

Odysseus and Melanthius

Rick M. Newton

IN A BRIEF NOTE in his *The Theme of Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, Charles Segal classifies the mutilation of Melanthius (*Od.* 22.474–77) as a “significant exception” to Homeric practice.¹ In the *Iliad*, Segal observes, threats of abuse of a corpse occur “in contexts where there is a marked awareness of cruelty and violence.” One thinks readily of the many heated scenes in that poem in which a warrior, caught up in the carnage of battle, vows to leave the body of his opponent as carrion for birds and dogs. Likewise in the *Odyssey*, the suitors’ threat to toss Eumaeus’ body to dogs and vultures (21.363f) and their plans to send the hulking Irus to be mutilated by Echetus the ogre (18.84–87, 115f) occur in scenes that emphasize the lawless violence of these intruders into Odysseus’ house. But the context of *Od.* 22 provides no such violent setting that would prepare the reader or listener for the sudden lopping of Melanthius’ nose, ears, hands, and feet and the tossing of his severed genitals “to the dogs to eat raw.” On the contrary, only 60 lines earlier Odysseus had restrained a jubilant Eurycleia from exulting over the sight of the slain suitors. “Rejoice in silence,” he bids her, “for it is sacrilege to exult over the slain. It was the fate of the gods and their own wretched actions that brought these men to ruin” (22.413, τούσδε δὲ μοῖρ’ ἐδάμασσε θεῶν καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα). Following on the heels of this reprimand, the viciousness shown towards Melanthius is indeed puzzling. It would seem to negate W. B. Stanford’s eloquent defense of this hero as “a man well integrated both in his own temperament and with his environment ... [who is] essentially self-possessed, fully able to control conflicting passions and motives.”²

¹ *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 17 (Leiden 1971: hereafter ‘Segal’) 14 n.2.

² W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*² (Oxford 1962) 77. On the same page Stanford defends Homer’s Odysseus against the charge that this untypical hero is “a man distracted by psychological conflicts and distressed by social tensions.” According to M. FERNÁNDEZ-GALIANO, in J. Russo, M. Fernández-

As curious as the execution itself, however, is the emotional distance that separates Odysseus from the atrocity. Melanthius is killed not by Odysseus but by his two loyal servants, Philoetius and Eumaeus, along with Telemachus. The poem does not explicitly state that Odysseus has ordered the execution. For this reason, it has been proposed that the idea of punishing Melanthius originates with "the swineherd, the cowherd, and perhaps—one hopes not—Telemachus ... Odysseus himself ... had no part in the barbarities, which are best excused as the revenge of servants on a traitorous servant."³ On this reading, the violence done to Melanthius is an expression of the ignobility of the serving class. Such an explanation is unlikely for two reasons.

First, there is no indication that Telemachus is excluded. After the three men together carry out Odysseus' orders to execute the maids, they immediately turn their attention to Melanthius. We may hope, therefore, but we may not assume, that Telemachus excuses himself at this point: the verbs appear in the plural, not the dual.⁴

Second, the direct manner in which the men proceed from the maids to Melanthius without discussing the matter suggests that they are still following their master's instructions. Only after killing the goatherd do they wash their hands and feet of the gore and report to Odysseus that "the task has been completed" (22.479, τετέλεστο δὲ ἔργον).

Although the poem does not explicitly record Odysseus' instructions to the men, his orders at 22.176 to bind Melanthius hand and foot and hoist him up a pillar in the storage room "so that he may endure agonizing pain while still alive" surely suggest to Telemachus and his assistants that Odysseus has special treatment in store for him. Such binding and suspending of a captive from a beam or plank is a customary prelude to execu-

Galiano, and A. Heubeck, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, III: *Books XVII–XXIV* (Oxford 1992: hereafter 'Fernando-Galiano') 304, "the four lines [describing Melanthius' execution] have the look of an interpolation."

³ W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer*² (New York 1965) ad 22.474–77.

⁴ It also bears mentioning that, pro-aristocratic biases of modern commentators notwithstanding, servants in the *Od.* are not ipso facto of ignoble character. Odysseus' castigation of the young Phaeacian Euryalus (8.166–85) points out that the noble are not necessarily above rude and contemptible behavior. The lowly Eumaeus, we learn (15.413), is the son of a king. On the internally noble character of Odysseus' loyal servants, see S. D. Olson, "Servants' Suggestions in Homer's *Odyssey*," *CJ* 87 (1992) 219–27.

tionary torture, in both literary and historical contexts.⁵ Homer's text, therefore, quietly but clearly indicates that Odysseus initiates the punishment while literally keeping his hands clean of the violence. The hero is involved in the execution but emotionally divested. His silencing of Eurycleia makes it clear to the reader and listener that he does not relish this action. The punishment of Melanthius is simply something that *must* be done.⁶

The *Iliad* provides a parallel, albeit emotionally charged, to the mutilation of Melanthius. Although that poem presents many scenes in which individuals threaten to mistreat the corpses of

⁵ Cf. *Il.* 21.453ff (Laomedon's intention to torture Apollo and Poseidon); *Soph. Aj.* 106–10 (Ajax's treatment of the ram whom he takes for Odysseus); *Plut. Per.* 28 (Pericles' treatment of the leaders of the Samian revolt).

