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## Penelope's Male Hand: Gender and Violence in the Odyssey

by MICHAEL N. NAGLER

IN AN EARLIER study I argued that the innocent-sounding line at the beginning of the Slaughter of the Suitors when Odysseus says the contest is over and he will now try a shot “which no one has ever made before” (*Od.* 22.6) is actually a signal that the event we are about to witness is an *aition* for a leader’s use of violence against members of his own community—the central ethical topic of the *Odyssey*.<sup>1</sup> It seemed to many a weak point in this argument that such an off-hand and rather obscure remark could be expected to carry such programmatic weight and direct the hearer’s attention to the aitiological character of the whole episode. At the time of writing I could only support my intuition with the *ex silentio* argument that in oral epic we would not expect the poet to stress the aitiological character of his story any more overtly. The return of Odysseus is—at least on the surface—a good stretch down the road of progressive rationalization from its origins in aitiological myth.

On further checking, however, I discovered substantial confirmation I had overlooked: the most explicit aitiological reference in Homer occurs only a hundred or so lines before this scene, when Antinoos reacts with intense disapproval (νεμέσησαν, 21.285) to the disguised Odysseus’ request to try his hand at the bow test. The thoroughly alarmed leader of the suitors warns his disquieting guest that he is acting like the centaur Eurytion who got drunk amid the heroes foregathered in the home of Peirithoos and was expelled and mutilated by them. Antinoos concludes:

ἐξ οὗ Κενταύροισι καὶ ἀνδράσι νεῖκος ἐτύχθη,

From which time strife arose between men and Centaurs. (303)

Beyond this striking indication, the present exchange between the two men and the beginning of the slaughter exhibit a complex and revealing parallelism. They are, in fact, move and counter-move in a single unit of conflict. Nothing less depends on them than the success of Odysseus’ climactic struggle with his rebellious *kouroi*—and what we take that struggle and its outcome to mean.

To begin with, Odysseus has triggered Antinoos’ sharp reaction by speaking in precisely the same kind of disconcerting ambiguity he will use then in the apparently innocent phrase referred to earlier: “but enough of bow-testing for now . . . let me try the bow” (279-84). On the surface Odysseus might mean that

1. Nagler (1990).

his attempt somehow doesn't count, assumedly because he is too low-class to be in the running for the hand of Penelope and the power that represents in the community; tomorrow morning, he explains, the gods will give real political power or "dominance" (κράτος, 280) to whomever they wish, while he just wants to see if his old strength holds up. Under the surface, however (and as at 22.6 one is forced to look under the surface by the oddness of the language), we may well hear him saying both that there is "no contest" because he alone is the rightful wielder of the bow (see Antinoos' own testimony at 91-95, discussed below), and even more ominously that this is not a "contest" but a deadly battle.<sup>2</sup> If he is saying this—as on one level I am certain he is—these words subtly unmask not only the violence that is inherent in all competitive struggle but, more particularly, the violence lurking behind political authority.

This is complex enough. However, another element in this intense exchange has if anything even more decisive importance: there is a definitive resolution here also of the gender struggle which goes on at the borders of military conflict, as it were the darker side of the *Odyssey's* more successful integration of the feminine in the restored "peacetime" community which that poem presents in contrast to the *Iliad*.

But first let us consider some better-known facts which constitute the background of this scene. Homer presents it as an intersection of several controlling themes, particularly as *swayamvara*, disguised return, and the flying of a stranger. All these are common (and powerful) elements of the return story, and even their combination is not unexemplified. They are all present, for example, behind the events on Phaeacia when Euryalos taunts their guest for not wanting to participate in the athletic contest (8. 159-64). There is a *swayamvara* not taken, so that Odysseus' successful display of identity leads to departure for return instead of return, but the main difference is that in the former scene he defeats his challenger's words with more potent words and nonlethal deeds, the athletic contest,<sup>3</sup> while here he conspicuously refrains from words—Telemakhos and perhaps Penelope speak for him—and pointedly rejects mere symbolic deeds for the action we all know will follow. The mythological background is clearly a traditional *swayamvara* with a disguised hero whose invincible identity is hidden behind a mask of social inferiority, the former rousing the suitors' fear and the latter their indignant rejection (*nemesis*). The traditional thematics articulate with the particular needs and resonances of the present performance most pointedly in the fact that Antinoos' taunt recoils on himself. This is one of

2. Let me add to the references to contest and combat enlisted at the end of Nagler (1990) the following observation of Davis (1992) 98: "but it might be better [than Clausewitz's war being a continuation of politics] to say that war is the general condition of any competitive game." To clarify what I am proposing here, the scenes are subtly disclosed to be aitiological on two, synergistic levels, almost "deconstructing" the accepted pretense which conceals real violence in a ritual (or contest) framework and the similar concealment of violence which is the sanction behind domination or unpopular authority.

3. We may assume the word-to-deed pattern, which we meet in *Beowulf*, is more typical. Note that Odysseus twice refers to his young challenger's words as a *mythos* (180, 185); his own retort is not only longer and more telling (on these criteria see Martin [1989]) but begins with the charge that Euryalos has made himself look like an *atasthalos* (166), a strong enough word anywhere and in the *Odyssey* the most dangerous possible label.

many ways that the suitors compass their own destruction, thus fulfilling on the textual level, i.e., in the symbolic discourse of their words or other behaviors, exactly what the poem predicts of them (*via* the companions) and which the entire moral persuasion of the epic asks us to believe: that they kill themselves by their own criminal folly.<sup>4</sup>

By the time Antinoos advances this *paradeigma* an intensely gripping struggle has already developed between himself and the disguised Odysseus for control over the community, and indeed for mere survival. When the Eurytion story backfires—for the moment only in the sense that it fails to put Odysseus off the bow test—he has made a fatal mistake since he has allowed his authority to be publicly flouted.<sup>5</sup> This is the climax of the return story, and the parallelism between it and the actual shooting begins, but does not end, when Odysseus, in contorted words, makes his bid to get his most characteristic weapon back in his hands. Well might the suitors “fear lest he (in fact) string the well-polished bow” (285f). But panic makes Antinoos fall into the fatal error of citing as paradigm for what they are experiencing the story of the famous centaur, Eurytion.

