SONDERDRUCK AUS:

EUPHROSYNE

STUDIES IN ANCIENT EPIC AND ITS LEGACY IN HONOR OF DIMITRIS N. MARONITIS

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Paradigms of Paternity: Fathers, Sons, and Athletic / Sexual Prowess in Homer's *Odyssey*

> τίς νύ μοι ἡμέρη ἥδε, θεοὶ φίλοι! ἦ μάλα χαίρω·
> υἱός θ' υἱωνός τ' ἀρετῆς πέρι δῆριν ἔχουσι.
>
> "What a day for me, dear gods! What joy—
> My son and grandson vying over courage."[1]

These are the words of Laertes at *Od.* 24.514-15, as he initiates the battle against the suitors by killing their leader, Eupeithes, Antinous' father. Into this single offspring of Arcesius, Athena had breathed enormous strength (μένος, 520), enabling him to fight alongside his son and grandson. Since his wife's death Laertes, in his despondency, had been isolated at the farm for some time (1.189-93 and 11.187-96); in view of his 'retirement', it is striking that the narrator not only gives him the first and only named victim but also details his *aristeia* alone.[2] Odysseus has just exhorted Telemachus not to disgrace (καταισχύνειν) the race of his fathers, who "in battle prowess (ἀλκῇ τ' ἠνορέῃ) have excelled for ages all across the world" (24.508-509). To this Telemachus responded (511-12):

> "Now you'll see, if you care to watch, dear father,
> now I'm fired up. Disgrace, you say?
> I won't disgrace your line."

Here, during a brief defense of their *oikos*, the patriline from Laertes to Odysseus to Telemachus is utterly intact. Three successive generations fight side-by-side... until

1 I am using the lively translation by Robert Fagles, *The Odyssey: Homer* (New York 1996). The text of Homer's *Odyssey* is cited from W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer*, 2nd ed., Vols. 1 and 2 (London 1965).

2 For a recent consideration of this passage, in light of intergenerational tensions, see Gregory Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow* (Cornell 1998) 206-223. He builds upon and critiques the model of male development set forth in Nancy Felson (= Felson-Rubin), *Regarding Penelope* (Princeton 1994) 67-91. See now Georg Wöhrle, *Telemachs Reise: Väter und Söhne in Ilias und Odyssee oder ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der Männlichkeitsideologie in der homerischen Welt* [Hypomnemata 124] (Göttingen 1999), which I was not able to obtain in time for this essay. Thomas M. Falkner, *The Poetics of Old Age in Greek Epic, Lyric, and Tragedy* (Norman, OK 1995) 3-51, gives a reading of Laertes' last stand in terms of renewal; he does not specifically consider tension among the generations. Barry Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Idealogy and Society in the Era of thePeloponnesian War* (Princeton 1993) 1-20, focuses on the family in classical Athens, with some brief remarks about Homeric and Hesiodic antecedents; he uses the distinction posited by A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960), between solidarity and conflict. James Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad*, rev. ed. (Durham, NC 1994) 1-113, discusses the "cooperative relation between father and son" as "an outgrowth of the special character of inheritance in the Homeric world... Because successful inheritance is the completion of the householder's social task, each householder is (in effect) dependent on his heir... The father's greatest hope is that his son will surpass him" (111).

Athena's word and a sign from Zeus force them to make peace. In a counterfactual, their victory is mapped out even as it is precluded (528-29):

> and now they would have killed them all, cut them off from home
> if Athena ... had not cried out in a piercing voice that stopped all fighters cold.

This unrealized outcome—they would have killed them all—provides an alternative ending to the *Odyssey*, namely, massacre; but Athena, schemer and plotter, substitutes reconciliation and peace.[3]

After Laertes' *aristeia* (522-25), the narrative summarizes the exploits of Odysseus and Telemachus, without giving detail:

> Odysseus and his gallant son charged straight at the front lines
> slashing away with swords, with two-edged spears.

It names no victim, describes no encounter. In fact, the battle itself, from the time that Athena breathes μένος into Laertes through the summarized actions of Odysseus and Telemachus, occupies only 8 lines (520-27).

