A Note on Odyssey 3.216-38

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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

A NOTE ON ODYSSEY 3.216-38

Nestor to Telemachus (Od. 3.216-38):

"τίς δ' οἶδ', εἰ κέ ποτε σφι βιας ἀποτύσεται ἐλθὼν,
η δ' γε μισοῦσι έδων, ἦ καὶ σύμπαντες Άχαιοι;
εἰ γὰρ σ' ὡς ἐθέλοι φιλέειν γλαυκώπης Άθήνη
ὡς τότ' 'Οδυσσῆς περικήδετο κυδαλίμου
δήμῳ ἐνι Τρώων, δόθ' πάσχομεν ἄλγε' Ἀχαιοί— 220
οὐ γὰρ πα ἰδον ὅδε θεοὺς ἀναφανδά φιλεῦτας
ὡς κείνῳ ἀναφανδά παρίστατο Παλλᾶς Άθήνη—
εἰ σ' οὕτως ἐθέλοι φιλέειν κῆδοίτο τε θυμίφ,
tὸ κὲν τις κείνων γε καὶ ἐκλελάθοιτο γάμοιον."

Τὸν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἔδα—
"ὦ γέρον, οὐ πο τοῦτο ἔπος τελέσθαι δίω—
λὴν γὰρ μέγα ἐπές— ἂγη μ' ἔχει. οὐκ ἄν ἔμιο γε
ἔλπιμένῳ τὰ γένοιτ', οὐδ' εἰ θεοὶ ὡς ἐθέλοιεν."

Τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε θεά γλαυκώπης Άθήνη:
"Τηλέμαχε, ποιον σε ἔπος φύγεν ἔρκος ὄδυντον;
βέτα θεός γ' ἐθέλων καὶ τηλόθεν ἄνδρα σαῦσαι.
βουλομένη δ' ἂν ἔγω γε καὶ ἄλγεα πολλὰ μογήσας
σκαδέ τ' ἐλθέμεναι καὶ νόστιμον ἦμαρ ἰδέσθαι,
ἢ ἐλθὼν ἀπολέσθαι ἐρέστος, ὡς Ἀχαίειμων
ἀλεθ' ὑπ' Ἀλγίσθοιο δόλῳ καὶ ἦς ἄλχοιο.

ἀλλ' ἦ τις πάνατον μὲν ὄμοιον οὐδ' θεόν περ
καὶ φίλον ἄνδρι δύναναι ἀλλακέμεν, ὅποτε κεν δὴ
μοιρ' ὀλοθ' καθέλῃ κατηγέρος πανάτοιο." 230 235

The above passage continues to exercise the commentators; the problem turns on
whether καὶ τηλόθεν at verse 231 is to be construed with θεος, with ἄνδρα, or with
σαῦσαι, and whether σαῦσαι means "save" or "bring to safety." Meter is of no use
to us here, since in early Ionic hexameter poetry sense pauses occur roughly twelve
percent of the time after the strong caesura, nine percent after the weak, and eleven
percent after the bucolic diaeresis.1 In 3.231 adverbial καὶ follows the strong cae­
sura and ἄνδρα σαῦσαι the diaeresis, so that on purely metrical grounds a sense
pause is possible at either juncture.

Linguistic parallels from Homer are also inconclusive.2 The adverb τηλόθεν
properly means "from afar" and since Greek adverbs only distinguish between

C. Higbie, Measure and Music (Oxford, 1990), chap. 4 and tables.
2. For the language of the verse, cp. Semonides frag. 42 (West); Ῥβετα θεοὶ κλέπτουσιν ἄνθρωπον νόον,
and for West's proposed emendations of the fragment in his apparatus criticus cf. R. Renehan, "The Early