Eurytion, whose very name is derived from Eurytos, “bow-drawer” (see, for example, 18.262), got disgracefully drunk at a gathering of heroes in the hall of Peirithoos, presumably for the latter’s wedding with Hippodameia, and was ejected from the hall and mutilated—i.e., treated to the extreme form of ritual expulsion from the community, reserved for the unclean and subhuman. Antinoos warns Odysseus that he must be seriously drunk to offer to try the bow, given his underclass position, and thus implies that Odysseus is Eurytion in the *paradeigma* while he and implicitly his sidekick Eurymachos (277) stand for Peirithoos, the suitors in general for the heroes (ἄνδράσι κουροτέροισι, “lusty warriors,” 310)—and of course we can add Penelope as Hippodameia from the traditional background. Thus if the stranger strings the bow, Antinoos concludes, the suitors will “send him to Ekhetos” (a folkloric or nonce name, “Holder,” implying the lord of the death realm) whence he will never return (308f; see diagram).

Antinoos must be having one of those uncanny half-intuitions people get when they sense something is wrong but can’t pin it down, and often say exactly the wrong thing. We have already learned from the poet’s “genealogical” description of the very bow in question which he has given in a typical ring-compositional format when Penelope fetched it from the armory (21.3-41) that it belonged to none other than Eurytos, who bequeathed it to his son Iphitos, who gave it in turn to the young Odysseus as a *xeinêion* (21.11-41) when the two heroes met by chance in Messenia. Evidently this was some sort of trial expedition on which Odysseus had been sent for the whole community by the elders to recover some stolen flocks (17-21); and indeed, if it was a similar trial for Iphitos, he never returned. For on that very trip Herakles lawlessly killed him, spurning “the gods’ decree and the table” (i.e., *xenia*, 26-29). Simply put,

4. See Nagler (1990) on all these points.

5. For what follows we may bear in mind the observation of Schattschneider (1972) 2f: “Watch the crowd, because the crowd plays the decisive role. . . . Every conflict is determined by the extent to which the audience gets involved in it.”

## THE RITUAL EXPULSION PARADIGM\*

*Odyssey* 21.274ff

	Suitors' Interpretations	<i>Paradeigma</i>	Odysseus' Interpretation
PROTAGONIST	Antinoos	Peirithoos	Odysseus
COMMUNITY	suitors	<i>hêrôes</i>	Telemachus + herds (representing the <i>dêmos</i> )
"BRIDE"	Penelope	(Hippodameia)	Penelope
INTRUDER	"the beggar"	Eurytion	Antinoos
<i>signs:</i>	"drunk" & outrageous	very drunk (described as <i>atasthalia</i> in run of "fours," 296, 7, 301, 2)	<i>atasthalia</i> (+ heavy drinking)
<i>outcome:</i>	sent to "Ekhetos," i.e., killed	expelled & mutilated	killed (Antinoos and suitors), mutilated (Melanthios and bad serving women)
ACTION OF CONFLICT	(between commu- nity and intruders)	between two communities	(between rulers and resisters?)

\* Items in parentheses not explicit

Herakles killed his own guest; so will Odysseus.<sup>6</sup> That is the story of this bow.

Commentators have assumed that the famous bow did not go off with the hero to Troy because it is not a combat weapon. Fitzgerald refers to it quite simply as a "hunting bow," and Stanford supplies the information that Odysseus "'used to carry it', *sc.* for hunting," again from the fact that Odysseus did not take it to the war.<sup>7</sup> We might well expect Homer to refer to the bow as a hunting weapon (if he knows such a distinction), since it would fit the animal and hunting imagery soon to be used of the slaughter (see below), but he does not. What's more, when Penelope proposes outfitting Odysseus more as a hunter in the all-important but rejected speech that we are leading up to (339-42), a bow is conspicuously absent from her description of the equipment. What the poet actually says about the bow has an entirely different and much more disturbing significance. Odysseus never takes it with him to war but leaves it in his home "as a memorial to his *xeinos*" (40), a phrase which invokes all the tension of drastically violated guest-friendship which the bow's history contains; then in a "perfective" half-line the poet concludes:<sup>8</sup>

6. For further relevant parallels between Herakles and Odysseus, cf. Redfield (1983) 229.

7. Fitzgerald (1990) 505f; Stanford (1965) comment at 21.41.

8. I use the term "perfective" originally applied to the traditional rhetoric of the Homeric simile but applicable in other descriptive contexts. It is usually a concluding half line (sometimes a whole line) which sums up the result and/or the significance of the description; cf. Rietzler (1936). Also on the language of the description note *kesketo*, "used to lie" (40), from *keimai* "to lie, be placed," which has the significance in epic "be left idle" and takes in a subset of meaning in the *Odyssey*, "be left idle in the absence of Odysseus." *Kesketo* closes a ring begun by *keito*, "lay" (10), that encapsulates the "genealogy" of the bow. Also the expression "in his (own) country" is expressed

φόρει δέ μιν ἤς ἐπὶ γαίης.

he used to carry it about in his own country. (41)

The contrast is not between war and hunting but between enemies and one's own community. Odysseus brandishes, or indeed uses a weapon designed for killing others, or other species, inside the circle he is supposed to protect. The shock, which the text will not allow to become explicit, reminds us of the way Apollo appears carrying his bow on Olympus or, more to the point, that Herakles uses with unusual savagery against his own nuclear family. In a context of richly significant language, the bow symbol embodies two of the four functions, guest-relationships and bow-wielding, which define masculine prerogatives and which appear along with two others, we shall soon see, in a substitution system within the traditional language of rejection by which women are put aside by their men. Ironically enough, this is part of a description set in motion by Penelope.

