

⁴ For sacrificial meals in the *Odyssey* see BAKKER 2013 *passim*.

⁵ While the scholia reduce Telemachus *epos* here to the slaughter of the suitors (PONTANI 2010, p. 79; schol. in *Od.* 3.226 ex. b1), Nestor has actually provided three resolutions to the situation: (1) Odysseus returning alone; (2) Odysseus returning with others; and (3) Telemachus winning his own fame.

⁶ Telemachus “now believes his father to be dead”: HEUBECK - WEST - HAINSWORTH 1988, p. 173 – though it seems clear that he expected as much, if not fully accepted it, before. See above, note 58.

⁷ Both the emphasis on suffering and the use of the collocation “νόστιμον ἧμαρ” are strongly associated with Odysseus (*Od.* 1.9, 168, 354; 3.233; 5.220; 6.311; 8.466; 16.149; 17. 253, 571; 19. 369).

⁸ The suitors scarcely credit that one man could return home alone and triumph (*Od.* 3.217). Later, the narrator himself expresses amazement that one man could defeat so many (*Od.* 20.30). Cf. BARKER AND CHRISTENSEN 2011, pp. 12-23.

⁹ Note the play between *alastos* and *κεῖνῳ δ’ οὐκέτι νόστος ἐτήτυμος*.

den and unanticipated and demands interpretation. The same, radically different options are available to us. In part we can understand Telemachus as representing an imagined audience member for ancient nostos-narrative,¹ who wants to know more about this famous story and how the death of Agamemnon could have happened, when Menelaus was still alive.² The distractive potential of this “well known” tale and the desire to look to it for inspiration, if not instruction, keeps breaking in.

And yet perhaps it would also be remiss to discount Telemachus’s motivation to learn about this other nostos and learn from it. Telemachus’s abrupt change of subject has attracted speculation that he has now started to plan for his own return home and his role in this poem.³ Certainly it is true that the version of Agamemnon’s nostos that Nestor subsequently relates is more pertinent to the situation back on Ithaca – Menelaus’s prolonged absence helped Aegisthus’s plot, as if Telemachus should too beware of staying away for too long – while also, again, failing as a paradigm – the absence of Menelaus also allows Orestes to perform his heroic deed. Would Telemachus have the possibility, were his father to remain absent without leave. To insist on Telemachus’s refusal to look beyond this example would place ourselves, ironically, in the same position as his own denials of his father’s existence.

While Nestor recounts how Menelaus’s wanderings took him to Egypt, he has little else to add and returns, as we have seen, to the story that they all know: Agamemnon’s nostos. However we negotiate Telemachus’s reading of the nostoi here, mention of Menelaus prepares for the next stage of Telemachus’s journey into song.

Menelaus’s nostoi

Telemachus’s trip to Sparta is motivated by the continued lack of information about Odysseus. In part this will be sated by the visit to the couple whose separation had sparked the Trojan War. As we have seen, the less than happy couple indulge in tale telling against each other in ways that do much to give a sense of the Odysseus who will be needed in this narrative. Menelaus’s own nostoi tales, which frame the stories about Odysseus at Troy, play a role in this too, first spontaneously and then after Telemachus asks for more information.

Overhearing Telemachus’s whispered amazement at his riches, Menelaus puts that wealth in context by spontaneously offering a quasi-nostos narrative unsolicited to unknown guests. He headlines his nostos by drawing attention to his own wanderings and sufferings (ἦ γὰρ πολλὰ παθὼν καὶ πόλλ’ ἐπαληθεύεις) to rank him alongside Odysseus as a great nostos hero.

Yet, the competition in this first telling falls flat. First, Menelaus’s travels, many though that they are, are very much limited to the known Greek world: the exotic places he journey to all belong to the North African coast. Furthermore, while there he seems to indulge largely in ordinary activities, all the goods he gathers are notably rustic in character, perhaps anticipating Odysseus’s own – and radically more dangerous – acquisition of rustic goods in Polyphemus’s cave. This is not like an Odysseus, who, as Malkin has

¹ DOHERTY 1995, pp. 73-131. Cf. PERADOTTO 1990, pp. 117-118; MARTIN 1993; MURNAGHAN 2002.