The manner of narration reflects balance among the three generations. All three males speak. Father and son speeches form a pair and express mutuality, affirming reciprocal identification across two generations. Grandfather Laertes, when he adds his voice, praises this day because his son and grandson are "vying over courage," as he describes their struggle (δῆριν) to see who can outdo the other in battle.[4]

Is this a zero-sum competition between father and son, where an increase in status for the winner entails a corresponding decrease for the loser? I think not. In the battle against the suitors' relatives, there will be winners and losers, zero-sum; in the familial battle over courage, however, the son's triumph validates his patriline but it is his ancestral excellence that enables him to succeed.[5]

The Ithacan trio, as represented in the *Odyssey*, belong to an unusually harmonious patriline.[6] One reason for such harmony is that the family is a line of single sons (16.117-20).[7] As Telemachus tells the stranger in Eumaius' hut:

3 On alternative plot possibilities, or hypothetical plots, see Felson, *Regarding Penelope*, espec. viii, 7, 67 and Marilyn Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the* Odyssey (Princeton 1991) 6-7, who sees the House of Atreus story "as the governing paradigm for the development of the plot of the *Odyssey*" and reads the poem "as a construction of an alternative to it." On Homer's use of Athena as the poet's "guiding hand," see Karl Reinhardt, *Tradition und Geist: Gesammelte Essays zur Dichtung*, Carl Becker ed. (Göttingen 1960) 45; Sheila Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the* Odyssey (Princeton 1987) 20; and Felson, ibid., 5, 29, and 59.

4 On the meaning of δῆριν ἔχουσι see Thalmann, *The Swineherd* 222, n.99: whereas in the *Iliad* δῆρις or δηριάομαι refers to conflict between antagonists on opposing sides, the two occurrences in the *Odyssey* (at 8.76 and 78) denote rivalry between comrades at arms (Achilleus and Odysseus).

5 Cf. Hes. *Op.* 11-26 on two types of Ἔρις "Strife," and Alvin Gouldner, "The Greek Contest System," in *Enter Plato* (New York 1965), on the effects of ἔρις on all aspects of Greek life, public and private.

6 In the Epic Cycle, especially in the *Telegony* (credited to Eugamon of Cyrene as the closing part of the Cycle), darker and more conflictual patterns survive: Telegonus, Odysseus' child by Circe, ultimately kills his father in a cattle raid and marries his stepmother Penelope. Proclus (*Epit.*) attests to a marriage between Telemachus and Circe, another case of a son occupying his own father's bed.

7 Hes. *Op.* 376-77 exalts the begetting of a single son, as he addresses his contentious brother Perses who wants more than his share of the patrimony: "Wealth will increase inside your house if you beget an only son to nurture it (μουνιγενὴς δὲ πάις εἴη πατρώιον οἶκον / φερβέμεν)." He is not con-

ὧδε γὰρ ἡμετέρην γενεὴν μούνωσε Κρονίων.
μοῦνον Λαέρτην Ἀρκείσιος υἱὸν ἔτικτε,
μοῦνον δ αὖτ' Ὀδυσῆα πατὴρ τέκεν· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
μοῦνον ἔμ' ἐν μεγάροισι τεκὼν λίπεν, οὐδ' ἀπόνητο.

"Zeus made our line a line of only sons.
Arcesius had only one son, Laertes, and Laertes had only one son, Odysseus,
and I am Odysseus' only son. He fathered me,
he left me behind at home, and from me he got no joy."

The use of a hapax, μούνωσε (117) and of anaphora (118-20) lays emphasis on their unusual lineage. As for Laertes, for reasons unexplained in extant epic, he yielded his throne to Odysseus rather early on, presumably without conflict; and even during his son's twenty year absence he did not reclaim the role of *basileus*.[8] We can surmise that he did run his own household until, grieving first for his son and then for his wife, he withdrew even from private household affairs, and moved to Dolius' farm.[9]

To the harmonious father/son relations in Ithaca before the Trojan War, contrast the conflictual pattern that pervades epic tradition, as in Phoenix's narrative at *Iliad* 9.445-95 of his own near parricide and quasi-incest. In the embassy scene Phoenix tells Achilleus how, as a young man, he reluctantly complied with his mother's repeated pleadings, that he sleep with the concubine who shared his father's bed, and how he committed the act. Then his father Amyntor cursed him to childlessness, a self-defeating curse, since it cuts off his own lineage as it does his son's. In this story the mother uses the budding sexuality of her son as a weapon against her unfaithful husband; and the son, probably at the peak of his youth, wants to kill his father but is restrained by kinsmen, who keep him under house-arrest. He escapes, leaves home, and wanders, eventually arriving in Phthia, where Peleus receives him hospitably and loves him "even as a father loves his own son" (481); there in turn he nurtures Achilleus tenderly, as his own son, explicitly hoping (as he tells Achilleus) to replace the child he would never have (492-95).