It will help to locate the act toward which we are moving between two other mythological prototypes that involve "wrongful" use of weapons. In a kind of madness, Ajax applies violence by mistake down the scale of licit victimization, expending it on sheep instead of enemies. On one level this is a kind of social disgrace; on another we might consider it just a mis-presentation of what is always true, namely that the forms of violence we find it convenient to classify as licit or illicit are essentially interconvertible: while men regularly kill animals (particularly in sacrifice, also in hunt) as a kind of preparation as well as substitution for the killing of men, mad Ajax operates in the other direction. This is a useful juxtaposition, but unfortunately the relevant paradigm here, as the genealogical content of the ring tells us, is not Ajax. When Herakles goes mad he slips *up* the scale, killing his own family instead of enemies—literally tearing them apart with his arrows, as Euripides tells us, just as he "rent" his own guest, Iphitos, in a frightening adjective of Pindar's (ξενοδοαίκτης, fr. 140a. 56, Snell). Here it is more the disguise that covers forms of indirect or concealed violence that slips; rather than a socially awkward act like Ajax's, this is a regression to primordial behavior that threatens to let slip what a decent text like the *Odyssey* conceals, at least by its surface. Herakles too often kills in sacrifice, of course, and it would be hard to improve on Durand's comment: "Héraklès, héros de la violence à l'état pur et condensé, révèle, immolant à son seul usage la bête au travail, que le sacrifice est violent."<sup>9</sup>

To put Odysseus against this background is to say, among other things, that he is specially sanctioned to use normally illicit forms of violence. But the poem has already said that. One of the first things we learn about the hero's background in Book One occurs when Athena, appearing to Telemakhos in the guise of a long-established family *xenos*, Mentès, describes that, while men in general shun poisoned arrows out of reverence for the gods, "her father" loved Odysseus so

in unusual syntax (*epi* + genitive) that conveys the impression Odysseus is riding on the place, as the master of a vehicle.

9. Durand (1986) 197; cf. also Watkins (1987). Interestingly, Durand compares Apollo's personal sacrifice of Neoptolemos at Delphi. Neoptolemos inherited his father's mantle of lawless violence, i.e., the "licit victim" label Odysseus is successfully struggling to pin on Antinoos and the suitors.

dearly that he granted the hero this technological advantage. The speaker's real father, we need hardly add, is Zeus.<sup>10</sup> Most men fight within certain rules under protection of "the gods"; but there is a hero of Odysseus' type, who, *like those who recognize no law*, fight outside all rules. He, radically unlike lawless inebriates in the mould of Polyphemos and Eurytion, acts under protection of Zeus himself.

To return, then, to Antinoos' "flying words." As the climax of his damning comparison, during which he equates the inebriation of Eurytion/Odysseus with ἄτη four times in eight lines (296, 297, 301, 302), Antinoos utters a resounding hexameter which must alert any sensitive hearer to the theme which has been coming to a climactic resolution since the proem:

οἷ δ' αὐτῷ πρῶτον κακὸν εὗρετο οἶνοβαρεῖων.

He reaped the first evil onto himself in his wine-logged folly. (304)

With almost uncanny skill, the poet manages to combine the traditional rhetoric of aetiology, saying that Eurytion is the *prôtos heuretês* of this evil, with the intense thematic concern of the poem, namely to demonstrate the guilt of the sufferers as instigators who bring suffering on themselves. In attempting to invert the personas in the key *mythos*, Antinoos has thus challenged everything the poem stands for, and now a desperate struggle between the two men ensues for control of this crucial paradigm. One will have to be the death-marked victim who will bear the guilt for injecting disorder into the community, the other will be the triumphant order-bringer sanctioned to use any and all forms of violence over this interloper. In mythic—and sacrificial—terms, one of these people is going to be labelled "beast," the other "hero"; there is no middle ground.

To better appreciate the discourse strategy and what is at stake here, we might consider an example of programmatic victimization from our own political experience—something recent enough that some of us are old enough to have lived through it, yet distant enough to have been "demythologized," i.e. (and one wishes one knew how and when this is allowable), the duplicity of its discourse can be revealed. In the 1950's when Congressional investigators used to challenge some terrified schoolteacher or Hollywood writer, "Are you a communist?" we can now understand that such an unfortunate was legally compelled to answer the question on the level of fact (or be condemned for refusing to), while the investigators and the entire audience were under no such obligation to stick to literal reality: they had already encoded the language to mean subconsciously, "Are you the Enemy, the Great Subversive?" and anyone who answered on the level of fact that he or she had been a member of the Communist Party, an almost comically innocuous distinction, it now turns out, was subject to various modern forms of ritual expulsion.

Homer's world is more colorful (their chaos demons had names and richly significant stories), but the psychology of labels is the same; under the surface we are still dealing in the unmistakable preconscious categories that dominate

10. More on this overlooked irony in Nagler (1990) 342.

the struggle for political power—and the playing out of that struggle before an audience, the community. Epic no less than tragic action is, in Girard's language, "a struggle between the protagonists for influence over the people."<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the outcome of this contest is a foregone conclusion: Odysseus captures control of the interpretation and turns Antinoos' application of the label of hated interloper and instigator of primordial conflict onto himself. Antinoos had set himself up for defeat by making wine-drinking the local symptom of criminal "folly," when he is talking to the man who overcame Polyphemos by making him drunk! Indeed Polyphemos himself had fallen into a similar trap when he called Odysseus a νήπιος ("fool," 9.273), but the hero fooled *him* with the unmixed wine. Here Odysseus does not have to make Antinoos drunk (though the latter will in fact be killed in the act of lifting a wine-cup to his lips, 22.8-20) but only reverse the "sign" of moral intoxication onto its user. He does this most decisively by in fact winning the contest; before then, however, in an exchange that could well be regarded the precise climax of the struggle and hence of the *Odyssey*, he has triumphed over Antinoos in the struggle for Eumaios' loyalty. In another intense drama the suitors almost succeeded in frightening the faithful herd out of carrying the bow to his disguised master. Telemakhos jestingly (but with thinly concealed violence) threatens to drive him out with stones (i.e., make *him* the despised *pharmakos*) if he insists on obeying everybody (369-75).<sup>12</sup> The suitors laugh at Telemakhos' image (375f); he has literally and psychologically disarmed them; the instrument of their death is in Odysseus' hands.

