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Author(s): A. Gottesman

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## The Authority of Telemachus

The role of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* is a perennial puzzle. This paper argues that Telemachus must reconstruct authority in Ithaca in order to present the death of the suitors as a lawful execution rather than as an extra-legal murder. This is part of the *Odyssey*'s strategy to exonerate Odysseus from any possible blame. The job falls to Telemachus because in the *Odyssey* authority is premised on personal relationships, and the suitors simply do not know Odysseus. The construction of authority occurs in a sympotic and domestic arena where Telemachus competes against the suitors to assert control over the key social practices of marriage (*gamos*), transportation (*pompê*), and hospitality (*xenia*).

Few if any scholars these days put much store in the notion of a *Telemachy* as a storyline separate and separable from the *Odyssey*. It is now generally agreed that the story of Telemachus' education and growth is inextricable from the *Odyssey*'s broader arc.<sup>1</sup> And yet, as one scholar put it, "No hero causes the interpreter of Homeric Epic so much head-scratching."<sup>2</sup> The cause of the "head-scratching" is the question of how, exactly, Telemachus contributes to Odysseus' return. Here I will attempt to approach the puzzle of Telemachus from a different direction

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1. For the Telemachy from an "analytic" perspective see Schadewaldt 1958: 327–32; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1927: 99–127. For "unitarian" perspectives on Telemachus' development as a character and his role in the broader plot see Austin 1969; Clarke 1963; Felson 1994: 67–91; Heath 2001; 2005: 79–118; Jones 1988; Thalmann 1998: 206–22; Petropoulos 2011. A thorough summary of analytic and unitarian approaches to the *Odyssey* can be found in Heubeck 1974: 87–109.

2. "Kein Held den Interpreten des homerischen Epos so viel Kopfzerbrechen bereitet wie Telemach" (Krischer 1988: 1).

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from the ones usually taken.<sup>3</sup> I argue that part of the role of Telemachus is to contribute to a solution of some thorny ethical and political problems that the *Odyssey* sets for itself:

The poet is dealing with something he cannot or does not want to confront directly, which is obviously that Odysseus. . . has to kill his own retainers. *This is the central problem of the Odyssey, and the poet will try in many ways to construct a reason for such a distasteful necessity.*

Nagler 1990: 345, my emphasis

Related to this ethical problem is a political one, namely, How can a king reclaim his power after a prolonged absence? These problems are interrelated because only a person of recognized authority can dispense justice, especially a king.

Although Homer does not picture a king doing so explicitly, dispensing justice is an essential part of Homeric kingship.<sup>4</sup> According to Aristotle, the adjudication of cases (*dikas*) was one task of “heroic” kings, who judged cases by swearing an oath after raising their scepter (*Pol.* 1285b11–12). Achilles describes the scepter he is holding as the one that “the sons of the Achaeans hold in their hand when they dispense justice [*dikaspōloi*]” (*Il.* 1.237–39). Intriguingly, the only other occurrence in Homer of this term, *dikaspōlos*, is at *Od.* 11.186, where his mother Anticleia reassures Odysseus that Telemachus “peaceably administers your properties, takes part in equal feasts—as is fitting for a *dikaspōlos* man; for everyone invites him.” Of course this does not describe the situation of the *Odyssey* at all. It may describe the situation Anticleia knew at the time of her death, if we can get around the fact that she is describing a thirteen-year old in terms that seem more appropriate to an adult!<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, I suggest that we can read her description of Telemachus as a negative programmatic statement for the

3. One popular interpretive move is to read Telemachus as a model of an internal audience of epic. “He is like us and we are like him,” as Richard Martin put it (1993: 239). This approach accounts for some aspects of Telemachus’ part better than others. It accounts well for his role in Books 1 through 4 in which he listens enthralled to stories of the heroism of his father, but less well for his role back in Ithaca as a defender of his father in disguise against the aggressions of the suitors. It also does not account sufficiently for the ultimate failure of his heroic education. For despite his growth as a character he cannot complete his education in heroic kingship without undermining the return of his father. See also Peradotto 1990: 117–18; Pucci 1987: 201–208; Olson 1995: 64–90; Murnaghan 2002.

4. “Homer, it is true, nowhere pictures a king dispensing justice. But this is a mere accident, for Idomeneus proposes to Ajax to submit their dispute to Agamemnon [*Il.* 23.485]. Minos settling disputes in the spirit land certainly had his prototype in such kings as Nestor who *περὶ οἷδε δίκας* [‘was thoroughly skilled in legal judgment (*Od.* 3.244)] and Sarpedon who *Λυκίην εἴρυτο δίκησι τε καὶ σθένει* [‘protected Lycia with his legal judgments and strength’ (*Il.* 16.542)]” (Bonner and Smith 1938: 1.29–30). According to the traditional concept of kingship, a community’s prosperity depends on its king’s administration of justice (*Od.* 19.109–14; Hes. *W&D* 225–29).

5. For the suggestion see Combellack 1974. Ahl and Roisman 1996: 127–29 suggest that Anticleia’s words, which Odysseus narrates to the Phaeacians, represent what Odysseus wishes to be the case rather than what actually was the case at the time of his mother’s death. Either way, the connection is made for the listener/reader between Telemachus and the administration of justice.

listener/reader. She is listing what is now *not* the case about Telemachus: he is *not* administering his properties “at ease”; he is certainly *not* taking part in equal feasts; he is not a dispenser of justice. But he must do all those things in the course of the epic. The catch for Telemachus is that in Homeric epic, as Redfield puts it, “authority is secured by the exercise of authority” (1994: 95). And at the outset Telemachus clearly has no real authority. He will have to construct his authority in the eyes of the suitors, and in ours as well, before it can be exercised in its most extreme form, that of violence against its own subjects.<sup>6</sup>

Before I show how Telemachus constructs his authority I will first have to discuss the *Odyssey*’s vision of politics, highlighting the personal nature of political relationships as the *Odyssey* conceives them. That will be the task of the first section. Then I will turn to a careful reading of Telemachus’ interactions with the suitors in Books 16–20. I will show how Telemachus constructs his authority by engaging the suitors in a contest over the definition and control of the terms of what we might call a traditional grammar of authority. Key terms in this grammar are marriage (*gamos*), transport (*pompê*), and hospitality (*xeinia*). The rivals negotiate their relative positions by disputing over the meaning of these terms. Each of these terms features prominently in archaic politics, where powerful men are marked as much by their wealth as their ability to employ and manipulate traditional practices. This is not surprising. Each of the practices that I will consider—marriage, transport, and hospitality—were peaceable opportunities to organize a family’s or a community’s resources and to reveal dramatically the structure of the hierarchy by showing who commands and who obeys.

#### POLITICS IN/OF THE ODYSSEY

Most scholars interested in Homeric politics have understandably looked to the *Iliad* rather than the *Odyssey*.<sup>7</sup> For the *Iliad* involves issues of collective decision-making in a more obvious way. The *Odyssey*’s vision of politics is related but slightly different. The difference is due to the fact that each epic presents a vision of politics that is most relevant for its purposes. Thus the *Iliad* presents a story where the authority of the heroes is already constituted. Each of the characters is already a leader of men, recognized by them as a “speaker of words and doer of deeds” (*Il.* 9.443). Competitive jockeying for status between the heroes is fierce at times, but it takes place within the traditional arenas of recognition. By contrast, the rivals for leadership in Ithaca must compete for recognition in the

6. As Deneen rightly notes, “it is [Odysseus’] ability to act apolitically and even amorally that will restore justice to Ithaca” (2000: 65). See also Havelock 1978: 139–49.

7. As Halverson put it, “There is no state in Ithaka, only estates” (1985: 130). The pioneering work on Homeric politics is by Finley 1978 [1965], but the scholarship on the topic is extensive. Representatively, see Rose 1975; 1992: 43–140; 1997; Donlan 1979; 1982; 1989; 1994; 1997; 1998; Quiller 1981; Geddes 1984; Raaflaub 1993; 1997; Flaig 1994; van Wees 1992; Hölkeskamp 1997; Thalmann 1998; Hammer 2002; Raaflaub and Wallace 2007: 24–32; Elmer 2013.

eyes of the community, and of each other, far from the battlefields and assemblies “where men win glory” (*kydianeiras: Il.* 4.225, 1.490). Their main arena of competition is the household and the central institution is the feast.

And yet, although there are in the *Odyssey* few “crowd scenes” comparable to the *Iliad*’s, the eyes of the people are always present, ready to assess and judge the actions of the heroes. We glimpse them in public displays and processions; for example, on the shore of Pylos, where Nestor is celebrating a festival for Poseidon (3.7–8), or at Sparta, where Menelaos is celebrating two marriages at once (4.3–14). The ears of the people are also quite present, ready to attend to the events in Odysseus’ house, evaluate them, and spread them about in the community in the form of gossip.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the heroes act as if the eyes and ears of the people are always on them. They are always concerned with how their words and actions might be judged by others. Also important are the external “eyes” of the audience of the epic. The poet is no less interested in their esteem of his heroes than in the esteem the heroes display for each other, and probably more so.

