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Homeric Time Travel

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Homeric Time Travel

In a recent pair of articles I argued that the *Odyssey* presents itself as the heroic analogue to, or even substitute for, fertility myth.¹ The return of Odysseus thus heralds the return of prosperity to his kingdom in a manner functionally equivalent to the return of Persephone, and with her of life, to earth in springtime. The first paper focused on a detailed comparison of the plots of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Odyssey*;² and the second on the relationship between Persephone's withdrawal and return and the narrative device of ring-composition.³ In my analysis of ring-composition, I concluded that what began as a cognitive and functional pattern, organizing small-scale narrative structures, evolved into an aesthetic pattern, organizing large blocks of narrative, before finally becoming an ideological pattern, connecting the hero's return to the promise of renewal offered by fertility myth and cult. In the story of Persephone, the pattern of withdrawal, devastation, and return that brings renewal takes place within cyclical time. But, I also hinted that the same pattern can also be re-imagined in linear time as a return of the past, and specifically the heroic age.⁴ In what follows, I will argue that the *Odyssey* involves just such a return, of the heroic age in linear time, and in two, complementary ways. My central claim, then, is that epic performance is a kind of time travel that involves both the internal characters and the external audience. The idea of 'return' has thus exerted a centripetal force on the narrative so that return is a narrative ring-structure, representing a spatial journey-pattern by the protagonist(s), that has assimilated to itself complementary, cyclical and linear temporal processes. Abetting this assimilation is the underlying idea that return brings with it renewal for the community.

That both Homeric epics are structured by a withdrawal and return story-pattern with close affinity to the *Hymn to Demeter* is uncontroversial. In *The Singer of Tales*, for example, Albert Lord remarks that:

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.⁵

Seven years later, Mary Lord would go on to publish a detailed comparison of the plots of the *Hymn* with the Homeric epics, which she argues are based on a shared story pattern:

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.

These themes are listed as they occur in the *Homeric hymn to Demeter*.⁶

I agree with the Lords that the relationship of Homeric epic with fertility myth is genetic. Where we differ is that they deny any form of intertextual engagement, while I argue that the relationship between the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn* is so close as to require it. My explanatory model is that once the epics were drawn into the underlying pattern of fertility myth, the performance traditions of Homer and the *Hymn to Demeter* developed in tandem over the course of several centuries before being committed to writing in Athens under the tyrant Peisistratos.⁷

Element one in Mary Lord's schematization is important for my argument. Lord herself finds that the *Odyssey* depicts elements two through six in some detail, but that the first element is missing. It is, however, fully represented by the *Telemachy*, which includes the themes of a quarrel, with the suitors, a journey, in search of a missing loved one, and a prolonged absence, by the son, that clearly mirrors the absence of the returning father.⁸ The *Odyssey* is thus the story of a son's withdrawal and a father's return: put differently, Telemachus initiates a story-pattern which Odysseus completes, so that the *Telemachy* allows Odysseus' return to belong to the kind of story the situation calls for. What I mean by this can be elucidated with another feature of the pattern, one missing from Lord's analysis because she takes the *Hymn to Demeter* as her point of departure, and restricts her analysis of the epics to the overall plot. Every account of withdrawal and return in Homer includes the theme of *revenge*:

The 'Revenge Story Pattern' in Homer

1) The protagonist suffers outrage/disgrace,

- 2) threatens revenge,
- 3) withdraws,
- 4) returns secretly,
- 5) and exacts his revenge.

(Examples of the pattern include: the stories of Telemachus, Odysseus, Orestes, and Hephaestus in the *Odyssey*, and of Menelaus, Achilles, and Meleager in the *Iliad*.)⁹

That is to say, we are dealing with an epic, or perhaps more broadly a heroic, variant of the pattern, so that in taking his journey Telemachus ultimately enables his father to return as an avenger. In a reversal of the pattern of generational succession, in which the son replaces the father, the father displaces the son on whom he is also dependent: yet the point in either case is the equation and interchangeability of father and son in affirmation of patriarchal ideology. (This is a point to which I will return.)