Without saying a word, Odysseus secures the loyalty of his son and his retainer; that is, he begins to cement the patriline and behind them the community as a fighting entity. In symbolic terms he will only confirm the political victory here enacted by silently presiding later over the *mutilation* of the disloyal goatherd Melanthios, unmistakably marking his party as that of the interlopers, in the terms of their own accusation. All the world blames a loser.

It seems important that Telemakhos carries out these acts. From the time he pulls Eumaios into line at least through the mutilation of Melanthios and disgraceful execution of the serving maids, Odysseus is only a presence behind the events that surround the slaughter proper; he doesn't even respond to Telemakhos' report about the problematic execution (22.481), just as he will not hurl a weapon in the last showdown with the suitors' relatives. His "executive style"—and the text's definition of authority—is to give orders or get things done even more indirectly, but we may well feel that he is thus insulating himself (to some extent) from the excesses of the violence he occasions, and represents. The portrayal of executive authority could not be more accurate; in our own day the

11. Girard (1987) 39.

12. Thus both sides try to win Eumaios' loyalty by frightening him with a dire punishment, as Antinoos did Odysseus: the suitors curse him to be eaten by his own dogs (combining the very serious suggestion that Eumaios will have failed to protect his kine with the "Iliadic" destiny of the uncared-for warrior, 363f), while Telemakhos echoes back Antinoos' threat in the form of expulsion by stoning. On one level Eumaios is here only a passive victim while Antinoos and Telemakhos (for Odysseus) fight over the role of community head who can expel the unwanted.

endless scandals, or rather non-scandals of “teflon” Presidents invite comparison. These are the key considerations. Odysseus might also be standing back from the action because part of his role is to arrange for his own succession, and on the poetic level the deflection of agency away from him is psychologically effective: Telemakhos represents “youth” in contrast with the mellow maturity of his “gentle” father.<sup>13</sup> Still, the most important effect is to draw attention from the latter’s role in the violence of the embattled patriline.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER player, or would-be player, in the scene before us whom we have yet to consider. By far the most interesting fact around the struggle for control of the Eurytion *paradeigma* is that when Antinoos falls silent the first person to respond to his multilayered challenge is none of these contending heroes; it is Penelope. What is her role in this life and death struggle of the males?

After reminding all of them that the stranger is a *xenos* and asserting that he never intended *really* being in the contest (for her) but only, as he said, wanted to try his strength (in response to which Eurymakhos protests for the second time that they, too, have no interest in winning Penelope but only in their social rank and reputation), Penelope points out that if the suitors are really worried about their standing they could stop eating someone else’s wealth (331-35); then, using a commanding line to introduce it (337), she proffers a really breakthrough suggestion: let the stranger try and, if he strings the bow (note esp. 338, δῶτη δέ οἱ εὖχος Ἀπόλλων; cf. 22.7 spoken by Odysseus before the killing), let him be outfitted as a ranking fighter (or hunter) and *conducted out of the community*, that is—on the surface at least—as a successful *hiketês* accepted as *xenos*.

Penelope offers a kind of compromise in which Odysseus can string the bow and yet be neither “Eurytion” nor “Peirithoos”; he can succeed in the contest without detriment to anyone else. To say that this is a compromise, however, does scant justice to her innovation. Penelope breaks out of the paradigm. She offers an alternative to the extreme form of zero-sum interaction into which the men have fallen—your life or mine, your mutilation-expulsion and my triumphant repossession of the community or vice versa. In Penelope’s alternative, amazingly, both can win: the stranger can go fight somewhere else if he wishes, while those present can go on living (like her pet geese) and there will be no violence. It is difficult to say to what degree we are meant to take this seriously, that is, as a real possibility, on the literal level. But there is no difficulty in understanding it on the thematic level: it is an alternative to deadly conflict—indeed, as just mentioned, to the entire paradigm of conflict and competitive interaction.

This proposal evokes the strongest rebuff from Telemakhos. It is the first time he has spoken to her in this vein since Athena put *menos* into his head in Book One (1.346-59):

Μῆτερ ἐμή, τόξον μὲν Ἀχαιῶν οὐ τις ἐμεῖο  
κρείσσων, ὥ κ' ἐθέλω, δόμεναι τε καὶ ἀρνήσασθαι,  
.....

13. Note, for example, Telemakhos’ impatience to get on with the contest: 21. 111, 135.

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε,  
 ἰστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε  
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· τόξον δ' ἀνδρεσσι μελήσει  
 πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

Mother, the bow—no one has power over mine  
 to give or refuse it to whom I will—

.....  
 So (*alla*), go to your place (*oikon*) and tend your work,  
 Loom and shuttle, and order your handmaids  
 To tend to (their) work; bow(-work) will be for men;  
 Men, and especially for me, whose authority prevails  
 over the household (*oikōi*). (21.344-53)

The rejection is so abrasive that Penelope, who actually arranged the contest and furnished the weapon, cries herself to sleep (356-58). As well she might. There is much more at stake here than a personal rebuff, or even the tragic failure to avert a fatal conflict in Ithaka: in oral epic all such issues take on a typological dimension.

In this case the issue and its pattern of underlying consistency with local variations is represented in the epic language with unusual transparency. On four occasions in Homer men remand women to “their place” and take control of important public activities with this decisive pattern of speech and rhetorical structure. The first example occurs where we might well expect it, as Hektor’s fateful rejection of Andromakhe’s advice in Book Six of the *Iliad* (490-93), climaxing what is at once one of Homer’s most poignant depictions of human tragedy and one of his most decisive thematic separations of man and woman.<sup>14</sup> They are Hektor’s last words to her.

The other three examples are from the *Odyssey*. This is at first blush rather puzzling, since it is the *Odyssey* which brings women back into the picture. Yet that is precisely why they are the subject of “women’s place” ideology three times as often in the latter poem: it is in the domestic space of Ithaka (and its “mantic” mirror, the Apologue) that women are real contenders for influence and power and their place most needs to be defined, not to say confined. Accordingly, Telemakhos rebukes his mother when she tries to control the content of the singer’s performance in Book One (356-59) and when she tries to control the outcome of a verbal contest here in Twenty-One; between these Ithakan scenes King Alkinoos is prompted by his aged counsellor Ekheneos to wrest at least nominal control of guest-passage from Arete and does so with a speech that ends up in the same “man’s prerogative” template (11.348-54).