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"near" and "far" also implies a path linking these two points. There are sixteen instances of τηλόθεν in Homeric epic. It occurs eight times with verbs of motion, ἐρχόμαι (II. 1.270, 5.651, Od. 9.273, 13.237, 19.28), ἔκβα (II. 5.478), ἴκνο (Od. 7.25), and ικνεάμαι (II. 18.208). On three occasions from the Iliadic catalogue of ships a verb of motion is implied (II. 2.849, 857, 877). Τηλόθεν is twice used as a predicate adverb, at Odyssey 6.312 ἵνα νόστιμον ἴμαρ ἱδει / ... εὶ καὶ μάλα τηλόθεν ἐσσί and at 7.194 ἣν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἰκηται / ... εἰ καὶ μάλα τηλόθεν ἐστί. These last two examples can be used to support the construction ὄτες + τηλόθεν or ἄνδρα + τηλόθεν. However, Odyssey 3.231 would then refer to a god or man who is "from far away," and it is difficult to see the point of claiming that even a foreign god can save a man, or that a god can even save a foreigner. The predicate construction is only plausible if we equate τηλόθεν with τηλόθη as the lexicographers have done at Iliad 23.359.\(^3\) As we shall presently see, however, there is no compelling reason to interpret the Iliadic verse in this manner, so that its value as a comparandum is questionable.

In each of the above passages, "far" is the subject's homeland, "near" is his current location, and the subject himself traverses the path.\(^4\) Somewhat different is the use of τηλόθεν with a transitive verb (II. 23.359, Od. 3.321, 5.283). The clearest example is provided by Odyssey 5.283, where Poseidon catches sight of Odysseus on his raft: τὸν ... / τηλόθεν ἐκ Σολύμων ὑδάτων ἱδε. In this case "far" designates the location of the subject, "near" that of the object, and it is the subject's vision rather than the subject himself that traverses the path. Iliad 23.359 can be similarly understood: στήμην δὲ τέρματα Ἀχιλλείως / τηλόθεν ἐν λείῳ πεδίῳ, παρὰ δὲ σκοπόν ἔσεν / ἀντίθεου Φοίνικα. Achilles and the other Greeks thus gaze from the starting block to the turning-post in the direction indicated by his gesture. The adverb τηλόθεν reanchors the perspective at the turning-post, which is the location of the next event. On the strength of the two Homeric parallels involving τηλόθεν with transitive verbs, Odyssey 3.231 could be understood to mean that the gods can extend their influence over a great distance so as to save a man.

A peculiarity of σαῶω makes another interpretation possible. The verb often implies motion to a place of safety along a path designated by an adverb or prepositional phrase.\(^5\) In Homer this is true of twenty percent of the passages in which the verb occurs (11/55). There are five cases in which such adverbial expressions specify the place of safety to which the object is brought (II. 5.224, 17.453, 17.692, 19.402, Od. 5.453). On seven other occasions they specify the source of danger from which the object is rescued (II. 5.469, 11.752, 17.452, 21.274, 22.175, Od. 4.753).

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Greek Poets: Some Interpretations." HSCP 87 (1983): 8–9. I wish to thank the anonymous reader for alerting me to this parallel.


4. At II. 18.208, ὡς δ' δέ κακός λαόν ἐκ διατος αἰθήρ' ἱκνατι / τηλόθεν ἐκ νήσου, the subject is inanimate but the principle remains the same.

5. Σαῶω is coordinated with a verb of motion at II. 11.828 ἵπτε ... σάωσον ἐγὼν ἐπὶ νῆα, 12.123 ἐκ πολέμου φεύγοντα σαῶονες μετὰ νῆας, Od. 9.430 τὸ δ' ἐκέρτω ἐκατέρθηκεν Ἰηνα σώονες ηταρρος, and 10.473 σαιβήναι καὶ ἰκεῖθαι ἐκ δορνικον ἐς ὑψόροφον.
If we interpret *Odyssey* 3.231 along these lines, then the motion designated by τηλόθεν constitutes the action of the main verb, so that it is not the god's influence that traverses the path but the ἄνφηρ, who is brought to safety from a foreign land identified as a source of danger.

The grammar of *Odyssey* 3.231 can only be explained in terms of its narrative context. Unfortunately, the passage in which the verse occurs is no less ambiguous than the verse itself. In 232–38 Athena clearly alludes to Odysseus, to whom the ἄνφηρ of 231 should then also refer. However, if we interpret the verse to mean that a god who is willing could bring Odysseus home, then it would seem to be “quite irrelevant to what Telemachus has just said.”

Thus, Aristarchus apparently held that ἄνφηρ refers to Telemachus. As a consequence, he athetized 232–35 as lacking a logical connection to the preceding narrative and 236–38 as contradicting 231. Predictably Aristarchus has been followed by modern Analysts such as Bethe, who pronounced 3.195–248 “eines der kümmerlichsten Stücke unserer Odyssee.”