⁶ It remains unclear why, of the available forms of torture, Melanthius is subjected to execution by amputation of his extremities. According to Antinous' account (21.295–304), the drunkenness of Eurytion the Centaur at a banquet of the Lapiths resulted in outrageous behavior, which led to his being thrown out on the porch and having his ears and nose sliced off with a knife. The story suggests that this form of punishment may be inflicted on unruly guests by a host as a means of restoring decorum to the gathering. The drunken Eurytion was out of control (21.298, *μαινόμενος κάκ' ἔρεξε δόμον κατά Περσέου*), and his punishment by "tipping" may be interpreted as an act of assertion by the master of the house reclaiming control of the feast. Antinous' tale as a warning to the disguised Odysseus against trying his hand at stringing the bow is consistent with this suggestion. Antinous, acting as master of the feast, uses the Eurytion story as a way of keeping the begging stranger in his proper place. It is significant, therefore, that Antinous' warning to Odysseus is overheard and countered by Penelope, who reminds the would-be master of ceremonies that it is improper that the guests of *Telemachus* (21.313, *ξείνους Τηλεμάχου*) be treated in this way. The suitors' threats to ship Irus to Echetus the ogre (18.84–87, 115f) occur in a similar context. The removal of this beggar to the porch by the disguised Odysseus restores order to the party. Antinous, acting as master of ceremonies, welcomes the new beggar with a paunch stuffed with fat and blood while threatening to send Irus for mutilation. This threat underlines Antinous' delusion that he is master of the feast in a house where he is actually an uninvited guest. Odysseus' execution of Melanthius, interestingly, occurs within a context of restoring decorum to the house. Only after the maids have scrubbed down the blood-stained tables (a detail suggestive of preparations for a feast) and "restored order to the entire hall" (22.457, *ἐπεὶ δὴ πᾶν μέγαρον διεκοσμήσαντο*) do Telemachus and his assistants drag Melanthius through the courtyard to the porch and subject him to torture. In Book 17 Melanthius attempts to keep the begging stranger out of the palace for fear that he will ruin the suitors' feast (cf. 17.219f). The punishment of the goatheard at the hands of Telemachus and his assistants underlines that, with the slaughter of the suitors, Odysseus has regained control of his house and of the decorum within.

their victims, only one character actually follows through.⁷ Achilles does indeed attempt to defile the corpse of Hector in a fit of rage that is both intense and protracted (22.394–404, 24.14–18).⁸ Scholarship on this eruption of the Achaean hero's violent nature has established that the sight of Hector in Achilles' armor triggers a nexus of emotional responses in Achilles. Seeing Hector before him, the hero is confronted with a vision of himself, the warrior who sent his beloved Patroclus into battle. Besides harboring visceral hatred for Hector as the slayer of his dearest companion, therefore, Achilles feels a combination of rage with Patroclus for falling victim to Hector,⁹ shame at not having confronted Hector himself,¹⁰ and responsibility for the death of his friend.¹¹ Achilles is faced with an image of the 'other' on which he projects his unbearable feelings. This 'other', however, is a literal reflection of Achilles himself, a visual reminder of the tragic error that he committed in sending Patroclus into battle.¹² This interpretation is borne out by Achilles' own words as he mourns Patroclus at 18.82f, "I have destroyed him (τὸν ἀπόλεσα), and Hector has stripped his enormous and splendid armor."¹³ The accounts of Achilles lay-

⁷ Cf. 4.236 (Agamemnon's prediction that vultures will eat the Trojans' tender flesh); 4.32–36 (Hera's longing to devour Priam and his sons raw); 24.207–10 (Hecuba's wish to sink her teeth into Achilles' liver).

⁸ Leading up to this climax of horrors is the heap of corpses in Book 21, which Achilles leaves in the Scamander to be devoured by fish and eels. Cf. Segal 30ff.

⁹ See G. Devereux, "Achilles' 'Suicide' in the *Iliad*," *Helios* 2 (1978–79) 3–15, esp. 8ff: "The figure Achilles faced was far more than Hector in person only. It was also Patroclus impersonating Achilles—and therefore Achilles 'himself'.... Achilles had wronged Patroclus and was vain and twisted enough—as most men are—to feel resentment toward the man he had wronged."

