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# **The Fall of Troy and the Slaughter of the Suitors: Ultimate Symbolic Correspondence in the *Odyssey*<sup>1</sup>**

**Thomas Dilworth**

## **Abstract**

The slaughter of the suitors in the *Odyssey* corresponds symbolically but antithetically to the fall of Troy. The correspondence implies an emotional dynamics in Homer and his audiences for which cultural anthropologists provide verification. As these dynamics imply, the recitation of the *Odyssey* achieved psychological reparation.

When Greek children of the 9th century BC played "Greeks and Trojans," who were the good guys and who the bad? The terms of the question are anachronistic in various ways and need qualification, but the question is nevertheless fascinating. What prompts it is a new understanding of the emotional dynamics of the *Odyssey* that emerges from an analysis of its form. The heart of this analysis is recognition of symbolic correspondence between the fall of Troy and Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors. The correspondence is supported by, and prompts new explanations for, problematic passages and thematic relationships that have long concerned commentators. My interpretation suggests what in any case seems reasonable, that the *Odyssey* was strongly influenced in its composition and initial reception by response to the fall of Troy among Homere's contemporaries

In considering this response I will make psychological claims that expand conventional reader-response theory by enlisting cultural anthropology to evaluate evidence spanning centuries of social change. My wide-ranging speculation is New Historicist in regarding the form of the *Odyssey* as evidence of contemporary attitudes toward the sacking of Troy. But my analysis is anything but New Historicist in that I assume basic psychological commonality and emotional dynamics constitutive of human nature and basic to the continuity between ancient

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and modern people, i.e., between Homeric and later audiences. This continuity is attested by the enduring popularity of the Homeric epics.. In the *Odyssey*, problematic passages and thematic parallels to the fall of Troy suggest that those who composed and first listened to the epic felt guilty over the victory of their not-so-distant ancestors, which is the flip-side to their undeniable feelings of sympathy for the Trojans as protectors of home and family. In the context of this guilt, which is probably conscious as well as unconscious, the climactic action of the epics has profound emotional significance. The content of the *Odyssey* was received, not invented, but that hardly precludes freedom to choose, arrange and embellish. The result of such ‘authoring’ is a form that transcends its epic matrix to apply to the over-all story of the fall of Troy. This essay is not about the *Odyssey*; it is about the effect of the *Odyssey* on the story it only partly contains but which is understood and already known by any listener to either Homeric epic. The slaughter of the suitors is symbolic reparation for the sacking of Troy—a reparation in which Odysseus symbolically becomes, in his bloody defense of home and family, a last, now victorious, as it were, Trojan.

To recognize this involves the exercise of reader-response theory—or, here, listener-response theory—across a vast expanse of time and differing cultures. At such distance, there are obvious dangers of projection--what Edward Said would call imaginative colonization of otherness. We may, however, be able to surmise the response of the Homeric audience to the epic and to the oral tradition that was, and to a significant degree remains, its context. The reason for thinking this possible is that, despite great cultural diversity, human beings are fundamentally the same. To say so is, of course, to fly in the face of now declining relativist theory, which holds that all "regimens of truth" are based on nothing more enduring than social consensus. Foucault, the chief spokesman for radical relativism, proclaims that any axiomatic system is arbitrary. Such exclusive localization of values has been challenged, however, by researchers from various disciplines. For example, G. P. Murdock and Alexander Argyros argue convincingly for basic cultural universality and maintain that cultural differences are noticeable only because they figure against a larger ground of common culture. Underlying this cultural ground are physical, biological and familial relationships that do not differ fundamentally between peoples of varying cultures. Recent brain-hemispheric studies in twenty-first century neuropsychology confirm this. These relationships, particularly the biological and generational (adult-child and sibling), inform

basic psychodynamics. Whether innate or determined by these relationships, human psychodynamics seems basically the same throughout history and across cultures.