Unitarian scholars generally connect τηλόθεν with ἄνφηρ or σαῶσαι and identify the ἄνφηρ as Odysseus. Merry-Riddell, for example, argue that “τηλόθεν cannot be referred to θεός,” and conclude from the linguistic evidence that constructions with ἄνφηρ or σαῶσαι are equally defensible. The argument against θεός rests on two points: first that it is not “the manner of the Homeric gods to help without being present,” and second that “whereas Telemachus’ difficulty was to conceive that the gods would or could bring his father home after so long an absence, and from some unknown place, it would be no answer to him to say that a god can help without personal presence.”

By the logic of this second objection 226–28 either refer to the prospect of Odysseus’ return or Athena ignores Telemachus altogether. On the other hand, if 226–28 refer to Odysseus, then Telemachus either ignores 218–24 or they refer to Odysseus’ return as well.

Similar arguments are to be found in Ameis-Hentze, who construe τηλόθεν with σαῶσαι and interpret 218–24 as alluding to Odysseus so as to connect them with 231: “εἰ σ’ οὔτως ἔδοξε φιλέειν ἰδεὶ σιν τοὺς ὄδυσσες ἀνακεκχειρεῖ (216). Eben hierauf bezieht sich gleich nachher Telemachs Zweifel und dessen Zurückweisung durch Athene (231).”

Hartmut Erbse likewise assumes that 218–24 are spoken in reference to Odysseus, but translates τηλόθεν with ἄνφηρ: “Ein Gott kann, wenn er nur will, auch einen in weite Fernen Verschlagenen erretten.”

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7. Cf. West, *Commentary*, ad 3.231, whose interpretation of Aristarchus’ atheteses is surely correct.


Stanford, who translates 231 without mentioning the difficulties involved, reproduces some of its ambiguity: "σαώσαι: potential optative 1 aor. σαώσας. ‘Easily could a god, if willing, save a man even from far way’, cp. 6, 312; 7, 194.” The passages that he cites, however, are those used by Merry-Riddell to support taking τηλόθεν as a predicate adverb. Stephanie West notes that 231 has a proverbial ring and distinguishes between two interpretations: “(1) a god, if he will, can easily bring a man home even from a distant land; (2) a god, if he will, can even at a distance save a man.” West concludes that “it may be wrong to ask which the poet really meant.” On the other hand, West interprets 218–24 to mean that with Athena’s support Telemachus could punish the suitors, and argues that Telemachus simply ignores these verses in 226–28: “Telemachus’ reply picks up Nestor’s reference to the possibility of Odysseus’ return (not his concluding words).”

West’s interpretation of 226–28, like that of 218–24 by Merry-Riddell, Ameis-Hentze, and Erbse, and Aristarchus’ athetesis of 232–38, are different solutions to a problem of logical continuity. If the αὔρα of 231 refers to Telemachus, then as Aristarchus saw the verse follows naturally on 227–28, but 232–38 either lack a logical connection or are factually inconsistent with it. If, on the other hand, Odysseus is meant, then 232–38 follow naturally on 231, but it requires some ingenuity to find a connection between 231 and the preceding verses. Thus, Merry-Riddell, Ameis-Hentze, and Erbse treat Nestor’s entire speech as a meditation on the prospect of Odysseus’ return, while West argues that in 226–28 Telemachus responds to the explicit mention of his return in 216–17.

The solutions thus far proposed are unsatisfactory, although each is in some measure correct. In what follows I hope to show 1) that 218–24 are spoken in reference to Telemachus; 2) that Telemachus rejects not only the import of 218–24 but the premise of Nestor’s entire speech; 3) that σαώσαι implies motion along a path specified by τηλόθεν; 4) that αὔρα refers to Odysseus; and 5) that 232–38 develop a line of thought introduced in 231. To this end it will be necessary to expand the contextual analysis to include a remark by Nestor that precipitates the entire discussion.

In the preceding verses Nestor mentions that Agamemnon was killed by Aegisthus on his return from Troy, but that he was avenged by his son (3.193–98). He concludes his speech by encouraging Telemachus to emulate Orestes (3.199–200):

καὶ σὺ, φίλος, μάλα γὰρ σ’ ὁρῶ καλὸν τε μέγαν τε,

καὶ ὁλίγος ἐστιν ὁ τάγμαν ἔτοιμος.

