

Trinity University

Digital Commons @ Trinity

Classical Studies Faculty Research

Classical Studies Department

2014

Structure as Interpretation in the Homeric Odyssey

Erwin F. Cook

Trinity University, ecook@trinity.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/class_faculty



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Cook, E. F. (2014). Structure as interpretation in the Homeric odyssey. In D. Cairns & R. Scodel (Ed.), *Defining Greek narrative* (pp. 75-101). Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748680108.003.0005>

This Contribution to Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Classical Studies Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classical Studies Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Structure as Interpretation in the *Odyssey*

‘Defining Greek Literature’ poses an interesting challenge for Homerists, like myself, committed to the proposition that the epics reflect the compositional practices of oral poetry the world over.¹ In terms of formal approaches, many scholars, including contributors to this volume, have found it productive to apply narratology to elucidate Homer, a methodology with greater universalizing assumptions than oral theory. Nevertheless, an aspect of the epics that I believe is distinctive, and in certain respects unique, is the ways in which they manipulate traditional conventions so as to guide reception. Although Scodel rightly cautions against assuming homogenous audiences of epic connoisseurs, the practice does, I think, imply audience *members* able to recognise the patterns and respond to the manipulation.² An example is the ascending scale of affection Phoenix employs as a persuasive device in *Iliad* 9.574-94: he positions the category of ‘friends’ (585: • •) higher up the scale than typical, because it is largely on the basis of friendship that he hopes to convince Achilles to return to battle.³

My point of departure is ring-composition and the plot of the *Odyssey*, which I argue need to be considered together.⁴ At first glance, ring-composition may seem unpromising: deciding on what constitutes a ring is always open to the charge of subjectivity, and there is nothing unique about such structures in Homer, or oral poetry.⁵ Still, I hope to demonstrate that in the *Odyssey* they create some highly sophisticated effects that, inter alia, help guide reception. For example, a series of rings at the close of Book 4 provides commentary on the passages so related, while simultaneously announcing that the narrative starts over with the divine assembly of Book 5. I mean ‘start over’ quite literally as I also argue that the *Odyssey* consists of a repeated story-pattern that structures the *Telemachy*, *Phaeacis* and *Revenge*.⁶ This sort of highly symmetrical and balanced narrative architecture is in fact a defining feature of Homeric

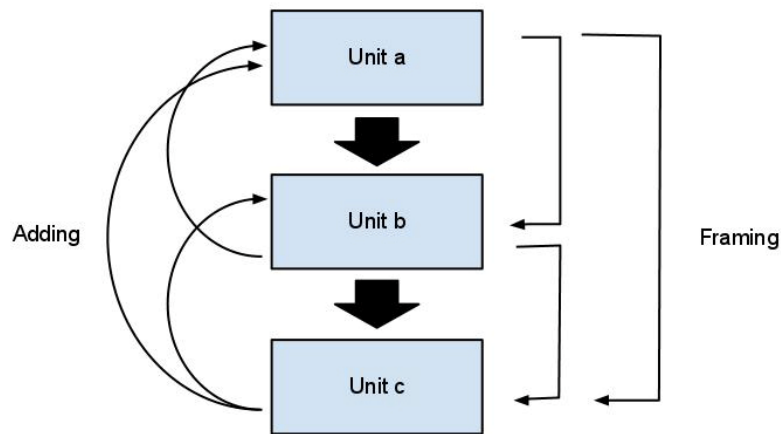
epic that influenced subsequent authors such as Aeschylus and Herodotus. It is thus distinctively Greek and it can also be paralleled in Greek art from the Geometric through the Classical periods.⁷ Yet nothing matches the sophistication of Homer's architectonics until Virgil, who learned the technique from Homer.⁸

Whereas ring-composition is over-diagnosed it is also undertheorised in terms of the large-scale structures I examine, and scholars have traditionally focused on the *Iliad*, where little agreement has been reached. (As a consequence of this focus, my theoretical survey will be skewed to the Iliadic material.) We are better off when it comes to small-scale rings, where at least five, overlapping explanations have been offered. Thalmann, for example, identifies 'enclosure' that creates a 'self-contained whole' as the 'most basic effect' of ring-composition.⁹ As a result, the concluding ring can have a 'resumptive effect', after a digression, although 'all inserted passages of this type will be found to add something to the surrounding context'.¹⁰ Van Otterlo, on the other hand, argues that rings are created when the author anticipates an outcome at the beginning of a passage.¹¹ Edwards finds that rings anticipate at the beginning and repeat at the end: 'first comes an anticipation of the outcome of a passage . . . then the idea presented at the beginning is repeated at the end, sometimes reinforced . . . by intervening material or otherwise developed, and poet and listener alike return, with ease and security, to the narrative at the point at which it was dropped'.¹²

Bakker situates ring-composition in the wider context of framing and addition, noting that Homer routinely introduces complex statements with a preview (a), followed by anecdotal information (b), and then the goal (c), supplying details of the preview. These units are added paratactically, but not randomly: 'More often than not a unit is not only connected with what precedes but also leads to what follows, and this relation of any

given present moment to its past and its future is what gives the listener an orientation and the discourse its meaning'.¹³ The individual units thus have a reciprocal relationship so that (a) frames (b) and (c), and (b) also frames (c), while (c) adds to (b) and (a), and (b) likewise adds to (a):

Fig. 1: Framing and Adding¹⁴



For example, the statement that Menelaus killed Scamandrius is followed by an anecdote and description of how Menelaus kills him (*Il.* 5.49-58). The anecdote, about Artemis having taught Scamandrius to hunt, is not a digression from the main narrative but allows ‘the killing proper [to] take place within the context of the victim’s tradition’.¹⁵

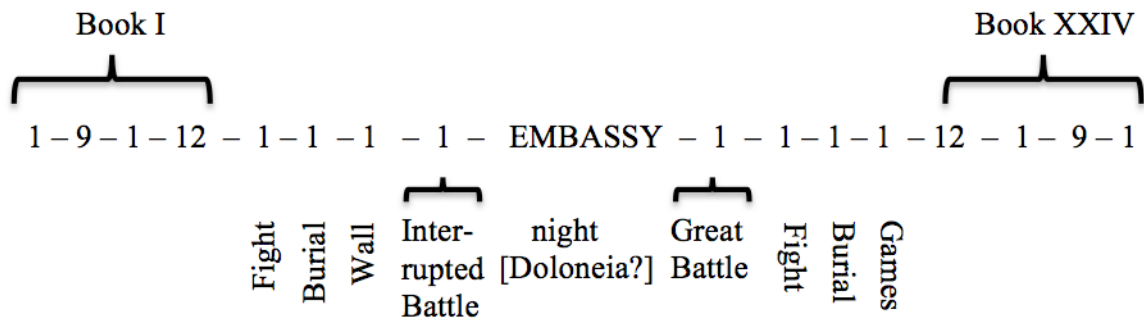
Accordingly, ‘The global-framing statement, uttered during a moment of orientation, has become a specific, fully contextualized concept by the time the speaker reaches the goal’.¹⁶ In other words, (c) differs fundamentally from (a) on account of the intervening information, even though it repeats its contents.