Freud, Jung, and most psychologists since, have held this to be true, and the enduring, widespread popularity of the Homeric epics seems to attest to it. Basic sameness allows for considerable difference, however. We should not, for example, confuse the values of Homer and his initial audiences with our own, or even with the values of later Greeks such as Aeschylus or Plato. But commonality of fundamental human psychology throughout history and across cultures ensures underlying continuity between Homer's contemporaries, their immediate descendants, and ourselves. This continuity endures even if it is, on their part or ours, largely unconscious and even though, as cultural anthropologists have shown, ancient Greeks encoded their values in forms foreign to us.

The textual correspondence between the fall of Troy and the slaughter of the suitors rests on Odysseus being the person most responsible for victory over enemies at Troy and Ithaca. That might seem to align the Trojans with the suitors, except the former are defenders of home and the latter home-invaders. The correspondence is dual: between Odysseus and the Trojans and between the suitors and the (other) Greeks attacking Troy. So circumstantial affinities between the two situations suggest the correspondences. There are, furthermore, other parallels throughout the epic which many commentators have noticed and which take on new and increased significance when seen as contributory to the dual correspondences. These parallels involve, as we shall see, Odysseus's disguises, his resemblance to Menelaus, and similarities between Helen and Penelope.

The large correspondence and the contributory parallels are all present in the text regardless of whether they first emerged in early oral formulation or in later oral or written elaboration. It is impossible to determine the degree to which the final form of the *Odyssey* may be ascribed to tradition, to a series of poets, to a single poet--a hom-eros, "he who fits together"--or to a redactor who fine-tuned the epic. The question of origins should be considered, however, because notions about origins have inhibited interpretation. Many readers convinced of the oral composition of the epics in a process described by Milman Parry and Albert Lord assume that the *Odyssey* is archaic and, compared to works composed by writing, inartistic. When the epic was composed and performed, however, the faculty of memory was far more powerful than in predominantly literate cultures and so, consequently, was the creative capacity of oral poets and

the appreciative capacity of their listeners. Moreover, since literacy had not narrowed reasoning (by making the left hemisphere of the brain dominant), awareness of the whole context (which belongs to the right hemisphere) was alert to overall form—a circumstance that ended with literacy. It is precisely the formal sophistication of the Homeric epics, and especially the *Odyssey* (Kullmann 35), that prompts the German neoanalysts to see in them deliberate written form rather than solely what they assume to be the less significant improvisational form of oral composition. Writing was a factor in Greece before the Homeric epics reached their final form—but we are concerned with overall form, not the means by which it was achieved. We need not and should not allow assumptions about origins to limit expectations about form and its meaning. Quite the contrary: preliteracy means greater sensitivity to the informing of the whole, which in this case is not the individual epic but the story of which it is a part.

Within the epic and in the larger tradition it evokes, the correspondence between the fall of Troy and the slaughter of the suitors is huge in scale. Yet it has gone unnoticed for various reasons, one being the breadth of the correspondence. It is almost too big to see. Another is that the correspondence is an expression largely of form and is not explicitly stated in speech or narrative. Furthermore, the form that implies the correspondence is not that of either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* alone or of both taken together but of the story behind the epics as it is remembered and evoked in the *Odyssey*.

The fall of Troy does not, of course, occur in the primary narrative of either Homeric epic, yet it is the climax of the principal story behind them. While aesthetically separate from this larger, unwritten story, the epics are not autonomous in meaning. If they were, the presumed knowledge of the audience would not, for example, have freed the *Iliad* from having to narrate the outcome of the Trojan war. Neither Homer nor his audience could have imaginatively divorced the epics from the oral tradition with which they initially coexisted.

An important narrative accomplishment of the *Odyssey* is, moreover, its presentation of the Trojan War. Although not part of the primary narration, the war has its elaborate anamnesis, or re-calling, in the third and fourth books of the epic through the talk of Nestor, Menelaus and Helen and later, in the eighth book, through the singing of the Phaeacian bard. As William Thalmann puts it, "the *Odyssey* looks back even as its narrative goes forward" gathering "into itself stories from all stages of the Trojan War." The war is recalled so frequently and with such insistence throughout the *Odyssey* that the reader ought to wonder why. As far as I am aware,

only Thalmann does, but he ventures an uncharacteristically weak explanation: that the *Odyssey* recalls the fall of Troy in order to present "its subject as somehow more vital" (170). Others, who do not regard the matter as problematic, may assume that intrinsic interest and the importance of the war for Odysseus are justification enough. It is an assumption, however, that demonstrates low expectations of the epic as a work of art. Odysseus's aggression at Troy preoccupies the start of the epic; his violent defense in Ithaca dominates its conclusion. They resonate with each other across the length of the *Odyssey* and of the chronology underlying it.

