

EXCHANGES IN THE UNDERWORLD:
ODYSSEY 11 AND 24

The Underworld offers an especially rich laboratory for examining the range and limits of the narrative perspectives that shape the *Odyssey*. Exchanges in both the First and Second Nekyia invite us to reflect on the poem's narrative possibilities and strategies; they also make audible other stories and outcomes that are beyond and even counter to those we might call "properly" Odyssean. In this paper we hope to indicate the ways in which the narrative logic of the *Odyssey* is illuminated through Odysseus' account of his conversations with the denizens of the Underworld, given their differing—even conflicting—perspectives on how the story of return has taken shape, how it might further unfold, and how it will be received. In part, these episodes highlight the temporal dynamics of narrative art: the effects of the passage of time on and in the narrative, on its characters, and on its internal and external audiences. And by distinguishing between underworld exchanges within an embedded narrative, as offered by Odysseus to his Phaiakian hosts in 11, and those that form part of the external, or extradiegetic, narrative level in 24 (unmediated, so to speak, by first-person involvement), the poem draws attention to its narratological sophistication, not least through its orchestration of multiple narrative perspectives and its subtle indexing of different narrative temporalities.¹

1. The terminology is from Genette 1980 and 1994. The extradiegetic (or primary) narrator is at the outermost narrative level, while intradiegetic (secondary, tertiary, etc.) narrators are at embedded levels. The terms heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators refer to content: a heterodiegetic narrator is telling someone else's story, while a homodiegetic narrator is telling his or her own story, as a character inhabiting the storyworld. If the teller is also the protagonist of that storyworld (in a homodiegetic narrative), the term autodiegetic

It is in the Underworld that stories—remote, recent, and those still in progress—meet and mediate between the living and the dead, as the poem creates a conjunction among agents and audiences across generations. For the poem of *nostos*, going forward is also a going back, and in the middle of that journey in which, we might say, *prosthen* and *opisthen* converge, the Odyssean Underworld brings together past and future: it is the place where the characters themselves explicitly pose questions about emerging plot possibilities and also where the poem meets its own past, in the form of the Iliadic heroes, now shades; it is the place of prophecy and retrospection—even perhaps of retrospection *as* prophecy. What are the implications, for both characters and audiences, of being *in the middle* of the story, as the First Nekuia locates us? By contrast, the Second Nekuia provides a reflection on how the poem's trajectory appears in retrospect, when the *nostos* story has finally concluded and, so to speak, looks forward to becoming a memory.

As we hope to show, the two Underworld episodes serve different narratological ends. The *Odyssey* knows the *Iliad*, and knows many other traditions: in its two Nekuiai, the poem progressively establishes (or re-establishes) its own narrative matter (and not only its *telos*). Thus the Underworld is also, we will suggest, the place where the poem presents us with and ultimately secures the parameters of its own genre.

First Nekuia: Odysseus and Temporality

Whether considered as a temporal, epistemological, or narrative domain, there is nothing simple or straightforward about the Underworld. The First Nekuia sets forth the principle that those in the Underworld will speak νημεπρέα (as Teiresias says at 96, 137 and 148—and as he himself does); apart from the seer, however, all the shades speak from their own subjective points of view. This problematizes the idea that Odysseus, or anyone,

is used. For a fuller description, see HERMAN, JAHN, and RYAN 2012, 341–42 (“Classification by Person”) and 422–23 (“Person”).

an ever gain access to νημερτέα ("the truth"), which is here aligned not with omniscience but with first-person perspective, in dialogue.

If the poem describes Odysseus as the man who "saw the cities of men and knew their minds" (1.3: πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἶδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον γυνω), we may ask what understandings, or kinds of knowledge, characters who have no future (except in and as story) can provide to those who, like Odysseus, are at the midpoint of their journey. While Odysseus is the central character in his narrative of his encounters in Hades, the figures that appear before him shift the angle of vision through which his story is viewed, and their perspectives shape the story as it unfolds. Odysseus begins his narrative of the descent with his interrupted sojourn on Circe's island; his meeting with Elpenor, which bridges the upper and lower worlds, brings the latest news, as it were, to the deeper past that the shades inhabit.