Most crucially for my purposes, the two epics pose a different set of political questions. If the *Iliad*’s central political question is, “how does one give endurance to communities made fragile by the very nature of human connectedness?” (Hammer 2002: 189), the *Odyssey* is more interested in the question, how does authority return to people who do not recognize it, and how does it dispense justice to them? This question is not a disinterested or theoretical one. It stems from the poem’s multi-pronged strategy to glorify Odysseus by exonerating him of all possible sources of blame, most obviously by arguing that his companions perished because they did not abide by his instructions to refrain from eating the Cattle of the Sun, and that the suitors brought their punishment on themselves because they devoured his household wealth, threatened his family, and were abusive.<sup>9</sup> One of the ways in which the poet goes about justifying the suitors’ death is by describing the process by which authority returns to Ithaca through the interactions between Telemachus and the suitors.

Indeed, the poet goes to great lengths to characterize Ithaca as a place without political authority at the outset. We are told the assembly has not met once in the twenty years of Odysseus’ absence (2.26–27). There are apparently no other institutions in which to settle disputes that might arise, such as the circle of elders depicted on Achilles’ shield (*Il.* 18.503–505); thus Telemachus calls his problem with the suitors a “private matter” and apologizes for bringing it before the whole people (45). In the king’s long absence, it seems, authority has been held in a state of suspension between the competing claims of the

8. Winkler 1990: 134ff. aptly characterized the climate of suspicion and surveillance in the *Odyssey* along the lines of the intense sociality of a Mediterranean village community. See also Olson 1995: 1–23; Schmitz 1999 for more in-depth discussion.

9. On the ethical problems raised by the *mnesterophonia*, and the text’s attempt to deal with them, see Buchan 2004: 133–80; Nagler 1990; 1993.

suitors and the immaturity of Telemachus, and abetted in no small part by the delaying tactics of Penelope. The assembly in Book 2 illustrates the vacuum of authority. Telemachus has summoned it to address the problem of the suitors. There, different voices attempt to influence public opinion (Telemachus, Mentor, Halitherses, the suitors Eurymachus and Antinous) but none can produce consent that leads to action. Threats deflect attempts to unite the people against the suitors (229–56). Telemachus issues a command for a ship and a crew but no one obeys (212–29). The only command that is effective, that is recognized and obeyed, is Leocritus' order that the assembled people disperse (257). West rightly characterizes Leocritus' dismissal of the assembly as "high-handed," and notes that the Ithacans' acquiescence suggests their lack of support for Telemachus (Heubeck et al. 1988–1992: 1.147). We might also note that this is Leocritus' only speech in the poem, and the only other time he appears is when Telemachus kills him (22.294–96).<sup>10</sup> That such a minor character assumes the prominent role of dismissing the assembly underscores just how up-for-grabs authority is on Ithaca.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the absence of strong authority it does not seem that the island is suffering materially during Odysseus' long absence. Life on Ithaca seems to go on without him. And yet the poet insinuates that it is only a matter of time before the Ithacan community regresses to a sub-civilized, "Cyclopic" state, as Aristotle calls the state of lacking collective authority (*NE* X.9, 1180a28). Like the Ithacans, the Cyclopes have no capacity to assemble collectively to deliberate or settle disputes; at least so Odysseus tells the Phaeacians (9.112). If the Ithacans have the capacity they do not employ it. The Cyclopes are focused only on their own households, "each giving *themis* to his own wife and children" (9.115). Just as the Cyclopes do not take action at Polyphemus' cry for help (9.398–412), so the Ithacans do nothing about the problem Telemachus has brought to their attention but instead disperse uneventfully to their private abodes (2.258).<sup>12</sup>

So, authority must return if the Ithacans are to unite again into a community and to know true peace and prosperity, as Zeus wills to happen (24.486). But, as far as Odysseus is concerned, authority must also return before the suit-

10. As is noted by de Jong 2001: 58.

11. Bassett 1931 has well shown that who dismisses Homeric assemblies is not a function of formal authority but rather of who has the floor when the poet wants to close the scene. Nonetheless, the fact that a minor character has the floor equally serves the point of showing the diffuseness of authority. In the *Iliad* only the major heroes take the prerogative to dismiss an assembly because the major heroes are primarily the speakers.

12. There might be some further verbal echoes connecting the Cyclopes to the Ithacans, as noted by Petropoulos 2011: 69–70. The poet gives the first speech to Aegyptius, whose son Antiphus had been eaten by the Cyclops (2.19–20). Also the agora is called *poluphemon* (2.150). See further Bakker 2002; Newton 2008: 17–19. Newton notes that, contrary to what Odysseus tells the Phaeacians about the Cyclopes' lack of assemblies, the Cyclopes do in fact seem to assemble when they hear the cry of Polyphemus. What they lack is collective authority which, in Odysseus' perspective, requires a political hierarchy.

ors can be dealt with. In terms of the overarching project of the *Odyssey* it makes all the difference that the suitors be killed justly. In part the poem accomplishes that aim by arguing repeatedly that the suitors really deserve their fate. And in part it accomplishes it by arguing that Odysseus has every right to punish them as he does. Their death has to be seen as an execution rather than as a murder.<sup>13</sup>

Now, Homer and Greek political thought in general notoriously lack a language to describe authority.<sup>14</sup> There is no term like the Roman *imperium* or *auctoritas* to describe the right of an official to execute a judgment or enforce a law (Finley 1983: 20). But that is not to say that the concept was lacking in Homer. It lies beneath the surface of the prevalent comparison between a “good king” and a “gentle father” (2.234, 5.12).<sup>15</sup> Despite Aristotle’s strenuous insistence that kingly rule is different from paternal rule (*Pol.* I.1, 1252a), in Homer these are not easy to disentangle. Homeric authority is couched in the terms of a specifically personal relationship.<sup>16</sup> This is especially the case in the *Odyssey* where, as Thalmann notes, “the *oikos* stands by synecdoche for the whole community” (1998: 131).

Although ultimately the authority of Odysseus is the real issue, the *Odyssey* chooses to narrate the return of authority to Ithaca by focusing on the construction of Telemachus’ authority.<sup>17</sup> Behind this displacement is a textual strategy. As Thalmann rightly notes, the text “toys with other possibilities while ultimately cancelling them in order to reaffirm—all the more strongly for having explored alternatives—hierarchical order under [Odysseus’] control” (1998: 207).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Telemachus is in a special position relevant to the suitors.<sup>19</sup> The suitors

13. Compare 22.35–67 with Lysias 1.25–26, another text which seeks to present a murder as an execution. Both passages involve husbands enforcing the death penalty on interloping males while refusing an offer of compensation. While Euphiletus justifies his actions on the basis of *nomos* Odysseus justifies his on behalf of *nemesis*. The difference, of course, is that the interloper in one case has committed adultery whereas in the other case the husband merely feared that he had.

14. Representatively see Berent 2000, with the response by Hansen 2002: 30–32. See also Rosler 2005, who shows that the view is mistaken that Aristotle had no notion of political authority.

15. This was a central concept of Freud’s political theory in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). In Homer there are other models of kingship at work besides the paternal one, including the king as shepherd and the king as gardener. For the former see Haubold 2000: 17–20, for the latter see Giesecke 2007: 203–204.

16. For the centrality of paternal relationships in Homeric epic, not just the *Odyssey*, see Wöhrle 1999. There is a nice irony in the fact that authors engaged in forging the modern concept of sovereignty in the Renaissance, like Jean Bodin, often drew on Homer as a resource, including for the comparison of a kingly power to paternal authority (Bizer 2011: 126n.15).

17. “The *Odyssey* is, above all, designed to draw attention to Odysseus and to present him as the most supremely successful of the heroes who fought at Troy, and it deploys the story of Telemachus’s relatively mundane coming of age to promote this project” (Murnaghan 2002: 137–38).

18. While Thalmann 1998: 206–23 highlights the unresolved tensions between Telemachus and Odysseus, Wöhrle 1999: 117–43 stresses the cooperative nature of the competition between them.

19. A similar point is made by Scheid-Tissinier 1993: 16–17, who argues that the generational difference is quite important: Telemachus must achieve before the eyes of his age-mates the status that Odysseus enjoyed among the previous generation.

do not know Odysseus. They were just a little older than Telemachus when he left for Troy. They were boys (16.442–44) and Telemachus was still a baby (11.448). As Mentor complains, the Ithacans do not come together to expel the suitors from Odysseus' house because none of them remembers how good and fair a king he was (2.233). Odysseus cannot simply return and resume where he left off, dispensing justice as if he never left to subjects who do not know him. His lack of authority in the suitors' eyes is shown by their comment that even if he were to return they would sooner kill him than obey him (2.245–51). By contrast, at least they do *acknowledge* Telemachus' claim to authority, although they do not view it as particularly compelling (1.387).