Commentators may also have failed to notice the correspondence because the violent events at Troy and Ithaca are, in many respects, antithetical. At Troy, for example, the defenders are defeated; in Ithaca the defenders (i.e., Odysseus and his family) are victorious. In the *Odyssey*, however, antithesis does not diminish the likelihood of a correspondence. An example of antithetical correspondence often cited by interpreters is that between the homecomings of Agamemnon and Odysseus--the first a return to treacherous Clytemnestra, the second to her cousin faithful Penelope. Another example, which permeates much of the epic, is the broad correspondence between the Telemacheia and the experiences that Odysseus recounts, especially his visit to Hades in Book 11. Both Telemachus and his father travel. The son is safe in the places he visits; the father is not. The son listens; the father acts. During his visits to acquaintances of his father, the son experiences safe, orderly domestic culture and learns about heroic life. Visiting former acquaintances in Hades, Odysseus--like his son, in quest of information--encounters some of those whom Telemachus heard about and learns the dreadful metaphysical limits of heroic egoism.

Antithetical correspondences are characteristic of Homeric epic. Thalmann calls them "corresponding opposites" and gives as an example the Phaeacians and Cyclopes--types respectively of extreme civilization and extreme savagery, yet near neighbors once and both descended from Poseidon (1-2). Antithetical correspondences create what Thalmann calls "symmetries" that are often paradoxical and reflect the geometric age in which the Homeric epics were written, an age of which "the basic principles...are similarity and antithesis" (2, 32). The differences are often more apparent than the similarities, and usually the correspondence is not rhetorically announced or explained. They are achieved merely by placement, a method syntactically evident in parataxis, or "fitting together," whereby clauses in a sentence are not logically subordinate but coordinate. They are merely "strung together," as Aristotle puts it

(Rhetoric 3.9, 1409a 27-37), in contrast to the "knit together" style of later, classical literature. Some classicists regard the paratactic style and its larger formal expression as rambling, formless and incoherent, but where correspondence occurs, it is wise to look for significance. In modern times, the artistic potential of paratactic form has been demonstrated in the juxtaposition of apparent dissimilarities by John Donne and other English Metaphysical poets of the Renaissance and by the Modernist writers of the 20th century. Authorial refusal to explain correspondences reflects trust in the interpretive powers of the audience, who are expected to respond virtually as co-creators of the work.

Chief among the dissimilarities that may obscure the correspondence between the fall of Troy and the slaughter of the suitors is Odysseus's seeming to be an aggressor in Ithaca, unlike the Trojans who were defenders. Yet to regard Odysseus as an aggressor is like considering Hector an aggressor instead of a defender when he emerges from the walls of Troy to attack the Achaean force. The tactic is certainly aggressive but within a larger strategy of defense. In Ithaca, Odysseus is the defender, the suitors the aggressors.

Moreover, the violence of Odysseus there is as desperately defensive as that of the Trojans. He protects not only his property, which the suitors have been devouring for years, but his life and that of his son. In a moment frozen in narrative time for ten of the epic's twenty-four books, a group of suitors waits in ambush to kill Telemachus. And one of the suitors makes it clear that if Telemachus's father were to return, he would be killed: "If Odysseus of Ithaca himself surprised us feasting in his palace and were bent on thrusting us out again, his wife would have little joy at his homecoming...no, there and then he would meet an ignominious end if he took up arms against such odds" (2: 245-52). Other than ceasing to be himself by relinquishing his property, Odysseus has no choice but to kill all the suitors. In Ithaca, Odysseus resembles Hector as chief defender of Troy.