From the outset, the First Nekuia foregrounds questions of the *where* and the *when* of knowing, as in Odysseus' inquiry of Elpenor: "How did you get here *before we did*?" And these questions of knowing what happened or is happening, of knowing "what" or "that," are also questions of tale-telling and timing. Elpenor's response will send Odysseus back to Aiaia: his request not to be left unburied, promptly agreed to by Odysseus, is the first directive, as it were, for the route Odysseus and his companions will take on their way home; yet Elpenor cannot see beyond that particular horizon.

On a narratological level, the successive encounters in the first Nekuia offer a kind of bravura resumé of—and subtly unfolding corrective to—such limited and partial perspectives. As Odysseus converses, in series, with Teiresias, Antikleia, the heroines of an earlier generation, and with his fellow war heroes, we are invited to consider the subjectivity of narration as well as the contingency of knowledge.

The encounters in the First Nekuia make plain that the Underworld is a place of deferred and perspectival knowing, a knowing developed in part dialogically—i.e. through conversation. It is also a place of narrative desire, of the great pathos of curiosity. We might say too that knowing happens provisionally, conditionally: this is part of the force of Teiresias'

prophetic mode as a sequence of conditional narrative lines: if this, then that. But the “this” and the “that” are themselves partly occluded, riddles to be unlocked in the course of the poem.

Teiresias’ if-then structure (11.104-15), in fact, hands agency to the central character, Odysseus: thus the seer provides not a literal roadmap—as Circe suggests he will at 10.508-10 and as she herself does at 12.37-141—but a behavioral logic of acts and their consequences; and in that process Teiresias gives Odysseus information about circumstances awaiting him in Ithaca, should he arrive. Once he comes to the point in his prophecy of arrival in Ithaca, the seer shifts from conditionals and subjunctives to future indicatives and imperatives. The shift starts with the singular aorist participle *elthōn* at 11.118 (“having come” to Ithaca). This suggests that Odysseus will indeed arrive, but seemingly alone, without his errant companions – as the Phaiakian audience already know to be the case—and thus hints at how the ‘if-then’ of Thrinakia and Helios’ cattle will turn out. Teiresias’ prophecy looks both forward to the rest of Odysseus’ account in the *Apologoi* and also back to the external narrative—that is, to the very opening of the poem.² It also anticipates more than the external narrative has yet given its audience to expect, namely, the journey inland.

Seeing beyond subjective emplotment, as he does, Teiresias points to things not only beyond Odysseus’ immediate interest in the pathway home, but beyond the poem: to the journey outward from Ithaca to a place where people do not recognize an oar. The prediction—unrealized within

2. The poem attributes the companions’ loss of their homecoming to their recklessness in eating the oxen of the Sun God:

ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὥς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, λέμενός περ:
αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο,
νήπιοι, οἱ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἡελίοιο
ἥσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ. (1.6-9)

*Even so he could not save his companions, hard though
he strove to; they were destroyed by their own wild recklessness,
fools, who devoured the oxen of Helios, the Sun God,
and he took away the day of their homecoming.*

our *Odyssey*—that Odysseus will have to leave Ithaca, raises the possibility of an alternative ending, perhaps evoking the further adventures known to the traditions followed by the Epic Cycle's *Telegony*, in which Odysseus marries the Queen of the Thesprotians (and has a son by Circe).³ Ultimately, the poem rejects such possibilities as incompatible with its narrative of fidelity and the restoration of the *oikos*; but at this stage of the journey, the question of how its conclusion will be narrated remains suspended, even from the vantage point of the external audience.

Antikleia, in contrast to Teiresias, produces a version of the story with no obstacles to Odysseus' return to his household and no source of distress other than his family's longing for him. It is true that she knows more than Odysseus about conditions in Ithaca up to the time of her death; yet her tale is shaped by her own perspective as a grieving mother, such that she focuses almost entirely on the impact of Odysseus' absence on herself and Laertes and on the steadfast Penelope. Her life has come to an end while the *nostos* story is still unfinished—indeed has come to an end *because* it is unfinished—and from the *Odyssey*'s point of view, her narrative, in omitting the suitors and all they entail for the poem's design, is drastically partial and incomplete.