Telemachus heard this story only two days before from Athena-Mentes, who concludes with these same lines of encouragement (1.301–2). There the point of the statement is clearly that Telemachus should prepare himself to adopt the role of avenger if his father proves to be dead. West, who represents a long tradition of


14. West, Commentary, ad 3.231.

15. Ibid. Although I disagree with her ultimate conclusions, I believe that West rightly disregards the objections of Nitzsch and Merry-Riddell against τηλόθεν + ἔναρξ. In the context of a cosmology that typically associates divine influence with physical proximity, Od. 3.231 can be seen as a kind of boast: “the gods,” says Athena, “are so powerful that they can protect their favorites even from a great distance.”

Analytic scholarship on the passage in Book 3, finds that "the compliment of 199 is clumsy in this context, and it is hard to avoid seeing in Nestor’s advice a reference to the suitors, and thus an inept anticipation of 211 ff. . . . If 199–200 are removed, there seems to me nothing wrong with the end of this speech . . . ." Erbse denies that the suitors are meant on the grounds that Telemachus has yet to mention them and argues instead that Nestor merely offers Orestes as a role model.17 Yet in 211 Nestor indicates that he has already heard about the suitors (3.211–13):

\[ \text{ὁ φίλ', ἔπει δὴ ταῦτα μ' ἀνέμνησας καὶ ἔειπες}, \]
\[ \text{φασί μνηστήρας σής μητέρος εἶνεκα πολλοὺς} \]
\[ \text{ἐν μεγάροις ἀέκητι σέθεν κακὰ μηχανάσθαι}. \]

Verses 199–200 can thus be seen as an attempt to draw Telemachus out on a matter that Nestor suspects is the cause of his journey, but that he has thus far neglected to mention.

Be that as it may, Telemachus indicates to Nestor that he knows the story and understands its relevance (Od. 3.205–9):

\[ \text{αἳ γὰρ ἔμοι τοσσηνδὲ θεοὶ δύναμιν περιθέτον,} \]
\[ \text{τίσσοθαί μνηστήρας ὑπερβασίης ἀλεγεινής,} \]
\[ \text{οἰ τὲ μοι ὄβριζοντες ατάσθαλα μηχανόωνται.} \]
\[ \text{ἄλλ' οἴ μοι τοιοῦτον ἐπέκλωσαν θεοὶ δόλον,} \]
\[ \text{πατρὶ τ' ἐμῷ καὶ ἔμοι· νῦν δὲ χρῆ τετλάμεν ἤμης}. \]

Telemachus expresses the wish that the gods give him the strength to punish the suitors of Penelope just as Orestes had punished Clytemnestra’s suitor Aegisthus. He concludes with the dispirited remark that the gods have not fated such happiness either for himself or for his father; he will not repay the suitors because the gods have denied him the strength, Odysseus will not because they have denied his return. To this Nestor responds with 210–24. Verse 216, τίς δ’ ὅδ’, εἰ κέ ποτε σφι βίας ἀποσίεται ἐλθὼν, is directed at the implicit claim of 208–9 that Odysseus will not return to punish the suitors. In 219–22 Nestor offers the reassurance that whatever may have happened in the meantime Odysseus was the favorite of Athena at Troy. His words show that it is still reasonable to hope for Odysseus’ return, but they also bear directly on the question whether Athena, whose favoritism is regularly passed down from father to son, might be expected to support Telemachus as well.18

Ameis-Hentze interpret the wish contained in 218–24 to mean: if only Athena loved you as she loved your father at Troy, then she would bring Odysseus home to punish the suitors. Yet Athena showed her love for Odysseus by standing by him in a time of war. Surely the logic of the analogy implies that if Athena loved Telemachus as she had his father—that is openly with the goddess at his side—then Telemachus could rival his father’s exploits at Troy by defeating the suitors himself. Thus, in verses 218–24 Nestor repeats his earlier encouragement at 199–200, and he does so by echoing Telemachus’ own wish that the gods enable him to punish the suitors. Ameis-Hentze’s tortured reading of these verses is based solely on an attempt to reconcile them with 231 and makes the bulk of Nestor’s speech a

17. Erbse, Beiträge, p. 135.
reply to a one-word reference to Odysseus at 209. Instead, by our interpretation
Nestor responds in chiastic order to each of the issues raised by Telemachus: his
desire to oppose the suitors, his characterization of the gods as indifferent or ma-
levolent, and his conviction that Odysseus is dead.