None of these scholars investigates large-scale patterns. Whitman offers a genetic explanation, arguing that ring-composition originated as a mnemonic device used in

small-scale narratives.¹⁷ Ring-composition loses its original function, however, ‘when it becomes the structural basis of a fifteen-thousand-line poem such as the *Iliad*. It has become an artistic principle’.¹⁸ By ‘artistic principle’, Whitman means that the structural properties of rings were exploited to balance and frame, so that ‘the use of “hysteron proteron,” giving the effect of concentric circles, was gradually transformed from a mnemonic device to an architectonic one’.¹⁹

One of Whitman’s most important findings concerns the *Iliad*’s temporal sequence, in which Books 1 and 24 balance each other, with Book 9 at the centre:

Fig. 2: The Sequence of Days in the *Iliad*²⁰



In an earlier study, Myres identified Book 9 as the temporal *and* structural centre of the *Iliad*.²¹ Richardson, however, notes that Myres’ analysis has been skeptically received because it divides the narrative unevenly.²² Speaking of ring-composition generally, Gaisser declares that ‘The primary objection to this type of structural analysis is that the scale is not always consistent’.²³

Although Richardson rejects the level of detail in Whitman's analysis, there is ultimately little to distinguish between his and Whitman's understanding of how large-scale rings actually operate. He observes that whereas there is broad consensus that Books 1 and 24 complement and balance each other, scholars have had difficulty identifying the *Iliad's* structural centre. He then proceeds to review pairs of books in chiasmic order, concluding that meaningful parallelism can be observed as far as six books, or roughly fifty percent, of the way into the poem in either direction.²⁴ The inference Richardson draws is that the poet 'will naturally take most care over the opening and closing parts of his work, where consequently we find the clearest correspondences, providing the narrative "frame" . . .'.²⁵ As we approach the centre, however, the rings 'gradually fade out'.²⁶

Douglas observes that rings are a species of structural parallelism, which, drawing on the work of Roman Jakobson, she sees as 'hardwired in the brain':²⁷ 'Jakobson's idea implies an aesthetic theory about the satisfaction derived from the brain making images of itself at work and duplicating its own structure and activity'.²⁸ This is why authors throughout history have employed ring-composition: 'The brain works by making parallelisms. No other explanation is necessary'.²⁹ As for why authors should resort to the chiasmically ordered parallelism of ring-composition, Douglas observes that rings are difficult to execute, and can thus authenticate narrator and narrative.³⁰ Douglas finds a second explanation for ring-structures in their ability to provide closure through return to the beginning. This she identifies as product of 'a home seeking urge', concluding 'that "homing" is another of our fundamental mental resources, like making analogies and parallelisms'.³¹ Meaning, however, is conditioned by cultural context: 'The myth of eternal return can be taken to be comforting and stabilizing, or it can be seen as a

frustratingly sinister trap. Alternatively, it is equally possible for every ending to be an opening on a new ring, a philosophy of renewal and regeneration'.³²

Douglas identifies these formal elements as characteristic of large-scale ring-compositions:³³ a prologue introduces the central theme and characters; the narrative is divided in two by a 'mid-turn' echoing the prologue and conclusion; the second half of the narrative runs parallel to the first in chiasmic order; all subsections are clearly demarcated, often by minor ring-structures, especially the mid-turn; closure is signaled with the repetition of key words and themes from prologue and mid-turn; an epilogue, or 'latch', is common in long narratives and sets 'the text as a whole in a larger context, less parochial, more humanist, or even metaphysical';³⁴ to identify individual rings, we need 'at least two distinctive items found in both members of the pair, but nowhere else'.³⁵

In contrast to Richardson, Douglas lays particular emphasis on the 'mid-turn', which she finds definitive of ring-composition and its most important feature.³⁶ The flanking rings serve to frame a structural centre which they thus identify and emphasise.³⁷ However, 'The mid-turn is not in the middle in any quantitative sense. The best way to recognize it is by the two supporting series flanking it on either side and showing a conspicuous correspondence to each other'.³⁸

To identify the *Iliad's* mid-turn, Douglas turns to Whitman's analysis of the temporal sequence. As Whitman notes, the embassy is flanked by single days of fighting, and Douglas is able to find, in addition to their clearly sign-posted temporal markers, two corresponding 'items' that identify them as parallel: 'On day 4 Zeus sends up his eagle (8.247) . . . and Zeus also prophesies Patroclus's death and Achilles' entry into the war. On day 5 the eagle portent is repeated and the prophecies of day 4 come true'.³⁹ One may add that Zeus supplements his prophecy in Book 8 with further prophecy in Book 15, in

both cases to Hera. In contrast to the other battle-narratives, Zeus forbids the other gods from interfering, while he actively does so.

After praising the ‘excellence’ of the poem’s mid-turn, however, Douglas declares that ‘at this point my eulogy for the *Iliad*’s compliance with ring conventions must come to a pause’.⁴⁰ The difficulty is that Douglas finds the ‘presumptive parallels’ between the remaining days and nights to be ‘weak, barely recognizable’.⁴¹ Although the temporal sequence does identify the mid-turn, better results obtain if we link the individual battles: assemblies in Books 1 and 2 are followed by a battle lasting from Books 3 to 7. It is framed by complementary duels, between Menelaus and Paris in Book 3, and between Ajax and Hector in 7.⁴² The intervening narrative is structured by the *aristeia* of Diomedes, widely recognised as a surrogate Achilles.⁴³ Whereas Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel in the assembly of Book 1, and the quarrel is echoed by the speech of Thersites in the assembly of Book 2, in Book 19 we have another assembly in which Agamemnon and Achilles reconcile, followed by the *aristeia* of Achilles in Books 20 to 22. His *aristeia* is bracketed by complementary duels, between Aeneas and Achilles in Book 20, and between Hector and Achilles in Book 22. Poseidon spirits Aeneas away before he is killed, a service that Aphrodite performs for Paris in Book 3, while Hector loses the duels to Ajax and Achilles. Finally, Zeus remains aloof from these battles while the other gods participate, and Ares and Aphrodite are wounded:⁴⁴

Fig. 3: The Structure of the *Iliad*

- A Quarrel: between Agamemnon and Achilles
- B Day of battle: the Greeks triumph, led by Diomedes
- C Day of battle: the Trojans triumph, led by Hector

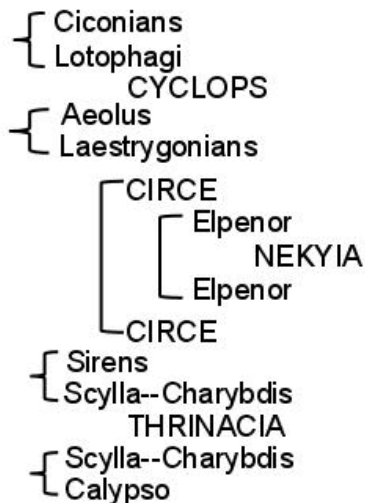
- D Nighttime embassy: Agamemnon offers to reconcile with Achilles
- C' Day of battle: the Trojans triumph, led by Hector
- B' Day of battle: the Greeks triumph, led by Achilles
- A' Reconciliation: between Priam and Achilles

In other words, more than one organizational structure is at work, a sequence of days, and a contrapuntal sequence of battles. Whether or not it is legitimate to pursue the analysis to the level of granular detail attempted by Myres, Whitman, and more recently Stanley, the overarching structure seems clear.⁴⁵

To sum-up before proceeding to the *Odyssey*. Douglas offers a cognitive theory that can be applied to ring-composition at any scale of narrative and that assumes an author consciously striving to create the effect as a source of aesthetic pleasure. On the other hand, Bakker's theory that small-scale ring-structures provide orientation for the listener can also be extended to large-scale compositions. It is thus essentially a functional theory, but it is not ultimately incompatible with the view that such structures are also a source of aesthetic pleasure. Where Bakker and Douglas differ most significantly is in their assessment of the enclosed centre: for Bakker the centre adds and contextualizes, so that the effect of the concluding element is cumulative; while for Douglas the centre is the most significant element of the structure. The Odyssean material is varied on just this point and can be used to support both positions. Odyssean ring-compositions not only reflect the balanced aesthetic that defines archaic Greek art generally, but they are also distinguished by marked variation that, together with their complexity, suggest a high degree of self-consciousness in their production.