In the midst of his conversation with his mother, the famous wives from earlier generations approach Odysseus in endless sequence. As much as Teiresias' advice extends beyond the scope of the future that the *Odyssey* chooses to narrate, here the poem's vantage point moves outside Odysseus' story in the other direction, into a remote past, far removed from events on Ithaca and even anterior to the war at Troy. Marked by a different narrative mode, that of the catalogue, Odysseus' encounters with these wives from long ago offer no intersection with his own life-story; he learns something about their lives, but reproduces no conversation with them, ostensibly because they can tell him nothing about his own life. But

3. On independent traditions about Odysseus, as represented in the epic cycle, see the important discussion in BURGESS 2001, as well as SACKS 2012.

through their histories, the poem juxtaposes to Antikleia's version of the stasis on Ithaca a range of volatile domestic scenarios that suggest perilous alternatives to the family romance reassuringly conjured in her recollection—not only in its evocation of figures like Eriphyle and Phaedra, but also of those wives seduced by one or another god.⁴

Yet the female figure who next converses with Odysseus—Arete—returns us to Odysseus immediately in the here-and-now of the extra-diegetic frame (i.e., Skheria), and to a more optimistic view of household relations. The Intermezzo re-introduces her in the role of the exemplary wife and of a discerning listener (rather than as subject matter) who reflects on the storyteller's prestige and draws attention to the question of narrative continuity and scale. The Intermezzo also reorients the story's focus: Alkinoos' praise of Odysseus as a singer leads to a request to turn from the theme of family, which preoccupies Antikleia, to that of the Achaean 'Männerbund'—a topic already of riveting interest to the Phaiakians, as we know from the songs of Demodocus. Here, we might say, the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* meet: the narrative of Odysseus is situated quite literally face-to-face with its origins in the events and repercussions of the Trojan War.

Odysseus responds to Alkinoos by recounting his exchange with Agamemnon, whose reply to Odysseus' questioning continues the subject of the dangers of the domestic sphere, which are, so to speak, Agamemnon's preoccupation. Here the inner narrative, Odysseus's recital of his Adventures, converges with the outer narrative, which has raised the specter of wifely infidelity from the widest perspective at the outset of the poem—namely in the Council of the Gods in Book 1—to which it returns in Books 3 and 4.

When Agamemnon advises Odysseus to go home in disguise, lest Penelope turn out to be another Clytemnestra, we are made aware once again of the grim fortunes of the house of Atreus as one possible route

4. On the *Odyssey's* catalogue of heroines, see DE JONG 2004, 281-285; DOHERTY 1992, 161-177; SAMMONS 2010, 74-101; and SLATKIN 2012.

for the house of Odysseus and as an *alternative* first-person narrative. Though not ultimately actualized by the poem, its possibility hovers until Penelope's knees go slack and she embraces her husband at 23.205.⁵ For the characters—and audience—at the midpoint in Book 11, Odysseus' *nostos* could yet turn into Agamemnon's: but in the end, Odysseus' narrative will correct Agamemnon's perspective, with its limited understanding of women and homecomings.

What follows is one of several crucial meta-poetic junctures in the *Nekuiai* in which the *Odyssey* signals both its debt to, and its counter-shaping of, *Iliadic* material. With his statement at 11.488-91, Achilles' shade reflects the ambivalence toward the heroic code of honor that characterized him especially in *Iliad* 9-16.⁶ On the one hand, he rejects Odysseus' designation of him as most fortunate (483: *makartatos*), and even expresses impatience at the notion that he has a privileged status as lord of the dead. Desiring life, he rues his early demise and rejects the epic of war's cherished value of *kleos*; in this sense his outlook aligns with the Odyssean willingness to forego glory in favor of survival.⁷ At the same time, Achilles sets store by the *timē* of his father Peleus (503) and rejoices when Odysseus describes Neoptolemos' preeminence on the battlefield and in council. On behalf of his father and son, Achilles remains attached to the very code that he questioned in the *Iliad* and that he rejects in this dialogue with Odysseus.