This tale of intergenerational strife, within the natal family, and of exile and eventual adoption (by Peleus of Phoenix; by Phoenix of Achilleus) expresses both patterns, the first deeply oedipal (as we have come to call it), the second ideally paternal. Epic is aware of both paradigms, but it treats the conflictual model as an anomaly, the congenial as the norm. As I will show, the story of Odysseus and Telemachus contains elements of both

cerned here with kings and lines of succession, but with sustainable households and sibling cooperation.

8 The Ithaca to which Odysseus returns after twenty years has no political leader and has held no assemblies (2.26-27): the simile at 19.108-14, where Odysseus compares Penelope's fame to that of "a flawless king...who governs a kingdom vast, proud and strong," in no way coincides with Ithacan reality.

9 On Laertes' problematic old age, see Falkner, *The Poetics of Old Age*, espec. 34-46. Laertes no longer goes to the polis but lives on Dolius' farm, isolated from the affairs of the household and city (1.188-93). What drove him into isolation were a series of losses, first of Odysseus (11.202-203, cf. 15.358), then of his wife. At Telemachus' departure, his situation worsens (16.142-45). In discussing Laertes' isolation and decrepitude, Falkner (ibid. 37) concludes that the "shroud Penelope weaves and unweaves...suggests the slender thread of his life." He points out that while the old man neglects his own care of the self, he gives painstaking care to his orchard, a fact that Odysseus acknowledges (24.248-53).

patterns, although for them the intergenerational conflict remains hypothetical: it is displaced onto Odysseus' relations with other νέοι.

In this paper I examine the idealized father/son dynamic in the *Odyssey* against the backdrop of a variety of failures, from within the Greek epic tradition, which includes such ungentle and dread fathers as Uranus and Cronus among the gods, Laius and Amyntor among men. I also identify motifs shared by both positive and negative patterns, focusing on moments of potential as well as actual conflict. Whereas the son of the dread father rebels and attempts to displace him and usurp his power—an oedipal move not without provocation,[10] the son of the gentle father acts with reciprocity and respect. The key to the pattern of success, as construed by the *Odyssey* poet, is the presence of an ἤπιος πατήρ.

On a number of occasions, diverse characters ascribe the quality of kindliness to Odysseus. Twice at the Ithacan assembly he is said to be a king who was kindly as a father (πατὴρ δ' ὣς ἤπιος ἦεν), first by Telemachus (2.46-47), expressing his loss of a father and outrage at the unappreciative township, and then by Mentor (2.233-34), who exclaims (with sarcasm): "Let no sceptred king with a ready heart be kind and gentle" (230-31: ἀγανὸς καὶ ἤπιος). Athena uses the same formulaic language when she addresses Zeus (5.7-12), also with sarcasm, at the council of the gods:

μή τις ἔτι πρόφρων ἀγανὸς καὶ ἤπιος ἔστω
σκηπτοῦχος βασιλεύς, μηδὲ φρεσὶν αἴσιμα εἰδώς,
ἀλλ' αἰεὶ χαλεπός τ' εἴη καὶ αἴσυλα ῥέζοι·
ὡς οὔ τις μέμνηται Ὀδυσσῆος θείοιο
λαῶν οἷσιν ἄνασσε, πατὴρ δ' ὣς ἤπιος ἦεν.

"...never let any sceptered king be kind and gentle now,
not with all his heart, or set his mind on justice—
no, let him be cruel and always practice outrage.
Think: not one of the people whom he ruled
remembers Odysseus now, that godlike man,
and kindly as a father to his children."

Anticleia's ghost, too, at 11.202-203, calls her son's ways gentle, as she explains to him what caused her death: "No, it was my longing for you, my shining Odysseus / you and your quickness, you and your gentle ways (ἀγανοφροσύνη) / that tore away my life." All these characterizations of Odysseus, taken together, give listeners the sense of his "personality" as a man who is not impulsive, not oppressive, not overpowering, but who is, on the contrary, generous and gentle to his wife, mother, son, and his subjects.[11]

10 For a discussion of the relation father/son as inscribed in supplement, with the son standing for the absence of what it supplements, and therefore as its displacement, see Pietro Pucci, *Oedipus and the Fabrication of the Father* (Baltimore 1992) 62-65. He writes (63): "The father is a plus for the son while simultaneously being a minus, the absense of a fatherhood as absolute origin and destination. Conversely, the son, by being born, produces the father as an origin, an authority but simultaneously he is also the sign of the father's own birth, a repetition of the father's experience as a child, a copy of it, and accordingly the son is the father of man, the sign of man's death and contingency."