At Troy, Achaeans had sacked a city-kingdom; in Ithaca, the next generation of Achaeans are gradually sacking another city-kingdom. Odysseus's palace is not exactly under siege, for there has been no possibility of active resistance. Nevertheless, the presence of the suitors has been prolonged, as in a siege, though without delay of gratification. From the start and for three years now, they have continually been sacking the palace by consuming the wealth of its prince in uninterrupted feasting. The parallel with the Achaeans laying siege to Troy is closer than may

at first appear. Like the Ithacan palace, Troy did not really fall all at once. The lands upon which the city largely depended for sustenance had been under prolonged enemy occupation.

Legendary pretexts aside, such as retrieving a run-away wife or courting a wealthy widow, Troy and Ithaca were both wealthy city-kingdoms, both strategically important. Troy dominated the eastern Aegean and controlled the entrance to the Black Sea. As J. V. Luce points out, Ithaca commanded the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth so that a strong Ithacan king could dominate traffic along the Acarnanian coast, between the archipelago of islands to the east, and across to southern Italy and Sicily (142).

In recounting her memories of Troy to Telemachus, Helen emphasizes circumstantial resemblance between Troy then and Ithaca now. Recalling the first visit of Odysseus to Troy, she remembers, "he disfigured himself with ignominious stripes, threw dismal wrappings over his shoulders, and disguised as a beggar passed into the city of the Trojans" (4: 246-49). This disguise is identical to that in which he enters his palace in Ithaca in Book 17.

The two locations are further associated by a parallel between the women chiefly associated with them. Although Helen and Penelope are cousins, their relationship is not so much genetic as symbolic. The parallel is elaborate, detailed and, as Lattimore says, present in the epic from Helen's first appearance (100), but it has been problematic. Sheila Murnaghan writes that "it is hard to see how" these women "could be at all comparable" (41-42), and attempts to understand their relationship have been inadequate. Some see it as introducing the possibility of Penelope betraying Odysseus through seduction by other men (Zeitlin 206; Katz 55). Such a reading is unconvincing because the audience already knows that Penelope will be faithful and because Helen's situation in the correspondence is post-seductive. F. Klinger sees the correspondence as simply clarifying the contrast between the unfaithful woman who initiated the Trojan calamity and the faithful woman "who preserves the home for her husband" (79). If we were to accept this explanation as adequate, we would be faced with a discrepancy between the amount of detailed narrative devoted to the parallel and its negligible significance.

The main purpose of the parallel between Helen and Penelope is to intensify the correspondence between Troy and Ithaca. Helen's account of Odysseus's visit to Troy suggests that as Helen was then, Penelope is now. "Before he returned to the Argive camp," says Helen, Odysseus's "long sharp sword had killed many Trojans.... Then the other women of Troy made loud lament but my own heart was filled with joy, because my desire had turned by now to going

back home again" (4: 255-60). Whether or not we believe this late attestation made in the presence of Menelaus, it establishes the possibility that, at least at the time of Odysseus's visit, Helen wanted rescuing. Because of her change of heart--true then or pretended now--the war acquires in retrospect the character of a rescue mission. It was Odysseus who came to her rescue when he returned in his second, more elaborate disguise, the Trojan horse. While Helen claims to have wanted rescuing, Penelope in Ithaca undoubtedly does. Besieged by unwanted suitors, she is isolated--without Odysseus's mother (dead) and father (in Lear-like reclusion) and with tension growing between herself and her son. Odysseus comes to her rescue as he had rescued Helen.