So too the *Odyssey*, the avowed poetic heir to the story of Troy—launched as the poem of aftermath and survival—performs the delicate balance between honoring its antecedent and affirming its own concerns

5. See FELSON 1994 for a discussion of Penelope's gradual recognition of Odysseus.

6. ἴση μοῖρα μένοντι καὶ εἰ μάλα τις πολεμίζοι:

ἐν δὲ ἴῃ τιμῇ ἡμὲν κακὸς ἰδὲ καὶ ἐσθλός:

κάτθαν' ὁμῶς ὃ τ' ἀεργὸς ἀνὴρ ὃ τε πολλὰ ἐργῶς.

11.9.318-320

Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard.

We are all held in a single honour, the brave with the weaklings.

A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much.

7. See the discussion in EDWARDS 1985, esp. 226-227.

and values.⁸ The poem of *nostos* represents Achilles endorsing the Odyssean cherished value of staying alive at all costs, even as it pays homage to the preeminence of those whose glory the *Iliad* celebrates.

Odysseus' confrontation with Ajax offers an equally powerful meta-poetic moment in revisiting—and polemically revising—the post-Iliadic tradition of the competition over the arms of Achilles. This scene of abortive exchange—unparalleled in Homeric poetry—takes up the problem of narratological constriction by prematurely truncating a story or foreclosing its possible development. Ajax serves as the extreme instance of a character locked in his own subjective pain. Stuck in a kind of negative nostalgia, he will not alter his grudge, ever: will not even converse with his enemy, Odysseus, and hear his apology. The *Odyssey* contrasts Ajax's inability to move beyond the *Iliad* (as it were) with the opportunity, offered here by Odysseus, for an opening out into a wider story.

In the Underworld, then, the dead—other than the seer—are a kind of audience who know certain things, but only up to a point.⁹ In this they are not unlike the mortal audiences within the poem; and indeed they provide a model for external audiences as well, whose lives are likewise incomplete. The Underworld encounters in the First Nekuia allow for a complex negotiation and acknowledgment of Iliadic values. In this way, the epic of *nostos* here refines and begins to secure its narrative terrain—both its matter and its direction—precisely through its dialogic and progressive sifting of subjective, epistemologically limited story.

Second Nekuia (24.1-204)

The Second Nekuia both confirms and augments the narratological and epistemological stakes of Underworld exchanges. Here, once the narrative

8. See SLATKIN 2009.

9. At 11.218-24, when Antikleia explains the *dikē brotôn* to Odysseus and reflects on the ontological status of the dead, she generalizes beyond her own experience; yet her explanation and her reflection do not carry the narratological implications of Teiresias' vision of events beyond the poem. They do nothing to set forth a pathway of song for her son's return.

has restored Odysseus to his *oikos*, the pair of exchanges bear not on the possible direction the course of the poem will take, but on the question of its afterlife—what will the poem mean to those in the future? Unlike the First Nekuia, the Second is a succinct 204-line diegesis that the primary narrator offers the external audience. Clearly not a sightseeing tour of the Underworld, it includes no heroines or sinners as in Odysseus' account to the Phaiakians.

The Second Nekuia streamlines the personnel in the primary narration to a mere three speaking characters: Achilles, Agamemnon, and Amphimedon. In structure, intermittent extradiegesis (1-23, 35, 98-105, 120, 191, and 203-204) frames two sets of character exchanges, each including a secondary narration—an embedded tale.

Achilles meets Agamemnon and comments on his untimely demise (24-34).

Agamemnon in 36-97 gives an epyllion of Achilles' funeral (106-119)¹⁰ Agamemnon meets Amphimedon and asks for an account of the suitors' demise (192-202).

Amphimedon in recounts the suitors' version of their slaughter (121-190).