Nestor’s response comprises two alternative scenarios: 216 leaves open the pos-
sibility that Odysseus is alive and will return to punish the suitors, while 218–24
are based on the assumption that he is dead.19 Thus, in 223–24 εἰ σ’ οὖν τως ἔθελοι
φιλέειν κηδεῖτό τε θυμῷ / τῷ κέν τις κείνων γε καὶ ἐκκελάθοιτο γάμιοι, Nestor en-
visions Athena offering Telemachus her support as he takes on the role of avenger
himself. Whereupon Telemachus exclaims (3.226–28):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ὁ γέρον, οὐ μω τοῦτο ἔπος τελέσσοι δῶν-} \\
\text{λίνη γὰρ μέγα ἐπες· ἄγη μ’ ἔχει· οὐδ’ ἄν ἔμοι γε-} \\
\text{ἔλπομένῳ τά γένοις’, οὐδ’ εἶ θεοί ὡς ἔθελοιεν.}
\end{align*}
\]

West solves the problem of continuity by making these verses apply to 216–17
rather than 218–24. This is more elegant than the solution proposed by Ameis-
Hentze, yet several factors weigh against it. First is the absence of any kind of
marker to indicate that Telemachus aims his reply at a specific pair of verses in the
middle of Nestor’s speech. West’s explanation is, moreover, designed to resolve a
problem that is not yet apparent, so that it is based on interpretative strategies more
natural to a reading as opposed to a listening public.20 Nestor’s “concluding
words,” as West puts it, also comprise fully half of his speech and require Telema-
chus to consider opposing the suitors himself. Are we to imagine that Telemachus
simply ignores an issue that has been urged on him repeatedly and touches him so
closely? Finally, the language of λίνη γὰρ μέγα ἐπες· ἄγη μ’ ἔχει more easily re-
fers to Telemachus’ incredulity at the prospect of killing over a hundred men in
their prime rather than the prospect of Odysseus’ return under wholly uncertain cir-
cumstances.21 As it happens, the phrase occurs only twice in Homer and this is
clearly its meaning in the second passage. When Odysseus suggests that he and
Telemachus might be able to punish the suitors alone, Telemachus replies once
more with:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ὁ πάτερ, ἦ τοι σεῖο μέγα κλέος αῖεν ἄκουν-} \\
\text{άλλα λίνη μέγα ἐπες· ἄγη μ’ ἔχει· οὐδὲ κεν εἶ-} \\
\text{ἄνδρε δῶν πολλοίτει καὶ ἱσθίοισι μάγεοθαι.}
\end{align*}
\]


19. Nestor’s silence on this issue can be seen as an indication of his tact.
20. I choose my words carefully here. Although the debate on the orality of Homer continues unabated
there can be no question that the Homeric epics were composed for a listening public. I say this notwithstanding
the recent arguments of R. Bellamy, “Bellerophon’s Tablet,” CJ 84 (1989): 290–307, on which
the responses by G. Goebel, D. Miller, and R. Bellamy, CJ 85 (1990): 170–83. This is not to deny the
genuine obscurity of the passage before us; a listening public could hardly have sorted out except in the
most general way the sequence of thought. Note, however, that by my interpretation Telemachus’ response
to Nestor also operates on a “general” level (see below).
21. This objection also applies to the interpretation of Ameis-Hentze and Erbse.
22. These are the only two occurrences of λίνη μέγα ἐπες in Homer. The word ἄγη occurs three times
in Homer, always in the phrase ἄγη μ’ ἔχει and occupies the same metrical slot. In its third occurrence, ll. 21.221, Scamander uses the phrase to express his awe at the number of men killed by Achilles in his
revenge on Hector.
It is here that the problem of logical continuity becomes acute, for what is the sense of Athena’s reply: ἰη τοῖς γ’ ἔθελων καὶ τηλόθεν ἄνδρα σαῶσαι? A solution to this difficulty can be based on the fact that Nestor’s speech has a single overriding message: there are still grounds for hope that Telemachus may yet be rid of the suitors. Telemachus thus responds to and rejects the import of the entire speech with the collective expression: οὐχ ἂν τοῦτο ἔπος τελέσαθαι ὅω (226). The phrase λίην γὰρ μέγα εἰπες· ἀγη μ’ ἔχει (227) likewise applies to the notion that anyone could rid the house of the suitors, be it Telemachus or even Odysseus himself. Our interpretation is further encouraged by the construction of 227–28, in which the demonstrative plural τά can refer to both of the scenarios offered by Nestor:

λίην γὰρ μέγα εἰπες· ἀγη μ’ ἔχει, οὐκ ἂν ἔμοι γε ἐλπομένῳ τά γένοιτ’, οὐδ’ εἰ θεοὶ ὃς ἔθελουν.