The rhetorical template of these four passages is extremely interesting from the point of view of conflict ideology, and conflict dynamics. Its assertive thrust unfolds in two stages: men over women and then one man, the speaker, preeminent over the whole group. These speakers know how to mobilize “unanimous violence” against an outsider, namely a woman, and to ride that

14. Arthur (1981).

wave of mob feeling against the other to their own preeminence. It also looks as though the traditional syntax encodes what happens to men who sequester themselves from the influence of women: they turn into obsessive competitors. That isolation and militarization is precisely what Odysseus is supposed to be recovering from in the course of this poem. Interestingly, especially in the light of what has been said about his leadership style above, he does not utter any of these rebukes. Rather, he is in one way or another the occasion of all three in this poem.

Three of the four passages begin with a dismissive ἀλλά, “but (now, instead),” which we might almost translate “but as for you . . .” remanding woman to her work while men, and particularly the speaker, take back their public-sector responsibility,<sup>15</sup> and all four show the double priamel, the move from the subordination of women by men to the assertive speaker’s command over competitors. Pushing women off the margins, and then fighting: we might note, for example, that Eumaios’ first act after getting the master his weapon is to order Eurykleia to stay locked up out of the coming action (21.379f).

Oral literature scholars will not find it surprising that a traditional pattern of this kind, once thought to be a mere compositional aid, actually embodies ethical meaning on several levels. Nor will they be surprised that once we have identified the commonalities of such a rhetorical or lexical pattern we are in a position to appreciate differences among the various realizations in each specific context. In this case each of the four “women’s place” speeches supplies a different thematic term for the male responsibility which the speaker takes back from his addressee, and the case could be made that the four are complementary and, taken together, exhaustive. They constitute an impressive substitution system defining male prerogative over a broad range of activities; the terms are πόλεμος, μῦθος, πομπή, and τόξον, for which I would offer the translations “war,” “discourse” (both performative speaking and the social construction of meaning itself, which ultimately implies nothing less than culture), “safe conduct (i.e., for *xenoi*),” and finally the portentous word which immediately concerns us, “bow.”

The first and the last terms, or themes, *polemos* and *toxon*, stand respectively for the two kinds of violence (or two arenas in which violence can be discharged) which form the major topic of the respective epics: war, which is violence against another community, and “bow,” which in the symbolic code of the epics, or certainly the *Odyssey*, stands for violence used to control one’s own community. To see this is to see immediately why the *Odyssey* is the more disturbing and problematic poem.<sup>16</sup> Most of the time this violence is symbolic, held in reserve (as a good Machiavellian will appreciate); what we see in the climax of the epic

15. Actually the *Iliad* example, which is all but unbearably poignant because we know Hector is doomed to fail, is rhetorically more complex. There is an initial *alla* and *melei* at line 441, then the famous speeches which foresee Andromache’s enslavement and the picking up of Astyanax (with the impossible prayer); then we have the expected formal dismissal, 490-93. It is as if we sense Hector’s terrible hesitation in the special formation of the traditional language. Alkinoos’ situation is also complicated because of the third party intervention, not to mention the fact that he is in actual fact ratifying his wife’s advice (348) even while taking over her authority to offer it. Ekheneos’ *alla* at line 345 may well be a verbal signal to Alkinoos to behave as expected and dismiss Arete’s (successful) bid to control the guest protocol.

16. Further on categories of violence: Nagler (1988).

is what must occasionally happen and what the symbol always means: the disguise drops and the violence becomes suddenly real.<sup>17</sup>

The other two terms that we meet with in the *Odyssey* simply support, I would argue, these implications of *toxón*, inasmuch as they represent respectively the public discourse among men which defines the power relations of the household and its wider community—the *mythos* of the *Iliad* is almost entirely confined to relations within the Achaean or Trojan groups and thus not central to the framing conflict of the poem—and the institution of *xenia*, a primary male function since it deals with relationships, especially potential military alliances, with distant households. *Xenia* is without question the major social topic of the *Odyssey* and the major criterion of the household's viability, which the suitors are ruining and Odysseus is fighting to restore. As we have seen, the bow in question here was acquired by the hero on a journey of *xenia* to other households and is kept at home by him "as a memorial to his close *xenos*" so there is no doubt in this case that the themes of the bow and *xenia* are directly linked. To make a rough parallel with modern conditions, we could say that *polemos* and *pompê* refer to (and define a polar opposition of) the "foreign policy" of the community, *polemos* being the job of what is now euphemistically called the "Department of Defense" and *pompê* the "Department of State"; while *toxón* corresponds roughly to the functions of the Justice Department and law enforcement. All four terms, then, taken together, constitute a repertoire of the major forms of deadly conflict, while simultaneously constituting a rejection of woman's influence over public life.

*Mythos*, however, is a meta-concept which, in one of its meanings, includes the other three. Significantly, it is the first item that man takes back from woman at the beginning of the *Odyssey*. It stands for nothing less than the control of culture, or at least the construction of society presented as culture (continuing the modern analogy, the media).<sup>18</sup> But there is a dual struggle in the scene that began our discussion, when Penelope, Antinoos, and Odysseus struggle for the interpretation of the Eurytion paradigm. On one level *μῦθος* = "narrative." Present only implicitly, the meaning of a story is being fought for primarily between two groups of men, Odysseus and his familial patriline against Antinoos and the rebellious *kouroi*. On another level *μῦθος* = both "performative utterance" and the key ideological and value structures of the culture. On this level even these bitterly contesting groups are in complete agreement. Together they defend men's reality against the "interference," almost the cognitive dissonance of women. When Penelope, who does not want to hear about the "ghastly" return of the Achaeans (1.341), tries to influence the course of public performances within her *oikos* and Telemakhos wrests this influence away from her, we are seeing a perfect prediction of the struggle for power in the scene before us, when not just the story of Odysseus but Odysseus himself has returned and again Penelope will struggle in vain to deny and prevent that. I am not arguing, against

17. For more on this meaning of the bow, with Egyptian parallels, cf. Nagler (1990) 349-51.

18. "Social conflicts are cultural conflicts, in which the ultimate stakes are control of the production of symbolic goods, that is, the information and images, of culture itself" writes Alain Tourain (1985) 774, quoted by Chickering (1988) 4f, in his eye-opening article. We are only looking at the gender aspect of a timeless struggle.

all traditional readings of the epic down the centuries, that Penelope does not want Odysseus to return. Let us say that "Penelope" does not want "Odysseus" to return; that is, Penelope as generic woman does not want combative male authority to disrupt the disordered peace of the *oikos* only to establish a better but still disordered peace at the cost of great violence.