11 Odysseus' insensitivity to Laertes when he makes trial of him at *Od.* 24.244-316 before revealing his identity (321-22) suggests a latent agonistic mode of interaction, with the son as the dominant mem-

Moreover, the existence of epic formulae such as πατὴρ ὣς ἤπιος ἦεν / αἰεί underscores the normalcy of such fatherhood within epic tradition: characters in the text can use a father as a way of measuring the kindliness of a friend or king, and Homer's audiences understand the comparison. [12]

In psychoanalytic models of the last decade or so, the figure of the *rapprochement* father has been identified as playing a crucial role in the development of the young male or female child.[13] This type of father is not rivalrous or forbidding, and so the child can experience identificatory love of him. As Jessica Benjamin writes:

> Conventionally, a stronger mutual attraction between father and son is fostered by the father himself, and this promotes recognition through identificaton, a special erotic relationship. The practising toddler's 'love affair with the world' turns into a homoerotic love affair with the father who represents the world. The boy is in love with his ideal. This homoerotic, identificatory love serves as the boy's vehicle for establishing masculinity both defensively and creatively; it confirms his sense of himself as subject of desire. Of course, this process of identification can only be successful when it is reciprocal, when the father identifies with his son and says, You can be like me, or when the validating mother says, You are just like your dad.[14]

This contemporary formulation sheds some light on the gentle father in the *Odyssey*, and on the kind of reciprocity he elicits from his son. The father who identifies with and encourages his son (in words and gestures) raises a son who responds with admiration and indeed obedience. Such mutuality may be handed down the patriline.

The father-son dyad crafted by the *Odyssey* poet is just such a reciprocal pair. It sharply contrasts with the deviant conflictual pattern familiar from epic tradition. Essential to the positive model is a father who represents the outside world, exploration, freedom—but who tells his son "You can be like me." The son in the dyad may desire to outstrip his father but mutual feeling precludes him from actualizing that desire.

I've selected two among many possible scenes from the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus—as a middle aged man, battered by ten years at war and ten at sea, competes with νέοι, youths. These competitions are intergenerational, by definition, and they provide an intratextual context against which the Odysseus-Telemachus relationship can be experienced and assessed by Homeric audiences. First, Odysseus competes with the Phaeacian youths, in athletic contests that anticipate his more deadly combat in Ithaca with the suitors. Then, at the contest of the bow, Odysseus supplants Telemachus (along with all the youthful suitors) as the one to string the bow, but he does so graciously and not too soon—i.e., not before Telemachus proves he would have succeeded. Telemachus in turn, acting as host, graciously and in a timely manner hands the bow to Odysseus, so that his father, not he, can be the one to string the bow, regain Penelope, and initiate the slaughter of the suitors. The slaughter itself culminates the *agon* between stranger and suitors that began when Odysseus the beggar first entered his palace.

ber of the pair. On some qualitites of the domestic Odysseus, see Felson, *Regarding Penelope*, 43-65.

12 Cf. Redfield (above, n. 2).

13 For an overview of this work, see Jessica Benjamin, "Sameness and difference: Toward an 'over-inclusive' theory of gender development," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 15.1 (1995) 125-42. She argues, in her four phase model, for a pre-Oedipal over-inclusive phase, in which both male and female child identifies with same and other-sex parent.

14 Benjamin, ibid. 130.

These scenes complement and supplement one another. In them we can see an Odysseus who defines himself as still in his prime, not to be defeated or replaced. The narrator represents Odysseus (and others) commenting on his manly prowess, and even on his right to enter the competition.

Among the Phaeacian Youths

After the banquet and the first playing of the lyre, Alcinous calls for all manner of games (ἀέθλων), "so our guest can tell his friends, / when he reaches home, how far we excel the world (περιγιγνόμεθ'[α]) at boxing, wrestling, jumping, speed of foot." (8.102) The king's son, Laodamas, urges his friends to:

> "ask our guest if he knows the ropes of any sport.
> He's no mean man, not with a build like that...
> Look at his thighs, his legs, and what a pair of arms—
> his massive neck, his big rippling strength!
> Nor is he past his prime (οὐδέ τι ἥβης / δεύεται),
> just beaten down by one too many blows."

Then, addressing Odysseus as ξεῖνε, he invites him to try his hand at the contests if he has skill in any; for it is fit and proper to know sports (ἀέθλους, 146): "Come and compete then, throw your cares to the wind!" (149)

Although young Laodamas' invitation is considerate, Odysseus feels taunted (κερτομέοντες, 153) by such a challenge; he has suffered too much already. Then Euryalus breaks in and mocks Odysseus to his face (νείκεσέ τ' ἄντην, 158):

> "Oh I knew it!...
> I never took you for someone skilled in games,
> the kind that real men play throughout the world.
> ...You're no athlete. I see that."