¹⁰ See A. L. Motto and J. R. Clark, "Isê Dais: The Honor of Achilles," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 109–25.

¹¹ See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971) 10, 27: "Achilles knows that his obstinacy was due to *atê* sent by Zeus but nonetheless feels responsible for the death of Patroclus.... Achilles sacrifices his life not for glory but out of remorse for his responsibility for the death of Patroclus."

¹² On the dynamics of psychological projections in a shame culture, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 1–27.

¹³ Throughout the *Iliad* the first aorist form of ἀπόλλυμι describes violent destruction, which is carried out by the verb's subject. When found in battle descriptions, this verb is more active in force than the translation "lost" allows. Cf. 1.268 (Nestor's generation destroyed [ἀπόλεσαν] the Centaurs; 5.648 (Heracles destroyed [ἀπόλεσε] Troy); 5.758 (Ares killed [ἀπόλεσε] Achaeans); 24.260 (Ares killed [ἀπόλεσε] Priam's sons); cf. also 23.280; *Od.* 9.354.

ing his “man-slaying hands” (χείρας ἐπ’ ἀνδροφόνους) over the breast of his companion (18.316f, 23.17f) likewise suggest that these hands are responsible for Patroclus’ death.¹⁴ Facing Hector, therefore, Achilles confronts his own self-image, and his defilement of his arch-enemy’s corpse becomes an exercise in assuaging his conscience, directed against an ‘other’ who is a reflection of his own self.

With this parallel as background, let us consider Odysseus and Melanthius. What about this goatherd marks him out in Odysseus’ estimation for special punishment? If Achilles sees unbearably negative aspects of himself in Hector, is it possible that Odysseus has an analogous experience when he sees Melanthius? The first suggestion that Melanthius may trigger such associations is to be found in Odysseus’ initial encounter with him. Making his way to his palace for the first time in twenty years, the hero encounters Melanthius driving a herd of Odysseus’ own choice goats to be slaughtered for consumption by the suitors (17.214, αἴγας ἄγων, αἱ πᾶσι μετέπρεπον αἰπολίοισι). Physical and verbal abuse ensues, as Melanthius taunts the ragged beggar for his unsightly appearance, kicks him on the hip, and threatens to sell him into slavery. The exchange, understandably, “enrages Odysseus’ heart” (17.216, ὄρινε δὲ κῆρ Ὀδυσῆος). But Odysseus’ reaction may be attributable to more than Melanthius’ rudeness and violence. For the hero’s own past includes an experience in which *he* drove off someone’s choice livestock and subjected his victim to physical and verbal abuse. His actions in this past episode are of pivotal importance in sealing the fate of his crew as well as the sufferings that he endures alone on Ithaca.

In Book 9, after escaping from Polyphemus’ cave and driving off the monster’s best rams (9.425f, 432, εὐτρεφές, δυσύμαλλοι, καλοί τε μεγάλοι τε ... ἀρνειὸς γὰρ ἔην, μήλων ὄχ’ ἄριστος πάντων), Odysseus proceeds to taunt the Cyclops whom he has just blinded. It is especially interesting that the stolen rams are a special breed, “with fleece of dark-violet hue” (9.426, ἰοδνεφές εἶρος ἔχοντες), bearing the color of “the black violet.”¹⁵ Fleece of such an unusual natural color, occurring without the application of dyes, must have made these animals especially valuable. The wool from such sheep appears, for example, in

¹⁴ Segal (49f) reads a similar accountability into this phrase at 24.479.

¹⁵ Cf. Theophr. *Hist. Pl.* 1.13.2, ἴον τὸ μέλαν; Theoc. *Id.* 10.28, ἴον μέλαν.

the silver basket from which Helen, sitting in near-Olympian splendor in her palace in Sparta, spins yarn on a golden spindle (4.135). Given the unusual nature of the Cyclops' rams, the name of Melanthius in Book 17 may therefore be significant. Returning to his palace, Odysseus finds a man named "Black Flower" driving off goats that are the pick of the herd. But stealing livestock and subjecting the owner to physical abuse do not suffice for this goatherd. Like Odysseus with Polyphemus, the Ithacan servant taunts his victim as well. Seeing in Melanthius' actions a shadow, as it were, of his own behavior with Polyphemus, the hero may well experience the sort of 'flash-back' that Achilles experiences when he sees Hector in his own armor. For just as Achilles faces a reflection of his own culpability with regard to the death of Patroclus, Odysseus is now confronted with a visual reminder of the episode marking the beginning of the hostility that Poseidon directed against him and his companions. Melanthius, in short, inflicts on Odysseus the same abuse and violence that he had earlier inflicted on the Cyclops. In Melanthius, Odysseus sees the 'other' who provides a reflection of his own self.