Whitman unquestionably played a role in the neglect of Odyssean ring-composition. He finds that, in contrast to the *Iliad*, which ‘follows a strict Geometric design . . . [v]ery little of the sort occurs in the *Odyssey*, and where it does occur, asymmetrical elements are more frequent, the responsions less careful and less significant’.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he notes that the *Apologue* is structured by elaborate ring-composition serving to frame the *Necyia*:

Fig. 4: Framing the *Necyia*⁴⁷



Confirmation of Whitman’s analysis can be found in the organization of the *Necyia*, which is likewise organised by ring-composition:

Fig. 5: Structure of the *Necyia* with Frame

- | | | |
|-----------------|----|--|
| <i>Apologue</i> | A | Circe describes the journey to Hades to Odysseus |
| | B | Elpenor’s death |
| <i>Necyia</i> | C | Voyage to Hades |
| | b’ | First Person Interview with Elpenor |
| | i | Refusal to Interview Anticleia |
| | ii | First Person Interview with Tiresias |
| | i’ | First Person Interview with Anticleia |

	D	Third person Interviews with mothers of pre-Iliadic heroes, including the mother and wife of Heracles
<i>Intermezzo</i>	E	Arete praises Odysseus' person, acknowledges him as <i>xeinos</i> , and requests more gifts
	F	Echeneus approves
	G	Alcinous promises gifts and return
	F'	Odysseus approves
	E'	Alcinous praises Odysseus' speech, and requests more stories
<i>Necyia</i>	D'	First person Interviews with Iliadic heroes, and Heracles
	C'	Voyage from Hades
<i>Apologue</i>	B'	Elpenor's Burial
	A'	Circe describes the journey home to Odysseus

The 'resumptive' effect after the *Necyia* is so stark – Circe provides Odysseus with the roadmap of his return that she claimed he would receive from Tiresias – that scholars have sometimes labeled the entire episode an interpolation.⁴⁸ As I have noted elsewhere, the *Intermezzo*, with its acknowledgement of Odysseus as Arete's *xeinos*, promise of further *xeinia*, and affirmation of return, occupies the structural centre of the narrative set on Scheria.⁴⁹ It thus corresponds approximately to a mid-turn for the Phaeacian episode. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the *Necyia* as a whole, in which Odysseus learns the metaphysics of his and his family's destiny in contrast to the heroes of old, constitutes the mid-turn of the poem.

Like the *Apologue*, the *Telemachy* is a quasi-autonomous narrative integrated into the main story by structure and theme, and it has approximately the same dimensions (*Telemachy*: 2,222 verses; *Apologue*: 2,233). It is likewise enclosed by ring-structures, which are, however, less comprehensive than those organizing the *Apologue*. Neither do they frame the centre, as there is none: in its place we have complementary scenes of sacrificial and wedding banquets at Pylus and Sparta comprising fifty percent of the *Telemachy* (Ithaca: 1,100 verses; Pylus and Sparta: 1,121), themselves organized by

simple rings in which ritual feasting brackets stories about Odysseus.⁵⁰ Nor does the opening frame anticipate the conclusion, as the initial scenes on Ithaca are fully developed and the closing scenes cursory. Instead, the closing scenes are designed, in part, to bring out the contrast with Pylus and Sparta: this is the reason for the abrupt mid-sentence scene-change from Sparta to Ithaca (4.625). Finally, since there is no centre there is no ‘mid-turn’ of the sort that Douglas requires of a well-turned ring. I do not see this as supporting Richardson’s theory that poets expend less effort on shaping the central portion of the narrative than its beginning and end. Nor is it a sign of diminished artistry: the *Apologue* demonstrates an ability to create ring-structures as elaborate as any discovered by Douglas, when occasion calls for it. Instead, ring-composition articulates the formal boundaries of the *Telemachy*, while the enclosed narrative contextualizes the situation on Ithaca by providing complementary images of well ordered societies to which it can be compared.

The episode at Sparta concludes by returning to the themes of proper feasting and marriage with which it began. The narrative then shifts to the antithetical scene on Ithaca in which Penelope’s suitors amuse themselves in advance of dinner. The shift echoes the gaming and feasting of the suitors in Books 1 and 2. The resulting ring is reinforced by further echoes of opening books that return the narrative, without its protagonist, incrementally to the *Telemachy*’s first scene:

Fig. 6: The *Telemachy*’s Narrative Frame

- A Divine assembly
- B Athena impersonates a family *xeinós* and encourages a grieving Telemachus
- C The Suffering Penelope
 - i Phemius sings the painful return of the Greeks
 - ii Penelope complains
 - iii Telemachus instructs her to return to her quarters and weave

- iv The suitors raise a din and pray to sleep with her
- v Athena puts Penelope to sleep
- D Telemachus assembles the Ithakans; is censured by Antinous; requests ship
- E Noemon lends a ship to 'Telemachus'
- F Pylus
 - i Proper sacrificial feast on Pylus
 - ii Stories of Odysseus, Troy, the returning Greeks, Agamemnon
 - i' Proper sacrificial feast on Pylus
- F' Sparta
 - i Proper wedding feast at Sparta
 - ii' Stories of Odysseus, Troy, the returning Greeks, Agamemnon
 - i' Proper wedding feast at Sparta
- E' Noemon asks about the ship he lent 'Telemachus'
- D' Antinous assembles the suitors; censures Telemachus; requests ship
- C' The Suffering Penelope
 - i Medon announces the plot to kill the returning Telemachus
 - ii Penelope complains
 - iii Eurycleia instructs her to go to her upper chamber and pray
 - iv The suitors raise a din and declare she is about to wed
 - v Penelope falls asleep
- B' Athena impersonates Penelope's sister and encourages a grieving Penelope in her sleep
- A' Divine assembly⁵¹

Noemon next arrives at the palace to ask Antinous and Eurymachus if they know when Telemachus will return from Pylus, for, he adds, Telemachus borrowed his ship and he needs it (4.630ff.). This echoes the earlier scene in which Athena impersonates Telemachus and secures the ship from Noemon (2.382-7). Antinous then convenes the suitors to complain about Telemachus' voyage, and requests a ship with twenty companions to lay an ambush (4.659-72). The scene parallels the assembly Telemachus convenes in Book 2 to denounce the suitors. Antinous censures him for the denunciation, after which Telemachus requests a ship. Noemon only appears in these two passages, and these are the only public assemblies in the *Telemachy*.

The herald Medon then informs Penelope of Telemachus' journey and the suitors' plot (4.675ff.). Penelope complains to her maidservants that she is already bereft of a 'famous husband', and now the storm-winds have snatched away her son (4.716-41). The

scene echoes Penelope's only previous appearance, when she complains to Phemius for singing the *Returns* of the Greeks, since she yearns for her 'famous husband' (1.337-44: 1.344~4.726=4.816; her mention of Laertes at 4.738 also echoes that of Athena at 1.189). The rings created by Noemon and his ship, the two assemblies, and Penelope's grief, are strongly marked and easily recognizable.

The rings bracketing the *Telemachy* serve more than one purpose. First, as Bakker has argued in the case of small-scale compositions, they do not simply return to the point of departure, but the intervening narrative ensures that this is a return with a difference: we now see Ithaca in explicit contrast with Pylus and Sparta. In particular, the • described in the closing scene at Sparta (4.621-4) contrasts sharply with the feasting of the suitors, which Athena sarcastically declares is no picnic (1.226).⁵² Moreover, Telemachus now clearly poses a threat to the suitors, with the result that the situation on Ithaca too has changed. Finally, the ring created by the second divine assembly formally subordinates the *Telemachy* to the main narrative so that it contextualises the story of Odysseus: this is the situation, wife, and son Odysseus will return to. We shall presently see that the *Telemachy* is subordinated to the main narrative in another way as well. The second assembly is thus 'resumptive', returning the listener to the *nostos* of Odysseus announced in the first assembly after an extended anecdote about Telemachus. But the sequential return to the poem's opening scene also serves to announce that the story is starting over with a new cast of characters. If this analysis is correct, then it supports Whitman and Scodel's argument that the assemblies of Books 1 and 5 are, in a sense, the same.⁵³ Telemachus consequently hears about his father's presence in Ogygia on the same morning that Odysseus departs for home.

Ithaca in Book 4 also helps frame the second divine assembly, where it is balanced by Ogygia in Book 5. The scenes are of nearly equal length (Ithaca: 233 verses; Ogygia: 215), and serve double-duty structurally: Ithaca frames the *Telemachy* and the second assembly, while Ogygia corresponds to Ithaca in Book 4 as part of the frame, and to Ithaca in Book 1 as the scene immediately following an assembly. The scenes that follow both assemblies thus begin with the arrival of a god to announce the hero's departure, the hero's preparations to depart by ship, assisted by a goddess, and the departure itself. In Books 4 and 5, on the other hand, we have contrasting images of heralds, Medon and Hermes, arriving at the chambers of Penelope and Calypso to make a momentous announcement, and a resulting scene of grief over loss by Odysseus' consort.⁵⁴ Noemon and his ship also do double-duty: his loan of the ship in Book 2 is balanced by his need of it in Book 4, which in turn corresponds to Odysseus' need of a ship in Book 5; and it precipitates a departure of the suitors from Ithaca that parallels Odysseus' departure for Ithaca. Finally, the assembly in Book 5 likewise does double-duty, both as the goal of the narrative regression that concludes the first narrative sequence, and as the point of departure that begins the next one.