The theme of recognition is thus central to the politics of the *Odyssey* and the authority of Telemachus. As Murnaghan has shown in her careful study of the theme, "In the world of the Homeric epics, the recognition of identity... is bound up with honor and prestige. . . . Their [the heroes'] identities are largely congruent with a social role that is determined by their valuation in others' eyes" (1987: 4–6). Murnaghan has in mind primarily the recognitions of Odysseus' disguised identity, but the principle applies also to Telemachus' true identity as a king. This identity is unrecognized rather than disguised. A challenge for the poet is that two audiences must come to recognize the authority of Telemachus. The first audience is a hostile one: the suitors. They are not willing to recognize it. The other audience is us, the audience of the epic. We must recognize that the suitors recognize the authority of Telemachus. For only then will their execution at the hands of Telemachus and Odysseus be justified in our eyes.

This might be a difficult point to accept. We are quite habituated to (in Weber's terms) "rational" authority and even "traditional" authority. The first is the impersonal authority of bureaucratic officials and is based on rules and laws. This is the form of authority we are most familiar with, in which an individual acquires a right to coerce by virtue of occupying a particular office. The second is personal and inherited. Its claim to legitimacy is based on the fact that it is ancestral, "the way we've always done things." This notion is clearly present in Homer. From either perspective the murder of the suitors appears justified. However, although Telemachus by traditional rights should be king, as Antinous explicitly declares (1.386–87), the peculiar situation in Ithaca means that the most relevant concept of authority is Weber's third type, namely "charismatic" authority, which he defines as follows:

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a "leader."

Weber 1978 [1921–1922]: 1.241



This kind of authority is the most fragile. It depends on the willing and constant recognition of those who are its subjects.<sup>20</sup> In Telemachus' case, the suitors are quite simply not willing to recognize his authority. And, from this perspective, unless they recognize his authority their execution cannot be justified.

Recently, Hammer (2000; 2002; 2005) has explored the political dimension of Homeric recognition through a Weberian lens. He underscores Weber's notion of "plebiscitary leadership" as especially relevant for reading Homeric politics (2002: 153–60). Weber coined this paradoxical term to describe the relationship that prevails between charismatic leaders and the people where "the validity of charismatic authority rests entirely on *recognition by the ruled*, on 'proof' before their eyes" (my emphasis). Under plebiscitary leadership, "instead of recognition being treated as a consequence of legitimacy, it is treated as the basis of legitimacy" (Weber 1978 [1921–1922]: 1.266–67). In other words, the concept construes politics as a struggle in which powerful individuals compete for recognition and authority before the eyes of the people.<sup>21</sup> Recognition is something that must be earned in a struggle.

This emphasis on the "plebiscitary" aspects of Homeric politics, in which "leaders play to the audience, seeking to persuade, cajole, or elicit support" (Hammer 2005: 108), dovetails quite nicely with the study of Homeric self-performance. The path-breaking work here is Martin's *The Language of Heroes*, which considers the speeches and gestures of Homeric characters as if they were "actual moves in a social game" (1989: 91). This approach reads Homer's characters as crafted to represent a keen awareness of their own status as performers, interacting with other characters in performance. They are engaged in a constant struggle to define their status and identity relative to each other. Their interactions can be quite subtle, involving gestural, physical, and linguistic dimensions.<sup>22</sup> It is to these subtle interactions that I will pay special attention, for they will allow us to trace the suitors' growing recognition of Telemachus' authority.

#### WHO WILL (MAKE) PENELOPE WED?

Aristocrats in archaic Greece, perhaps as aristocrats in all times and places, put much effort into deliberating about, planning, and conducting marriages.<sup>23</sup> Vernant nicely summarizes the rationale behind this:

20. As Aristotle notes, a key feature of heroic kingship is not only that it was ancestral but that it was also exercised over willing subjects (*Pol.* 1285b5–8).

21. See also Andreev 1979, who stresses the double function of the Homeric assembly as a mechanism for the rule of elites over the mass, as well as a space in which the mass were "spectators" of elites' conflicts (389). More recently see Elmer 2013.

22. For Homeric gestures see Lateiner 1995; for conversation see Beck 2005; Richardson 2007. For psychological subtlety see Scodel 2008.

23. On marriage in archaic Greece see Leduc 1992; VÉrilhac and Vial 1998: 50–53.

The framework [of archaic marriage] is that of social interchange between the great noble families, with the exchange of women seen as a means of creating links of union or dependence, of acquiring prestige or confirming vassaldom.

Vernant 1990 [1974]: 60

Marriage was thus especially politicized. As Redfield puts it, marriage was a “game” in which “men compete for women and for advantageous in-laws” (1982: 184). Although we are poorly informed about marriage among the lower classes, for the upper classes of archaic Greece the stakes were certainly high.<sup>24</sup>

Marriage is also very important in the politics of the *Odyssey*. Along with transport and hospitality (as I argue below), it represents a major element in the *Odyssey*'s grammar of authority; that is, it has an important place in how authority and identity are constructed and contested.<sup>25</sup> The marriage that is most contested, of course, because it has the most at stake, is Penelope's (re)marriage. Scholars interested in archaic marriage more generally have been especially hard-pressed to explain what kind of practices it reflects.<sup>26</sup> In particular the difficulty is due to the different ways in which Penelope's remarriage is described in the text: at times it is as if it is up to Penelope's father, Icarius, to arrange it (e.g., 2.52, 113–14), while at others her wedding arrangements are to be made by Telemachus (e.g., 23.135). Sometimes both possibilities are raised in the same speech (1.276, 292). And sometimes Penelope is imagined as arranging her marriage herself (4.770–71). All this is quite puzzling if one is concerned with establishing the rules of the institution of archaic marriage. But the topic of Penelope's marriage can also be seen within the context of a political struggle between Telemachus and the suitors. From this perspective, Penelope's marriage is described differently depending on who is describing it. The different ways in which it is described do not have to do with strata of composition but with the rhetorical function that the marriage serves in context.<sup>27</sup>

24. See Gernet 1968 [1954]; McGlew 1993: 26–35; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990 [1972–1986]: 207–27.

25. This is noted by Flaig 1995: 365.

26. “The wooing of Penelope... would seem to offer the best raw material for the study of Homeric marriage. It is my opinion, however, that Homeric marriage institutions can be studied only by ignoring this material” (Finley 1954: 172n.19).

27. My understanding of the role of Penelope's *gamos* in the struggle for authority in Ithaca owes much to Thomas 1988 and Thalmann 1998: 181–88, who stress the competitive dynamic within the *Odyssey*'s ethics of honor. In this view, Penelope's marriage relates to Ithacan kingship because it signifies more than marriage with an attractive female; it signifies success in a competition between peers for a tangible and desirable prize. The winner, accordingly, wins greater status and thus expresses a better claim to the kingship. I differ in that I would emphasize that the competition in question is ultimately not who gets *to possess* Penelope in marriage, but rather who gets *to be seen as the person who authorizes* Penelope's remarriage (cf. Vernant 2006 [1965]: 157–96). I have also found Scodel 2001, who describes the competition through the lens of game-theory, quite helpful.

The issue first comes up in the passage in which Athena, disguised as Mentès, gives advice to Telemachus. She instructs him to summon the assembly and to bring the matter into the light of publicity:

Tell the suitors to disperse to their own. As for your mother, if her heart urges her to be married, let her go to the house of her mighty father. They will prepare the wedding and arrange the very many bride-gifts that should accompany a beloved daughter.

1.274–78

μνηστῆρας μὲν ἐπὶ σφέτερα σκίδνασθαι ἄνωχθι,  
μητέρα δ', εἴ οἱ θυμὸς ἐφορμᾶται γαμέεσθαι,  
ἄψ ἴτω ἐς μέγαρον πατρὸς μέγα δυναμένοιο·  
οἱ δὲ γάμον τεύξουσι καὶ ἀρτυνέουσιν ἔεδνα  
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε φίλης ἐπὶ παιδὸς ἔπεσθαι.

These lines are controversial. First, questions are raised about the sense of *eedna* here.<sup>28</sup> In most instances the term seems to refer to the gifts that suitors offer to the father of the bride, but in this case it seems to refer to the gifts that the kin of the bride will offer to the groom, that is, the dowry. The lines have also been controversial from the perspective of textual analysis, because in the assembly in Book 2 the suitors repeat the suggestion of Athena (195–97), yet it is not carried out.<sup>29</sup> Page accordingly saw here strong proof of the clumsiness of the *Odyssey's* “editor”:

Who would believe, if he had any choice in the matter, that our poet would break the most elementary laws of his craft, making *the Suitors* repeat verbatim a proposal made by *Athene* to Telemachus, and then making Telemachus reject that proposal? But this is what happens.