If this reading is correct, we may expect to find indications in Book 17 of a reversal, as it were, of events in Book 9. If Melanthius' behavior recalls the earlier behavior of Odysseus, does Odysseus now begin to resemble Polyphemus? Melanthius' taunts indeed suggest that, in his eyes, the ragged beggar has the makings of a Cyclops: "If you could only give him to me to keep my stalls, sweep my pens, and fetch fodder for my kids, he would develop a sturdy thigh muscle from drinking whey" (17.223ff), he boasts to Eumaeus.¹⁶ Odysseus' response to the kick builds on the Cyclopean nature of his sufferings at this point (17.235ff): "Odysseus pondered whether he should leap up (μετάξας) and kill the man with his staff or lift him into the air and dash his head against the ground (πρὸς γῆν)." In pondering whether to kill Melanthius outright, Odysseus recalls the heroic endurance that he exhibited when he restrained himself

¹⁶ E. M. Bradley, "The Hybris of Odysseus," *Soundings* 51 (1968) 33-44, finds parallelism in the syntactic structure of Melanthius' abusive statement in 17.251ff and Odysseus' taunt of Polyphemus at 9.523ff. For a discussion of Polyphemus' rustic expertise as a dairy farmer, see N. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey* (Berkeley 1975) 143-49.

from killing Polyphemus in the cave.¹⁷ He managed to curb the 'heroic impulse' that would have driven him to slay the monster outright. But his second deliberation shows him considering a distinctively Cyclopean form of violence, for at 9.288ff Polyphemus "leapt up (ἀναίξας), grabbed hold of two comrades and beat their heads against the ground (ποτὶ γαίῃ) as if they were puppies."¹⁸

These verbal echoes, occurring within curiously parallel contexts, invite the interpretation that Odysseus' encounter with Melanthius evokes memories of his earlier encounter with Polyphemus, an exchange disastrously marred by the hero's pride and folly. It is universally acknowledged in the scholarship that Odysseus' taunting of Polyphemus and boastful declaration of his name is, however deeply rooted in the world of heroic values, an act of hybris.¹⁹ Exulting in his victory and rubbing salt, as it were, into the monster's wounded eye, Odysseus declares his identity and thereby enables Polyphemus to invoke the curse that results in the loss of Odysseus' companions, long delays in his homecoming, and subsequent trouble in his own house.²⁰ Indeed, Odysseus' plight on Ithaca fairly repli-

¹⁷ His deliberation to strike Melanthius with his staff (17.235f, ῥοπάλαφ) also invites the reader to recall the Polyphemus episode, where Odysseus wields the same weapon against his adversary (9.319, ῥοπάλον).

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that each incident ends with a curse directed against the perpetrator of the violence: Polyphemus' prayer to Poseidon at 9.526–35 is paralleled by Eumaeus' prayer to the nymphs at 17.238–46 to punish Melanthius. Both the Cyclops and the swineherd, furthermore, raise their hands to the sky as they utter their curse.

¹⁹ For Odysseus' hybris in this episode, see C. S. Brown, "Odysseus and Polyphemus: The Name and the Curse," *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966) 193–202; Bradley (*supra* n.16); K. Reinhardt, *Tradition und Geist* (Göttingen 1960) 47–112; E. Dolin, "Odysseus in Phaeacia," *GrazBeitr* 1 (1973) 272–82; and N. Austin, "Name Magic in the *Odyssey*," *CSCA* 5 (1972) 1–19; *contra*, S. Olson, "'Name-Magic' and the Threat of Lying Strangers in Homer's *Odyssey*," *ICS* 17 (1992) 1–7.

²⁰ For the fullest and most recent studies of this episode from a perspective that reads the hero's culpability within the contexts of a heroic impulse that displays a proclivity toward hybris, see R. FRIEDRICH, "Heroic Man and *Polymêtis*: Odysseus in the *Cyclopeia*," *GRBS* 28 (1987) 121–33, and "The Hybris of Odysseus," *JHS* 111 (1991; hereafter 'Friedrich 1991') 16–28. Odysseus is initially able to quell the heroic impulse, as he refrains from slaying Polyphemus, but is unable to sail away from his victim without declaring his full name. The ferocity of Odysseus' baiting of the Cyclops is attributable to the utter self-abnegation required by the ruse of anonymity. The heroic ego cannot long endure such intense suppression and thus reasserts itself with a vengeance when Odysseus finds himself at a reasonably safe distance from

cates that of the Cyclops in his cave. Both Odysseus and Polyphemus enter their homes only to find them invaded by uninvited guests who taunt the owner, consume his livestock, and inflict physical harm on him.²¹ Odysseus' victimization by Melanthius in Book 17, therefore, foreshadows the *πάθη* that Odysseus will endure as he fulfills the final stage of the curse of Polyphemus—*πάθη* that Odysseus has ultimately brought upon himself through gratuitous and mean-spirited violence.²² The fact that Melanthius is the first abuser whom he encounters on Ithaca makes this scene ominous.²³