At this point, Odysseus chides the youth and defends his skill in sports (166-85):

> "Indecent talk my friend.
> You're a reckless fool—I see *that*... .
> Your slander fans the anger in my heart!
> I'm no stranger to sports—for all your taunts—
> I've held my place in the front ranks, I tell you,
> long as I could trust to my youth (ἥβῃ) and striving hands.
> But now I'm wrestled down by pain and hardship, look... .
> Nevertheless, despite so many blows,
> I'll give your games a whirl. Your insults
> cut to the quick—you rouse my fighting blood!"

Odysseus throws the discus, heavy and huge, past all the marks (as proclaimed by Athena) and then he challenges "you young pups" (νέοι, 202) to match that. He invites any Phaeacian present except his host Laodamas to compete with him in any sport. Then he delivers an encomium, complete with myth, on his own skills with the polished bow (212-33), situating himself after Philoctetes alone of his contemporaries:

> "Of the rest I'd say that I outclass them all (πολὺ προφερέστερον εἶναι)—
> men still alive, who eat their bread on earth.
> But I'd never vie (ἐριζέμεν οὐκ ἐθελήσω) with the men of days gone by,
> not Heracles, not Eurytus of Oechalia—archers
> who rivaled (ἐρίζεσκον) immortal powers with their bows."

Alcinous intercepts this *neikos* and *agon*, so we never hear of a competing discus thrown by a Phaeacian youth. Instead, the king as host and mediator supports his guest (236-40):

> "Stranger, friend—nothing you say among us seems ungracious.
> You simply want to display the gifts you're born with,
> stung that a youngster marched up to you in the games,
> mocking, ridiculing your prowess (ἀρετήν) as no one would
> who had some sense of fit and proper speech."

Again he urges his guest to witness and someday tell his own wife and children of Phaeacian excellence when he returns home, and he summons the dancers (251-53). The song of Demodocus—the Adultery of Aphrodite and Ares—is actually part of this display of Phaeacian excellence in song, for it is presented amidst the contests to impress the stranger. Its theme of sexual competition, quarreling, and reconciliation resonates with its athletic setting, in which Euryalus has just wrangled with Odysseus over manly valor. Woman as the object of contention among men is central to the epic tradition (as to mythic plots)—Helen and Briseis in the *Iliad*, Penelope in the *Odyssey*. Euryalus, at the least, feels encroached upon by the stranger, at most perhaps that he may lose out to him with Nausicaa.[15]

At Alcinous' prodding, after the dance, Euryalus makes amends for his insolence with words and gifts, thereby in effect yielding to Odysseus and retracting his insult. In the fantasy world of Scheria, youths are rude to elders, but they are reprimanded and put in their place. As a result of the king's reprimand, the mid-aged Odysseus, still in his prime as far as athletics are concerned, remains preeminent, although he does not monopolize center stage. (He can be a spectator as well as a performer—a main ingredient, by the way, of the ἤπιος πατήρ.)

Odysseus shows by his surpassing throw of the discus that he is not to be insulted or discounted. Compare this demonstration of athletic prowess to his emphasis, in narrating his Adventures, on how each goddess, first Circe and then Calypso, detained him in her halls, desiring him to be her husband (9.30 and 9.32); how he mounted Circe's gorgeous bed (10.347 and 480), and how Calypso loved him and tended him (12.450). These tales of athletic and sexual prowess are told by a middle-aged man, preoccupied with affirming that he is still in his prime. Later, the theme subtly reappears in Odysseus' angry outburst at Penelope's insinuation that someone has moved their bed (23.187-89):

> ἀνδρῶν δ' οὔ κέν τις ζωὸς βροτός, οὐδὲ μάλ' ἡβῶν,
> ῥεῖα μετοχλίσσειεν, ἐπεὶ μέγα σῆμα τέτυκται
> ἐν λέχει ἀσκητῷ· τὸ δ' ἐγὼ κάμον οὐδέ τις ἄλλος.

15 Perhaps we are to imagine Euryalus as among the many and noble Phaeacian men who woo Nausicaa and whom she spurns, according to the comments she ascribes to τις at *Od.* 6.276-84, as she explains to the stranger when she leads him covertly to the palace.

> "Not a man on earth, not even at peak strength,
> would find it easy to prise it up and shift it, no,
> a great sign, a hallmark lies in its construction.
> I know, I built it myself—no one else... ."

Athletically and sexually, then, Odysseus presents himself as full of vitality, full of μένος;[16] but he is ever aware of himself in relation to the νέοι, and he puts his self-assessments in generational terms. His success against the younger generation in Scheria means he is not yet to be supplanted, a fact reaffirmed on Ithaca, where he competes with and outstrips first Iros, then the multitude of youthful suitors.