Return with renewal in cyclical time can be achieved in two different but complementary ways: by assimilating the hero's withdrawal and return to the story-pattern of Persephone, as the Lords recognized; and equally by staging his return at New Year's, a period especially associated with social and political renewal.¹⁰ And in fact the *Odyssey* does both.¹¹ But for Greeks of the Archaic and Classical periods, renewal could also be accomplished with a return of past greatness; and they could conceptualize this in two ways as well. The first is via Hesiod's degeneration model of human history, epitomized by the myth of the Five Ages of Man.¹² A journey back in time is thus by definition the return of a better age and better men, both physically and morally. But it is also a historical fact, of which the Greeks at all periods were intensely aware, that their Bronze Age ancestors enjoyed unparalleled and indeed unimaginable wealth and military power. I mean unimaginable quite literally: when Homer tries to conceive of

the herds of a Bronze Age dynast, he comes up with 6,000 head of livestock; while it has been estimated that at Knossos the wool flocks alone numbered approximately 82,000 sheep, mainly the more laniferous wethers.¹³ Corresponding to this, Homer imagines fifty maidservants in Odysseus' palace (22.421; cf. 7.103), as opposed to approximately 1,500 women and children dependent on the Pylian palace, with 450 or so located at Pylus itself.¹⁴ Homer's contemporaries who had seen the Bronze Age fortification walls at, e.g., Mycene, Tiryns, and Athens might well have thought their ancestors were physically stronger, as well as technologically more sophisticated. The return of the Bronze Age would have had analogous results for them as the return of Persephone.

These two historical models are thus both degenerative, but sufficiently out of sync with each other that Hesiod was compelled to insert an age of heroes into his schema of four metals.¹⁵ They also produced a similar historical *Anschauung* fundamentally different than our own: whereas we sometimes share and certainly understand a historical model based on moral decline, we do not look at the remote past as a time of unrivaled wealth and power, to say nothing of technological sophistication. Homeric epic celebrates this heroic age for which it also displays a clear nostalgia. (Conversely, many of us today in western culture look to the future as Homeric Greeks looked to the past: as just like the present only infinitely better.) The *Iliad* expresses this nostalgia as a contrast between the poem's heroes and a much diminished present. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, internalizes this same contrast, so that Odysseus represents the heroic age, and the suitors the present. There are several ways that the poems develop these contrasts, and arguably even the contrast between these contrasts. I will mention two that I find especially compelling.

That a generational contrast between Odysseus and the suitors symbolizes one between human ages can be supported by observing the different ways the gods interact with men in the epics. It is a commonplace in cultural anthropology since the pioneering work of Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas that mythic time is the primordial time in which the gods still walked among humans. In fact, the sole formal criterion by which Boas was able to distinguish myth from other forms of traditional story was its temporal setting before the modern condition.¹⁶ Whereas Boas speaks of the separation of man from the other animals, the corresponding period for the ancient Greeks would have been before the differentiation of god, man, and animal into a cosmic hierarchy.

It is thus highly significant that Iliadic gods appear or make their presence known to humans far more often than in the *Odyssey* and to a far larger number of humans, some of whom are themselves demi-gods:¹⁷ in the *Iliad*, for example, I count over four dozen examples, or slightly more than two per book, while Odyssean examples number under two dozen or less than half as many, even though the *Odyssey* is a significantly shorter poem (12,110 versus 15,693 lines of verse). Still more striking, in the *Iliad*, human percipients include a wide cast of characters: Agamemnon, Odysseus, Diomedes, the Ajaxes, Patroclus, Paris, Helen Aeneas, Periphas, Helenus, Hector, Agenor, Priam, both armies, and above all Achilles, to whom six different gods appear directly, and at least four of whom he can recognize on sight. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, the overwhelming number of divine encounters involve Odysseus alone; and though each member of his family is allowed at least one such encounter, the suitors never once do (which is perhaps unsurprising since despite their constant feasting they nowhere perform animal sacrifice to the gods). The sole exception to this striking, blanket restriction of such encounters to Odysseus and his family comes in the climactic final scene of the poem, when

Athena reveals herself by aural epiphany to Odysseus, his men and the parents of the slain suitors, and Zeus hurls a thunderbolt at her feet to put an end to their fighting. A partial exception to the rule that Odyssean gods only appear in manifest form (ἐναργής) to Odysseus is instructive: after participating in a sacrifice at Pylus, Athena flies off as a sea-eagle (3.372: φήνη) and Nestor is able to identify her to Telemachus as a consequence. Even the indirect communication of the gods through omens and portents is less common in the *Odyssey* than it is in the *Iliad*.