Richard Martin's brilliant study of *mythos* vs. *epos* (roughly, performative vs. merely declarative speech) in the *Iliad* has shown us that speech as performance, especially as agonistic self-presentation, is characteristically male, and that is wonderfully borne out by Deborah Tannen's sociolinguistic studies on men's and women's discourse in our own society.<sup>19</sup> Yet Martin's generalization that Homeric women have few *mythos* speeches is slightly incorrect for the *Odyssey*. As Laura Collins has recently shown, a large number of *mythos* speeches *are* made by Penelope—until Odysseus gets home.<sup>20</sup> Then she yields the baton to him; and it is precisely that transition of authority in all its bearings which the three *Odyssey* usages effect.

Even the structuring of the three scenes, their beginning in Ithaka and returning to Ithaka after a mirroring detour through the anti-world of the Adventures, is quite significant. Given the typological parallels between Arete (and the "dread goddess" figures) and the "real" Penelope,<sup>21</sup> the Adventures help us to see how this struggle has much greater than personal significance for Penelope and the men who surround her. The poet has inserted a large lens along the trajectory from *mythos* to *toxon*, from ideological to actual combat that we see in the first and last rejection scenes on Ithaka. As we shall try to show in the remainder of this article, the rejection of Penelope is nothing less than a rejection of peace.

In reaction to the horrors of modern war women writers beginning with Baroness Bertha von Suttner and her once astoundingly popular anti-war novel *Die Waffen Nieder* and continuing through Virginia Woolf to Christa Wolf, Birgit Brock-Utne, and Sara Ruddick have sought to define woman's potential counterforce to war and conflict.<sup>22</sup> But as Marilyn Arthur and others have now shown, the themes and tensions of women's relationship to war were felt long before war was modernized and they had to receive articulate, complex treatment within the war genre *par excellence* which was Greek heroic epic.

All of these facts and in particular Penelope's attempt to offer another "story" in answer to the Eurytion paradigm which would lead both Odysseus and the suitors, the "loyalists" and rebels, out of their conflict altogether, shed new light on a fact which has long puzzled scholars, that she herself proposed the contest *and furnished the weapon* for it.<sup>23</sup> From this point of view the emphasis is not

19. Sociolinguistics seems to show that Homer is only carrying out into the field of formal battle how girls and boys and women and men are; cf. Tannen (1990), e.g., 265: "His is an agonistic world, in which friendship is a matter of banding together against others."

20. Collins (forthcoming).

21. Cf. Nagler (forthcoming).

22. Among nonfiction writers (if that distinction is meaningful) I would particularly cite Ruddick (1991) for her article on maternal thinking and its defense.

23. Cf. most recently Murnaghan (1987b).

so much on whether this implies domestic disloyalty to her lord or whether she in some way knows that he has returned. We can hardly fail to recognize in this act an image that would have been hauntingly familiar to anyone who had witnessed a Greek sacrificial ritual, seen a male citizen setting off to war or a representation of that often repeated scene on innumerable vases of the classical period; for it is a woman who often brings the armor out of storage to her husband or son, just as it is a woman who regularly carries the sacrificial knife, hidden in a basket, and hands it to the priest, then to fall silent herself until uttering the ritual lament at the moment of ritual killing. Excluded from the sacrificial action itself and the civic entitlements that it confers, she nonetheless displays her willingness to serve by carrying the concealed weapon for the sacrificer. Whatever may be her private feelings (e.g., as mother or wife), her public voice is orchestrated into the murderous scenario.<sup>24</sup> In an entirely parallel way—for these are entirely parallel behaviors in their social meaning—she brings her own husband or son his armor to send him off to war, symbolizing thereby her dutiful suppression of maternal feeling.<sup>25</sup> “Sacrifice” and “war” are quite parallel symbolic structures in general; Homer gives them equal weight as thematic resonances of the slaughter. These two themes together give that episode its meaning to the traditional audience. When Penelope brings the bow to her husband *and* son—the bow with its concealed intention to use “contest” as a setting for outright killing, like a sacrificial knife, the weapon which is not used in war but which brings war into the *oikos*—she plays an immensely important semantic role, helping to guide the interpretation of the scene as powerfully as Helen does in the *xenia* episode played out before Telemakhos in Book Four, but in Penelope’s case the meaning of her action completely undercuts the desire she has expressed in narrative. Her own behavior in relation to these symbols carries the symbolism to a deeper level on which she complies with violence expressed as ritual or war.

In other words, she is coopted into the system she is trying to replace: a disturbingly familiar pattern. Her thwarted attempt to deflect the course of the action by speech can be read as an extremely realistic psychological model of a person’s conscious intentions trapped in a more potent momentum that is encoded in ritual and culture. And in this, too, she is Womankind. Whether it be prior to the outbreak of open conflict (as here) or at the moment of violence itself (as with the ritual outcry of the women at a sacrifice) or at the funeral lamentation which marks its inevitable conclusion,<sup>26</sup> the pain of those who stand outside the spell of the conflict, for whom the compelling imperative to “win” or “lose” does not blot out the human realities of alienation and death, is dangerous to those

24. Zeitlin (1982). Again, Scheria offers important control of this interpretation. Gorham (1987) 146 writes: “Like female philanthropy in a capitalist economy, this feminine pacifism can easily define itself as powerless and, when it does so, its opposition to war becomes simply a new form of what Nancy Huston has called the symbolic women’s tears that have long been a part of the martial tradition.”