Most important thematically is the contrast between Odysseus' consorts: in the natural order of things, Calypso is meant to be without a mortal companion, just as Penelope is meant to have one. Odysseus' presence on Ogygia has caused inverse disruptions in the natural order of both islands. Circumstances have compelled Penelope to become a Calypso or Circe, and for all her human limitations Penelope exerts a control over the suitors comparable to the control Circe exercises over Odysseus and the crew, Calypso over Odysseus, or Helen over her husband and Telemachus.⁵⁵ This is what gives the contrast point.

An inference I wish to draw from the way the transition to the *Phaeacis* is managed is that Book 4 does not represent a natural break in the narrative; indeed the composer has gone to some lengths to erase what might have been one. I see this as weighing against the possibility of four book performance units.⁵⁶ There is no comparable balancing of themes in the transition from the *Phaeacis* to the *Revenge*. Instead, the transition is desultory, but the effect is again to erase narrative boundaries:

Fig. 7: The *Phaeacis* and Transition to the *Revenge*

- A Divine Assembly: Athena complains about Odysseus' treatment⁵⁷
- B Journey of a god, Hermes, to earth
- C Odysseus sets out from Ogygie to return home
- D Poseidon destroys Odysseus' ship as it reaches Scheria
- E Odysseus arrives on Scheria at night
- F Odysseus enters the palace at night
 - i Phaeacian elders pour libations to Hermes
 - ii Odysseus approaches Arete and supplicates her
 - i' Pontonnoos prepares libations to Zeus
- G Phaeacians feast all day in honour of Odysseus⁵⁸
- H Odysseus narrates his adventures
- G' Phaeacians feast all day in honour of Odysseus
- F' Odysseus departs the palace at night
 - i' Pontonnoos prepares libations to Zeus
 - ii' Odysseus pledges Arete and departs
- E' Odysseus and Phaeacians set out from Scheria at night
 - Second 'proem' (13.88-92)
- e Odysseus and Phaeacians arrive at Ithaca at night; Phaeacians return home
- A' Divine Assembly: Poseidon complains about Odysseus' treatment
- B' Journey of a god, Poseidon, to earth
- C' Phaeacians arrive at Scheria
- D' Poseidon destroys ship that conveyed Odysseus as it reaches Scheria

The 'second proem' precedes a divine assembly, as does the first, but lacks a formal parallel in Book 5. Poseidon appears at the same structural juncture in A' as he would had the ring-composition continued with D'. The preceding rings may have suggested the entry of Poseidon into the narrative at this point, and even introduced an element of

suspense, since they imply he will destroy the ship with Odysseus still on board. But even though ring-composition is not used to return to the beginning, it still frames the entire narrative set on Scheria. What remains to be explained, then, is why A through D and their corresponding primes are narrated in the same rather than chiasmic order.

It is now necessary to consider the plot of the *Odyssey*, which as noted is organised by a repeated sequence of themes. Moreover, the pattern is complex, with a number of features that do not have an obvious morphological explanation at the level of the type-scene. Roman entries occur in all three narratives, while those italicised occur in two, indicated by their initials 'T' (*Telemachy*), 'P' (*Phaeacis*), and 'R' (*Revenge*):

Fig. 8: The Plot of the *Odyssey*

- 1) *The story begins with a proem characterizing Odysseus (TR)*
- 2) and a divine assembly in which a god complains to Zeus about Odysseus' return and others' transgressions,
- 3) followed by *a divine arming scene (TP)* and journey to an island
- 4) *where the god takes in the surroundings*
and is recognised by the ruler, who offers hospitality (TP).
- 5) While others feast,
- 6) the hero is:
under the control of a powerful female,
and isolated from the community,
in his yearning for Odysseus' return.
- 7) *A goddess rouses and assists the hero (TP)*

- 8) who secures a ship,
provisions it with female *and even divine (TP)* assistance,
and undertakes a *nocturnal (TR)* voyage,⁵⁹
- 9) *but Poseidon destroys the ship as it nears its destination (PR).*
- 10) Athena facilitates the hero's arrival,
*gives tharsos to a royal youth meeting an intimidating stranger (TP),
and her olive tree offers protection (PR).*
- 11) A royal youth, *the great grandchild of Poseidon (TP),*
welcomes the newly arrived *and awakened (PR)* hero on the beach,
- 12) who is offered food or hints he is hungry.
- 13) The hero describes himself and his quest, but withholds his name,
- 14) followed by stories of Troy,
- 15) epiphanies of hero and goddess,
- 16) and the hero being advised to seek further assistance from a named individual.
- 17) The hero proceeds *to his initial destination,*
- 18) *the home of a man noteworthy for hospitality and piety,*
where he spends the night
and his appearance is transformed, rendering him godlike (TR).
- 19) *The hero is escorted to a sacred grove and spring,*⁶⁰
- 20) *where prayers are offered for Odysseus' return (PR),*
- 21) *and then* to a palace, which is his final destination.
- 22) A wedding is imminent,
- 23) the community feasts in celebration,
- 24) and the queen enjoys noteworthy prominence.

- 25) The hero marvels at the palace *and guard dog(s) (PR)*
- 26) and hospitality is initially called into question,
 but the person responsible is admonished.
- 27) The royal household offers the hero hospitality,
 and he is awarded a seat of honour next to the king (TP).
- 28) The hero does not disclose *and actively conceals (PR)* his identity,
- 29) but an identification is made by the queen, based on physical appearance,
- 30) who tests the disguised Odysseus,
- 31) *and the king declares he would grant Odysseus part of his kingdom (TP).*
- 32) Stories of Odysseus at Troy cause the hero and/or host to weep.
- 33) *If the hero conceals his identity, royal youths insult his appearance and prowess,*
- 34) *he enters a contest which he wins, thereby avenging the insult,*
- 35) *and reveals his identity (PR).*
- 36) Goods and honors are offered to *placate* the *offended (PR)* hero.
- 37) The hero or host narrates his adventures,
- 38) which include or are followed by Catabasis,
 and accounts of Odysseus, Agamemnon, *Achilles (PR)* and a grieving parent.⁶¹
- 39) The hero is offered, or recounts receiving, gifts,
- 40) followed by further feasting.

The thematic sequence elucidates the end of the *Phaeacis*. The feast in Alcinous' palace in Book 13 corresponds to theme 40, so that the sequence is now complete. As in the *Telemachy*, this is itself a ring-structure, followed by a series of further themes that provide closure to the Scherian narrative (figure 7: F' – D'). The last four themes,

however, belong to the next iteration of the sequence. The feasting of the Phaeacians in Book 13 creates a ring (G') that also corresponds to theme five. Odysseus' pledge of Arete before departing (F') echoes his earlier supplication on entering the palace and reminds us of the queen's prominence. It thus corresponds to theme six, as does his isolation during the feast. His nocturnal departure from Scheria (E') balances his nocturnal arrival and corresponds to theme eight. The 'second proem', divine assembly, and Poseidon's journey to earth, occur during the Phaeacians' return voyage, and the section is framed by scenes of Odysseus sleeping and waking on Ithaca. Nevertheless all of the themes in the previous iterations of the pattern are represented except four and seven. The sequence is thus: 5, 6, 8, 1, 2, 3, 9 and so on. Like the rings at the end of the *Telemachy*, these themes serve double-duty, simultaneously concluding the *Phaeacis* and launching the *Revenge*. The effect is to erase the very narrative boundaries that the story-pattern would naturally impose: it is as though we are dealing with a poem designed to be unperformable in the sense of being unstoppable.

Other departures from the sequence of themes can be explained by the process of local adaptation, compression and expansion. In the *Phaeacis*, for example, the initial destination is eliminated, while in the *Revenge*, Eumaeus' hut, to which Odysseus first proceeds, provides a setting in which to develop the themes of disguise and testing, and to reunite Odysseus with his son. These sorts of examples could be much expanded, but the sequence still remains fairly uniform, both in the recurrence of themes and the order in which they appear. Type-scenes, it should be noted, can undergo similar expansion and compression while maintaining a fixed thematic sequence.