1955: 57, original emphases

The proposal of Athena is not repeated “verbatim,” however. There are important differences. First, her words were spoken to Telemachus in a confidential conversation which others could not overhear (1.157). They were intended for Telemachus alone. Second, it was part of a set of instructions, but these were not necessarily instructions for a course of action that Telemachus should follow.<sup>30</sup> As I read it, Athena’s imperative ἴτω (276) is not necessarily addressed to Telemachus

28. On the controversy, in addition to Finley 1954 and Lacey 1966, see Morris 1986: 105–10 and Perysinakis 1991.

29. On this controversy, see Eisenberger 1973: 37–42; Olson 1995: 71–74; Siegmann 1976. Katz 1991: 38–39 is sensitive to the difference between the proposals, but reads it as a textual subversion of “the claims of various males to [Penelope’s] control” rather than as a difference in rhetorical stance, as I do.

30. According to West (Heubeck et al. 1988–1992: 1.109), the advice is carefully designed to conceal background information from Telemachus that the audience surely knows. Another solution is suggested by Olson 1995: 72, who argues that the plan is not meant to be interpreted sequentially, but rather as presenting alternative possibilities.

as an imperative at all, polite or otherwise.<sup>31</sup> It is merely something he should publicly proclaim.<sup>32</sup> In that respect, it parallels ἀνωχθι in the passage quoted above (274) as an instruction to give a command in the assembly. Athena does not expect that it will be carried out, any more than she expects the suitors to disperse simply because Telemachus tells them to. This is why, as part of Athena's further instructions, if he finds out that his father is dead he is to return and give away his mother to a new husband (292), even though Icarius supposedly would already have dealt with Penelope's marriage arrangements. Athena in this speech is being strategic about Penelope's marriage, not directive. Her instructions are designed to allow Telemachus to assume an authoritative posture vis-à-vis his mother and her suitors. And in fact he succeeds in doing so immediately after her speech (1.356–59, 378–80). Perhaps Athena's confidence in him (as well as the paradigm of Orestes) has inspired him.

But in the assembly in Book 2 the suitors easily overwhelm his attempt to be authoritative. There, instead of proclaiming that he is commanding his mother to go back to Icarius, which is what Athena told him to do, what he says is different in a subtle but significant way. He says that the suitors "hesitate" to approach Icarius, and instead prefer to feast on his animals and wine (2.50–58). Furthermore, far from issuing an authoritative speech-act, as Athena told him to (1.273),<sup>33</sup> he declares his own unmanliness in comparison to his father:

There is no man here like Odysseus to protect the *oikos* from this curse. I am not the sort to protect it.

2.58–60

οὐ γὰρ ἔπ' ἀνήρ,  
οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκεν, ἀρῆν ἀπὸ οἴκου ἀμῦναι.  
ἡμεῖς δ' οὐ νύ τι τοῖσι ἀμυνέμεν.

And he goes on to make a confused appeal for help to the community which he concludes by hurling down the speaker's staff and bursting into tears (68–81). This might earn the sympathy of the Ithacans (perhaps that is what Telemachus wants) but it does not complete any of the objectives that Athena assigned him.<sup>34</sup>

31. As Katz 1991: 38 takes it. West in Heubeck et al. 1988–1992, ad loc., considers the shift from Athena's ἴτω, "let her go" (1.276), to Eurymachus' ἀνωγέτω, "let him command" (2.195), as uncharacteristically abrupt. The difference in phrasing make sense if one keeps in mind that Athena was giving Telemachus advice in private, while Eurymachus was giving him a command in public. Eurymachus' ἀνωγέτω is more direct, addressing Telemachus as the person who will command Penelope to leave (yet still subordinate to the speaker), whereas Athena's ἴτω is more neutral, leaving indeterminate the motivator of Penelope's departure.

32. As is remarked by Allione 1963: 31.

33. On the term *mythos* as an authoritative speech-act see Martin 1989. On Telemachus as speaker of *mythoi*, see Martin 1993: 235–38.

34. Heracleides Ponticus (fr. 174 Wehrli) criticized this speech as "disorderly" (ἀνοικονόμητον). It is also very different from Odysseus' handling of the scepter in assemblies. In one instance he is notable for holding the scepter steady (*Il.* 3.218). In another he uses it to powerful effect (*Il.*

The point of the matter is that in the assembly Telemachus inadvertently handed to the suitors the initiative over the issue of his mother's marriage. He said they "hesitate" to go to Icarius when he should have said that he commands his mother to go, which is what Athena told him to do. Athena's intent was for Telemachus to present himself publicly in a posture of strength. Telemachus actually assumed one of weakness, depicting the decision over Penelope's marriage as resting with the suitors, not with himself. This gave the suitors the opening to declare publicly that they would like nothing better than to end their feast, but Telemachus' mother has tricked them into staying with her famous shroud (94–110). Besides implying that Telemachus had been irrelevant in the matter, this also allows them to turn the tables on him, and to publicly issue their own commands:

Transport your mother away; order her to marry whomever her father orders and is pleasing to her.

2.113–14

μητέρα σὴν ἀπόπεμψον, ἀνωχθὶ δέ μιν γαμέεσθαι  
τῷ ὅτεώ τε πατήρ κέλεται καὶ ἀνδάνει αὐτῆ.

And again:

Let him command his mother to go to her father. They will prepare the wedding and arrange the very many bride-gifts that should accompany a beloved daughter.

2.195–97

μητέρα ἦν ἐς πατρὸς ἀνωγέτω ἀπονέεσθαι·  
οἱ δὲ γάμον τεύξουσι καὶ ἀρτυνέουσιν ἕδνα  
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε φίλης ἐπὶ παιδὸς ἔπεσθαι.

These lines do echo Athena's advice closely, as Page and others note, but it is not necessarily the case that they are a "later interpolation . . . presumably inserted for the sake of meretricious comprehensiveness," as West suggests (Heubeck et al. 1988–1992: 1.110). Instead, they are a subtle indication that the suitors have seized the initiative and are publicly making the commands that Telemachus should have been making. If Telemachus obeys the suitors' public command at this point, and commands Penelope to go back to Icarius to remarry (quite apart from Penelope's feelings on the matter), the game is lost: it shows that the suitors have not recognized his authority while he has recognized that of the suitors. If he had initially publicly commanded his mother to go to Icarius, as Athena had told him, and she had gone, this might have reinforced his authority. But at this point, he cannot order his mother's remarriage without reinforcing the image that he has painted of himself as immature. If he commands her to marry now it shows that

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2.265–66). The only other hero who hurls down the scepter in an assembly is Achilles (1.245), another young man who needs to learn to control his emotions.

the suitors' command has taken precedence. And if Penelope marries on someone else's command it shows that Telemachus is irrelevant.

Accordingly, Telemachus makes the only move that he can:

There is no way I can send away against her will the woman who bore me, who raised me, while my father is somewhere in the world alive or dead. It would be bad to pay a large amount back to Icarus, if I willingly send away my mother. I would also suffer ill from my father, and a spirit will pile it on, when my mother makes a woeful curse as she leaves the home. Blame will also come from people.

2.130–37

οὐ πως ἔστι δόμων ἀέκουσαν ἀπῶσαι  
 ἢ μ' ἔτεχ', ἢ μ' ἔθρεψε, πατὴρ δ' ἐμὸς ἄλλοθι γαίης,  
 ζῶει ὃ γ' ἢ τέθνηκε· κακὸν δέ με πόλλ' ἀποτίνειν  
 Ἴκαριω, αἶ κ' αὐτὸς ἐκὼν ἀπὸ μητέρα πέμψω.  
 ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ πατρὸς κακὰ πείσομαι, ἄλλα δὲ δαίμων  
 δώσει, ἐπεὶ μήτηρ στυγεράς ἀρήσεται ἔρινυς  
 οἴκου ἀπερχομένη· νέμεσις δέ μοι ἐξ ἀνθρώπων  
 ἔσσεται.

This speech is introduced by a line characterizing Telemachus as *pepnumenos* (129). As Heath has argued at length, Homer ascribes this hard-to-translate epithet to Telemachus only at moments when he's being particularly canny or politic, when he is "becoming a public figure, gaining self-confidence and authority in speaking" (2001: 138). The response is canny, I suggest, because it deflects the suitors' command, which, as I've shown, he cannot accept even though it is practically the same course he had urged. It is also canny because it attributes Telemachus' hesitation to other sources, namely family obligations and public opinion, rather than to the suitors. It allows him to maintain that the decision is his to make, not the suitors'.