Among the suitors and vis-a-vis Telemachus

Sparring verbally in the palace with the suitors and engaging in a wrestling match with their favorite beggar, Iros, prefigure the battle with the suitors of Book 22, just following the competition to string the famed bow of Eurytus. The match with Iros, in particular, compresses into a single event the competition between Odysseus and the would-be usurpers. Iros stands, synecdochically, for the 108 suitors. Moreover, Odysseus' disguise as a beggar makes him, for the time being, seem to depend on Telemachus' protection. This apparent dependency gives Telemachus the opportunity to play "man of the house." As host and protector of the stranger he is by no means his subordinate. Thus, even though other demands of the plot motivate Odysseus' crafty disguise, and not the need to cater to Telemachus' budding manhood, still his subordinate role as he begs enables Odysseus, once again, to be a gentle father watching his son perform *his* roles and essentially, if temporarily, displace him.

Penelope devises the bow-contest in the course of her interview with the stranger (19.576-81) and implements it in Book 21, when she announces to her suitors (73-79):

> "Here is the prize at issue, right before you, look—
> I set before you the great bow of King Odysseus now!
> The hand that can string this bow with greatest ease,
> that shoots an arrow clean through all twelve axes—
> he is the man I follow, yes, forsaking this house
> where I was once a bride, this gracious house... .
> I shall always remember it, that I know... .
> even in my dreams."

Whatever Penelope knows at this point, and whatever her purpose, the bow contest provides the opportunity for the son to confront his father and for the two of them, as a team, to take on the suitors. In this contest for Penelope's hand, the oedipal innuendoes are unmistakable, especially given the variety and number of stories in which father and son do

16 See Anne Giacomelli [Carson], "Aphrodite and After," *Phoenix* 39 (1980) 1-19 for a penetrating discussion of the range of meanings of μένος: "In humans, fluid which moves with a shooting energy in or from the body is called μένος." (4) Her study focuses on Anchises' fear at *Hom. Hymn Ven.* 188-90 that he will be ἀμενηνός, "without μένος, feeble," for having slept with an immortal goddess. Cf. Zeus' epithet, ὑπερμενής (*Il.* 2.116, 350, 403 al.), which LSJ translates colorlessly as "exceedingly mighty"; the epithet may instead suggest amply flowing μένος, as suits a god with so many progeny.

"Of the rest I'd say that I outclass them all (πολὺ προφερέστερον εἶναι)—
men still alive, who eat their bread on earth.
But I'd never vie (ἐριζέμεν οὐκ ἐθελήσω) with the men of days gone by,
not Heracles, not Eurytus of Oechalia—archers
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Again he urges his guest to witness and someday tell his own wife and children of Phaeacian excellence when he returns home, and he summons the dancers (251-53). The song of Demodocus—the Adultery of Aphrodite and Ares—is actually part of this display of Phaeacian excellence in song, for it is presented amidst the contests to impress the stranger. Its theme of sexual competition, quarreling, and reconciliation resonates with its athletic setting, in which Euryalus has just wrangled with Odysseus over manly valor. Woman as the object of contention among men is central to the epic tradition (as to mythic plots)—Helen and Briseis in the *Iliad*, Penelope in the *Odyssey*. Euryalus, at the least, feels encroached upon by the stranger, at most perhaps that he may lose out to him with Nausicaa.[15]

At Alcinous' prodding, after the dance, Euryalus makes amends for his insolence with words and gifts, thereby in effect yielding to Odysseus and retracting his insult. In the fantasy world of Scheria, youths are rude to elders, but they are reprimanded and put in their place. As a result of the king's reprimand, the mid-aged Odysseus, still in his prime as far as athletics are concerned, remains preeminent, although he does not monopolize center stage. (He can be a spectator as well as a performer—a main ingredient, by the way, of the ἤπιος πατήρ.)

Odysseus shows by his surpassing throw of the discus that he is not to be insulted or discounted. Compare this demonstration of athletic prowess to his emphasis, in narrating his Adventures, on how each goddess, first Circe and then Calypso, detained him in her halls, desiring him to be her husband (9.30 and 9.32); how he mounted Circe's gorgeous bed (10.347 and 480), and how Calypso loved him and tended him (12.450). These tales of athletic and sexual prowess are told by a middle-aged man, preoccupied with affirming that he is still in his prime. Later, the theme subtly reappears in Odysseus' angry outburst at Penelope's insinuation that someone has moved their bed (23.187-89):

ἀνδρῶν δ' οὔ κέν τις ζωὸς βροτός, οὐδὲ μάλ' ἡβῶν,
ῥεῖα μετοχλίσσειεν, ἐπεὶ μέγα σῆμα τέτυκται
ἐν λέχει ἀσκητῷ· τὸ δ' ἐγὼ κάμον οὐδέ τις ἄλλος.