Structurally parallel themes can also resonate with each other in meaningful ways.⁶² For example, the sequence confirms that Odysseus' boast about his skill as an

archer in the *Phaeacis* foreshadows the *mnesterophonia*:⁶³ the quarrel with the Phaeacian youths that precipitates the boast is structurally parallel to the *mnesterophonia*, in which Odysseus uses his bow to kill the suitors. Moreover, in making his boast Odysseus declares that he would not compete with Heracles and Eurytus in archery (8.223-8), while immediately before the *mnesterophonia* we learn that Odysseus' bow once belonged to Eurytus and was given to him by his son, Iphitus, whom Heracles killed and stole his horses even though Iphitus was his guest (21.11-41). It is thus with the *xeinion* of a *xeinos* killed in flagrant violation of the laws of *xeini* that Odysseus kills the suitors for violating those same laws in similar ways.

As a further example of such intratextual engagement, consider the scenes of recognition by the queen: Helen identifies Telemachus based on his physical appearance (4.138-46); Arete in turn identifies the clothing Odysseus is wearing and through this recognises that he has had uncertain dealings with her daughter (7.233-9). These parallel scenes inject suspense into Odysseus' encounter with Penelope as to whether, and in what way, the queen will identify the stranger (such expectations may have been reinforced by traditions in which Penelope does recognise him).⁶⁴ The poet's response is to incorporate and displace both identifications: when the disguised Odysseus describes what he wore to Troy, Penelope is able to recognise the clothing, the person described as her husband, and the stranger as his guest-friend (19.221-35). Yet she 'recognises' Odysseus in a narrative of the distant past. Afterwards, a mother-figure, Eurycleia, recognises the stranger's resemblance to Odysseus, and then that he is indeed Odysseus, based on his hunting scar (19.361ff.).

Further analysis of these engagements is for another study. More important in the present context is the typology of the sequence. It is generally recognised that the plot of

Homeric epic is structured by the 'Withdrawal and Return' story-pattern which, Albert Lord argues, originates in fertility myth:

The essential pattern of the *Iliad* is the same as that of the *Odyssey*; they are both the story of an absence that causes havoc to the beloved of the absentee and of his return to set matters right The rape of Persephone in all its forms as a fertility myth underlies all epic tales of this sort, and until the historical is completely triumphant over the mythic, all such tales are likely to be drawn into the pattern of the myth.⁶⁵

Six years later, Mary Louise Lord published a detailed comparison of the *Hymn to Demeter* with the epics. At the outset, Lord cautions that she is 'not suggesting literary indebtedness, but instead similarity in the use of old and widespread epic themes'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, she makes the plot of the *Hymn* the basis of her comparison:

The narrative pattern ... centers on the following principal elements with accompanying themes:

- (1) the withdrawal of the hero (or heroine), which sometimes takes the form of a long absence; this element is often closely linked with a quarrel and the loss of someone beloved;
- (2) disguise during the absence or upon the return of the hero, frequently accompanied by a deceitful story;
- (3) the theme of hospitality to the wandering hero;
- (4) the recognition of the hero, or at least a fuller revelation of his identity;

- (5) disaster during or occasioned by the absence;
- (6) the reconciliation of the hero and return.⁶⁷

Although Lord observes that the themes generally occur in the same order, she argues that the sequence may be altered to suit the needs of the narrative. This obviously obtains when, as she also notes, important themes are repeated for emphasis.

Lord finds that themes two through six are well represented in the *Odyssey*, but that the first theme is not. As a possible echo, she offers the wrath of Poseidon, which leads to Odysseus' absence and the death of his companions, though she concedes that the absence is not motivated by the hero's loss (nor is it motivated by his wrath). As a second possibility, she offers Nestor's account of the quarrel between the Atreidai, who serve as narrative foils for Odysseus. Neither parallel is direct, nor do they occur in sequence. Finally, Lord observes that Demeter's Withdrawal differs from Achilles and Odysseus' because it takes the form of a journey in search of her daughter. She does, however, note the parallel supplied by the *Telemachy*: 'one of the intrusive patterns in the *Odyssey* is Telemachus' quest for news of his absent father, an initiatory exploit for Telemachus'.⁶⁸

In the same year that Lord's study appeared, Rose published a comparative analysis of what he terms a 'revenge pattern' in the *Odyssey*:

- 1) The hero suffers outrage or disgrace;
- 2) initiates a plan of revenge;
- 3) departs from home as part of the strategy;
- 4) returns secretly and unexpectedly;

5) and exacts revenge, although his enemy enjoys an advantage
in strength or numbers.⁶⁹

This is transparently the same story-pattern analyzed by Lord. His findings differ from hers because he only treats Odyssean instantiations and includes themes shared by nearly all the narratives. In so restricting his evidence, however, Rose exposes what seems to be an epic variation on the pattern: the hero's secret return for revenge. Moreover, whereas the theme of return for revenge features prominently in both epics, that of *secret* return is restricted to the *Odyssey*, where it can be explained by its centrality to Odysseus' strategy for killing the suitors.⁷⁰

Rose finds the theme of angry Withdrawal after suffering outrage so pervasive that he includes it in the pattern even though he notes that 'Orestes and Odysseus also return unexpectedly from an absence and successfully accomplish their revenge. Missing from the motif is, obviously, a departure from home as part of the strategy'.⁷¹ This is a variation on Lord's claim that in the *Odyssey* the hero's 'withdrawal or long absence, associated with anger and the loss of a loved one, is not so clear-cut as in the *Iliad*'.⁷² Nickel goes so far as to say that 'The *Hymn to Demeter* is the only poem from the Greek oral tradition, besides the *Iliad*, whose narrative is structured around the story pattern of wrath, withdrawal, and return'.⁷³

The *Telemachy*, however, exhibits all of the elements that Lord and Rose identify as belonging to the first theme. As one might expect, the *Telemachy* includes other themes as well, but what it pointedly does not include is a secret Return for revenge. Yet if we consider events independently of character we see that the poem describes a Withdrawal by Telemachus followed by Odysseus' Return. What I am suggesting, then,

is that the *Telemachy* supplies the missing elements of the pattern, and in their proper order, so that the *Odyssey* can be seen as a story of Withdrawal and Return.⁷⁴ This combined account emerges as the ultimate example of ring-composition in the poem, one that represents ‘a philosophy of renewal and regeneration’. Form is content.

I thus suggest that the Withdrawal of Telemachus makes Odysseus’ Return possible. Indeed, the *Hymn to Demeter* models just such a scenario, in which Demeter’s Withdrawal is responsible for Persephone’s Return. The *Telemachy* accomplishes this in thematic terms by initiating the pattern of Withdrawal and Return. It thereby allows Odysseus to return *in a manner appropriate to the situation on Ithaca*. Odysseus usurps, as it were, the Return for revenge that Telemachus prepares for with his angry departure. For this reason, Odysseus must return first, leaving Telemachus stranded in Sparta for nearly a month. Moreover, the displacement of the son by the father in the pattern is abetted by the rings that manage the transition between the *Telemachy* and the *Phaeacis*: not only does the device subordinate the *Telemachy* thematically to the story of Odysseus, but it also creates a bridge that brings the narratives into structural relation with one another as two halves of a single Withdrawal and Return. The *Telemachy* twice contextualises the main narrative: by defining the circumstances of Odysseus’ Return and by initiating a Withdrawal and Return to which it supplies the themes of a lost loved-one, quarrelling, suffering outrage, and angry Withdrawal. The thematic sequence that I have identified as the *Odyssey*’s plot is thus a journey sequence used to describe both Withdrawal and Return. The sequence starts over before the *Phaeacis* concludes in order to integrate it and the *Revenge* into a single two-stage narrative of Return.

The Withdrawal and Return story that is the *Odyssey* meets the formal requirements of large-scale ring-composition as outlined by Douglas: the beginning is

echoed at the end, and it has a clearly marked mid-turn that echoes both. The prologue looks forward to the *mnesterophonia* and reunion with Penelope by speaking of how Odysseus yearns for his wife, and the contest (1.18: •) that awaits him even among his own people (19:).⁷⁵ The divine assembly reinforces this with the paradigmatic account of how Orestes killed Aegisthus for courting Clytemnestra (39: μ •) and murdering Agamemnon. Athena then declares that she will place ‘manhood’ in Telemachus (89: μ) so he can denounce the suitors of Penelope (91: μ).