#### GETTING THERE AND BACK

I have suggested that *gamos* (marriage) is one term in the *Odyssey's* grammar of authority. It represents an important arena in which Telemachus must construct his authority. The person who publicly authorizes the physical movement of Penelope from her *oikos* to another would obtain powerful public recognition of his authority, over both her and her *oikos*. This expression of authority is primarily directed inward, to the Ithacan community. It allows one's fellows and the public to witness one's domestic authority in a palpable and conventional way. Another, closely related, expression of authority, directed as much outward as inward, is the specific ability to authorize the transport of oneself and others across space.

The evidence for *pompai* in archaic politics is not as extensive as that for marriage. It has been argued that early poleis used processions through a landscape as a means of marking out the limits of their territory (de Polignac 1995 [1984]). Processions were certainly useful for politics, such as the one Peisistratus orchestrated to engineer his return to Athens (Hdt. 1.60; see Connor 1987). Shortly after the battle of Salamis, the Spartans honored Themistocles with an honorary *pompê* that included a fine chariot and an escort by 300 Spartiate knights to the border with Tegea. Herodotus notes, “Of all the people that I know of, only him did the Spartiates honor with *pompê* [προέπεμψαν]” (Hdt. 8.124.3; Plut. *Them.* 17.3).<sup>35</sup>

Herodotus’ comment suggests that by the early fifth century the honorary *pompê* was obsolete. In Homer, however, it is commonplace. *Pompê* is a key part of the “typical scene” of hospitality (Arend 1933: 28ff.; Reece 1993: 39). When a guest is hosted, the final step in the process is the act of send-off, the *pompê* to the guest’s next destination. The term could refer either to the provision of an escort or the permission to depart; in many cases it refers to both. For example, Nestor gives Telemachus a chariot and his son as companion (3.369), while Menelaos offers him long-overdue permission and an elaborate gift-giving ceremony (15.65–181). Both are described as *pompê*. Odysseus, of course, usually needs *pompê* in both senses of permission and the means to travel.

Not anyone can command *pompê*, however. There is a clear correlation between the person who can command *pompê* and the person who is recognized as the highest authority within a community, for he is in a position to marshal the resources and manpower of the household or community towards a specific end. I say “he” for, as Katz (1991: 151) points out, *pompê* is defined as a decidedly masculine concern. Thus, the nymph Calypso admits that she cannot give Odysseus *pompê* from her island because she lacks the necessary resources, namely a ship and *hetairoi* to sail it (5.140–42). These are the features of *pompê* that are most germane to its politics.

The link between *pompê* and masculine authority is also made quite explicit when Arete in a moment of exultation at Odysseus’ story-telling prowess commands the Phaeacians to give Odysseus rich gifts and *pompê* to his home (11.339). That her words transgress the bounds of propriety is made clear by the immediate response, which is offered by the court’s elder statesman, Echeneus. He redirects the authority over *pompê* to Alcinous, who then claims power unequivocally:

“Friends, she did not speak off the mark or unconventionally, the wise queen. Listen to her. But this word and deed depend on Alcinous.”  
Alcinous then spoke and said, “Let the word be such then—if I live and rule over the oar-loving Phaeacians.”

11.344–49

35. On Themistocles’ honors in Sparta see Blösel 2004: 323–38; Jordan 1988. It might be no coincidence that this extraordinary procession went to the border with Tegea, one of Sparta’s more restive “allies” in the early 5th century (Hdt. 9.37.4; see Andrewes 1952).

“ὦ φίλοι, οὐ μὰν ἡμῖν ἀπὸ σκοποῦ οὐδ’ ἀπὸ δόξης  
 μυθεῖται βασιλεια περίφρων· ἀλλὰ πίθεσθε.  
 Ἀλκινόου δ’ ἐκ τοῦδ’ ἔχεται ἔργον τε ἔπος τε.”  
 τὸν δ’ αὖτ’ Ἀλκίνοος ἀπαμείβετο φώνησέν τε·  
 “τοῦτο μὲν οὕτω δὴ ἔσται ἔπος, αἶ κεν ἐγὼ γε  
 ζωὸς Φαιήκεσσι φιληρέτμοισιν ἀνάσσω.”

Control of *pompê* is a specific, and conventional, manifestation of kingly authority.<sup>36</sup> That is why Echeneus referred to the appropriateness of Arete’s words. He reminded the court that the queen did not speak *apo doxês*, which I translated above as “unconventionally” (cf. *LfgRE* 11.224–25). Echeneus defuses the tension. The passage shows that conveyance is a proper concern for the king. Echeneus’ redirection allows Alcinoos to assert his authority before his peers. Penelope also makes explicit the connection between *pompê* and mature, masculine authority in this passage where she describes for the beggar the limitations of her hospitality:

Odysseus is not coming home, and you will not get *pompê*, since there are no leaders in the house of the sort Odysseus was among men—if he ever was—to receive and give *pompê* to proper guests.

19.313–16

οὐτ’ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔτι οἶκον ἐλεύσεται, οὔτε σὺ πομπῆς  
 τεύξει, ἐπεὶ οὐ τοῖσι σημάτων ἔσσις ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,  
 οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσχε μετ’ ἀνδράσιν, εἴ ποτ’ ἔην γε,  
 ξείνους αἰδοίους ἀποπεμπέμεν ἠδὲ δέχεσθαι.

Penelope further associates conveyance with *adult* male authority (μετ’ ἀνδράσιν). The thought that Telemachus might have that kind of authority does not cross her mind.<sup>37</sup>

Penelope had good reason to discount Telemachus’ ability to secure *pompê* for the stranger, since he had previously been unable to secure *pompê* for himself. In the assembly in Book 2 Telemachus, following the instructions of Athena/Mentes, told the Ithacans to give him transportation so that he might ask after his father (2.212–15). The command was completely ignored as Mentor took the floor and addressed an appeal to the community to condemn the suitors (230–41). The fact that everyone ignored Telemachus’ request has troubled analytic scholars, but it is quite effective in showing that not even his allies recognize Telemachus’ authority.<sup>38</sup> When they return to his house, Telemachus indignantly concedes to

36. Philodemus seems to conceive something along these lines: πομπέουσιν ἄλλ’ οὐ βασιλεύουσιν (*On the good king acc. to Homer*, XX.15 Dorandi), to condemn the behavior of latter-day kings. That is, they have the power of kings, the *pompê*, but they are not kings.

37. Cf. 4.707, when Penelope finds out that Telemachus has left Ithaca: “Herald, why did my child leave? He had no need to board swift ships that are like sea-horses for men.”

38. See Besslich 1966: 104–10; de Jong 2001: 57.



the suitors that he will go as a passenger (ἔμπορος) if he has to since he cannot go as a captain (ἐπήβολος, 2.319–22).

If Telemachus does manage to embark on his journey it is thanks to the direct intervention of Athena. She helps Telemachus by fostering his recognition as a leader in the eyes of the community by means of an unprecedented double disguise. To Telemachus she appeared disguised as Mentor, telling him to prepare provisions while “he” prepared a ship and a *willing* crew (292: ἐθελοντήρας, a revealing hapax). But to the crew and the ship-owner Noemon she appeared *disguised as Telemachus* (2.382–87). Noemon obeys the false Telemachus πρόφρων (387), a term which in Homer can be used to characterize the reaction to unquestionable authority.<sup>39</sup> It seems that the Ithacans were ready to recognize Telemachus’ authority even if he was not himself ready to perform it.

Indeed, when the suitors learn that Telemachus has actually left the island, they are quite troubled. The poet explains, “They did not think that he had gone to Neleian Pylos, but was still there in his fields, or with the pig-herd” (4.638–39).<sup>40</sup> When Noemon comes to the house to find out if Telemachus is back yet with his ship, the suitors are stunned and immediately want to know:

When did he leave and what young men followed him? Ithaka’s elite, or his field-hands and maids? He could also have done that! And tell me this true, so I will know it: Did he take your dark ship from you by force, or did you give it willingly since he demanded it with a *mythos*?

4.642–47

πότ’ ὄχγετο καὶ τίνες αὐτῶ  
κοῦροι ἔποντ’; Ἰθάκης ἐξείρετοι, ἧ εἰσι αὐτοῦ  
θῆτες τε δμῶές τε; δύναιτό κε καὶ τὸ τελέσσαι.  
καὶ μοι τοῦτ’ ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμον, ὄφρ’ εὖ εἰδῶ,  
ἧ σε βίη ἀέκοντος ἀπηύρα νῆα μέλαιναν,  
ἧε ἐκῶν οἱ δῶκας, ἐπεὶ προσπύξατο μύθῳ;

What they want to know is whether his transport to the Peloponnese constituted proper *pompê*. Did Noemon give his ship willingly, or unwillingly? Was he accompanied by noble companions, or by hired hands and slave-girls (as Antinous suggests mockingly)? Ship and companions, as we saw in Penelope’s remarks to the beggar, are the defining features of *pompê*, but here the emphasis is on *recognition*. Hired hands or slaves are obliged to do what their master demands of them regardless of his personal qualities. But “picked” men have the option of disobeying or of not acknowledging the order if they do not recognize one’s

39. Cf. Achilles’ remark to Agamemnon, “who will obey you πρόφρων?” (*Il.* 1.150).

40. De Jong characterizes this statement as an “embedded focalization. . . [that] contains their unspoken thoughts” (2001: 115). It underscores precisely how little regard the suitors have for Telemachus’ authority in the eyes of the community.

authority to “pick” them. Antinous is worried that the Ithacans are starting to recognize Telemachus as someone with authority. As he admits to the suitors:

We said he wouldn’t accomplish it. When so many are opposed, if a young child just departs like that, commandeering a ship and picking nobles from the people, this is the beginning of further trouble.