A second, important distinction between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* involves their contrasting evocations of the Ages of Man. This contrast is explicit in an Iliadic formula comparing its heroes favorably to “men as they now are” (οἷοι νῦν βροτοί εισ’), that is, the members of Homer’s own audience.¹⁸ Including a pair of variants, the formula recurs six times in the poem. To begin with the variants, in Book 1 Nestor boasts that in his youth he fought among the Lapiths and Theseus against the Centaurs. Against those men, he assures Achilles, no one could contend, “of those who are now men upon the earth” (272: οἱ νῦν βροτοί εἰσιν ἐπιχθόνιοι). There is thus decline within the heroic age itself, from the generation of Theseus and Heracles to that of Achilles; and, conversely, Homeric characters themselves subscribe to the notion of generational decline. In Book 11.636-7, Homer says of Nestor’s cup that: “another man would have toiled to lift it from the table when full, but Nestor did so without toil.” Commentators have roundly criticized this remark in light of Nestor’s own repeated lament that he has been enfeebled by old age, but it makes complete sense if the “other man” referred to is ‘such as men now are.’¹⁹ even in old age, Nestor is more than a match for men of the present.

Turning to the direct comparisons, in Book 5, Homer says that Diomedes “grabbed a boulder in his hand, a great deed, which not even two men could carry, such as men now are, but he cast it easily, even alone” (301-4); and Aeneas is described with identical language in Book

20.285-7. In Book 12, Ajax kills Epicles with “a big rock. . .nor could a man, such as men now are, not even in his absolute prime, have held it with both hands, but he, of course, lifted and cast it from on high and smashed his four horned helmet” (380-4). And later in the same book, “Hector snatches and carries off a rock. . .which two men, the strongest in town, could not have easily pried from the ground and set on a wagon, such as men now are, but he cast it easily, even alone” (445-9). In each case, then, the comparison solely involves physical strength. Our general image is that men of the heroic age were over twice as strong as the strongest men of the present.

This formula is essentially absent from the *Odyssey*. The reason for this, I suggest, is because the poem internalizes the contrast between the heroic age and the contemporary world. An analogy can be drawn to the contrast between Nestor’s generation and that of the other Iliadic heroes, the difference being that a contrast between generations has become one between ages. This casts further light on why the return of Odysseus is accompanied by killing the suitors.²⁰ Revenge may be a fundamental element of the story pattern in epic, one rationalized by Homer as punishment for improper courtship, including plundering Odysseus’ herds and the attempted murder of his son, but the return of the heroic age by definition means the end and even erasure of the contemporary age. Thus, in the closing scene of the poem Zeus declares “let Odysseus rule *forever*, let us cause forgetfulness of the murder of their sons and brothers, let them love each other as before, and let there be abundant wealth and peace” (24.483-6). In the present context, forgetting their death must mean forgetting their very existence, which, I suggest, is no less emblematic of the return of the heroic age than the promise of peace and prosperity that immediately follows. And the return of the heroic age, like the combination of New Year with Persephone’s return, marks the return of both the social order and material prosperity to Ithaca.

Although the formula is not found in the *Odyssey*, there is a lone variant in Book 8 that can be compared to the one Nestor applies to himself in *Iliad* Book 1. After defeating the Phaeacean youths in the discus-toss, Odysseus boasts that he could defeat them in other contests as well, including boxing, wrestling and running. He then makes a more sweeping claim about his skill with a bow:

Philoctetes alone surpassed me in archery,
in the land of the Trojans, when we Achaeans shot bows,
but of all the rest I say that I am the best by far,
as many as *are now mortals* upon the earth (ὄσσοι νῦν βροτοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ χθονὶ) (219-22)²¹

He goes on to top even that, declaring:

and I can hurl a javelin as far as Nobody else can shoot an arrow (229)

Taken literally, Odysseus boasts that he is greatest archer on earth, with the sole exception of Philoctetes, assuming he is imagined as still living.²² But he declines at once to strive with men of former times, such as Heracles and Eurytus. Less obvious is that Heracles and Eurytus belong to the generation before the Trojan War, while Odysseus, a veteran of that war as he here lets slip, belongs to the generation before the Phaeacean youths with whom he is competing.