² πῶς ἔθαν’ Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων; / ποῦ Μενέλαος ἔην; τίνα δ’ αὐτῷ μήσατ’ ἔλεθρον / Αἴγισθος δολόμητις, ἐπεὶ κτάνε πολλὸν ἀρείω; / ἦ οὐκ Ἄργεος ἦεν Ἀχαιύκοῦ, ἀλλά πη ἄλλη / πλάζετ’ ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπους, ὁ δὲ θαρσήσας κατέπεφνε; 3.252-256.

³ OLSON (1995, pp. 76-77) finds it difficult to believe that Telemachus can be so sceptical: he puts Telemachus’s increasingly strained denials (see below) to “merely clever pretence” (77), even though the plot of the *Telemachy* makes it difficult in turn to believe that Telemachus could be so disingenuous.

shown, could become the paradigmatic hero for so many Greeks of the so-called ‘period of colonization’ precisely because of the range and spatial oddity of his travels. At the same time, like Nestor’s before, Menelaus’s *nostoi-tales* raise elements of suffering, prophecy and narrative (and literal) shape-shifting that prepares us for the much greater tale to come, including the fact that Menelaus’s tale is broken up and only revealed through repeated attempts – again like Odysseus’s own.

While engaged in his rather prosaic wandering, Menelaus learns of the death of his brother. As a result, even though he had gained many treasures on his travels, which now sit resplendent in his palace, Menelaus strikingly claims to have “lost his house” (ἔπει μάλα πολλὰ πάθον, καὶ ἀπώλεσα οἶκον / εὔ μάλα ναιετάοντα, κεχανδότα πολλὰ καὶ ἐσθλά), almost as if he *hasn’t* achieved *nostos* after all. This stark assessment prompts a reflection that again takes a war veteran back to battle for Troy. He wishes that all those who died at Troy were still alive, instead of him having all this wealth. Menelaus’s wanderings and sufferings resonate with Odysseus’s. But crucially his fail to promote *kleos*: indeed, he loses his brother as a result, which renders his magnificent home and the priceless possessions within it worthless to him, and his perceived *nostos* no true *nostos*.

And again Odysseus comes to mind as the singular hero. Of all the men lost at Troy and after, Menelaus grieves most for Odysseus: τῶν πάντων οὐ τόσσον ὁδύρομαι, ἀχνυμένός περ, / ὡς ἐνός. After Helen recognises Telemachus straightaway, Menelaus is even more forthcoming and sings Odysseus’s praises more eagerly still: so much does he love Odysseus that, if the man would return, he would make a city for him near Argos and they would be best friends together forever (4.169-182). Yet it is open to question whether Odysseus would want to travel “from Ithaca”, when the whole narrative impulse is towards it.¹ What he does hit upon, however, beyond Odysseus’s exceptional suffering (and endurance of it) is his unknown fate. Odysseus is exceptional in the fact that *he alone* is *anostimon* (ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν που μέλλεν ἀγάσασσασθαι θεὸς αὐτός, / ὅς κείνον δύστηνον ἀνόστιμον οἶον ἔθηκεν, 4.181-182). It is not only the case that his *nostos* lacks closure, by virtue of which his family and friends are not able to grieve properly; Odysseus is almost being defined by the fact that he has no *nostos*.

Throughout this passage further emphasis is laid on the audience to listen and weep to the songs being narrated.² So much so, in fact, that Nestor’s son, Peisistratus complains that “he cannot delight in grieving near dinnertime” (οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ γε / τέρπομ’ ὀδυρόμενος μεταδρόπιος, 4.193-194). For him tears are appropriate for a man who has died, mourning due to those who are buried. Of course, Peisistratus has his own personal circumstances to contend with here. The story of Peisistratus’s brother – Antilochus, mentioned here as a swift-footed fighter – is one that is over, lamented, and told. Peisistratus’s discomfort indicates again the outstanding qualities of Odysseus’s tale. Telemachus, as if confirming the strangeness of the occasion, stays silent and leaves us to consider his traveling companion’s confusion. By implication, we can see both young men unsettled by the tales and unsure how to receive them. The internal audience’s difficulty in assimilating and understanding the openness of Odysseus’s narrative contributes in turn to its amplification.