4.664–67

φάμεν δέ οἱ οὐ τελέεσθαι.  
εἰ τοσσῶνδ’ ἀέκητι νέος πάϊς οἴχεται αὐτως,  
νῆα ἐρυσσάμενος κρίνας τ’ ἀνὰ δῆμον ἀρίστους,  
ἄρξει καὶ προτέρω κακὸν ἔμμεναι.

The irony is that Telemachus has not yet achieved the public recognition that Antinous imagines. The illusion of authority is entirely the work of Athena. In reality Telemachus has failed to this point to play the part of the leader who controls marriage and transport. Because he has failed with these conventional terms in the Odyssean grammar of authority he will need to employ another one, although in a less conventional way, that will enable him to assert authority and to compel the suitors to recognize it by obeying. They will do this despite themselves.

#### THE TRICK WITH THE BEGGAR

In archaic politics, as Finley noted, “marriage and guest-friendship were the two fundamental devices for the establishment of alliances among nobles and chieftains” (1978 [1965]: 60). The complex of practices known under the name of *xeinia*, hospitality or guest-friendship, has been intensely studied.<sup>41</sup> In Homer, and especially in the *Odyssey*, the theme is of central importance.<sup>42</sup> In this section I will argue that it is also important in helping Telemachus achieve the recognition of his authority in the eyes of his peers, the suitors.

There are several ways to interpret Athena’s decision to disguise Odysseus as a beggar (13.386).<sup>43</sup> The disguise tends to be viewed as a mortal version of *theoxeny*, in which a god is disguised as a mortal in order to test the justice of his hosts.<sup>44</sup> The suitors, in this view, condemn themselves because they abuse the beggar. Athena certainly *wants* Odysseus to view his role as a beggar along these lines. Thus, on the one hand, she encourages him to beg from the suitors, so that he can separate the good suitors from the bad (17.361–63), a traditional function of theoxeny. On the other hand, she repeatedly encourages the suitors to maltreat him (18.346–47; 20.284–85). Since Athena has no intention of leaving

41. See notably Herman 1987; Kurke 1991: 87–92, 135–59.

42. See Edwards 1975; Pedrick 1988; Reece 1993; Thornton 1970: 38–46.

43. In general see Murnaghan 1987; Stewart 1976.

44. Most recently see Loudon 2011: 30–56.

a single suitor alive (17.364), her plan to disguise Odysseus as a beggar is hard to comprehend solely as theoxeny. As Pucci notes, “Her strategic reasons are her own” (1987: 84). Odysseus himself seems to understand Athena’s plan as also strategic in nature. He knows that the suitors will abuse him (for Athena has told him so) but he also knows that it will come down to violence, and thus he tells Telemachus beforehand to look for his signal to remove all the suitors’ weapons from the hall (16.274–98). And we know that on a previous occasion he disguised himself as a beggar to infiltrate Troy (4.242–64). Thus, morality and strategy are possible interpretations for the disguise, both clearly suggested by the text. My interpretation here is along different lines: the disguise is a way to bring about a situation in which the suitors are compelled to recognize Telemachus’ authority.

Telemachus himself suggests a way in which the *xeinos* he first meets in Eumaeus’ hut is connected to his own authority. This passage interweaves the issue of *xeinia* with the issues of *gamos* and *pompê*, which I considered separately above. When Eumaeus “entrusts” (16.66) the stranger to Telemachus, he demurs:

Eumaeus, you have said something grievous to my heart. How can I host the stranger in my home? I am young and do not yet trust in my hands to defend a man if someone starts harassing him. And my mother’s mind is divided, whether she should stay here with me and care for the house, respecting the bed of her husband and the gossip of the people, or whether she should follow the best of the Achaeans who woos her in the palace and offers the most. But since the stranger has arrived at your house . . . I will send him where his heart and mind wish.

16.69–81

Εὐμαι', ἧ μάλα τοῦτο ἔπος θυμαλγὲς ἔειπες.  
 πῶς γὰρ δὴ τὸν ξεῖνον ἐγὼν ὑποδέξομαι οἴκῳ;  
 αὐτὸς μὲν νέος εἰμι καὶ οὐ πῶ χερσὶ πέποιθα  
 ἄνδρ' ἀπαμύνασθαι, ὅτε τις πρότερος χαλεπήνῃ·  
 μητρὶ δ' ἐμῇ δίχα θυμὸς ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μερμηρίζει,  
 ἢ αὐτοῦ παρ' ἐμοί τε μένη καὶ δῶμα κομίζῃ,  
 εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δῆμοιό τε φῆμιν,  
 ἢ ἤδη ἅμ' ἔπηται, Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος  
 μνάται ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἄνθρωπος καὶ πλεῖστα πόρῃσιν.  
 ἀλλ' ἢ τοὶ τὸν ξεῖνον, ἐπεὶ τεὸν ἔκετο δῶμα,      74  
 . . .  
 πέμψω δ' ὅππῃ μιν κραδίη θυμὸς τε κελεύει.      81

The connection he makes might be surprising at first glance. What does his ability to defend a guest from abuse have to do with his mother’s marriage? The topics are closely connected in Telemachus’ mind because the issue of his mother’s marriage, as we saw, is indicative of the state of his authority. This is not fully established, at least not yet (οὐ πῶ), and so he cannot be sure that if he intervenes

to protect the stranger his commands would have any effect. Though he is not willing to bring the stranger home because he cannot guarantee his protection, he says he is willing to give the stranger *pompê* “to anywhere he wants to go” (81). If Telemachus feels able to offer *pompê* now, it is perhaps because he has already mastered at least that element of the grammar of authority, as we can see from the Theoclymenus episode (15.222–95, 493–557).<sup>45</sup>

The beggar’s progression in the house maps the increasing authority of Telemachus. Although my focus here is on Telemachus, Odysseus plays an important role in the process by which the suitors come to recognize Telemachus’ authority. Sometimes acting on his own and sometimes under the influence of Athena, Odysseus repeatedly goads the suitors into behavior that compels Telemachus to express his authority more assertively and more effectively. Athena has told Odysseus, as part of her plan for his revenge on the suitors, that he must endure and not reveal his identity no matter what the suitors do to him (13.307–10). Odysseus repeats these instructions to Telemachus, but expands them revealingly. He tells Telemachus that he must not lose his composure, “whether they drag me through the house by my feet or throw things at me.” He tells Telemachus to put up with it, just as Athena told him (13.307 16.274–75). But he also tells him to try to stop them by issuing commands calmly (*παύεσθαι ἀνωγέμεν ἀφροσυνάων, μειλιχίους ἐπέεσσι παραυδῶν*), even though they will not obey (16.278–80).

And yet they *will* obey Telemachus’ commands. Not all of them or not at first, or even fully consciously, but slowly they will come to recognize Telemachus’ authority. It is a gradual process, and I want to consider the steps that constitute it. But it is worthwhile glancing forward to how the process will end. It culminates in a moment of textual revelation that plays with the trope of recognition in a particularly jarring way:

Pallas Athena evoked in the suitors unquenchable laughter; she struck their wits loose. They were now laughing with jaws not theirs, eating blood-drenched meat. Their eyes filled with tears, their heart felt lamentation.

20.345–49

μνηστῆρσι δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη  
ἄσβεστον γέλω ὤρσε, παρέπλαγξεν δὲ νόημα.  
οἱ δ’ ἦδη γναθμοῖσι γελῶν ἀλλοτρίοισιν,

45. The episode with Theoclymenus has been troublesome to critics who have not seen the reason why so much attention is lavished on such a minor figure (see Thornton 1970: 58–62; Fenik 1974: 233ff.). In my reading of it, the scene serves to underscore how far Telemachus has come. In the beginning he was ready to travel to the Peloponnese as a passenger rather than a captain, much less a leader of picked men (2.318–20). Now, he is able both to give escort to a high-status fugitive (cf. the genealogical emphasis of 223–55) and to assert his status when it is questioned (508–34).

αίμοφόρυκτα δὲ δὴ κρέα ἤσθιον· ὅσσε δ' ἄρα σφέων  
δακρυόφιν πίμπλαντο, γρόον δ' ὤϊετο θυμός.