Telemachus declares: “these things won’t happen, not if I should wish it, nor even if the gods should wish it; Odysseus will not return to kill the suitors and I could not possibly kill them myself.”

By denying that his father could return to kill the suitors “even if the gods should wish it” (228), Telemachus echoes his earlier claim that Odysseus is dead (209). Athena’s reprimand at 231, ἰη τοῖς γ’ ἔθελων καὶ τηλόθεν ἄνδρα σαῶσαι, echoes the language of 228, οὐδ’ εἰ θεοὶ ὃς ἔθελουν, in order to refute Telemachus’ denial with a manifesto on the scope of divine power. In so doing Athena selects the first of the scenarios offered by Nestor for ridding the house of the suitors, namely the return of Odysseus, although like Telemachus’ denial her refutation applies to both: Odysseus will return, and yes she does love Telemachus as she loved his father at Troy. In fact, she is even now standing at his side! On the other hand, if ἄνδρα alludes to Odysseus, then σαῶσαι implies motion along the path specified by τηλόθεν, since at this moment Odysseus needs to be brought safely home rather than saved from present danger in a far-off land.

Once 231 is seen as referring to the first of Nestor’s scenarios, then 232–33 follow naturally upon it. In 216–17 Nestor imagines Odysseus as returning home to punish the suitors. In 231 Athena affirms that it is in the power of the gods to guarantee Odysseus’ return. She then favorably compares the fate of a man who returns safely after suffering hardships to that of Agamemnon. Verses 232–33 repeat the return-scenario contained in 231 to provide a composite description of Odysseus, who will reach home in safety (231 and 232), by the will of the gods (231), after suffering hardships (232). For the comparison to work we must also assume that the character who returns after suffering manages to avoid the fate of Agamemnon. This is of course what happens to Odysseus and precisely because Athena κεῖνον ἀναφανδὰ παριστήσει as she had at Troy (222). The fate of Agamemnon in 234–35 thus continues the description of Odysseus by way of contrast: Odysseus will return and avenge himself on the suitors of his wife, σφι βίας ἀποστίσει ἐλθόν (216), unlike Agamemnon who returned and was killed by his wife and her suitor, ἐλθόν ἀπολέσθαι ἐφέστιος (234). The strength of the analogy may explain the

23. For a semantics of ἔπος in Homer, cf. R. Martin, The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad (Ithaca, 1989), esp. pp. 12–14. His definition of ἔπος as “an utterance . . . focusing on message, as perceived by the addressee” (p. 12), is of some relevance in this connection.
somewhat inappropriate use of ἔφεστιος in 234, since as West remarks Agamemnon was killed in the home of Aegisthus.24

Of course Telemachus cannot know that Odysseus will return, and as we have seen he implies that his father is dead with οὐκ ἄν ἔνοι γε / ἐλποιμένῳ τὰ γένοιτ’, οὔδ’ εἰ θεοί δός ἔθλοιν (227–28). Athena thus admits for the sake of argument that Telemachus would be right if the fates have ordained his father's death, for θάνατον... οὐδὲ θεοί περὶ / καὶ φίλῳ ἀνδρὶ δύνανται ἄλλακέμεν (236–37). Telemachus demonstrates his awareness that Odysseus is meant: κείνῳ δ’ οὐκέτ’ νόστος ἔτήσωμοι, ἄλλα οἱ ἡδὴ / φράσσαντ’ θάνατοι θάνατον (241–42). Athena’s departure from Pylus in the manner of a bird provides graphic confirmation of Nestor’s wish that the goddess love Telemachus as she had his father at Troy and adds the assurance that she will stand by him ἄναρπανά (371–72). Her very confirmation moreover serves as a kind of imperative, since the conditions have been met under which Telemachus might himself expect to oppose the suitors. A reflective Telemachus could also find in Athena’s reprimand at 231–35 the further assurance that his long-suffering father will return from a distant land, after suffering many hardships, but will avoid the fate of Agamemnon.25

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24. West, Commentary, ad 3.234.
25. I wish to thank M. Edwards and A. Riggsby for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