More generally, the principle actors and themes from the *Telemachy* converge in the *mnesterophonia* and *anagnorismos*. When Athena arrives on Ithaca, Telemachus is daydreaming about his father scattering the suitors and himself gaining honor (113-8). This directly foreshadows the *mnesterophonia* in which he joins his father in killing the suitors, thanks to Athena’s gift of *menos*. Telemachus’ conflict with the suitors in the assembly of Book 2 and their subsequent ambush provide further echoes of the *mnesterophonia*, itself both a contest and an ambush. Athena is present in bird-form to oversee the slaughter (22.239-40), while in Book 1 she mentions Odysseus’ poisoned arrows (260-4), encourages Telemachus to kill the suitors (294-6), and departs as a bird (319-20).⁷⁶ Phemius and Medon, whose complementary role at the beginning and end of the *Telemachy* is to narrate events that cause Penelope to grieve, appear impromptu at the close of the *mnesterophonia* to be spared as a pair (22.330-80).⁷⁷ After she recognises Odysseus, Penelope listens to his story of Return (23.306-43), just as she had earlier heard Phemius sing the *Returns* of the Greeks, a song from which Odysseus is excluded (1.328-44). Odysseus’ story at the end of the poem thus completes Phemius’ song at the beginning. Another pairing of characters occurs when Athena then escorts Odysseus and his party to Laertes’ orchard in Book 23, followed by Hermes’ escort of the suitors to

Hades in 24. This corresponds to the double-embassy announced in Book 1. In both cases, Athena journeys to Ithaca and provides safe escort, of Telemachus and of Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus and Philoetius, followed by Hermes' journeys to an island of the blessed (Ogygia) and Hades.⁷⁸ Finally, note the paired warnings of Halitherses and Mentor in the assembly of Book 2 (157-76, 224-41), and Athena's subsequent appearance as Mentor (398-401), followed by Halitherses' reminder of both warnings in Book 24 (451-62), and Athena's subsequent appearance as Mentor (502-3).

The prophecy of Tiresias (11.100-37) is key to understanding the *Necyia* as a mid-turn. It echoes the themes of the prologue and first divine assembly when Tiresias declares that Poseidon hates Odysseus and is hindering his return because he blinded Polyphemus. At the same time, the prophecy looks forward to the poem's conclusion: if Odysseus' companions harm the cattle of Helios Odysseus will return late and alone to find suitors devouring his own *biotos*; he will, however, take revenge on them.⁷⁹ These parallels are reinforced when Odysseus repeats to Penelope the further prophecy that he must undertake another journey to propitiate Poseidon (23.268-84~11.121-37). Ring-structures feature so prominently in the *Apologue* not simply to authenticate Odysseus as story-teller, but also to mark the *Necyia* as the poem's mid-turn.

Finally, there is a narrative-latch. Aristophanes and Aristarchus notoriously claimed that the *Odyssey* ends at 23.296.⁸⁰ To be sure, the thematic sequence I have outlined integrates Odysseus' adventure-story to Penelope, the second *Necyia* and recognition of Laertes into the narrative.⁸¹ But there is an important respect in which the Alexandrians are right, for the *Odyssey* ends twice, once after Penelope recognises Odysseus, and a second time after Laertes does so. The events following the second *Necyia* thus constitute the latch that places the story in its wider metaphysical context.

This it accomplishes in two ways: most directly, we see Zeus enact the ‘principles of his rule’, programmatically announced in the first divine assembly, by putting an end to needless human suffering.⁸²

When Eupheithes and over half the parents of the suitors set out to take revenge on Odysseus, the scene switches to Olympus, where Athena asks whether Zeus intends war or friendship (24.472-6). The scene is a variant on the previous divine assemblies in which Athena complains of the mistreatment of Odysseus. The scene thus sends a false signal that the story is starting over again. This is reinforced by cultural expectations, for after Odysseus kills the suitors it is to be assumed that their relatives will attempt to retaliate. Zeus, however, responds by suggesting that the suitors’ relatives be made to forget their sorrows. He thereby puts an, or even *the*, end to the eternal return of death by vendetta, so that an end to cyclical death is also the end of the *Odyssey*.⁸³ For the second way in which the latch provides metaphysical context, we need to return to the origins of the *Odyssey*-plot.

Thus far my analysis only depends on seeing the *Odyssey* as a highly sophisticated Withdrawal and Return. In an earlier study, however, I argued that the *Odyssey* presents itself as the political equivalent of fertility cult, promising material prosperity to a listening community willing to submit to its ideology and holding out the possibility of immortal fame to those who strive to emulate its heroes.⁸⁴ There my focus was on epiphany and theoxeny: in the present context I note that the theoxeny theme can account for the themes of disguise and punishment that Rose identifies as key elements of his Revenge pattern. More important in the present context, the significance of the latch becomes more fully evident when viewed in relationship with the Persephone myth.

That myth is a double ring-pattern in which the human life-cycle is assimilated to the cycles of nature, so that eternal return becomes ‘a philosophy of renewal and regeneration’. The Withdrawal and Return of Demeter is literally accompanied by the death and rebirth of nature; while the parallel Withdrawal and Return of Persephone assimilates her death and rebirth to nature’s cycles. Vegetable life thus provides an analogical model for the mitigated triumph over death realised in cult with the promise of prosperity in this life and eternal blessedness in the next: infinite linear time in the divine sphere is thus made cyclical, resulting in partial mortality; this leads to a parallel conversion of finite linear time in the human sphere that results in partial immortality.

The *Odyssey* likewise integrates the story of Odysseus into nature’s cycles: Odysseus reveals his identity during a New Year festival on the new moon marking the winter solstice on the first day of the first month of the twentieth year after he left for Troy.⁸⁵ His return thus marks the completion of a ‘Great Year’ when ‘the New Moon would coincide with the New Sun of the winter solstice’.⁸⁶ As a result the

- occurs during the
- •

⁸⁷ Moreover, when Odysseus builds his marriage-bed on the stump of a living olive tree, he literally displaces the cycles of nature with the human life-cycles of waking and sleep, conception, birth and death, or in seasonal terms life, death, and rebirth.⁸⁸ This human cycle is embodied in Odysseus, Telemachus and most completely Penelope, who conceives and bears a son on this very bed.⁸⁹ In this sense, she is the tree and Odysseus her gardener; yet she is equally the tree’s gardener in that she cultivates their marriage and ensures the continued viability of the *oikos* by preserving the bed’s integrity. The bed is not simply a *s ma* of identity, it is that identity, invested with a numinous power such that its true nature is a carefully guarded secret. Moreover, Penelope recognises Odysseus by returning, through the narrative of

the bed's fabrication, to their wedding night; and they are re-married on that same bed after Athena has rejuvenated her and her husband (18.187-96; 23.153-63).⁹⁰ Return home is equally a return to the past and with it erasure of the physical effects of over nineteen years spent at Troy and wandering. As important, with his successful reintegration into the household, Odysseus wins immortal *kleos* as the hero whose late Return heralds the return of prosperity to the entire kingdom.⁹¹ His remarriage to Penelope is thus a *hieros gamos* that takes place on a displaced source of *biotos*.

This complex of themes is powerfully echoed in the recognition scene with Laertes.⁹² Whereas Odysseus incorporates living nature into the heart of his domestic space as the foundation of his marriage-bed, Laertes makes nature his domestic space, sleeping on the leaves of his orchard in summer and at the hearth of his farmstead in winter (11.187-96). While Penelope's preservation of the tree-bed represents the continued well-being of the family, Laertes' cultivation of the orchard sustains the household literally and symbolically through its production of *biotos*.⁹³ Whereas the foundation of the marriage(-bed) on a living tree displaces nature's cycles with those of man, and specifically Odysseus' family, 'In the primary rituals of planting and tending [Laertes] reasserts the connection between human life and the rhythms of nature'.⁹⁴ The orchard thus becomes a symbol of generational succession, from father to son.