25. Bérard (1989) 44–47. Thetis’ bringing of the immortal armor to Achilles in *Iliad* Eighteen is a kind of archetypal representation of this act (as so much surrounding Achilles is archetypal for warrior experience). We can see much more clearly in Thetis’ case her ambivalence, her maternal reluctance and the public obedience which inevitably overcomes it (juxtapose 18.95f and 19.10f).

26. Alexiou (1974) and Loraux (1986) *passim*. I ponder whether Socrates’ sending Xanthippe and the children away from his own execution is merely to maintain philosophical detachment.

caught in that spell, to the combatants. If they were to get a glimpse of the women's outlook it could shatter their illusion of otherness, and woman's voice must therefore be controlled—at least for the complex cognitive and behavioral system of fighting to continue. In the unending tension between family and society, which will grow only more bitter when the society is developed and formalized into a state, there must unfortunately be mechanisms to overcome or, if that is not possible, to neutralize the resistance of those who might offer a “reality check” to the glorification of conflict by the immediacy of their grief.

In the scene before us this is played out decisively when Telemakhos takes over the function of bow-giver from his mother on behalf of his father and their team project of military revenge, devoting six lines of his speech to establishing that no one but himself has the authority to furnish the key weapon (344-49).<sup>27</sup> Is this only because she does not know who the stranger is, while Telemakhos does?

On the contrary. Under the surface, I would argue, Penelope knows only too well who the stranger is; she is more aware of that than any other actor on the scene. For there is some truth to the argument that Penelope has recognized her husband at an early interview; only we do not need to interpret that recognition in modern, that is, psychological terms.<sup>28</sup> Homer's evocation of the human person is as deep as any that poetry can provide, but his world view is archaic, which is to say, typological. He is not thinking of “Penelope” as a modern individual only; she is the woman of sorrows whose compassion extends even to the suitors who have annoyed her—and threatened her son. She is not caught up in what we would call today the “discourse frame” of the symbols “hero” or “centaur”; instead Penelope *dreams* (only that) that the suitors are her pet geese (19. 535-43), an image which the still disguised Odysseus (in her dream, the avenging eagle who is about to destroy these domestic creatures) interprets quite correctly while remaining totally insensitive to the poignancy of her image.<sup>29</sup> She has maternal feelings for these young men, on that level, just as she obviously has for Telemakhos, whom she tries, equally in vain, to hold back from his inevitable maturation into the status of an adult male, marked as that passage is by immediate danger to his life.<sup>30</sup>

Penelope is Greek womanhood in general, woman in general, whose compas-

27. This is quite parallel to 11. 336-54 in that both Telemakhos and King Alkinoos insist on doing themselves precisely what Penelope and Arete proposed. The issue is authority, not at all the quality of the advice; this is even implicitly true of Hector and Andromache.

28. Cf. Fitzgerald's translation (1990) 499ff. Seeing only the first part of this paradox, but seeing that correctly enough, Fitzgerald concluded that “for the last and greatest of Odysseus' feats of arms his wife is as responsible as he is” (506). Further on the consciousness of Penelope's recognition of the strange beggar: A.A. Parry (1963) 113-17 and Murnaghan (1987b).

29. The traditional interpretation of Penelope's fondness for the geese runs along modernistic lines, e.g., Fitzgerald (1990) 504: “She had grown fond, in a way, of having the suitors about her.” I think this can be accepted, but only as background noise. For us the poem is not about “a man who cared for his wife and wanted to rejoin her”; it uses that theme as a framework for its representation, and hence to some extent its management of power, authority, and violence.

30. In this view the element of sexual attraction to the suitors has been much exaggerated. This is, however, a poetry of human motivation in its full complexity, and these generic feelings, whether of sexuality or, as I now think, maternity, don't replace her feelings of rejection toward the suitors on the surface level, as we would say her conscious feelings.

sion must not be allowed to interfere with the conflict system practiced by men, even though that system has a disturbing tendency to erupt in periodic violence. Indeed Penelope's efforts, as we have seen, not only do not interfere with that dynamic but facilitate it. Would it be too much to suggest that when this Penelope gazes at the uncased bow lying across her lap (21.55-57) it is more than nostalgic regret for her absent husband and his μένος ῥύ ("goodly strength," 2.271) that makes her weep? That this might even be true of Eumaios and Philoitios, Odysseus' faithful herds, who are soon to be brought into service as faithful warriors?<sup>31</sup>

If we look for other signs of suppressed anxiety and grief about the state and its war system, we are bound to be struck with the appearance in our episode of one of the most famous "inappropriate" epithets in Homer, long written off by critics as one of those inevitable lapses of oral composition. When Penelope sets out to do her part in weaponing her disguised husband for the coming fight she takes up the bronze key to the storeroom-armory, the poet says, "with (her) stout hand," χεῖρὶ παχείῃ. As we might expect, this epithet (with one significant exception) applies to the hands not of women but of war-fighting men. Stephen Lowenstam has recently argued that women were not expected to be physically delicate in the ancient world so the epithet only seems inappropriate to modern sensibilities.<sup>32</sup> But the issue is more than aesthetic; it is thematic, and it is hard to overlook the fact that an epithet persistently associated with fighting men is applied to Penelope at the beginning of the very episode which will establish control over women to enable fighting to go on. The only other time this epithet isn't used of a male's hand is when it is used of Athena, the goddess who prompts Penelope to bring the bow; and it is used of Athena in the *Iliad* when she is fighting, and not only that—what Athena does with her stout hand is *strike Aphrodite on the breasts*: a more arresting symbol of the rejection of the feminine, particularly the feminine as adverse to war, it would be difficult to imagine.<sup>33</sup>

Something else Homer says about the bow at this moment should be mentioned. It marks the onset of "contest and murder," ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν (21.4), in the halls of Odysseus. This portentous phrase, which introduces the calling forth of the bow from the "deepest recess" (*thalamos*) of Odysseus' home, controls its thematic associations throughout the subsequent description. Havelock has shown very imaginatively, through parallels in the *Iliad*, how it signifies "beginning of disastrous conflict."<sup>34</sup> By joining "contests" directly to "murderous outcome" with this secure traditional association the poet

31. 21.82f. Perhaps the greatest irony of Antinoos' folly is that he, the first victim of the bow, mocks Odysseus' retainers for weeping at the sight of it, calling them *nēptoi* ("fool" or "child") who weep like women at the beginning of his taunting speech and closing it with a reminiscence about Odysseus' unique capacities which he remembers — *pais d' eti nēptios ēa!* ("but I was still a child [fool]" at that time, 85-95).