When Odysseus turns to punish Melanthius in Book 22, however, he does *not* take sadistic delight in his victory. His heroic impulse remains in check. This dispassionate stance suggests that, by this point in the narrative, he has undergone a shift in his attitude toward the rôle that human beings play in their own suffering, as well as the rôle played by those individuals who mete out the necessary punishments. The contrast with his attitude in Book 9 is telling. There, the hero remains oblivious to

the monster. By this reading, the Cyclops episode demonstrates that the heroic ethos that drives behavior on the Iliadic battlefield is misplaced in the world of the *Odyssey*.

²¹ For studies of the Cyclops episode that emphasize Odysseus' violation of *xenia*, see R. M. Newton, "Poor Polyphemus: Emotional Ambivalence in *Odyssey* 9 and 17," *CW* 76 (1983) 137–42; N. Austin, "Odysseus and the Cyclops: Who is Who?" in C. A. Rubino and C. W. Shelmerdine, *Approaches to Homer* (Austin 1983) 3–37. Friedrich (1991: 26) finds the hero especially hybriistic in setting out to "test" (9.174) the Cyclops' degree of civilization while himself behaving in a most uncivilized manner.

²² Odysseus' measures to defend himself and escape from the monster's cave are not in and of themselves culpable: see B. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey* (Wiesbaden 1974) 210. But the hero indulges in excessive, gratuitous, and even sadistic violence while saving himself. The graphic similes describing the blinding indicate that, after Odysseus destroys the pupil, he proceeds to burn out the entire eye up to and including eyelashes and eyebrow. Odysseus subjects his victim to an unnecessary degree of pain.

²³ For Odysseus' culpability in the death of his comrades, contrast the opening lines of the poem with the subsequent narrative. The proem attributes the death of the crewmen to their own folly in devouring the forbidden cattle of Hyperion. But this accounts only for the loss of the men from the last surviving ship. The other eleven ships, *i.e.*, some 92% of the original band, are destroyed by the Laestrygonians in the aftermath of the Cyclops episode. The folly of Odysseus' companions accounts for the loss of only 8% of the group. The bulk of the losses is to be attributed to the curse of the Cyclops and thus ultimately to the folly of Odysseus. For an explanation that would attribute this discrepancy to the poet's pro-Odysseus bias, see J. S. Clay, "The Beginning of the *Odyssey*," *AJP* 97 (1976) 313–36, and *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey* (Princeton 1983) 9–53.

his own accountability, despite indications from men and gods that his actions have exposed himself and his comrades to unnecessary danger. While taunting the Cyclops, Odysseus hears the vain pleas of his men, "Wretch (σχέτλιε, 9.494), why do you insist on provoking such a wild creature?" Odysseus' behavior here qualifies as the sort of *σχέτλιον ἔργον* which he will later mention in his caveat to Eurycleia. In Book 9, however, he remains blind to his recklessness: "So they spoke, but they could not persuade my high-spirited heart" (9.500, ὡς φάσαν· ἄλλ' οὐ πείθον ἐμὸν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν). Upon rejoining the rest of his men on the nearby island, the hero sacrifices the prize black ram to "Zeus of the dark clouds, who rules over all" (9.552). But Zeus rejects the offering, a rejection that the hero attributes not to his own criminal folly but to the god's malice: "Zeus was already devising ways to destroy my well-benched ships and faithful companions."²⁴ Such an attribution indicates

²⁴ It is significant that, after Odysseus declares his name, Polyphemus recalls Telemus' prophecy that he would be blinded by a man named Odysseus. The Cyclops' own sufferings, therefore, are brought about by the "fate of the gods" as revealed in the old prophecy as well as his own "wretched actions" of cannibalism. Odysseus, however, takes full credit for the monster's fate and hybriistically arrogates to himself the justice of Zeus when he declares, "In exchange for your misdeeds, Zeus and the other gods have punished you" (9.479): see K. Reinhardt, "Die Abenteuer der *Odyssee*," in *Von Werken und Formen* (Bad Godesburg 1948) 85f, followed by Friedrich (1991: 24), who sees the hero arrogantly validating his fiendish vindictiveness by calling it an expression of the will of Zeus. Odysseus' invocation of Zeus here is especially disconcerting, as he commits the first infraction of Zeus-sanctioned *xeneia* by entering the cave uninvited and helping himself to the edibles inside. His subsequent demand (9.269ff) that the Cyclops respect the laws of Zeus by showing his 'guests' proper respect indicates that the wily Ithacan feels at liberty to violate the very rules that he expects others to obey. Note especially that the proper sequence of events in the rites of *xeneia* is observed in a highly ironic, indeed distorted, fashion: on returning to his cave, Polyphemus abruptly asks (9.251), "Strangers, who are you?," thereby committing a breach of hospitality in asking such a question before he has invited his guests to eat. In actuality, however, Odysseus and his men have just finished eating. The Cyclops' inquiry is ironically appropriate, therefore, and draws our attention simultaneously to the breach of manners committed by both Odysseus and Polyphemus. It is important for Homer's reader to keep in mind that the Cyclops adventure is narrated by Odysseus to an audience of Phaeacian hosts from whom he hopes to extract as many guest-gifts as possible (cf. 11.355-61). For this reason, he downplays his own rôle as a violator of hospitality and refers to his uninvited eating in the home of the absent master with the deliberately misleading euphemism, "sacrifice" (ἑθύσαμεν, 9.231). It could be argued that this cosmetic description, sacrilegiously suggestive of piety, is itself hybriistic: cf. Eur. *Med.* 582 (τ' ἄδικα εὖ περιστελεῖν). A century ago it was posited that Odysseus' "sacrifice" must have been an offering of melted cheese, for which of course there is no evidence from the entire ancient world:

that, at this point, Odysseus is one of those mortals reviled by Zeus in his opening speech in the poem: "How dare mortal men blame us gods for their woes! Through their own recklessness they bring sufferings upon themselves, which go beyond those allotted to them" (1.32ff, οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν).

The hero's behavior in Book 22 is markedly different. His explanation to Eurycleia that the suitors have been destroyed by the fate of the gods and their own wretched actions (22.413, τούσδε δὲ μοῖρ' ἐδάμασσε θεῶν καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα) amounts to an accurate and precise translation of Zeus' earlier pronouncement. Odysseus' own intense and protracted sufferings in the aftermath of the Cyclops episode have converted him into a spokesman for the theodicy of Zeus. This conversion allows, indeed compels, him to interpret the sufferings of the suitors, Melanthius, the maids and, most importantly, himself in a new light. The hybristic goatherd must be punished because he has violated the laws of Zeus. By the "fate of the gods" this man was born a servant and was therefore compelled to cater to the outlandish suitors. Through his own "wretched deeds," however, he subjected his master to gratuitous verbal and physical abuse. Odysseus cannot, therefore, exult in or even claim credit for the punishment of this man. To do so would be, as he tells Eurycleia (22.412), a sacrilege (οὐχ ὀσίη), an appropriation of some-

see W. W. Merry, *Homer: Odyssey I* (Oxford 1899) 106. This strange interpretation has been put forth again in the otherwise solid and persuasive reading of Friedrich (1991: 26f; *supra* n.20: 128). The Homeric text is quite 'Odyssean' in suggesting, without explicitly declaring, that the hero sacrificed and ate one of the monster's sheep: see Newton (*supra* n.21) 140. Odysseus' violation of the Cyclops' cave is identical in kind to the suitors' violation of the Ithacan palace: the suitors and Odysseus alike help themselves uninvited to the abundantly available meat. In the end, perhaps, it remains immaterial exactly *what* the hero ate in the cave. His offense against *xeneia* lies in his invasion of the monster's home and his subsequent overly-clever attempt to manipulate the rules and protocol of *xeneia* to his advantage. This accounts in large part, I posit, for Zeus' endorsement of Poseidon's wrath. Odysseus' behavior outrages more than one deity, but his abuse of Zeus-sanctioned *xeneia* marks him out for punishment by the one god who guarantees the sanctity of the host-guest relationship. Like the suitors on Ithaca, Odysseus is the first offender in the exchange of incivilities in the Cyclops' cave and, like the suitors, he must pay for his crime. For expressions of the archaic notion of justice, which dictates that the first offender be punished, cf. *Il.* 4.234–39; *Hes. Th.* 166, 172; *Op.* 265–72; *Archil.* 66D; *Aesch. Cho.* 123. *Od.* 20.394 expressly states that the suitors were selected for punishment "since they were the first offenders of propriety" (πρότεροι γὰρ ἀεικέα μηχανώοντο).

thing that rightfully belongs to the gods.²⁵ Odysseus is merely the agent, not the author, of Melanthius' agonizing death.²⁶ Had he *not* learned from his errors, we might expect him to vent his spleen while punishing Melanthius, protracting the torture and asserting his heroic identity to the man who had wronged him. But Odysseus, as already noted, does not even carry out the execution: he quietly delegates the task to his son and loyal servants in such a way that scholars have questioned whether he even authorized it. Thus, both the execution of Melanthius and the way in which it is carried out attest to the depth of Odysseus' conversion. In singling out this culprit whose actions mirror his own, Odysseus punishes his foolish and reckless former self, expunging that hybristic side of his character that had outraged the gods. By distancing himself from this deed of necessary justice, furthermore, and assigning authorship, as it were, to divine fate and the victim's own criminality, Odysseus bears the most credible witness possible to the theodicy of Zeus.²⁷ As recently argued (Friedrich 1991: 27), Zeus chastises and chastens the hybristic hero

²⁵ Cf. the elegant translation of Fernández-Galiano *ad* 22.413: "It was destiny, not I, who brought death upon them, and their own wickedness."