A further aspect of the parallel between the two women--and one which undermines Helen's claim of having desired rescue--concerns Helen's having gone round the wooden horse calling in turn each of the Achaean chieftains while imitating the voice of his wife. She does this in order to trick them into replying and revealing their hidden presence. Murnaghan incorporates this into the parallel with Penelope by seeing it as an indication of the threat to Odysseus that might be posed by Penelope's recognizing him (121). Yet the principal aspect to the correspondence is, I think, the depth of suffering of the hearers. Owing to the telephone and the speed of contemporary transportation, few readers now can adequately appreciate the compelling power for soldiers absent from home for nine years of the voice of a woman speaking their language as only a native can. Late in life the modern poet David Jones recalled that after being wounded at the Somme he was wakened by a nurse speaking to him in English. Her voice seemed to him "a physical touch" and "left an indelible mark" (175). That was after seven months away from home. The Achaeans in the belly of the horse have been away for ten years. The experience of hearing the voice of a beloved wife from whom each has been long absent has its parallel at Ithaca in Odysseus's presence in the palace, where he can hear and see Penelope, to whom he dare not reveal himself while the suitors are present. The emotional effect on him of such prolonged proximity to his wife is, like the attraction of Nausicaa earlier, undisclosed and left to the reader to surmise. Experiencing Penelope's presence has affinity for him with his listening to sirens while bound to the mast--only now his restraint is internal. This aspect of the correspondence between Helen and Penelope contains its own element of antithesis. Odysseus now is as the Achaeans were in the belly of the wooden horse--which adds counter-tension to the resemblance of Odysseus to the Trojans. Nevertheless, the correspondence between Troy and Ithaca is strengthened.

Penelope's bed trick is another aspect of her affinity with Helen. Whoever wants admission to Penelope's bed must have the secret knowledge that only Odysseus possesses, that the bed is unmovably rooted in the ground. By insisting on this information she can counter the subtle deceit of a stranger disguised as Odysseus. An important aspect of the bed trick is Penelope's motivation, which is to avoid Helen's fate. "Deep in my heart," she says,

I always have had misgivings that some strange man might come and beguile me with his words; schemers of dark designs are many. There was Argive Helen, child of Zeus; never would she have lain with a foreign lover if she had but known that the warrior sons of the Achaeans were to carry her back again to her own land. But the god impelled her to do the shameless deed; not till then did her mind conceive the fatal folly that was the beginning of distress not only for her but for us also. (23: 215-24)

The comparison is strained to say the least. Penelope equates what would be her factual error to Helen's wilful choice or (there are two explanations here) to the collapse of Helen's will before that of "the god." The logically shaky analogy can only be intended to secure, through the parallel of Helen and Penelope, the large correspondence between Troy and Ithaca.

Odysseus's entrance to Penelope's bed results in sexual intercourse. This conquest, too, may have some, albeit antithetical, resonance with the fall of Troy, which involved the rape of the Trojan women. Moreover, ancient cities, like the tutelary goddesses with whom they typologically corresponded, were female. City gates were vulval. The defeat of Troy was civic rape. Long ago, W. F. Jackson Knight saw "the maidenhood of city goddesses" as "in some magical sympathy with the unbroken defense of a city" and recalled the Trojan woman "releasing her girdle of maidenhood...when the sacred wall of Troy, also called by the same name...was 'released' or broken to admit the wooden horse" (236-37). Recent scholarship endorses this view (Scully 13). The antithesis of rape, consensual marital intercourse adds to the significant differences between events at Troy and Ithaca.

The parallel between Penelope and Helen is initially suggested in Book 4 by the resemblance between their husbands. Each is greatly delayed in returning home from Troy, Menelaus for seven years, Odysseus for ten. Menelaus's wrestling of information from Proteus is, as many have noted, a typically Odyssean adventure--as though part of the folklore belonging to Odysseus had been transferred to Menelaus. In fact, the episode has some affinity with Odysseus's meeting with Tiresias in Hades. But the chief parallel between Menelaus and

Odysseus emphasizes the correspondence between Troy and Ithaca. Menelaus reclaimed his wife in Troy; Odysseus reclaims his wife in Ithaca.

The significance of the correspondence between the fall of Troy and the slaughter of the suitors seems to involve a value-charged contrast between aggression and defense. Without such a value-contrast, the correspondence would be no more than a means of aligning the narrative of the *Odyssey* to the larger story from which the Iliad had emerged. The pointlessness of such an alignment would be good reason for not recognizing the correspondence. There must be some meaning to a relationship so momentous; if there seems to be no meaning, perhaps there is no relationship. Certainly, if the correspondence is recognized, some significance must be sought.