The following morning Telemachus asks for the latest news of his father, using the same approach and charged poetic words as before with Nestor. On the one hand, he

¹ This recalls Agamemnon’s attempt to buy off Achilles with a wife, city and other possessions in *Iliad* 9 (121-156).

² The scholia remark on how, though they weep together, the characters weep for their own private reasons (schol. in *Od.* 4.184 ex. a2): PONTANI 2010, pp. 236-237. This again recalls the *Iliad*, when Briseis laments for Patroclus and Achilles refrains from joining the meal (*Il.* 19.282-338).

asks whether Menelaus might announce some fame of his father (εἴ τινά μοι κληηθδὸνα πατρὸς ἐνίσποις, 4.316). On the other, he attempts to put a limit on the tale by framing this request as a wish to be informed him of the “grievous ruin” of that man (κείνου λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον ἐνισπεῖν, 4.323). Menelaus’s narrative turns out to be the longest of the embedded nostoi (333-592) and offers thematic and structural intersections with Odysseus’s tale that serve to point out the special nature of the story being told.

In an echo of the other nostoi’s relationships to our *Odyssey*, Odysseus’s present and future are both subordinated to the storyteller’s account of his past: Menelaus’s news of Odysseus is contained within the tale of the old man of the sea. Yet, not only does Menelaus use Odyssean language to frame his tale (ἤδη μὲν πολέων ἐδάχην βουλήν τε νόον τε / ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων, πολλήν δ’ ἐπελήλυθα γαῖαν, 3.267-268);¹ the story he narrates shares remarkable similarities to that of Odysseus.² Menelaus’s quasi-fantastic nostos, communicated in the context of a palace with a suppliant, is in important ways a trailer for Odysseus’s song before the Phaeacians, with its tour of foreign places, divinely authored becalming, and helpful women.

Many of the interconnections with Odysseus’s own nostos only become evident as we come to understand how the *Odyssey* sets up a quasi-fantastic narrative here only to minimize it later. Menelaus is blown off course and becomes stranded in strange land (near Egypt). A mysterious goddess (Eidothea) helps him figure out how to get home with instructions. He and his men are disguised in the form of animals (seals). Menelaus eventually meets a prophetic figure on the borders of the world and receives a prophecy about his return home; in addition, the prophetic figure divulges the details of *other nostoi*.³

In reciting the prophetic narrative that he receives, Menelaus describes Proteus’s warnings about how to read this knowledge and the response that it is likely to provoke (4.492-499).

Ἄτρεΐδη, τί με ταῦτα διείρεαι; οὐδέ τί σε χροί
ἴδμεναι, οὐδέ δαῖναι ἐμὸν νόον· οὐδέ σέ φημι
δὴν ἄκλαυτον ἔσεσθαι, ἐπὴν ἐν πάντα πύθῃαι.
πολλοὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν γε δάμεν, πολλοὶ δὲ λίποντο·
ἄρχοι δ’ αὖ δύο μοῦνοι Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων
ἐν νόστῳ ἀπόλοντο· μάχη δέ τε καὶ σὺ παρῆσθα.
εἷς δ’ ἔτι που ζῶς καταρύκεται εὐρέϊ πόντῳ.’

‘Son of Atreus, why do you ask me these things? It isn’t right for you to know them or to know my mind. I expect that you will not go without weeping when you know everything truly. Many of the Greeks are dead but many also remain. Only two of the bronze-girded Achaean leaders perished during their homecoming and you were present during the war. One alone remains alive, lost on the wide sea.’

Proteus’s rhetorical gesture recalls Nestor’s earlier framing of his nostos narrative: who could tell all the evils of mortal men? He then makes three kinds of distinctions, which echo the *Odyssey*’s proem: he distinguishes between those who are alive and dead, those who died at war and at sea, and lastly, inevitably, the man who still lives but has yet to achieve his nostos, Odysseus. A trio of unhappy nostoi heroes complete the picture of possible return stories against the background of the relatively happy returns of Nestor and Menelaus: the punished sinner dead at sea (Ajax), the cuckolded father and brother

¹ The central themes of these two lines – Menelaus’s travels on sea and learning about people and their thoughts/ways – are included in the *Odyssey*’s proem (2-4): πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, / πολλὰ δ’ ὅ γ’ ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεια ὄν κατὰ θυμόν).