²⁶ It is reasonable to surmise that, had Melanthius not attacked Odysseus in Book 17, he would have been killed along with the suitors by one of Odysseus' arrows or perhaps in the company of the treacherous maids. The fact that he is singled out for separate torture away from the group balances the abuse to which he subjects Odysseus outside the hall. Just as Melanthius is the first Ithacan to attack Odysseus, furthermore, so is he the last to be executed. The fate of the suitor Ctesippus reveals a similar type of poetic justice: he who hurled a cow's hoof at the master (20.299–302) is slain by an arrow from the bow of the cowherd (22.287–91).

²⁷ It is relevant to this discussion that Zeus illustrates the declaration of his theodicy in Book 1 with the example of Aegisthus, the only other individual in the poem whose corpse is violated. At 3.259ff Nestor reports that Aegisthus' body was left lying in a field outside the city walls, to be devoured by birds and dogs and left unmourned by the women of Achaea. The refusal of Aegisthus to heed the warnings of Hermes (1.42f, ἀλλ' οὐ φρένας Αἰγίσθοιο πειθ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέων) parallels Odysseus' refusal to heed the warnings of his men not to taunt the Cyclops (9.500, ἀλλ' οὐ πείθον ἐμὸν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν) and his stubbornness in rejecting their advice to leave the cave before the monster's return (9.228, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐ πιθόμην, ἦ τ' ἄν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦεν). Segal (15) argues that the mutilation of Aegisthus does not evoke outrage or horror in Homer's audience, as this man is "a treacherous adulterer, murderer, [and] regicide." The agent of his demise is the young Orestes, who is presented throughout the poem as the necessary and dispassionate vehicle of Aegisthus' death. Just as Melanthius and Aegisthus seem to be cut from the same cloth, so too their human avengers are of a piece in that they act effectively without apparent emotional engagement.

for the hero's own sake in order to prepare him for the threats that await the home-coming hero. Zeus' larger design is the restoration of the order of justice in Ithaca through the punitive actions of the returning ruler.... His sufferings during the *plane* make him experience the limits and liabilities inherent in the heroic, and in the end will enable him to see it in perspective.... Odysseus, chastened by his sufferings, will overcome the imbalance in his character.

In the end, therefore, Stanford's assessment is correct: Odysseus is indeed well integrated, self-possessed, and fully able to control conflicting passions. But he was not always so. He has learned and adopted these virtuous qualities as a result of his sufferings.²⁸ Segal is likewise correct in viewing the execution of

²⁸ The poem's final scene, in which Odysseus closes bloody battle with the vengeance-seeking relatives of the slain suitors, underscores the difficulty that this converted hero encounters in sustaining his position as spokesman of Zeus' justice. It has been suggested that this violent relapse at the end of the poem is a sign of the hero's alternating and ultimately undefinable character, itself a manifestation of the poem's deliberate open-endedness and "indeterminacy": see S. Schein, *Reading the Odyssey: Selected Interpretive Essays* (Princeton 1996) 30f. As the subsequent wanderings predicted by Tiresias in Book 11 suggest, this hero is never quite "finished": he is forever "in process," permanently polytropic. But the apparent inconsistency pointed out by the poem's closing scene could also be attributed to the fact that old heroics die hard in a traditional society: temptations to regress can prove irresistible. Indeed, not only men but even the gods remain prone to counterproductive excesses. The suitors' relatives, mobilized by the passionate Eupheithes, disregard the wise Halitherses' warning not to pursue revenge against Odysseus. "The atrocities came about," the seer reminds them (24.454-62), "through your own wrongdoing (ὕμετέρῃ κακότητι) since you refused to obey (οὐ πείθεσθε) me and Mentor when we directed you to halt the senseless behavior of your sons." Similarly, Athena cannot bring herself to comply with her father's expressed wish (477-86) that an amnesty be declared so that peace and prosperity can once again reign on Ithaca. Despite Zeus' recommended line of action, the goddess remains obstinately eager for battle (487, μεμάντιαν), just as the Ithacans ignore the seer and give blind heed to the violent folly (469, νηπιέησι) espoused by Eupheithes. Odysseus responds with gleeful enthusiasm (504, γήθησε) when Athena exhorts him to gird for battle, and he challenges Telemachus to show his heroic mettle. In the massacre, Odysseus bellows the war cry and swoops like an eagle on the enemy (536f), demonstrating that he is still capable of engaging in and taking delight from the old heroics. But his reaction to the final thunderbolt, which Zeus hurls at the feet of Athena, is also telling. In response to the goddess' order to call a truce, "he obeyed, and he rejoiced in his heart" (545, ὁ δ' ἐπειθετο, χαίρει δὲ θυμῷ). Zeus does indeed oversee the cosmos, and his thunderbolt is a necessary reminder to men and gods that their ultimate duty is to uphold his laws. It is an important distinction, as emphasized by Fernández-Galiano