ODYSSEY 19.535–50: ON THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS AND SIGNS IN HOMER

In the nineteenth book of the Odyssey, Penelope speaks of her troubling dilemma to the disguised Odysseus: should she continue to wait for her husband or should she marry one of the suitors? Telemachus' coming of age is making it increasingly difficult for her to postpone a second marriage, and yet she feels shame before the bed of her husband and the talk of the people. After dwelling on her dilemma in some detail, Penelope shifts direction, asking the beggar to listen to a dream and to interpret it (Od. 19.535–50):

ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τὸν δνειρον ύπόκριναι και ἄκουσον.
χηνεός μοι κατὰ οἶκον ἐκίκοι πυρῶν ἐδοσων
ἐξ ἡδατος, καὶ τε σφιν λαίνομε εἰσορόωσα·
ἐλθὼν δ’ ἐξ ὀρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἄγκυλοχειῆς

My interest in the question raised in this article was stimulated by a conversation between Helene Foley and my colleague, Christine Perkell. I am grateful to them both for their thoughts and owe particular thanks to Christine for her comments on the paper. I thank also C. Bannon, P. Bing, J. Pettit, and the anonymous CP referees for their helpful suggestions. I delivered an earlier version of the paper at the annual meeting of CAMWS, Iowa City, IA., 1993.
Odysseus responds unhesitatingly. He states that it is impossible to interpret the dream by bending (it) aside in some other direction (Διάκαίνοντε). Odysseus himself has told her how it will be and the suitors will all be destroyed. The dream offers the key to its own interpretation, an interpretation that subsequent events reveal to be the correct one. Indeed, given how explicitly the dream enunciates its own message, Penelope's request that the beggar interpret it seems overly cautious.

Despite Odysseus' confident words, there is one element of the dream that has seemed to scholars to require explanation: Penelope's extravagant response to the slaughter of her geese in the dream at lines 541-43. She weeps (κλαίων) and wails (οἰκτρών ὅλοφρομένην); the sympathetic action of the Achaian women in gathering around her likewise calls attention to her grief. What is the significance of this element of the dream? Why does the poet include it?

Attempts to put a Freudian interpretation on the dream whereby Penelope's tears signal a repressed regard for the suitors have rightly been criticized by scholars working on dreams in antiquity. Several scholars have pointed out that the modern notion of dreams as a repository of unconscious desires that are encoded symbolically might be taken intransitively "bending aside (oneself)," i.e., "avoiding, dodging," (A. H. M. Kessels, Studies on the Dream in Greek Literature [Utrecht, 1978], p. 122, n. 44), or transitively with the dream as the understood object, i.e., "twisting or distorting the meaning of the dream" (R. B. Rutherford, ed., Homer: Odyssey, Books XIX and XX [Cambridge and New York, 1992], pp. 195-96). In any case, the phrase must indicate some kind of evasion or distortion of meaning.

1. Διάκαίνοντε might be taken intransitively "bending aside (oneself)," i.e., "avoiding, dodging," (A. H. M. Kessels, Studies on the Dream in Greek Literature [Utrecht, 1978], p. 122, n. 44), or transitively with the dream as the understood object, i.e., "twisting or distorting the meaning of the dream" (R. B. Rutherford, ed., Homer: Odyssey, Books XIX and XX [Cambridge and New York, 1992], pp. 195-96). In any case, the phrase must indicate some kind of evasion or distortion of meaning.

2. M. A. Katz, Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey (Princeton, 1991), p. 146, offers a helpful summary of different positions held by scholars on the dream and related bibliography. For discussion of Penelope's tears specifically, see also E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), p. 123, n. 21; Rutherford, Odyssey XIX and XX, pp. 194-95. Other recent interpreters (e.g., N. Felson-Rubin, "Penelope's Perspective: Character From Plot," in Homer: Beyond Oral Poetry. Recent Trends in Homeric Interpretation, ed. J. M. Bremer, I. J. F. de Jong, and J. Kalff [Amsterdam, 1987], pp. 72-74, and Katz, Penelope's Renown, pp. 146-47) read Penelope's sorrow as affection for the suitors without invoking the notion of repression. But this line of interpretation implicitly depends on Freudian assumptions, for Penelope never acknowledges affection for the suitors and openly wishes for their death (Od. 17.545-47). And the obvious surface meaning of the text is that she mourns for her geese.