32. Lowenstam (1993) 26-32.

33. *Il.* 21.403, ably discussed by Lowenstam (1993). Note also the homoioteleuton that occurs only a few lines before Penelope's stout hand, when Telemakhos watches for the moment when his father will lay *his* hands upon these wanton suitors: χεῖρας ἐφήσει (20. 386).

34. Havelock (1972) 41f.

seems to emphasize the impossible folly of hoping, as Penelope does, that "contest" could be something other than violence. This ironic shadow is cast over the whole notion of "contest" in the subsequent episodes. Antinoos, for example, enthusiastically calls for the contest as a *mnêstêressin aethlon aaton*, "an atê-free contest for the suitors" (21.91)—managing to set up his own destruction, as usual; he also tries to stop Eumaios and the faithful cowherd from crying at the sight of the bow and thus stirring Penelope up to tears—thematically, if I am correct, the only force that could save them (86-88).<sup>35</sup>

The heaviness of Penelope's hand is indeed "inappropriate." Despite Lowenstam's excellent arguments one is still tempted to feel an aesthetic repugnance when Penelope is almost physically masculinized; the imposition of values not her own are as it were stamped on her very body. Put otherwise, the poet's language, in a powerful *mimesis*, overlays traditional language on Penelope's way of being, and the tradition is not hers. It is a kind of cooption, and since this interpretation may seem forced perhaps it would be useful to point out a very different but in a way more obvious cooption that takes place in the final scenes of the poem.

Who is Melanthios, the mutilated victim who takes on himself the community's religious horror and consequent punishment of the rebellious? Melanthios has a sister Melantho who is his twin in iniquity as she is in nomenclature. She and her sisters in crime die the "impure death" (i.e., death of the impure?) meted out by Telemakhos just before he turns his righteous indignation (*kekotêoti thymôi*, 22.477)<sup>36</sup> against her brother Melanthios. They are strung up to a "tall pillar" out in the courtyard—a terrible inversion of the well-built pillars indoors that are Penelope's symbol and place, and in their hapless death resemble "thrushes and doves thronged into a (hunter's) net, and a dreadful bedding down" (469f), parallel both to the netted fish which imaged forth their erstwhile lovers—and the pet geese of Penelope, with all the ambiguity attending *that* image.

This unhappy pair with twinned names, rather unusual in Greek nomenclature, have a father with an equally patent name: Dolios, "the cunning." Nonce names like these are usually taken as signs of ad hoc composition, but another explanation (not contradicting the usual one) is also attractive in this case: that the patency of the names is required by the brevity of the narration. Father Cunning with two children, Blacky and Blackie, is rather obvious flag-waving on the poet's part: this family is a composite of "black hunter" attributes, and thus they stand in the shadows of the narrative as a background identity for Odysseus himself.<sup>37</sup> Yet there is still another complication here which may explain why, in fact, the narration of this family's role in the restoration of Ithaka is kept brief.

35. This is the *nêpios* speech mentioned above (21.85-95); now add that Antinoos once again hurls an accusation at others which recoils, this time in his own words, onto himself: taking on the style of Hesiod's muses (cp. 85f and *Theog.* 26) he abuses the faithful herds as "rustic *nêpioi*" and cycles back to applying the same epithet to himself in his brilliant close.

36. Walsh (1992) 149: "In this way the last execution, brutal as it is . . . caps the carnage in a manner that, in the ethical universe of the Homeric poems, can serve to justify it." Wisely cautious language.

37. Etymologically, *dolios* would actually come from *doulios*, "of slave origin." This would be equally interesting and it would be good to know how much the poet or his audience were aware of it.

There are three allusions to a Dolios in the Ithakan narrative, and scholars have not known whether the same person is intended.<sup>38</sup> The problem, in addition to brevity, is that the Dolios who stands faithfully with his sons by the side of Odysseus, Telemakhos, and Laertes during their final confrontation with the suitors' families, adding the support of his patriline to theirs, seems unlikely to be the Dolios whose children have just been ruthlessly mutilated by that same consortium. But I maintain that it *is* the same Dolios; that in fact his presence at the final melee adds, if I may be permitted the figure, three strings to the bow of Odysseus' power: the peculiar and rather frightening power of structured lawlessness (and unbridled rage) kept in reserve at the group's margins, the power of potentially rival lines, brought into cooperation, and finally the power of complete subordination from those most likely to rebel. If Dolios, whose children were mutilated, not only does not join Odysseus' attackers but helps him defeat them, *a fortiori* the fathers of those who have been merely killed will be won over.

Probably the story is undeveloped because it is so extreme, perhaps improbable, that to do it justice (to make it psychologically plausible) would have required more space than the poet was willing to grant in this telegraphic portion of the performance. Possibly similar stories were in circulation, which would have helped the way unperformed mythological material helps us grasp the point of the Eurytion *paradeigma*; but in any case if my interpretation is correct these allusions are remarkable testimony to the poet's desire for completeness and for maximum impact with regard to his basic program: Odysseus garners every form of authority, the legitimate alongside that which is normally beyond the pale, the willingly given alongside that which is taken by cunning, or by force.

ODYSSEUS COMES HOME from the war, but he brings war with him. He comes home from a world of males to reestablish a world with some gender balance, but not a world of real equality between the genders. That would have been unheard of; yet without it the social order is fatally flawed, especially from the point of view we have been emphasizing here, the point of view of peace. Really to assert her influence against the ruinous paradigm of competition, to proclaim the priority of life over all social roles, identities, and constructs, woman would have to be rebelliously and dangerously herself. In this highly realistic, sophisticated, and compelling poem, that does not happen.

38. Cf. Merry (1958) on 24.222.