Laodamas does, however, call attention to the generational difference less than a hundred lines earlier when in challenging Odysseus to compete, he addresses him as ‘fatherly-guest’ (145: ξεῖνε πάτερ). What is important in the present context is that Odysseus’ remarks conform to the

degeneration model of human history: just as Odysseus acknowledges he is no match for the greatest archers of the previous generation, the archers of the next are no match for him, as the contest of the bow in *Odyssey* 21 will demonstrate, and which the present scene foreshadows.²³

I suggest, then, that the *Odyssey*'s historical model has important implications for a series of temporal contrasts involving Odysseus. These contrasts employ the same pronoun, οἷος, or 'such as,' found in the Iliadic 'degeneration formula,' often embedded in a formula of its own: 'such as Odysseus used to be' (οἷος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσκε). Note that in the *Odyssey* the direction of the comparison is reversed, so that the pronoun introduces a past tense verb while the main clause refers to the present; in the "such as men now are" formula, by contrast, the main clause refers to the heroes of the past, while the pronoun compares them with men of the present. In the *Odyssey*, the latter form of temporal comparison is echoed only in the passage from Book 8 just discussed. On the other hand, there are twenty-four cases of pronominal "such as" in the singular, or one per book. In thirteen, or slightly over half, of these cases, Odysseus is the antecedent. And of these, seven involve a temporal contrast between Odysseus in former times, and the present circumstances of the poem. In three cases, the contrast exclusively involves physical strength, in two cases ethics, and in two cases both, so that on five occasions the contrast involves strength and on four ethics.

To illustrate, I'll begin with the ethical contrast, which as we have seen is absent from the *Iliad*, but is central to the rhetoric of the Hesiodic Five Ages of Man. Our most straightforward example is in Book 4.687-95, where Penelope complains that the suitors do not know what sort of man Odysseus was; whereas he never did anything unjust, the suitors' unseemly deeds are visible to all. In Book 19.313-6 it is again Penelope who laments that the beggar will not receive

an escort elsewhere, since there are no masters of the house present, such as Odysseus once was, to provide it.

As for the contrast in strength, most direct is Antinous' premonition in Book 21.91-4 that the bow of Odysseus will not be easily strung, for no man among them is such as Odysseus was. In Book 4.333-50, it is another man, Menelaus, who declares that the suitors want to lie in the bed of a stout-hearted man, while they themselves are feeble. He then compares Odysseus to a lion, and the suitors to a doe who has foolishly left her fawns in his lair. The lion then returns and kills them all. He concludes with the wish that Odysseus himself be such as he once was when he beat Philomeleides in wrestling; in which case the suitors will be short-fated. Telemachus will go on to repeat Menelaus' words verbatim to his mother in Book 17.124-41.

Combining superior strength and ethics is the remark of Telemachus in Book 2.55-80 that there is no man present, such as Odysseus was, to ward off ruin from the house; to which he adds at once that he is not up to the task of doing so. In Book 17.530-40, Penelope repeats Telemachus' contrast between Odysseus and present circumstances in the house, but instead of continuing that Telemachus is not up to the task she adds that if Odysseus were to return he and his son would take revenge on the suitors' violence. (There are two further examples in which the reference is to Odysseus and a temporal contrast is drawn, but they involve his love for Penelope.) Conversely, in almost every case where the reference is not to Odysseus, a temporal contrast is lacking and once more the exceptions prove instructive: twice the reference is to his son, Telemachus, once to his father, Laertes, and once to his epic rival, Achilles.

These are all of the examples of the pronoun οἷος employed in temporal contrasts. They are both prominent and the thematic content of the contrast is plainly and consistently mapped out: a nobler past, embodied by Odysseus, is set in opposition to a greatly diminished present,

embodied by the suitors. And the terms of the opposition are both physical and ethical, as in Hesiod. These themes are united in the contest of the bow; for after demonstrating Odysseus' heroic strength the bow then becomes the instrument of the suitors' punishment. On this analysis, longing for the return of Odysseus is straightforwardly a longing for the return of a better past, in which Odysseus epitomizes the heroic age and the suitors the age of iron.

Attentive readers will have already thought of one or two related objections to the foregoing. First, and most obviously, if there is already generational decline within the heroic age itself, then why do we need to imagine the contrasting statures of Odysseus and the suitors of Penelope as one between ages instead of generations? Indeed, I have called attention to the ready analogy that can be drawn between the generational contrast that Nestor draws in *Iliad* Book 1, and the contrast that the *Odyssey* itself draws between Odysseus and the suitors. Second, and conversely, if the *Odyssey* is at pains to portray Telemachus as maturing into his father's *doppelgänger*, can this be squared with either model of decline?