² Menelaus’s style as “close to that of the narrator”: DE JONG 2001, p. 106. For ring structures in the Telemachy and repeated plot patterns in the *Odyssey*: COOK 2014.

³ See the table below for the similarities.

betrayed at his moment of return (Agamemnon) and the indeterminately delayed Odysseus.

Not only does this series serve to increase the importance of Odysseus's continuing tale by making him the last entry in the series, but the content of the tales in ways anticipate, echo and prepare for the stories that will be told in this epic. Proteus presents a picture of Ajax who *could have survived* despite Athena's hatred had he not boasted and angered Poseidon (4.499-511). Odysseus too will attract the hatred of Poseidon but, crucially, retains Athena's support. Next, Proteus gives an account of Agamemnon's death that comes across more strongly connected to Odysseus than previous versions. Agamemnon apparently returned home only to be led to a festival and ambushed by Aegisthus and his twenty best fighting men, all of whom died along with Agamemnon's men while fighting in the palace (4.512-536). Such a slaughter foreshadows Odysseus's own ambushing and killing of the suitors, though Odysseus will have few of his men to help him.

Most significantly, Proteus's account is open to still further potential variations. He encourages Menelaus to depart because he has still a chance to overtake Aegisthus or at least to be present for the burial. Of course, by virtue of having Menelaus deliver this speech in the context of having *failed* to return home in time, the *Odyssey* shows how ultimately this tale did not fulfil its potential. Critically different is the prophecy that Teiresias delivers to Odysseus, which is similarly open-ended but crucially not bounded by this poem.¹ Indeed, despite his sorrow, Menelaus wants to hear about the unfinished tale – that is to say, Odysseus's nostos. Thus he forsakes his brother in order to learn that Calypso currently holds Odysseus, alone bereft of ships and companions (4.555-560), which brings us right up to date with Odysseus's nostos. The next book will open with the primary narrative focus on Calypso's island and Odysseus's continued suffering. Menelaus is able to return home with his ships and companions (4.571), precisely what Odysseus is lacking (4.559).

TABLE. Comparing structural elements of Menelaus's tale to the *Odyssey*.

CONTEXT	MENELAUS'S NOSTOS STORY	ODYSSEY
<i>Nostos at a banquet</i>	Menelaus in Sparta	Odysseus on Skheria
<i>Wandering at sea</i>	Menelaus after Troy	Odysseus after Troy
<i>Exotic travels</i>	Egypt	Everywhere
<i>Drugging hostess</i>	Helen	Circe
<i>Shape-shifting and disguise</i>	Proteus and Menelaus's companions	Odysseus and his companions
<i>Intervening minor goddess</i>	Eidothea	Leukothea
<i>Prophetic figure</i>	Proteus	Teiresias ²
<i>Embedded nostos stories</i>	Throughout	Throughout
<i>Comparison to other nostoi</i>	Agamemnon, etc.	Throughout

¹ See PURVES 2010, pp. 84-89.

² Proteus and Tiresias both instruct characters within the poem on "the path (hodon) and measures (metra) of their route" (*Od.* 4.389=10.539): PURVES 2010, pp. 84-89.

CONTEXT	MENELAUS'S NOSTOS STORY	ODYSSEY
<i>Divine enmity</i>	Poseidon for Ajax	Poseidon for Odysseus Helios for Odysseus's companions
<i>Helpful deity</i>	Athena	Athena
<i>Homecoming slaughters</i>	Agamemnon and his men	The suitors
<i>Exceptionality</i>	Odysseus	Odysseus

As is readily apparent from the common elements in Menelaus's and Odysseus's narratives in the table above (by no means exhaustive), the tales are spun from the same threads, strands of which a neo-analytical reading would perhaps attribute to the extant plots of the putative Epic Cycle.¹ But, as we have tried to show, these plot elements are deployed on multiple occasions in this epic for particular effect. In part they prepare us for the monumental homecoming; at the same time they also subordinate those other nostoi both explicitly and implicitly to the master narrative of the *Odyssey*.