An extremely important passage in the *Odyssey* suggests that there is a contrast in values which does give considerable meaning to the correspondence. The passage is a simile that describes Odysseus's reaction to hearing the Phaeacian bard sing about the fall of Troy:

Odysseus meanwhile was greatly moved, and down from his eyes the tears came coursing over his cheeks. It was as when a woman weeps with her arms around her darling husband, one who has been defending his country and countrymen, striving to keep the day of mercilessness far from his city and his children, but now has fallen and is dying and gasping out his life. She gazes at him, she clings to him and she shrieks aloud, but the victors behind her, with their spears, beat her on back and shoulders and lead her away into captivity to suffer lamentable oppression; her cheeks are wasted with piteous sorrow. So from Odysseus' eyes the tears fell piteously. (8: 521-35)

The content of an epic simile is usually of special importance. Relaxing quick-paced narrative, a simile invites meditation. Commentators have not, however, known what to make of this simile. Gregory Nagy sees the significance of Odysseus feeling "the grief of his own victims in war" as a means of universalizing feeling in the epic (101), but there is nothing universal about it. Odysseus feels, and what he feels is the suffering of his victims. Authors of a recent commentary remark that "it is not easy for the modern reader to separate the anonymous woman from the Trojan captives." (Do they mean to imply that it might have been easier for an ancient Greek?) But, they continue, "there would be bitter irony" in such an equation between victim and victor. These commentators tell us that in the simile "we should expect the poet to mark a connection which he wished to be significant" but, they admit, they do not know what that significance might be (Heubeck, West & Hainsworth 381).

The weeping of Odysseus closely resembles the fate that Hector foresees for his wife on the day of the fall of Troy (Iliad 6: 477-65). Thalmann recognizes this, and thinks that "the simile expresses the *Odyssey's* revaluation of the Trojan War" and shows "that the grief of both victors and vanquished is finally the same" because of "the 'baneful' returns" from Troy which the conquerors have had to endure as the price of victory (165). The simile certainly expresses revaluation of the war, and the victors have suffered, but Thalmann's thoughts can be further developed and in a more fruitful direction. The implication that Odysseus and those he has vanquished have suffered equally might account for his now being free to go home, having paid in kind for what he caused. This would achieve, or approach, the sort of balance that was important to the Greeks and which I will consider later. Victors and vanquished have not suffered equally, however. Nestor, Menelaus, and finally Odysseus are reunited with their families; no Trojan family is whole or can be made whole.

The suffering in the simile is, of course, precisely what Odysseus and the other Achaeans had inflicted on Troy. The simile is consequently a significant turning of tables, a remarkably daring symbolic interchange or assimilation of an opposite role. It would be hard to find a greater example of authorial audacity than this defining of Odysseus according to the typology of his victims. By feeling--as he certainly seems to--the grief of a Trojan, Odysseus becomes, for the moment, Trojan.

What renders his weeping and its simile significant rather than absurdly gratuitous is its context, not in space--he weeps in Phaeacia--but in time. As he weeps over Troy, Achaeans are, we know, laying siege to his wife and consuming his wealth. They correspond to the Achaeans who besieged and sacked Troy--but now Odysseus is not one of them. He has changed sides.

The correspondence between the fall of Troy and the slaughter of the suitors and of the contributory parallels that sustain it seem to imply, in their social-cultural matrix, a generally felt disquiet over the destruction of Troy. Felt by those who composed the epic and those for whom it was composed and performed, this disquiet can only have been aggravated by identification with ancestors who contributed to the allied force that destroyed Troy.

Sympathy for the Trojans is suggested by the extent to which the author of the Iliad sees and feels events from the Trojan point of view. As Andre Michalopoulos writes, Homer, who "might justifiably have been biased in favour of the Achaeans...seems to view the tragic fate of the Trojans with greater sympathy than he extends to their foes" (98). Troy was a peaceful city,

its royal family amiable, its ruler wise and humane. The destruction of the family of Hector and Andromache is the subject of two of the most poignant passages in the epic. As Simone Weil puts it, "This calamity could not tear more at the heart had the poet been born in Troy" (31). Since ancient epics speak for, as well as to, their audiences, furthermore, sympathy for the Trojans can hardly have been felt by Homer alone.