The Second Nekuia takes up that part of the First Nekuia after the Intermezzo, where Odysseus tells Alkinoos of his encounters with his fellow warriors (11.387-567). What is most significant in the first set of exchanges, between Achilles and Agamemnon, is their reciprocal regard: they are not quarrelsome rivals; instead, Achilles (like Priam in the last book of the *Iliad*) approaches Agamemnon sympathetically and thereby disarms any latent hostility from his interlocutor.¹¹

“Ἀτρεΐδῃ, περὶ μὲν σ’ ἔφαμεν Διὶ τερπικεράνῳ
ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων φίλον ἔμμεναι ἥματα πάντα,

10. EDWARDS 1985.

11. The *Odyssey* has Achilles introduce a hindsight speculation over who was dearest to Zeus and thus most blessed. His use of superlatives is striking, and it looks back to—but reframes—Agamemnon's claims in the *Iliad*, that he is the kingliest and the elder.

οὐνεκα πολλοῖσιν τε καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἄνασσες
 δῆμῳ ἔνι Τρώων, ὅθι πάσχομεν ἄλγε' Ἀχαιοί.
 ἦ τ' ἄρα καὶ σοὶ πρῶϊ παραστήσεσθαι ἔμελλεν
 μοῖρ' ὀλοή, τὴν οὐ τις ἀλεύεται ὅς κε γένηται.
 ὥς ὄφελος τιμῆς ἀπονήμενος, ἥς περ ἄνασσες,
 δῆμῳ ἔνι Τρώων θάνατον καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν.
 τῷ κέν τοι τύμβον μὲν ἐποίησαν Παναχαιοί,
 ἡδέ κε καὶ σῶ παιδί μέγα κλέος ἦρα' ὀπίσσω.
 νῦν δ' ἄρα σ' οἰκτίστῳ θανάτῳ εἴμαρτο ἁλῶναι.” (24.24-34)

“Son of Atreus, we thought that all your days you were favored
 beyond all other heroes by Zeus who delights in the thunder,
 because you were lord over numerous people, and strong ones,
 in the land of the Trojans, where we Achaians suffered hardships.
 And yet it was to you that the destructive doom spirit
 would come too early; but no man who is born escapes her.
 How I wish that, enjoying that high place of your power,
 you could have met death and destiny in the land of the Trojans.
 So all the Achaians would have made a mound to cover you,
 and you would have won great glory for your son hereafter.
 In truth you were ordained to die by a death most pitiful.”

Here Achilles does not tell a story, but provides an opening for Agamemnon to explain how and why he suffered a “baneful destiny” (24.29: *moir’ oloē*), contrary to the Achaians’ expectations (24-27: “we thought that all your days you were favored/ beyond all other heroes by Zeus who delights in the thunder,/ because you were lord over numerous people, and strong ones,/ in the land of the Trojans...”). The timing (28: *prōi*, “early”) and dislocation (not “in the land of the Trojans”¹² but in Argos) mark Agamemnon’s death as “most pitiful” (34: *oiktistōi thanatōi*). Here Achilles communicates his dismay and surprise in an unfulfilled wish (30-31), fol-

12. Cf. 24.32-33: “where all the Achaians would have made a mound to cover you,/ and you would have won great glory for your son hereafter.”

lowed by a counterfactual apodosis (32-33); then he contrasts what he had envisioned for Agamemnon with what has actually happened, introduced by *nun d'ara* (34). Thus Achilles presents two possible destinies for Agamemnon, one hypothetical, the other actual. In contrast to their mutual animosity in the *Iliad*, we find here an Achilles who is elegiac rather than vituperative. By putting its own stamp on their relationship, the *Odyssey* recalibrates the defining theme of the *Iliad*, signaled in its proem: the baneful wrath of Peleus' son. The Odyssean Achilles of the Underworld is, by contrast, respectful of his former (Iliadic) adversary, especially when he twice acknowledges Agamemnon's political power (27 and 31: *anasses*), invoking *anax andrōn Agamemnōn*, and when he wishes for Agamemnon that he had died gloriously at Troy.