Melanthius as anomalous in the epic tradition. Indeed, the anomaly now appears to be central to Homer's poetic strategy. By presenting a type-scene in which an avenging hero traditionally indulges in savage brutality and boasting, the poet underscores the amazing achievement of Odysseus, whose sang-froid is all the more impressive within a context traditionally associated with heroic but nevertheless excessive and unsanctioned cruelty.²⁹ The hero's display of self-control within such a type-scene brings his 'atypicality' into the highest possible relief. The Iliadic Achilles provides the most informative contrast. His mutilation of Hector's body indicates that this wrathful hero has not yet achieved Odysseus' state of integration. Achilles, rawly fresh in his grief and still subject to conflicting passions, indulges his appetite for gratuitous cruelty as a step in his journey toward learning and accepting the ways of the gods. Only in Book 24 will this hero, weeping along with Priam, articulate his newfound wisdom that no mortal is exempt from an allotment of woes from the one urn of Zeus.

The fact that Odysseus has now learned and accepted the ways of Zeus is indicated by more, however, than his words to Eurycleia. His explanation to the maid is accompanied by a Zeus-

(417), that Zeus' "thunderbolt is not directed towards Odysseus drunk with success, but (unlike the model passage in *Il.* 8.130-36, where it warns Diomedes) toward Athena, to remind her of her duty." If a goddess needs such a reminder, so much the more does a mortal hero. Odysseus' forte lies therefore not so much in expurgation of his passions as in his ability to control and balance them within a heroic world overseen by Zeus. He still experiences gleeful excitement in battle, but his behavior in this scene does not veer toward the hybriatic: only in response to cues from Athena does he venture out. Throughout this scene, therefore, he remains obedient to what he perceives as divine will. At the outset, Athena's will is at odds with that of Zeus, but in the end, the thunderbolt aligns her desire with her father's. For all the joy that Odysseus takes in fighting, furthermore, he takes a healthier and more profound joy in heeding the signals from Zeus. He can rejoice in heeding Zeus' request to cease fighting, for any would-be victory in a finished fight would belong ultimately to the god, whose cosmic cause the hero serves.

²⁹ For a survey of scholarship on type-scenes and a classification of general types, see M. W. Edwards, "Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene," *Oral Tradition* 7 (1992) 285-330; see also J. M. Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington 1995) 164-80, and his *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington 1991) 1-60; B. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Description* (=Hermes Einzelschriften 21 [Wiesbaden 1968]), and his study of "doublets" (*supra* n.22) 133-232.

like gesture. He asks her to light a fire so that he can fumigate the palace. As he goes from room to room, the stench of carnage that has permeated the house is expunged by the redolence of fire and sulfur, the scent of Zeus' own thunderbolt.³⁰ This hero has indeed learned from his sufferings. Just as he forbids Eurycleia from exulting, he himself no longer engages in sacrilegious behavior as he now knows what has brought death to all these men. He also understands that the sufferings he has endured over the past ten years are attributable not to random malice on the part of the gods but to a combination of divine fate and his own reckless deeds.³¹ For the old Odysseus is no more. His dark and wicked past—Melanthius—is dead and gone, and no one laughs or cries.³²

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³⁰ Cf. 12.415ff: Zeus hurls his thunderbolt at the remaining crewmen after their desecration and consumption of Hyperion's cattle, and the smell of fire and sulfur fills the air. For an interpretation of the Thrinacia episode as validating rather than contradicting Zeus' theodicy, see R. Friedrich, "Thrinakia and Zeus' Ways to Men in the *Odyssey*," *GRBS* 28 (1987) 375–400.

³¹ It may be more accurate to claim that the "fate of the gods" has destined Odysseus to reach Ithaca (cf. 1.65; 9.532–35) but that the length and difficulty of the journey are brought about by his own recklessness. At 5.41f Zeus reveals that it is Odysseus' "moira to see his dear ones and return to his high-roofed home and native land"; at 5.205–10 Calypso predicts the many suffering that await him on his homeward journey. Although all journeys are fraught with toil and trouble, Odysseus faces a particularly difficult one because of his own actions.

³² The author expresses his thanks to S. Douglas Olson of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, for reading an early version of this study and offering helpful suggestions.