15 Perhaps we are to imagine Euryalus as among the many and noble Phaeacian men who woo Nausicaa and whom she spurns, according to the comments she ascribes to τις at *Od.* 6.276-84, as she explains to the stranger when she leads him covertly to the palace.

"Not a man on earth, not even at peak strength,
would find it easy to prise it up and shift it, no,
a great sign, a hallmark lies in its construction.
I know, I built it myself—no one else... ."

Athletically and sexually, then, Odysseus presents himself as full of vitality, full of μένος;[16] but he is ever aware of himself in relation to the νέοι, and he puts his self-assessments in generational terms. His success against the younger generation in Scheria means he is not yet to be supplanted, a fact reaffirmed on Ithaca, where he competes with and outstrips first Iros, then the multitude of youthful suitors.

Among the suitors and vis-a-vis Telemachus

Sparring verbally in the palace with the suitors and engaging in a wrestling match with their favorite beggar, Iros, prefigure the battle with the suitors of Book 22, just following the competition to string the famed bow of Eurytus. The match with Iros, in particular, compresses into a single event the competition between Odysseus and the would-be usurpers. Iros stands, synecdochically, for the 108 suitors. Moreover, Odysseus' disguise as a beggar makes him, for the time being, seem to depend on Telemachus' protection. This apparent dependency gives Telemachus the opportunity to play "man of the house." As host and protector of the stranger he is by no means his subordinate. Thus, even though other demands of the plot motivate Odysseus' crafty disguise, and not the need to cater to Telemachus' budding manhood, still his subordinate role as he begs enables Odysseus, once again, to be a gentle father watching his son perform *his* roles and essentially, if temporarily, displace him.

Penelope devises the bow-contest in the course of her interview with the stranger (19.576-81) and implements it in Book 21, when she announces to her suitors (73-79):

"Here is the prize at issue, right before you, look—
I set before you the great bow of King Odysseus now!
The hand that can string this bow with greatest ease,
that shoots an arrow clean through all twelve axes—
he is the man I follow, yes, forsaking this house
where I was once a bride, this gracious house... .
I shall always remember it, that I know... .
even in my dreams."

Whatever Penelope knows at this point, and whatever her purpose, the bow contest provides the opportunity for the son to confront his father and for the two of them, as a team, to take on the suitors. In this contest for Penelope's hand, the oedipal innuendoes are unmistakable, especially given the variety and number of stories in which father and son do

16 See Anne Giacomelli [Carson], "Aphrodite and After," *Phoenix* 39 (1980) 1-19 for a penetrating discussion of the range of meanings of μένος: "In humans, fluid which moves with a shooting energy in or from the body is called μένος." (4) Her study focuses on Anchises' fear at *Hom. Hymn Ven.* 188-90 that he will be ἀμενηνός, "without μένος, feeble," for having slept with an immortal goddess. Cf. Zeus' epithet, ὑπερμενής (*Il.* 2.116, 350, 403 al.), which LSJ translates colorlessly as "exceedingly mighty"; the epithet may instead suggest amply flowing μένος, as suits a god with so many progeny.

in fact occupy the same bed or engage the same woman. Here Telemachus faces Odysseus in competition (for Penelope) before they join forces against their common enemy.

In my Telemachus chapter, called "Mother," in *Regarding Penelope* I traced the spiral development of Telemachus from boyhood to manhood (which others of course have also identified as a maturation process). Telemachus only hits a snag when, upon returning to Ithaca, ready to be an Orestes, he finds his father has come home, as he had earlier prayed he would (1.114-17). At their reunion, before Telemachus recognizes his father, each defers to the other over who will have the seat (16.42-45):

> As he approached, his father, Odysseus, rose
> to yield (ὑπόειξεν) his seat, but the son on his part
> waved him back: "Stay where you are, stranger.
> I know we can find another seat somewhere,
> here on our farm, and here's the man to fetch it."