The most important response to the first objection is subjective: the gap between Odysseus and the suitors is simply too extreme to represent mere generational decline: even if we are entitled to see Nestor as wholly objective when he says that the present generation is no match for the previous, the difference is not so great that Sthenelos cannot boast that he and Diomedes are *far greater* heroes than their fathers, themselves heroes of the Seven Against Thebes tradition (*Il.* 4.404-10: μέγ' ἀμείμονες).²⁴ Nothing remotely like this could be said of the contrast between Odysseus and the suitors.²⁵ And that contrast most emphatically does include moral decline, which as we have seen is a defining feature of the Hesiodic Age of Iron, as also of the Five Ages generally.

Undoubtedly, however, some will find divine involvement in the epics more diagnostic and convincing. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus can be fairly said to interact with the gods more freely than even the heroes of the *Iliad*, while the suitors do so only indirectly and less frequently, through omens and prophecies, which is to say in a manner precisely corresponding to that of Homer's Iron Age audience. Finally, it should be noted that the Greece of Homer was caught up in the throes of social upheavals that many lamented as a loss of the traditional social order and a period of lawlessness and license, as emblemized by the poetry of Alcaeus, Theognis and Solon. Such conditions would have given Ithaca a distinctly contemporary feel to Homer's audience.

But this still leaves the development of Telemachus into a hero able to string his father's bow and its plain violation of the theme of historical decline. I have already suggested a partial explanation in terms of patriarchal ideology, but I would like to suggest that ideology does not so much trump the notion of time travel as it ultimately leads to the erasure of time itself. In the course of the poem, we have seen Telemachus rapidly develop from the callow youth, who nevertheless graciously welcomes a disguised Athena in Book 1, to the one man on Ithaca who could also string his father's bow. But we have also witnessed the rejuvenation of Odysseus into the man in his prime who left for Troy, as also of his wife, Penelope, into the young bride he left behind. And in the poem's final scenes we even see the rejuvenation of Laertes into a man capable of killing with a hurled spear someone from his son's generation. Implicitly, then, all three generations of the Laertids are in the prime of life as the poem concludes: the three generations thus collapse into one.²⁶ Telemachus thus becomes an example of atavistic reversion that realizes the promise of patriarchal ideology: replacement of the father by the son without remainder. Put differently, the maturation of Telemachus into a hero can be understood as the

patriarchal analogue to the return of Odysseus to Ithaca. The maturation of the son is the return of the father *as* the father's replacement by the son. The promise of time travel and patriarchal ideology are in this respect identical.²⁷

Finally, I want to argue that the *Odyssey* promises not only a return of the heroic age to Ithaca, but also to Homer's own audience. At one level, which is valid as far as it goes, the poem can be seen as offering the means of achieving the return of prosperity to communities willing to submit to its ideology of 'good order' and strong rule. But from another perspective, the return can be seen as quite literal. Another commonplace among social anthropologists since Malinowski is that performing the old stories allows the community direct access to the primordial past. Epic performance is thus an epiphanic act, in which the gods and heroes of old are made vividly present to the poet and his audience. For Malinowski, then, "Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived."²⁸ And the reality lived is, of course, the one depicted in the story, while the ones who live it are the community of listeners. Implicitly, then, the community is 'living' in the primordial past. This becomes explicit in the following passage:

Studied alive, myth . . . is not symbolic [as the 'school of Nature-mythology' held], but a direct expression of its subject-matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a science interest [as Tylor, Frazer, and others, especially in England, held], but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements.²⁹

As the historian of myth theory, Andrew von Hendy, puts it, for Malinowski myth “is the medium through which the believing community conjures up and dwells again in the presence of the supernatural beings who founded it.”³⁰

This understanding of oral story is adopted by the religious phenomenologist, Mircea Eliade, who cites the above passage with approval at the close of the first chapter of *Myth and Reality*, with the preface that: “I cannot conclude this chapter better than by quoting the classic passages in which Bronislaw Malinowski undertook to show the nature and function of myth in primitive societies.”³¹ Eliade’s own formulation is that in myth and ritual we enter sacred time, the timelessness of the original event:³² in contrast to profane time, “*by its very nature sacred time is reversible* in the sense that, properly speaking, it is *a primordial mythical time made present*. . . . the participants in the festival meet in it *the first appearance of sacred time*, as it appeared *ab origine, in illo tempore*.”³³ This remains as true in the ancient world as it is in contemporary small-scale societies:

During [their] new year ceremonial . . . the Babylonians used to recite the creation poem, *Enuma Elish* [so that] by oral magic and the rites that went with it, they brought into the present the struggle between Marduk and the sea-monster Tiamat, a struggle which took place *in illo tempore*, and which, through the god’s final victory, put an end to the chaos. . . . The struggle, Marduk’s victory and the creation of the world thus became actually present.³⁴

On Malinowski and Eliade’s analysis, the *Odyssey* does not represent a return *to* the past but a return *of* the past.