This is “the most eerie passage in Homer,” according to Russo (Heubeck et al. 1988–1992: 3.124). It is a crucial passage for my argument. These lines represent a crescendo in the struggle for authority in Odysseus’ household. I will return to them after tracing the moves of the game which Telemachus plays with the suitors.

The lines cap a series of three scenes involving Telemachus, the beggar, and the suitors. In each case, someone throws something at the beggar, but the beggar does not retaliate. The three scenes were a favorite old chestnut of analytic scholarship on the *Odyssey*. The argument was over which was the true Homeric one and which two were the superfluous copies. However, Fenik showed that the scenes are not mere copies; they differ in subtle ways and serve a definite function. He notes, “just as the three throwing scenes contain an intensification of Telemachus’ reaction, they show a decrease in the effectiveness of the cast” (1974: 186). Let us look at each scene and consider it along the axes identified by Fenik, the cast and the reaction, while also adding another axis: how, in each case, Odysseus gives Telemachus the opportunity to force the suitors to recognize his authority. Gradually but surely Telemachus becomes more assertive and the suitors more obedient, despite themselves.

The first scene is in Book 17. Telemachus is already giving commands like the master of the house. He is speaking to Eumaeus: “Take this [food] and give it to the stranger and order him to beg from all the suitors” (17.345–47). This command is interesting, containing at least three commands inside it. The first command is to Eumaeus, the second is to the beggar, and the third one is implicit in the first two but is, I think, the most important one, because it is directed at the suitors. He is implicitly commanding them to give to the beggar and thus asserting his control over the resources of the household. When Antinous resists this implicit command, Telemachus makes the command explicit: “Take some and give it to him; I don’t begrudge it. In fact, I order it (κέλομαι γὰρ ἐγὼ γε)” (17.400). Most of the suitors obey and give to the beggar. Antinous, however, resists Telemachus’ authority still (406–409). Odysseus presses the point home: “You wouldn’t even give a beggar salt from your house, since here you’re sitting on someone else’s property (ἄλλοτρίοισι παρήμενος) and won’t give me bread even though there’s lots” (454–56). His remark presents Antinous with a stark choice: either recognize Telemachus’ command and give to the beggar or flout it and transgress the norms of hospitality. Either way, the comment underscores the point that this is Telemachus’ house not Antinous’ after all, and he has the authority to decide how to distribute its resources. Its effectiveness is shown by what happens next: Antinous becomes furious. He throws a stool and hits Odysseus squarely on the back. Telemachus does not intervene as his guest is abused, leaving it to the other suitors to come to the beggar’s defense, rebuking Antinous for disrespecting the beggar who might be a god in disguise (17.445–91).

The second scene is in Book 18. Telemachus is slowly adapting to the role he must play. By this point he has gone beyond authorizing the stranger's panhandling, he has publicly guaranteed his safety. But interestingly he has done so in a half-hearted, hesitant, fashion. The time has not yet come for a full assertion of his authority:

Stranger, don't be afraid of any Achaeans, since whoever assaults you will have to deal with a crowd. I am your host, and the princes Eurymachus and Antinous agree, canny men that both are.

18.62–65

τῶν δ' ἄλλων μὴ τιν' Ἀχαιῶν  
 δείδιθ', ἐπεὶ πλεόνεσσι μαχήσεται ὅς κέ σε θείνη.  
 ξεινοδόκος μὲν ἐγὼν, ἐπὶ δ' αἰνεῖτον βασιλῆες,  
 Εὐρύμαχος τε καὶ Ἀντίνοος, πεπνυμένω ἄμφω.

That is, he publicly claims the ability to protect the stranger (which he had initially denied in Eumaeus' hut before he recognized his father), but frames it in such a way that he does not completely infringe on the authority of the suitors. The time has not yet come for that. The second insult is similar to the first one. This time Eurymachus says that the stranger prefers “to beg for handouts among the people so that you can put your bottomless belly out to pasture” (363–64). In a different era he might have called Odysseus one of the “undeserving poor.” Odysseus' response is calibrated to enrage Eurymachus even more. He insinuates that the suitor would be no match for him as a worker, whether in the fields or in battle (366–79), and states quite bluntly that if Odysseus were to show up “you would find the windows too small for you to get away through, wide as they are” (384–86). Just as Antinous did earlier, now Eurymachus throws a stool at him. Whereas Antinous hit him squarely on the back, this time Odysseus ducks and the stool hits an unlucky cup-bearer on the hand instead. Telemachus' authority has once again been openly flouted. But now, rather than remaining speechless as after the first insult, Telemachus asserts himself. But not too much. He is still quite careful to avoid infringing on the suitors' authority:

Queer folk, you're being crazy; you're not holding your food and wine. Some god is stirring you up. You've eaten well—go home and sleep it off. When your heart wills it, that is. I'm not chasing anyone away.

18.406–409

δαιμόνιοι, μαίνεσθε καὶ οὐκέτι κεύθετε θυμῶ  
 βρωτῶν οὐδὲ ποτῆτα· θεῶν νύ τις ὑμῶν ὀρθοῦναι.  
 ἀλλ' εὖ δαισάμενοι κατακείετε οἴκαδ' ἰόντες,  
 ὅπποτε θυμὸς ἄνωγε· διώκω δ' οὐ τιν' ἐγὼ γε.

This is a perfect application of his father's instructions to use “honey-sweet words (μειλιχίλοισ' ἐπέεσσι)” with the suitors to try to dissuade them. Although Telemachus says that he is not commanding the suitors, he is. Allione (1963: 55)

appreciates the speech's "skillful architecture," which asserts a command while denying that it is making one. It is closer to it, but not yet an explicit performance of authority. Telemachus' command is accordingly not obeyed directly. Amphinomus, the one "good" suitor (18.119–56), intervenes and encourages his peers to leave the beggar alone and go home. The suitors agree and do so, but perhaps fail to notice that by doing this they are doing exactly what Telemachus commanded.

The third and final scene, in Book 20, involves the most ineffectual throw but provokes the most forceful response from Telemachus. Telemachus has brought the beggar to the feast personally. Previously, Odysseus had always been on the threshold (17.491; 20.1), but now he is next to the threshold, actually "inside the megaron" (20.257–58). Furthermore, he is not sitting on the floor. Telemachus provides him with a chair and a table, gives him a portion of the entrails, and serves him wine in a golden cup. The text explicitly call this a "trick" (257). According to Heubeck, the trick "refers to the advantage Telemachus has over the suitors in his knowledge of the beggar's identity, which allows him to establish Odysseus in a permanent place in the hall, under his personal protection, in preparation for the final attack. . . . The small table and mean chair contribute to the illusion that this is merely a harmless tramp" (Heubeck et al. 1988–1992: 3.120). I would suggest that the trick is not only strategic about the placement of the beggar in view of the battle to come. It is also strategic in that it gives Telemachus the opportunity to assert his authority in a way which the suitors are compelled to recognize.

The scene begins, like the others, with Telemachus issuing a command. But this command is different. It is a blunt assertion of what was implicit in the others:

Sit down and drink with the men. I will keep away the hands and insults  
of any suitor. This is no public house; it's Odysseus'. And it is to me  
that he bestowed it.

20.262–65

ἐνταυθοῖ νῦν ἦσο μετ' ἀνδράσιν οἰνοποτάζων·  
κερτομίας δέ τοι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ καὶ χεῖρας ἀφέξω  
πάντων μνηστήρων, ἐπεὶ οὐ τοι δήμιός ἐστιν  
οἶκος ὄδ', ἀλλ' Ὀδυσῆος, ἐμοὶ δ' ἐκτήσατο κεῖνος.

The stranger is no longer a beggar, now he is a guest—on the same social level as the suitors and Telemachus himself.<sup>46</sup> Telemachus' language reflects the solidarity achieved between him and his father. ἐμοὶ, "me," follows immediately Ὀδυσῆος, and both come on the heels of "this *oikos*." A united front confronts the suitors.<sup>47</sup> The effectiveness of Telemachus' assertion is shown by the fact that the suitors acquiesce to the stranger's receiving an equal piece of the meat,

46. As pointed out by, among others, Lateiner 1995: 155; Murnaghan 1987: 105–107; Nagy 1999: 233.

47. I owe this point to Alex Purves.

“because thus commanded Telemachus, the son of godlike Odysseus (ὥς γὰρ ἀνώγει Τηλέμαχος, φίλος υἱὸς Ὀδυσσεύου θείοιο)” (282–83).

And yet there is resistance, as in the previous scenes. This time it is Athena who eggs on the suitors (284–85), not Odysseus himself as before. The suitor Ctesippus senses that Telemachus is trying to redefine the status of the beggar, and reacts with mockery:

Well! I too will give him a guest-gift, so that he can give it to the bath-girl  
or to another of the slaves!

20.296–98

ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ καὶ ἐγὼ δῶ ξείνιον, ὄφρα καὶ αὐτὸς  
ἦε λοετροχόῳ δῶη γέρας ἦε τῷ ἄλλῳ  
δυῶν...