Near the close of Menelaus's narrative, these tales have less of an independent presence as they coalesce around (and serve to underpin) the reintroduction of Odysseus. Indeed, the table presented above could be expanded to show how the nostos-narrative contexts of the epic's first song on Ithaca expand in an ever greater, more dangerous and fantastic repeated pattern that culminates in the stories of Odysseus – first his *Apologoi*, then his actual homecoming (see the figure below for a graphic representation). In each case, the comparison and anticipation(s) ultimately fail to do justice (again) to the stakes of Odysseus's nostos. Menelaus recounts his nostos with little at stake, in the comfort of his own home *to a guest*. In contrast Odysseus sings to win his homecoming. The nostos he sings and the way he sings it are both critical for the ultimate success of his nostos. Furthermore, Odysseus's tale is marked out as different because it has no resolution, yet.² Its unknowability results in what we might call suspense but which the epic characterizes in Penelope and Menelaus as *unforgettable* grief. Not knowing hurts. The suspense of the return suspended or interrupted is a corollary to the popularity of the *new song* emphasized by Telemachus. The *Odyssey* is creating the nostos tale to end all nostoi.

Once what is known is shared, however, Telemachus reflects upon them in a new way that is uniquely at home to the poetics of the *Odyssey*. First, he acknowledges that he could endure the painful pleasure of listening to Menelaus³ for a year uninterrupted by missing home or parents. Yet, the very next day in his story time – but ten books later for the audience – he begs off returning to Pylos lest “the old man keep him unwilling in his household because he desires to care for him” (15.97). Perhaps what has changed has less to do with Telemachus's situation and more, again, to do with the changed circumstances of the external audience, who have by now witnessed Odysseus beguile the Phaeacians, the dangerous song of the Sirens, and the perversions of hospitality on the islands of Polyphemos, Circe and Calypso. It is now time for Telemachus to be in Ithaca. At the same time, it is perfectly possible to (re)read Telemachus's praise before as part of

¹ On structural repetitions in the *Odyssey*'s Telemachy and an overview of scholarship: COOK 2014.

² The use of “vast inequalities in the distribution of some knowledge among the players” is central to the uniqueness and effectiveness of the *Odyssey*: LOWE 2000, p. 143.

³ This adverb used in making positive-value statements is not uncommon. Athena says that Telemachus looks “terribly” like his father (1.208-209) and Telemachus describes his father as “loving terribly” (1.264)

a rhetorical strategy precisely to facilitate his swift departure (as too he will avoid returning to Pylos). Nestor's narrative prowess extends far enough that Telemachus announces he fears being robbed of his own homecoming when he bypasses Pylos on his way home from Sparta later in the epic.¹