Thus, even though Homer embeds contemporary reality in a poem of the past, since he is bringing his own poetic universe into the here and now, he is not projecting the present into the past but into an eternal present in which linear time has itself collapsed. It is in this light, I have argued, that we should understand the mimetic nature of Homeric performance, as a religious act of eternal return that makes the ancient heroes appear vividly before us.³⁵ So understood, the preponderance of character speech in the epics does not simply constitute a striving for vividness (*ἐνάργεια*), but this very striving belongs to the wider program of restoring the ancestors to life through epic performance: aesthetics and theology are one. Thus, over two-thirds of the *Odyssey* consists of character speeches, well over twice the amount in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius and the *Posthomeric* of Quintus. Other features of the narrative support this assertion. The Homerist Egbert Bakker, who cites Eliade with approval, has recently interpreted the use of the epic aorist as deictic, causing the events of the past to be re-experienced in the present, so that, in his words, the mountain comes to Mohammed.³⁶ We could extend his observation to include other forms of Homeric *deixis* such as demonstrative pronouns, or the use of apostrophe, in which the poet addresses one of his characters as physically present with him and his audience.³⁷ So too the highly idiosyncratic *nekuomanteion* of *Odyssey* Book 11, in which Odysseus conjures up the souls of the dead *en masse*.³⁸ This is not how ancient summoning rituals work, but it metapoetically reproduces the poem's own metaphysics of performance in that Odysseus here performs the function of a traditional poet.³⁹ Moreover, as a story of the hero's Withdrawal and Return that is simultaneously a return of the heroic age to Ithaca, the *Odyssey* reproduces its metaphysics in another way as well; as it also does by making the return of Odysseus a series of divine epiphanies: to the suitors, his servants, son, wife, and father.⁴⁰ In this way the eternal

return of Homer in the person of his ritual substitute, the Homeric rhapsode, performing the return of the hero, results in the return the heroic age to his audience.

¹ What follows is an expanded version of a plenary address at the annual meeting of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, held at the University of Dallas, Oct. 26-29, 2017. My sincere thanks to Richard Russell for inviting me, to Jeff Fish for moderating the session, and to Ernest Suarez for soliciting the paper on which the talk was based. A serious debt of thanks is also owed to Dimitri Nakassis, Corinne Pache, and Jonathan Ready who read and commented on the penultimate version of the manuscript.

² E. Cook. 2012. "Epiphany in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter and the Odyssey." *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 15: 53-111.

³ *id.* 2014. "Structure as Interpretation in the Homeric *Odyssey*." In *Defining Greek Narrative*. D. Cairns and R. Scodel eds. (*Edinburgh Leventis Studies* 7.) Edinburgh: 75-100.

⁴ For the return 'of' rather than 'to' the past, see the concluding section below.

⁵ A. Lord. 2000 [1960]. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge Mass: 186.

⁶ M. L. Lord. 1994 [1967]. "Withdrawal and Return." In H. Foley ed. 1994. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Princeton: 181-9, 181-2 (my formatting).

⁷ I here follow Nagy's evolutionary model, according to which the poems gradually 'crystallized' between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE before being finally written down. For recent summary with bibl. see G. Nagy. 2012. "Signs of Hero Cult in Homeric Poetry." In *Homeric Contexts: Neoanalysis and the Interpretation of Oral Poetry*. F. Montanari, et al. eds. (Trends in Classics Suppl. vol. 12.) Berlin: 27-71, 40-6. See also, *id.* 1996. *Homeric Questions*. Austin: 29-61, 109 n.167; *id.* 1996. *Poetry as Performance*. Cambridge: 107-11, 143-5.

⁸ In fairness, Lord notes the the *Telemachy* does represent the theme, but since she does not see it as an organic feature of the plot—she identifies it as “one of the intrusive patterns” in the poem, “an initiatory exploit for Telemachus” (185)—Lord excludes it from her analysis of the Withdrawal and Return pattern.