With these words, he picks up an ox hoof from the basket and throws it at Odysseus. In contrast to the previous throws Odysseus dodges it easily, and the hoof hits the wall. With this throw Ctesippus is striking at Telemachus as much as at the beggar. Specifically, he is striking at Telemachus' social promotion of the beggar, by giving him the kind of guest-gift that is appropriate for this kind of “guest.”

Telemachus' response is the firmest yet, showing the clear escalation of his assertions of authority. He says Ctesippus is lucky he missed. If he had not, “I would have struck a sharp spear in your middle, and your father would be preparing your tomb now instead of your marriage (ἢ γὰρ κέν σε μέσον βάλον ἔγχεῖ ὄξυόεντι, καὶ κέ τοι ἀντὶ γάμοιο πατὴρ τάφον ἀμφεπονείτο ἐνθάδε)” (20.306–308). While in the first response he depicted Eurymachus and Antinous as jointly responsible for the safety of the beggar, and in the second he gently encouraged the suitors to sleep off their drunkenness, now he takes sole responsibility and affirms his willingness to kill the suitors.

His forcefulness is surely due to an awareness that the time for physical confrontation is fast approaching. But what is important for my argument is the reaction of the suitors: they are stunned into silence (320–21). And then the suitor Agelaus tries to change the topic. Turning to Telemachus, he strikes a conciliatory tone. He offers, he says, Telemachus and his mother (who, it is worth noting, is not actually present) a “gentle word” (326–27). He says that it is up to Telemachus: the occupation of his house can end with a single decision.

Come on now, sit by your mother and tell her to marry the man who is the  
best and brings the most; so you will happily control all your possessions,  
eating and drinking, and she will look after another's house.

20.334–37

ἀλλ' ἄγε σῆ τάδε μητρὶ παρεζόμενος κατάλεξον,  
γῆμασθ' ὅς τις ἄριστος ἀνὴρ καὶ πλεῖστα πόρησιν,  
ὄφρα σὺ μὲν χαίρων πατρώϊα πάντα νέμῃαι,  
ἔσθων καὶ πίνων, ἢ δ' ἄλλου δῶμα κομίζη.



This passage brings us full circle back to the issue of Penelope's marriage. The suitors return to the strategy that had been successful before, telling Telemachus to command his mother to take a husband while also painting Penelope as responsible for the choice. As I argued, were Telemachus to do what the suitors tell him, he would be publicly admitting that his authority was subordinate to the suitors'. He would be conceding that he controls his property only at their behest. But now Telemachus has a very different response to this "offer."

No, Agelaos. By Zeus, and by the suffering of my father who far from Ithaca is either dead or wandering, I am not hindering my mother's marriage. I command her to marry anyone she wants. And I am offering countless gifts.

20.339–42

οὐ μὰ Ζῆν', Ἀγέλαε, καὶ ἄλγεα πατρὸς ἐμοῖο,  
ὅς που τῆλ' Ἰθάκης ἢ ἔφθιται ἢ ἀλάληται,  
οὐ τι διατρίβω μητρὸς γάμον, ἀλλὰ κελεύω  
γῆμασθ' ὧ κ' ἐθέλη, ποτὶ δ' ἄσπετα δῶρα δίδωμι.

These words leads us back to the passage which I mentioned above. The suitors' eruption into uncontrollable laughter significantly coincides with Telemachus' assertion of authority over the matter of Penelope's marriage. Rather than saying, as he did in Book 2, that it should be up to Icarius to determine who will marry Penelope on the basis of the bride-gifts that the suitors offer, Telemachus vows to offer a *dowry* to any suitor his mother chooses. In other words, Telemachus turns the suitors' pressure-tactic against them. He presents his authority as independent of the suitors' commands, and also as independent of the issue of his mother's marriage entirely. His offer of a dowry suggests that he *already* has full control of his house, and thus does not need the suitors' permission to manage his affairs and his property. As for Penelope, he does command her—to do whatever she wants.

The "eerie passage" following this speech masterfully captures the compulsion of recognition which the suitors are resisting to no avail. The suitors fail to recognize themselves: they think they are laughing but they are really lamenting. Their laughing jaws are "not their own." The roasted meat they are eating is in fact bloody and raw. They mock Theoclymenus' prophetic vision of their impending doom. The suitors' explicit and profound *mis*recognition of the situation in which they find themselves is the counterpart to the audience's recognition of Telemachus' transformation, from an insecure youth in a precarious situation to a man firmly in charge of his family's important decisions. This passage presents a rupture between what the suitors are willing to recognize and what we, the audience, recognize. Paradoxically, we recognize that the suitors recognize Telemachus' authority even though the suitors do not consciously recognize it themselves—yet.

## CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of his successful performance Telemachus continues to assert his authority, and the suitors continue to recognize, and to acquiesce to, his claims. We see this especially in the episode with the bow, when the beggar asks for permission to use the bow and Penelope grants it, along with *pompê* if he is successful (21.342). Telemachus quickly elbows his mother aside to claim the right to decide who can use the bow; he says that it is up to him to decide to give it away if he wants:

The bow is a concern for all men, and most of all for me. For I have the power in the house.

21.352–53

τόξον δ' ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει  
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.

This is the very same formula he had used earlier to assert his authority in the household. That claim was directed to his mother, who immediately recognized his authority and obeyed his instructions (1.358–61).<sup>48</sup> Now, the suitors also obey. In case we missed the point, it is made more explicit in the underworld scene in Book 24 when the suitors are recounting to Agamemnon how they died. They revealingly insist that it was on Telemachus' authority alone that the beggar was given a shot, over the objections of everyone: “Telemachus *alone* urged him on, gave the order (Τηλέμαχος δέ μιν οἷος ἐποτρύνων ἐκέλευσεν)” (24.172–75).

The *Odyssey*'s political argument is that sovereign power in Ithaca must first be securely reconstituted before it can be exercised in its most extreme form, that of violence against its own subjects. We saw how that happens through Telemachus' gradual mastery of what I have been calling the Odyssean “grammar of authority.” Although Telemachus was at first unsuccessful in controlling the conventional practices of marriage and transport, Athena created an unconventional opportunity for him to show hospitality to his father disguised as a beggar. We saw how (with Odysseus' help) Telemachus used the issue of the stranger's protection to create a space where he could assert his authority before his adversaries and to force them to recognize it despite themselves.

A preoccupation of the *Odyssey* is to justify the murder of the suitors at the hands of Odysseus and Telemachus. From the outset the suitors are depicted as inherently bad and marked for death by no one's fault but their own. Their murder was part of Athena's plan. In her instructions to Telemachus in Book 1 (271–97) she told him to transport himself to the Peloponnese (*pompê*) and, if he finds out that his father is dead, to return to arrange his mother's marriage (*gamos*). As

48. Compare Alcinoüs' words when Arete oversteps her bounds: “Transport is a concern for all men, and most of all for me. For I have the power among the people (πομπή δ' ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί· τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ δήμῳ)” (11.351–52). Control over *pompê* and *toxos* alike is symbolic of masculine adult authority.

we saw, this represented *in nuce* the grammar of authority that Telemachus had to master. However, Athena continued, he also had to plan how to kill the suitors in secret or in the open. Not killing them was never an option. “The time has passed for childish ignorance,” she tells him, Telemachus must know what taking power entails (294–96). Successfully controlling the terms of *gamos*, *pompê*, and even *xeinia* was never going to be enough.

Homer takes great pains to present Telemachus and Odysseus as a prodigiously harmonious and effective father-son team. They even look and think alike. Yet, although his authority ultimately derives from Odysseus, Telemachus is its representative in the eyes of the suitors. In the context of Homeric politics where so much depends on personal qualities and personal relationships it therefore falls to Telemachus to assert his family’s authority in the eyes of its subjects. Thus, the justification of the murder of the suitors depends in part on the extent to which the suitors come to recognize Telemachus’ authority, and in part on the extent to which we, the epic’s audience, recognize that the suitors recognize it. In the terms of Weber’s contemporary political theorist Carl Schmitt, sovereign authority has to be restored before it can “decide on the exception”; that is, before it can suspend law (in this case, the law of hospitality) and permit itself extraordinary measures (in this case, the murder of guests).<sup>49</sup> Telemachus and Odysseus, and Penelope too, must cooperate to bring about the return of authority to Ithaca toward that end. Telemachus’ growth into the role of a king, as I read it, is far from being a process that never truly culminates and is therefore superfluous to the poem as a whole. His growth, and our recognition of his growth, also means the return of Odysseus as rightful ruler, one entitled to dispense justice to lawless subjects who do not recognize him.

Temple University  
gottesman@temple.edu

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49. “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt 2006 [1922]: 5). For Weber and Schmitt and the politics of the exception see Kalyvas 2008.

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