An important indication in the *Iliad* of this sympathy, and one with possible moral implications, is that more gods align themselves with Troy than with the Achaeans. Siding with the Achaeans are Athena, Hera, and sometimes Poseidon. Allied with Troy are Apollo, Aphrodite, Ares, sometimes Poseidon (a founder of the city), and, in Books 14 and 15, Zeus-- though the high god otherwise remains neutral. What determines Troy's fall is not divine judgment, of course, but fate, which is ethically meaningless. The attitudes of the gods seem morally insignificant for the author of the *Iliad* but may well matter for the author and audiences of the *Odyssey*, assuming that he and they were aware of the earlier epic. One of the chief reasons for attributing the *Odyssey* to a later time or different author is that Zeus is, in the *Odyssey*, the arbiter of justice and punisher of wrongs.

People whose ancestors sacked Troy might sympathize with the Trojans for several reasons. Lovers of their own home regions naturally sympathize with others motivated chiefly by love of their native city. Defeat lends poignancy to the sympathy. Unless the defeated can be seen as evil, they always win in imagination, whether they be Trojans, Arthurian Celts, or American Indians. Greek sympathy for the Trojans may have been intensified by the defeat of their own city-states by Dorian invaders eighty years after the fall of Troy. Weil suggests that the Achaeans, "having lost their cities like the Trojans...saw their own image...in the conquered, whose misery was like their own." Some of those who shaped and passed on the tradition knew first-hand that "the greatest calamity the human race can experience" is "the destruction of a city" (32, 31).

Whatever the reasons for it, the sympathy of Homer and his audience for the suffering of the Trojans is psychologically suggestive. It implies regret. Regret and guilt are not, of course, synonymous; but regret over circumstances caused by you or by those with whom you identify generates guilt. Even when repressed or denied, such guilt is unconsciously felt. This would be true of any people regardless of cultural orientation. Homeric heroes do not, of course, feel moral guilt for their aggressive acts, and their attitude may be taken as roughly indicative of the

consciously held values of Homer and his audience--though to assume complete ethical agreement here would be to confuse the attitudes of peoples separated by centuries. It would also be a mistake, however, to equate the simple fictional psyches of Homeric heroes with the full psychological spectrum of the Homeric audiences. Epic heroes are legendary and imagined beings without the unconscious dimension of mind possessed by living men and women. Whatever their consciously held values, Homer and his audiences may have felt guilt over the destruction of Troy. Today, most would agree, moreover, that the unconscious plays a large part in the composition (oral or written) of literature and in its reception by an audience. To be comfortable with the hypothesis of Homeric guilt over the sacking of Troy, however, we need corroboration for ancient regret or guilt over what the sacking of Troy comprised: killing, robbery and sacrilege.

Michael Nagler maintains that in ancient and modern criticism, moral considerations--of whether punishment is deserved--are anachronistic and irrelevant to archaic logic. He urges limiting discussion to mythic pre-guilt "ritual dynamics" of cause and effect (339). He is presupposing a distinction that E. R. Dodds has made between the "shame-based culture" of social conformity and the "guilt-based culture" of morally conscientious individuals. The culture of Homeric Greece is predominantly shame-based, says Dodds, while that of later, pre-classical and classical Greece is predominantly guilt-based. The difference is relative, however. Dodds admits that there is evidence in the *Odyssey* for guilt and therefore morality (36-37). Because morality, like shame, usually involves social consensus, the distinction between guilt and shame must be, to some degree, blurred. Certainly, moral guilt is suggested in the proem of the *Odyssey*, which announces that the crew of Odysseus perished "because of their own presumptuousness" (a word also translated as "wickedness," "recklessness," "criminal folly") in eating the oxen of the sun-god. Moral retribution is also suggested at the start of the epic proper in the speech of Zeus, who mentions men bringing disaster on themselves by "their own presumptuousness." What Nagler calls the ritual dynamics of cause and effect is usually, to some degree in the *Odyssey*, also a moral dynamics.