In Agamemnon's lengthy reply to Achilles, the *Odyssey* represents him practicing a reciprocal generosity toward his former adversary, whose funeral in Troy he remembers and recounts in great detail—a gift to his second person addressee (36-89).¹³ His elaborate and vivid report of the rituals performed in honor of the slain Achilles amounts to a heroization, which resonates with Odysseus' summary at 11.484-86: "We Argives honored you as we did the gods, and now in this place you have great authority over the dead".¹⁴ Only at the end of his tale does Agamemnon finally bring up his own contrasting, pitiful destiny, but in a mere three lines.

The second set of exchanges, between Agamemnon and Amphimedon, gives voice to the vanquished suitors, whose perspective is then dismissed. Here the slaughtered suitors make their final appearance as their representative narrates an alternate version of the Slaughter. Like Antikleia in the First Nekuia, the suitors (through Amphimedon) recount their own

13. On the intimacy of I-you narratives, see FELSON 2011 and, on this passage, DE JONG 2004.

14. The use of *makar* may call attention to the fact that, in contrast to the *Aithiopsis* tradition, "the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are eccentric in their presentations of Achilles' afterlife." See EDWARDS 1985, 223.

demise.¹⁵ Yet unlike Antikleia, who arrived in Hades long before her son, their arrival in Hades coincides with the point to which the outer narrative has now brought us. Amphimedon's shade responds to Agamemnon's innocent and uninformed query¹⁶ with a kind of *apologia*, in which he recounts the end of the *Odyssey* from his own subjective angle.¹⁷ His tale focuses on how the suitors were tricked for three years by Penelope and then slaughtered at the hands of Odysseus, with the help of Telemachus and Penelope. It is a tale of deceit and collusion on the part of the royal family, with minimal transgression on the part of the suitors.

Amphimedon's account is even more partial than Antikleia's—not because it is out of date, and not only because of his insufficient knowledge of all the events but because of his angle of vision: to exonerate himself and the rest of the suitors, he skews his tale. The poem, however, puts its external audience in a position to recognize the inaccuracy Amphimedon's self-justifying retrospective version, especially when he asserts that Odysseus orchestrated the contest of the bow in collusion with Penelope—as the more conventional plot of the song of *nostos* might have had it, but as our poem did not.

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μιν ἔγειρε Διὸς νοός αἰγιόχοιο,
 σὺν μὲν Τηλεμάχῳ περικαλλέα τεύχε' αἶρας
 ἐς θάλαμον κατέθηκε καὶ ἐκλήϊσεν ὀχῆας,
 αὐτὰρ ὃ ἦν ἄλοχον πολυκερδείησιν ἄνωγε
 τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολὶὸν τε σίδηρον,
 ἡμῖν αἰνομόροισιν ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχὴν. (24.164-69)

But then, when the purpose of aegis-bearing Zeus had stirred him,

15. They are both homodiegetic narrators, though not clearly autodiegetic—i.e. protagonists in their own tale.

16. Far from being an eyewitness, Agamemnon is ignorant of the turmoil in Ithaca and its outcome; he is now first learning of these recent events.

17. DE JONG 2004 at 23.300-33 compares this 'analepsis' or flashback to the exchange of stories in their marriage bed between Penelope and Odysseus.

*he, with Telemachos, took away the glorious armor,
and stowed it away in the chamber, closing the doors upon it.
Then, in the craftiness of his mind, he urged his lady
to set the bow and the gray icon in front of the suitors,
the contest for us ill-fated men, the start of our slaughter.*

In voicing the complaint of the slaughtered suitors, Amphimedon speaks on behalf of the entire class of interlopers who threaten the stability of the *oikos* and undermine the kingdom of an absent legitimate husband and king.¹⁸ Thus the poem circles back, thematically, to the conversation on Olympus in Book 1, where Zeus's blaming of Aegisthus for *atasthalia* (1.32-43) evokes Athena's curse: "let any other man who does thus perish as he did" (1.46-47). The suitors are just such "others".