From this moment on, Odysseus and Telemachus work as a team and Odysseus consistently treats Telemachus as would a kindly father. He lives up to his epithet of ἤπιος πατήρ. The reason that, at the bow contest, the son defers to his father is that the father has repeatedly included his son in their joint plans for revenge. But the plot trajectory had suggested that Telemachus would be the man of the house. And traces of this unrealized plot can be felt in the attempt by Telemachus to string his father's bow (21.111-29):

> "Come, let the games begin! No dodges, no delays,
> no turning back from the stringing of the bow—
> we'll see who wins, we will.
> I'd even take a crack at the bow myself... .
> If I string it and shoot through all the axes,
> I'd worry less if my noble mother left our house
> with another man and left me here behind—man enough
> at last to win my father's splendid prizes!"
> ...With that, he leaped to his feet and dropped his bright red cloak... .
> He stood at the threshold, posed to try the bow...
> Three time he made it shudder, straining to bend it,
> three times his power flagged—but his hopes ran high
> he'd string his father's bow and shoot through every iron
> and now, struggling with all his might for the fourth time,
> he *would* have strung the bow, but Odysseus shook his head
> and stopped him short despite his tensing zeal.
> "God help me," the inspired prince cried out,
> "must I be a weakling, a failure all my life?"[17]

Here we see the passion and determination of Telemachus to string the bow. Three successive participles emphasize the intensity of his desire: μενεαίνων, ἐπιελπόμενος, and ἱέμενόν περ. The son's success would entail disobedience to his father—especially after

17 Telemachus' choice of ἄκικυς (21.131) in his mock self-rebuke invokes an image of lack of manly strength, similar to what Anchises fears will happen to him from sleeping with the love goddess (see above, n. 15). The only other use of that word in the *Odyssey*, at 9.507-16, is also tongue-in-cheek: Odysseus quotes Polyphemus, who, upon hearing his identity, remembers the prophecy that he would be blinded by Odysseus. Polyphemus, Odysseus tells the Phaeacians, had expected a large and handsome man to blind him, not someone being small and worthless and feeble (ἄκικυς).

Odysseus' nod that stopped him short despite his zeal. This moment defines their relationship as one of cooperation: it contains the seeds of an alternate plot-line, in which Telemachus will string the bow, kill the suitors, and supplant his mid-age father in the story of revenge. Instead, the now grown youth, whose father was absent through his childhood but whose image of his father he has recuperated on his travels and now in person,[18] counterbalances his own intense desires (e.g. to string the bow) with his firm acknowledgement of his father's position in the household.

After he strings the bow, Odysseus tells Telemachus (21.424-27):

> "...your guest, sitting here in your house, has not disgraced you.
> No missing the mark, look, and no long labor spent
> to string the bow. My strength's (μένος) not broken yet,
> not quite so frail as the mocking suitors thought."

The language of these remarks, especially ἔτι μοι μένος ἔμπεδόν ἐστιν (426), anticipates their later exchange (with which I opened this paper), as they enter the three-generation fight against the suitors' relatives. Here in Book 21 Odysseus asserts, as he did among the Phaeacians, that he is still in his prime and thus will not disgrace (ἐλέγχει) his son. His μένος is intact and secure (ἔμπεδον); in the final fight Laertes too, invigorated by Athena, possesses the μένος necessary to do battle. Each of these males can possess μένος, then, without detracting from its supply in the others, for their competition is not zero-sum.

Conclusion

We have seen how the Odyssey-poet highlights the culminating relation of father to son and son to father at the contest of the bow and finally on the field, as three generations fight against the suitors' relatives. The harmony in their relation is not a given, but is predicated on a family tradition, upheld by Odysseus, of sharing center stage, father with son. If we think of the center stage as a figurative crossroad, we can see how this pattern inverts the oedipal one, where each member of the dyad wants to occupy the crossroad first. The zero-sum aspect of the conflictual model is present in the reciprocal model—in the father's desire for dignity and the son's for proving his manhood. Both desires involve avoidance of disgrace. Whether the father recognizes the subjective desire of the son is critical, since this act of acknowledgement elicits reverence and obedience in the son toward his father. The *Odyssey*-poet turns this reciprocal intergenerational relation (which may be a societal ideal or even norm) into a theme of his epic. In fact, the global theme of *nostos*, "return," contains not only the important element of reclaiming wife and kingdom, but also the untroubled reentry into his own *oikos*, a reentry predicated on rapport between father and son, specifically on no threat arising for Odysseus from Telemachus. Yet as we have learned from Structuralism, meaning comes forward against the background of what it is not, and what Odysseus is not is the cuckolded husband, the deposed king, the supplanted father.

18 See Felson, *Regarding Penelope* 67-91 for a reconstruction of Telemachus' recuperation of the image of his absent father and for references to the scholarship on Telemachus' maturation journey; further, see Hanna M. Roisman, "Like Father Like Son. Telemachus' ΚΕΡΔΕΑ," *RhM* 137 (1994) 1-22 and Wöhrle, *Telemachs Reise* 117-49.