Like the tree-bed, a living orchard representing the social reproduction of the family is both context and instrument of recognition and legitimacy. While the scar is offered to Penelope as proof of Odysseus' identity, only to be rejected, Odysseus now shows it to Laertes as a proof to be superseded. In both cases, the preferred token is a shared memory upon or within which the house of Arcesius is assimilated to the eternal returns of nature. Odysseus thus proves his identity by recounting the trees and vines

Laertes had given him as a young boy. Whereas ‘the gift which a father gives his son is life, and the right to give life in turn to *his* son’, Odysseus affirms he is Laertes’ son by reminding Laertes that he had once given him *biotōs*.⁹⁵ Laertes thus recognises his son by returning through narrative to a time when he himself was in his prime.

In a real sense, then, the orchard is not simply a token that reveals Odysseus’ identity, but it is that identity as surely as his scar; nor, like the tree-bed, is it merely his own identity, but equally that of Laertes, who labored over it, and of Telemachus, who will inherit it. And so, the scene of reunion in an orchard as a new year begins reintegrates Laertes into the family after his Withdrawal, while Demeter restores life to the world and returns to Olympus when Persephone returns to her. The reunion of father and son in a symbol of cyclical nature reconstitutes the family across three generations, representing a complete human life-cycle of youth, maturity and old age that corresponds to the Homeric seasons of • , and •μ in further expression of a ‘philosophy of renewal and regeneration’. This is followed, as it must, with feasting, in which the reconstituted family is ritually affirmed through commensality.⁹⁶ Before they eat, however, Athena rejuvenates Laertes, just as she had earlier rejuvenated Odysseus before Penelope recognises him. Afterwards, Athena addresses Laertes as ‘o son of Arcesius’ (24.517: ••), the only time he is so-called in the poem.⁹⁷ All three generations of the household are now, miraculously, in the prime of life. This too is echoed in Laertes’ orchard, where the vines are said to bear grapes ‘continuously’ (24.342:) in clear evocation of the seasonless and ageless environment of Elysium.⁹⁸ Laertes is even allowed to win his own measure of *kleos* by making the only kill described in the ensuing altercation with the suitors’ parents.

I conclude by elaborating on the claim that the *Odyssey*'s promise of wealth and prosperity extends to the entire community. It has been a commonplace among social anthropologists since Malinowski and Boas that performing the old stories allows the community to reenter the primordial past in which the gods still walked among us. It is in this light, I suggest, that we should understand the mimetic nature of Homeric performance, as a religious act of eternal return that makes the ancient heroes and the gods vividly present.⁹⁹ As a story of Withdrawal and Return, the *Odyssey* thus reproduces its own poetics. It does so a second time by making epiphany, and in particular the miraculous reappearance of the long absent Odysseus, the dramatic climax and central theme of the epic.¹⁰⁰ Whereas Withdrawal and Return is the ultimate ring-structure in the *Odyssey*, epic performance is the ultimate return narrative in archaic Greece. More broadly, the *Odyssey* expresses nostalgia for a return to the glories of a bygone age from a degenerate present. This yearning is realised when Athena rejuvenates Penelope, Odysseus and Laertes, thereby restoring them to their relationships before Odysseus left for Troy. The spatial pattern of Withdrawal and Return is thus assimilated to a temporal pattern in which the progress of time itself is reversed, so that linear time is made cyclical, the same feat accomplished by inscribing the human lifecycle into the cycles of nature. Yet the degenerate present from which the poem longs to return also represents the contemporary world of its audience.¹⁰¹ In his final speech to Athena, Zeus promises that the returned Odysseus will rule 'forever' (24.483: •) and that the people of Ithaca will enjoy 'abundant wealth and peace' (486: • • • • •).¹⁰² Zeus' promise has a clear echo in the prophecy of Tiresias that Odysseus will die 'overcome by a rich old age, and his people will prosper about him' (11.136-7=23.283-4: •• •• μ • •μ • • •/• •). **So too**, the *Hymn to Demeter* promises that whomever the

goddesses love will be 'enormously prosperous', for they send the god Wealth to take up residence at his hearth (486: μ •• ; 489: •). Return thus takes place on a common spatio-temporal axis in which the Return of Odysseus to Ithaca is simultaneously a Return of Ithaca to the heroic world, with its promise of renewed prosperity and immortality, achieved through the eternal return of Homer.

Notes

¹ This is the premise that guided Parry and Lord in their fieldwork, and it is maintained by what I take to be the majority of US Homerists. See, e.g., Martin 1989: esp. 5-12, 89-100; Lord 2000; Scodel 2002: esp. 1-20; Doherty 2009: 3; see also Jensen 2011: chs. 1-4.

² Scodel 2002: esp. 4-13, 36-41.

³ Kakrides 1949: 18-27; Lohmann 1970: 258-63; see also Arthur 1981. For another example of manipulation, see Heubeck's analysis of the *Cyclopeia* as *aristeia*, 1989, on *Od.* 9.375-94.

⁴ Edwards 1991: 44-48; see also Stanley 1993: 6-9. In what follows, I limit my diagnosis of rings to (nearly) identical or antithetical themes, regarding as suspect parallels that require significant decoding.

⁵ For comparative study, see Douglas 2007; Welch 1981; see also Rubin 1995: 221, 274-7; for Aeschylus and Herodotus, see van Otterlo 1944: esp. 1-16; Sheppard 1966: appendix; and Lang 1984: 1-12; for Bacchylides, see Cairns 2010: esp. 41-4, 101-6; further bibl. in Stanley 1993: 307 n. 21.

⁶ The analysis, first outlined in Cook 1991, has some points of contact with Louden 1999.

⁷ Myres 1932, and Whitman 1958: chs. 5 and 11, press the analogy between the *Iliad* and Geometric art, though as Richardson 1993: 4-5 notes this has not been widely accepted. An important exception is Mackay 1999: esp. 116-17, whose *comparanda*, however, is early sixth-century Attic vase-painting; see also Andreae and Flashar 1977; Lewis 1981.

⁸ For Heliodorus, see Lowe 2000: esp. 137, 235-58; Lowe, 110-1, does not, however, consider ring-composition to be ‘part of the poetics of classical plotting’.

⁹ Thalmann 1984: 9; cf. van Otterlo 1944: 3; Douglas 2007: 137-38.

¹⁰ Thalmann 1984: 11.

¹¹ Otterlo 1944: 43.

¹² Edwards 1991: 48.

¹³ Bakker 1997: 115; cf. Bassett 1938: 119-28; Lang 1984: 1-12; Thornton 1984: ch. 7.

¹⁴ Bakker 1997: 119.

¹⁵ Bakker 1997: 118.

¹⁶ Bakker 1997: 121.

¹⁷ Whitman 1958: 98, 254; cf., e.g., Lohmann 1970: 209-12, 284; Rubin 1995: 275.

¹⁸ Whitman 1958: 98.

¹⁹ Whitman 1958: 98.

²⁰ Whitman 1958: 257.

²¹ Myres 1932: esp. 283-94.

²² Richardson 1993: 4-5.

²³ Gaisser 1969: 2.

²⁴ Cp. Bierl 2012: 173-4.

²⁵ Richardson 1993: 13.

²⁶ Richardson 1993: 5; cf. Whitman 1958: 258-9; Lewis 1981: 92.

²⁷ Although Douglas’ analysis assumes conscious intent in the construction of rings, her theoretical model could be used to explain the lack of scholarly consensus on ring-composition in terms of both theorization and diagnosis. It could even be used to assert that alternative structural patterns are not inherently exclusive.

-
- ²⁸ Douglas 2007: 40, 72.
- ²⁹ Douglas 2007: 99-100.
- ³⁰ Douglas 2007: 27-30.
- ³¹ Douglas 2007: 134, 137.
- ³² Douglas 2007: 73-74.
- ³³ Douglas 2007: esp. 36-38.
- ³⁴ Douglas 2007: 126.
- ³⁵ Douglas 2007: 89.
- ³⁶ Douglas 2007: e.g., x, 31-2, 34, 85-6.
- ³⁷ Assumed by Whitman 1958; see also Cairns 2010: 42-4, 80-81.
- ³⁸ Douglas 2007: 109.
- ³⁹ Douglas 2007: 114.
- ⁴⁰ Douglas 2007: 117.
- ⁴¹ Douglas 2007, 119.
- ⁴² Sheppard 1966: 34-5.
- ⁴³ Sheppard 1966: 40, 46; Richardson 1993: 10; Scodel 2002: 27; Cook 2009: 143 with n. 35; Christensen forthcoming, with n. 3.
- ⁴⁴ Richardson 1993: 10-11; cf., however, *Il.* 22.209-13, 403-4.
- ⁴⁵ Stanley 1993; see Nimis 1999.
- ⁴⁶ Whitman 1958: 287.
- ⁴⁷ Whitman 1958: 288; cf. Woodhouse 1929: 43-4.
- ⁴⁸ E.g., Page 1955: ch. 2; cf. Nagler 1980; Heubeck 1989: 75-7.
- ⁴⁹ Cook 1995: 74-6.