Agamemnon rejects Amphimedon's presentation of the suitors as victims who were treated unfairly. Instead, he sides entirely with Odysseus, in whose victory he exults:

ὄλβιε Λαέρταο πάϊ, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,
ἦ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτήσω ἄκοιτιν.
ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
κούρη Ἰκαρίου: ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος,
ἀνδρὸς κουριδίου: τῷ οἱ κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται
ἥς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσι δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδὴν
ἄθᾶνατοι χάριεσσιν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κούρη κακὰ μήσατο ἔργα,
κουρίδιον κτείνασα πόσιν, στυγερὴ δὲ τ' ἀοιδὴ
ἔσσετ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, χαλεπὴν δὲ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει
θηλυτέρῃσι γυναιξί, καὶ ἢ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν. (24.192-201)

*O fortunate son of Laertes, Odysseus of many devices,
surely you won yourself a wife endowed with great virtue.
How good was proved the heart that is in blameless Penelope,*

18. FELSON and SLATKIN 2015.

*Ikarios' daughter, and how well she remembered Odysseus,
her wedded husband. Thereby the fame of her virtue shall never
die away, but the immortals will make for the people
of earth a thing of grace in the song for prudent Penelope.
Not so did the daughter of Tyndareos fashion her evil
deeds, when she killed her wedded lord, and a song of loathing
will be hers among men, to make evil the reputation
of womankind, even for one whose acts are virtuous.*

The earlier emphasis on his *xenia* with Amphimedon and his family¹⁹ accentuates the unexpectedness of Agamemnon's immediate, emotionally-charged reaction to his guest-friend's tale. His apostrophe to an absent Odysseus—absent from the Underworld because victorious—disrupts the external readers' expectation that Agamemnon will pity his Ithacan guest-friend Amphimedon.²⁰

In Agamemnon's response to Amphimedon's version of the Slaughter, the poem offers a positive assessment of its new type of heroism: a heroism that allows for survival and that gives a woman, a faithful wife, a prime and decisive role in executing that blessed outcome. By congratulating Odysseus and ascribing *kleos* to Penelope for her *aretē*, which he credits for Odysseus' success, and by blaming his own treacherous wife for his most pitiful failure, Agamemnon in effect exonerates himself.²¹ More importantly for our argument, he affirms the reception of the song of *nostos* on an equal footing with the song of war and, in this way, validates the *Iliad's*

19. This expectation arises from the repeated mention of guest-friendship between Agamemnon and the suitor's family (cf. 24.104, 114-119, and 122).

20. The intensity of Agamemnon's immediate, powerful reaction could be read as vicarious satisfaction in hearing of the triumph of a legitimate husband and king over interlopers (who resemble Aigisthos).

21. To achieve this self-justification, Agamemnon appends a gratuitous misogynistic statement at 24.200-01, that "Clytemnestra's acts will bring a bad reput[e] on herself/ and on all women, even one who is upright" (χαλεπήν δέ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει/ θηλυτέρῃσι γυναιξί, καὶ ἢ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔσιν.) Cf. his earlier generalization at 11.433-434: οἱ τε κατ' αἰσχὸς ἔχουσιν καὶ ἐσσομένησιν ὀπίσσω/θηλυτέρῃσι γυναιξί, καὶ ἢ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔσιν.

EXCHANGES IN THE UNDERWORLD

endorsement of the *Odyssey*. Although he bases his assessment of female *aretē* and of a blessed life that depends on a virtuous wife on Amphimedon's flawed representation of Penelope's role, Agamemnon's interpretive judgment of Odysseus' survival once home accords with the poem's larger view. Agamemnon's centrality to the *Iliad*, his acknowledged status while alive, and his most piteous death (as an inverse parallel to Odysseus' survival) make him a perfect vehicle for the Odyssean message he conveys.

We hope to have indicated some of the richness of the dialogues in the Underworld in terms of narrative temporalities, differential access to "events," and the *Odyssey*'s securing of its own ethos, values, and outcomes. Through its complex and ramifying Underworld exchanges, the *Odyssey* subtly and decisively arbitrates the competing claims of *kleos* and *nostos* and offers an opportunity, for its denizens and for us, to reflect on the stakes and the logic of epic poiesis.

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