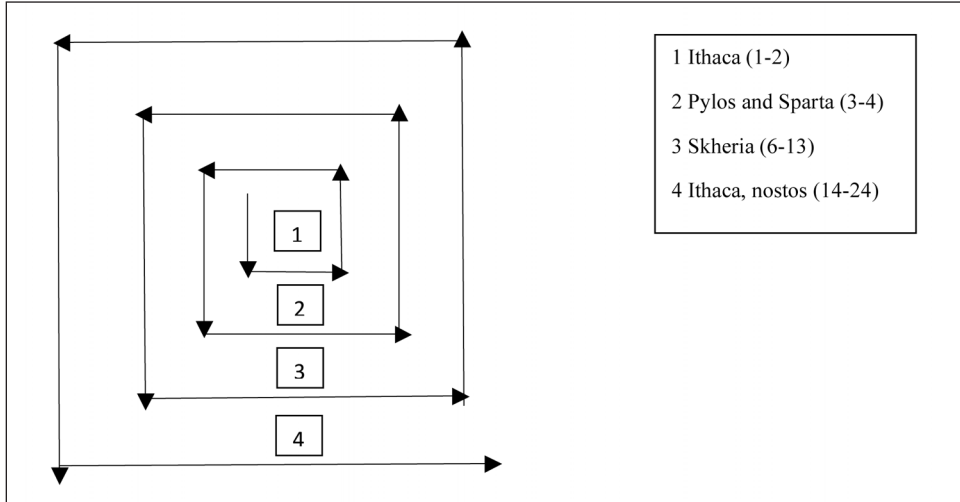


FIG. 1. Odysseus's geometric spiral.²

CONCLUSION: RECYCLING EPIC

In this chapter we have considered how the *Odyssey* frames its performances of nostos. In part, it creates an elaborate geometric spiral (as pictured in the figure above), wherein each telling gives shape to the next that necessarily embraces and exceeds it. The *Odyssey* locates its singers and audiences in sympotic settings for the telling of its tales, whether it is Phemius entertaining the suitors with the “difficult homecomings” of the Achaeans or Telemachus learning about his father from the Trojan War veterans, Nestor and Menelaus. This evolving theme is picked up in the series of songs performed at the court of the Phaeacians, above all Odysseus's connection to the *Iliou oiton* (Ἄργείων Δαναῶν ἡδ' Ἰλίου οἶτον ἀκούων, 8.578), which culminates in Odysseus performing his own nostos tale in response to King Alcinous's request for both the hero's name and the description of the lands, peoples, cities and customs he has seen.³ Even so, Odysseus's memorable and fantastic tale is anticipated in important ways by each tale that precedes it.⁴

Through Menelaus and Nestor, the *Odyssey* not only appropriates other nostoi narratives and communicates them for its own purposes, but it also deploys them in a way that

¹ On Nestor's hospitality “forestalled” and the peril presented by Nestor's storytelling: DICKSON 1995, pp. 187-195.

² For the geometric structure of the *Iliad* see Whitman 1965. This figure was inspired in part by correspondence with Erwin Cook and his work on structure in the *Odyssey* (e.g. COOK 1995 and 2014).

³ When Alcinous asks for a song 8.572-586, he starts with a formulaic phrase (ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἶπε καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατὰλεξον), followed by lines that recall the proem (ὄππῃ ἀπεπλάγχθης τε καὶ ἄς τινας ἴκσο χάρας / ἀνθρώπων, αὐτοὺς τε πόλιός τ' ἐξ ναιεταούσας), but with a particular ethical focus (ἦ μὲν ὅσοι χαλεποὶ τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι, / οἳ τε φιλόξενοι καὶ σφιν νόσος ἐστὶ θεοῦδής). Central to his interest, however, remains the homecoming narratives (Ἄργείων Δαναῶν ἡδ' Ἰλίου οἶτον ἀκούων).

⁴ On how these narratives pave the way for Odysseus's deceptive and clever nature: VAN NORTWICK 2009, pp. 7-12.

prepares the way for the major nostos narrative to come in the next book. Not only have we just been reminded at the end of the book about where Odysseus is, but we have also been reminded about the conditions in Ithaca. In addition, the details and patterns of the nostoi presented to Telemachus prepare us to read Odysseus's tale in a different way by providing elements that correspond to his journeys, mistakes and victories.

Crucially, something happens to Telemachus as he witnesses this testimony, which changes his sense of himself. As a member of the audience alongside Telemachus, so we are invited to go through the same transformative process. The audience perspective is additionally important because it indicates without a doubt that every tale told in the *Odyssey* is to some extent already known. But, as the figure above also anticipates, each narrative also shapes those that follows and prepares us for new ends. There is no accident in the open-ending character of this figure or the open-ended nature of the epic itself. The *Odyssey* looks forward to the worlds that succeed it and the lives of the people living in them – the people, that is, who are the audience of this poem.

In turn, this takes us back to the Epic Cycle and the repeated story patterns, themes, motifs and vocabulary. Details may have been part of discretely extant homecoming tales. But trying to reassemble and recuperate what has been lost and wondering which narrative employed them first misses the crucial point that the *Odyssey* puts them all at the service of its nostos and, second, overlooks the complex and functional structure of the epic itself. Instead, what we have is the evidence of this *Odyssey* where it is clear that the elements of the tale we hear about Odysseus appear earlier in the same epic. When we get to his story, it actually proceeds in the order of Menelaus's record of Proteus tale – Odysseus the god-angering braggart, becomes Menelaus the wanderer, becomes Ajax the shipwreck, becomes Agamemnon the homecoming king. But in each way, his nostos is greater in magnitude (length), stakes (danger and loss) and poetics. Where this Ajax sinks to a watery grave, Nestor dines interminably, Menelaus and Orestes bury the cuckolded Agamemnon, and that last Atreid looks forward to some strange type of immortality. Odysseus, whose tale is more lamentable and still more gripping because its end is not known to the players of his epic, looks forward to yet another departure from home, yet more recycling of epic narrative, yet further fame.

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