⁹ G. Rose. 1967. “The Quest of Telemachus.” *TAPA* 98: 391-8, abstracted from 395-7.

¹⁰ W. Burkert. 1983 [1972]. *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*. Trans. P. Bing. Berkeley.

¹¹ E. Cook. 1995. *The Odyssey in Athens: Myths of Cultural Origins*. Ithaca.

¹² Hesiod, *Works and Days* 109-201.

¹³ P. Halstead. 1998-9. “Texts, Bones and Herders: Approaches to Animal Husbandry in Late Bronze Age Greece.” *Minos* 33-4: 149-90, 154. Halstead also notes that the relatively small proportion of ewes in the palace records suggests that the wool flocks “were wholly or largely restocked from ‘private’ breeding flocks” (186), that as such were not inventoried. He estimates that 14-16,000 lambs would have been needed to replenish the palace-flocks, implying about as many productive ewes plus another 3-400 rams.

¹⁴ J. Chadwick. 1988. “The Women of Pylos.” In *Texts, Tables, Scribes: Studies in Mycenaean Epigraphy and Economy*. J. Olivier and T. Palaima eds. Salamanca: 43-96, 76-7 and 89.

¹⁵ For the myth of the five ages, see esp. B. Gatz. 1967. *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen*. (Spudasmata 16.) Hildesheim. Gatz demonstrates that the five ages represent the expansion of a binary model based on yellow and white metals in which a noble past stands opposed to a degenerate present.

¹⁶ E.g., F. Boas. 1916. "Tsimshian Mythology." In *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute*. Ed. F. Hodge. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office: 27–1037, 565; *id.*, 1982 [1940]. *Race, Language and Culture*. Chicago: 454–455; and *id.* 1914. "Mythology and Folk-Tales of the North American Indians." *The Journal of American Folklore* 27: 374-410, 378, where he remarks that the distinction between 'mythical' and 'historical' tales is "related, in a way, to the ancient concepts of the different ages as described by Hesiod." For incisive discussion of Boas' voluminous writings with further bibl., see A. von Hendy. 2001. *The Modern Construction of Myth*. Bloomington: 217-26.

¹⁷ The following exx. could be greatly expanded, but I have confined myself to instances where divine interference is presumably recognized as such by the internal characters: Athena reveals herself to Achilles (1.193-222, 22.214-24), Odysseus (2.167-82), and Diomedes (5.114-33, 793-861), appears as a meteorite to both armies (4.73-84), sends an omen that Odysseus and Diomedes recognize as from her (10.274-95), and she and Apollo allow Helenus to overhear them conversing (7.33-54); Zeus sends Dream to Agamemnon (2.5-36), thunders to frighten the Greeks, encourage the Trojans, or frighten both (7.478-81, 8.75-7, 170-1, 15.370-80, 17.593-6), and shoves Hector through the Greek wall (15.694); Thetis repeatedly appears to Achilles (1.357-428, 18.70-147, 19.3-39, 24.120-42); Iris appears to Hector (11.195-210), Achilles (18.166-202), and Priam (24.159-88); Aphrodite rescues Paris (3.380-2) and Aeneas (5.311-43), is recognized by Helen (3.383-420) and Diomedes (5.330-9); Apollo attacks the Greek army (1.43-56), rescues Aeneas (5.344-6, 432-48; 20.79-85) and rebukes him (17.333-41), rescues Agenor (21.596-601), is seen by Diomedes (5.432-4), reveals himself to Hector (15.236-62;

17.70-81), Patroclus (16.702-11), Achilles (22.5-17), and the Greek army (15.318-27); Ares kills Periphas (5.841-9), and is seen by Diomedes (5.596-606, 855-61); Poseidon is recognized as a god by the Ajaxes (13.59-84), shouts to encourage the Greeks (14.147-52), offers tactical advice and leads the army with a lightning sword (14.362-87), appears to Aeneas (20.325-40), and in company with Athena to Achilles (21.284-97); Scamander addresses and attacks Achilles (21.212-384); and Hermes appears to Priam (24.352-469, 679-94).