⁵⁰ A similar pairing at the centre of a ring occurs in *Od.* 4, where complementary speeches by Menelaus about his travels frame contrasting speeches, by Helen and Menelaus, about Odysseus. See Gaisser 1969: 37 n. 46.

⁵¹ Myres 1952: 3, 13.

⁵² The Spartan • is condemned by Page 1955: 69; defended by West 1988, on 4.621-4.

⁵³ Whitman and Scodel 1981, with the important qualifications of Scodel 2008: esp. 116; see also Olson 1995: ch. 5; Marks 2008: 36-44.

⁵⁴ For Hermes' role as herald, which he notoriously does not perform in the *Iliad*, see, e.g., Hes. *Op.* 80, *Th.* 939; A. *Ag.* 514-5.

⁵⁵ Zeitlin 1995: 139; on Helen see West 1975 (reprinted in West 2011); Clader 1976.

⁵⁶ On the book divisions, see now Jensen 2011: ch. 10

⁵⁷ Note that A-A' and F-F' are complementary scenes of nocturnal arrival and departure that frame the *Phaeacis* and the palace sequence respectively.

⁵⁸ For the significance of the ring, see Nagy 2010: 92-102.

⁵⁹ Odysseus sails day and night to Scheria.

⁶⁰ The stay in the city of Pherae in the *Telemachy* occurs at this juncture.

⁶¹ On Menelaus' Egyptian adventure, see Powell 1970; Nagler 1980; Lord 2000: 165-9.

⁶² Cook 2012 provides a preliminary survey of the parallels between the three narrative threads and the plot of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; on the arrival scenes in Books 3, 6 and 13, see also Cook 1998; for the parallels between the *Phaeacis* and *Revenge* see Lang 1969.

⁶³ Scodel xxx.

-
- ⁶⁴ Katz 1991: 93-113; Felson-Rubin 1994: 3-4, 56-60; Doherty 1995: ch. 1, 140-4; Murnaghan 2011: 36-7, ch. 4; Saïd 2011: 285-9, 297-302; for sustained analysis of the episode, see now Levaniouk 2011.
- ⁶⁵ A. Lord 2000: 186; cf. Clarke 1989: 70-2.
- ⁶⁶ M. Lord 1994: 182; cf. Sowa 1984; Nickel 2003; Cook 2012.
- ⁶⁷ M. Lord 1994: 181-2 (my formatting).
- ⁶⁸ M. Lord 1994: 185.
- ⁶⁹ Abstracted from Rose 1967: 396.
- ⁷⁰ The theme of *disguised* return is, however, clearly reproduced in Patroclus' re-entry into battle wearing Achilles' armor. What makes this of special interest in the present context is that the Return themes are thus distributed among closely related characters (on which, see below).
- ⁷¹ Rose 1967: 396.
- ⁷² M. Lord 1994: 184.
- ⁷³ Nickel 2003: 60.
- ⁷⁴ This is ideologically interesting as the interchangeability of father and son affirm the ability of the father to reproduce himself in the son. This bears directly on the symbolism of Laertes' garden (on which, see below).
- ⁷⁵ This is the only direct reference to Odysseus yearning for his wife by the narrator (though see 5.209-10).
- ⁷⁶ On the logic of her advice, see Felson-Rubin 1994: 4-9.
- ⁷⁷ Eurycleia's appearances are of some interest here: she assists in the ambush (21.380-7, 22.390-434), as she had earlier helped Telemachus depart Ithaca (2.345-80). When Medon arrives at Penelope's chambers with news that the suitors are planning to ambush

Telemachus, Eurycleia tries to console the distraught Penelope and instructs her to pray to Athena (4.742-57). After Odysseus spares Medon, Eurycleia arrives at Penelope's chamber to comfort her with the news that Odysseus has returned (23.1-84). In the first instance, Eurycleia asks Penelope to punish her; in the latter Penelope expresses the desire to do so. These are the only two occasions on which Eurycleia addresses Penelope in the poem.

⁷⁸ On Ogygia, see Powell 1970: 421; Crane 1988: 33-4, 142; Cook 1992.

⁷⁹ On the logic of the prophecy, see Peradotto 1990: 63-75.

⁸⁰ On the end of the *Odyssey*, relevant scholarship includes: Pfeiffer 1968: 175-7; Thornton 1970: ch. 11; Erbse 1972: 166-244; Fenik 1974: 47-53; Moulton 1974; Wender 1978; Goldhill 1991: 18-22; Scodel 1998; Bierl 2004; Marks 2008: ch. 3; Murnaghan 2011: 18-23; Saïd 2011: 217-22.

⁸¹ Laertes' orchard is structurally significant: 1.193, 11.193, 24.221 etc.

⁸² Kullmann 1985: 5; cf. 6-7: 'The religious system of the *Odyssey* . . . gives something like a metaphysical foundation of the principle of justice'

⁸³ Wender 1978: esp. 64; Heubeck 1992: on 24.482-5; Marks 2008: 67-78; Saïd 2011: 221.

⁸⁴ Cook 2012.

⁸⁵ On his appearance as epiphanic, see Cook 2012. For the timelines involved see, e.g., Auffarth 1991: 388-420, Austin 1975: ch. 5; Cook 1995: 156-7.

⁸⁶ Murray 1934: 211.

⁸⁷ Murray 1934: 212; cf. Auffarth 417-20.

⁸⁸ Katz 1991: 177-82; Cook 1995: 154, 161-3; Zeitlin 1995; Saïd 2011: 216-17.

-
- ⁸⁹ This coheres with Homeric agricultural metaphors such as • . . . • • •
(*Od.* 14. 175; cf. *Il.* 18.56, 437-8); for the metaphor in classical Athens, cf. Ormand 1999:
esp. 20-1, 138-41.
- ⁹⁰ Levaniouk 2011: 66-9.
- ⁹¹ Cook 2012: 53-6; cf. Steiner 2009; Levaniouk 2011: ch. 6.
- ⁹² On the connection of bed, orchard, and Laertids, see Henderson 1997: esp. 97-8, 110-
12.
- ⁹³ Odysseus is reunited with Telemachus on a pig-farm, so that his reunion with each
member of his family is associated with productive nature. It is, conversely, for their
wasteful consumption of Odysseus' that the suitors are destroyed.
- ⁹⁴ Falkner 1995: 44-5.
- ⁹⁵ Wender 1978: 61-2; cf. Henderson 1997: 108.
- ⁹⁶ As such, it is functionally analogous to the ritual footbath in Book 19 affirming the
beggar's status as *xeinós*, and the love-making of Odysseus and Penelope in Book 23
reaffirming their marriage. See Katz 1991: 143-7; Cook 1995: 155.
- ⁹⁷ Anticipated by 24.270; for its immediate function see Scodel 1998: 13.
- ⁹⁸ Heubeck 1992: on 24.342-4.
- ⁹⁹ On Homeric mimesis, see Nagy 1996: ch. 3; Bakker 2005: chs. 4, 9; Cook 2009: 127-8;
cf. Ford 1992: 6-7, 49-56, 126-30; Seaford 2012: ch. 2.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cook 2012.
- ¹⁰¹ On the social setting as post-heroic, see, e.g., Redfield 2009: 266-9.
- ¹⁰² The word • recurs once in the *Odyssey*, in the formula • • • (14.206).

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Douglas Cairns and Ruth Scodel for inviting me to the conference, and for their hospitality during my stay in Edinburgh. I would also like to thank them and the following colleagues for reading and commenting on various drafts of the article:

Jonathan Burgess; Tom Jenkins; Lenny Muellner; Corinne Pache; and Greg Thalmann.

Thanks are also due to Egbert Bakker for an extremely helpful conversation and series of emails on ring-composition. Please credit them with anything you find convincing, and attribute all errors of fact and interpretation to me.