In the *Odyssey*, Athena reveals herself to Odysseus on a number of occasions (7.18-81 with 13.323, 13.220-438, 16.155-177, 454-9, 19.33-43, 20.30-55, 22.205-40, 24.502-4, 541-5); but only in disguise to his son (1.102-323, 2.267-3.272, 19.33-43); once to his father (24.516-9); and Penelope in disguise and in a dream (4.795-839); but to no one else on Ithaca except by anonymous aural epiphany (24.531-3). Hermes also appears to Odysseus (10.277-307); as does Ino-Leucothea (5.333-53); he cohabits with Circe (10.135-12.150), and Calypso (5.13-268); and is informed by goddesses that Zeus destroyed his ship (12.389-90), and that Poseidon is destroying his raft (5.339-40).

¹⁸ Gatz (see above, n. 15) 130.

¹⁹ See W. Leaf. 1902. *Homer: The Iliad. Vol. 2: Books 13—24: ad loc.* He there finds that: “This couplet comes in very strangely. So far from being represented as of unusual physical strength, Nestor is always lamenting his departed vigour. The lines might well be omitted; they look like a copy of 24.455-6.”

²⁰ Though admittedly its association with New Year could be used to explain the *mnesterophonia* as a kind of initiatory death.

²¹ The only other occasions on which νῦν contrasts the present with former times are at 7.68: ὄσσαι νῦν γε γυναῖκες ὑπ' ἀνδράσιν οἶκον ἔχουσιν; and 9.264: τοῦ (sc. Agamemnon) δὴ νῦν γε μέγιστον ὑπουράνιον κλέος ἐστί.

²² Cf. †Arist.† *de Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* 107.

²³ E. Cook (see above, n. 3) 90 with n. 55.

²⁴ The same generational theme involving the descendants of the Seven resurfaces in 5.800-34, where Sthenelus' boast in the present scene is replaced by Diomedes' actual heroic exploit of wounding an Olympian god.

²⁵ To be sure, there are moments in the *Odyssey* where the suitors are said to be fairly imposing. The most straightforward of these is in Book 16, when Telemachus describes them to his father as “numerous and strong” (244), the Doulichians as “distinguished” (248), and the Ithacans as “noblest” (251). One might discount the claim with his youthful inexperience, but Odysseus himself likewise says that he killed “by far the best of the Cephallanians” (24.429). I see this as product of a natural tension between portraying them as worthy suitors and opponents, but as still degenerate; and I find it telling that both claims about the suitors' stature are made in the context of Odysseus killing them. Homer faces an analogous tension in his depiction of Hector in the *Iliad*.

²⁶ S. Goldhill. 2010. “Idealism in the *Odyssey* and the Maning of *mounos* in *Odyssey* 16.” In *Allusion, Authority, and Truth: Critical Perspectives on Greek Poetic and Rhetorical Praxis*. PJ. Mitsis, and C. Tsagalis, eds. Berlin: 115-27, 125-7; E. Cook (see above, n. 3) 97-100.

²⁷ In that Orestes is held out as a model for Telemachus to emulate, implicitly this applies equally to him.

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- ²⁸ B. Malinowski. 1992 [1926]. “*Myth in Primitive Psychology*.” In *Malinowski and the Work of Myth*. I. Strenski ed. Princeton: 79–116, 81.
- ²⁹ *ibid.* 82, with supplements by A. von Hendy (above, n. 16) 207-8.
- ³⁰ *ibid.* 207-8.
- ³¹ M. Eliade. 1975 [1963]. *Myth and Reality*. New York: 19.
- ³² *id.* 1957. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. W. Trask. New York: esp. 392-7.
- ³³ *ibid.*: 68–70, his emphases.
- ³⁴ *id.* 1958. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Trans. R. Sheed. New York: 400.
- ³⁵ E. Cook (see above, n. 3) 90.
- ³⁶ E. Bakker. 2005. “Mohammed and the Mountain.” In *id.* 2005. *Pointing at the Past: From Formula to Performance in Homeric Poetics*. Washington, D.C.: 154-76.
- ³⁷ Bakker, *ibid.* 169, reaches the same conclusion through his analysis of verb tense.
- ³⁸ K. Reinhardt. 1996. “The Adventures in the *Odyssey*.” In *Reading the Odyssey: Selected Interpretive Essays*. S. Schein, ed. Princeton: 63-132, 120-1.
- ³⁹ J.-P. Vernant. 1996. “Death With Two Faces.” In Schein, ed. (see above, n. 37) 55-61, 60.
- ⁴⁰ E. Cook (see above, nn. 2 and 3).