I want, however, to make a distinction between moral and psychological guilt that should reduce the force of any objections to my argument on the basis of distinctions between causality, shame and moral guilt. Psychological guilt is unconscious, its conscious manifestations being anxiety, fear, anger and depression. Psychological guilt may exist without reference to social-

ethical justification but it is usually related to morality, as when a person experiences guilt by analogy for an act considered wrong only in different circumstances. Killing in self-defense would be an example. Psychological guilt may also be a denied or repressed awareness of moral guilt but it "becomes" moral only if and when it becomes conscious and engages a code of behavior. Underlying both shame and fear of consequence, psychological guilt seems a likely response to events at Troy that were carried out by ancestors in the not-too-distant past.

Earlier I considered the simile in which Odysseus is depicted as weeping like a Trojan. It is what Nagler calls one of the "oddities in the text" that "draw oblique but unmistakable attention to ethical contradictions" (347). An event immediately following the destruction of Troy has a similar effect. Odysseus and his ships sailed, or were blown by the wind, from Troy to Ismarus, a city of the Cicones. He and his men "sacked the town and...killed the men," dividing between them the women and wealth (9: 40). Because Odysseus's men ignored his warning to flee at once, they were attacked the next morning by other Cicones and driven off with a loss of seventy-two Achaeans, six killed per ship. Listening to this, some Greeks may have murmured to themselves, "Good for the Cicones." Many may have felt the loss of the Achaean lives to be a consequence of activity that was, to say the least, morally suspect.

Although the Cicones may have been allies of the Trojans (Pocock 91), the Achaeans attacked without provocation in what was essentially an act of piracy. According to Odysseus, it is hunger that "makes us rig ships to cross the seas and bring destruction to our enemies" (17: 286-89), but hunger or a need for supplies can hardly have motivated a force fresh from sacking Troy. Instead, greed motivated the sacking of Ismarus--greed which, with envy, is the conventional target of blaming rhetoric in post-Homeric, pre-classical Greek writing (Nagy 228). Odysseus himself tells the beggar Irus, "you should not covet the property of others" (18: 18).

The chief impact of the briefly narrated destruction of the Cicones' city lies in its affinity with the larger, longer and more successful siege of Troy, with which it is juxtaposed. The unprovoked sacking of Ismarus undermines any mitigating reason for destroying Troy. Those who sacked Ismarus for greed needed no other reason to sack Troy. The suggestion seems to be that, for the Achaeans, Helen's presence in Troy was largely an emotional or propagandistic convenience. This is corroborated near the end of Book 7 of the Iliad when, after the first full day of combat narrated in that epic, the Achaeans, thinking they are about to win the war, decide to reject any negotiated peace involving the return of Helen and her wealth. "What they want,"

writes Weil, "is, in fact, everything. For booty, all the riches of Troy; for their bonfires, all the palaces, temples, houses; for slaves, all the women and children; for corpses, all the men" (16).

Once greed is seen as a motive for city-sackers, it becomes another aspect of the correspondence between the situations in Troy and Ithaca. Clearly, greed characterizes the suitors who are consuming the wealth of Odysseus in Ithaca. Moreover, concupiscence in the form of disproportionate appetite for meat is mythologized in Prometheus's withholding meat from the gods, an act which is recalled, as we shall see, in the behavior of the suitors and which was, for Homer and his audience, the "fall" that defines the human condition (Hesiod, *Theogony* 534). Both the sacking of Troy and the behavior of the suitors are redolent of this "original sin."

The killing of all the adult male Trojans may have stirred psychological guilt. Although killing in war merited praise, not blame, Nagler contends that "all killing is sacrilegious in a way" and "tinged with anxiety" (341). Violence was a source of renown but also often linked with hubris (Nagy 319), a linkage made apropos of bronze-age warriors by Hesiod (*Works and Days* 146). Even with the approval of the gods, the killer was in danger, which was felt more intensely when he had killed members of his own social group (Nagler 345). In the post-Homeric, pre-classical age for which we have data, killing during peace-time resulted in pollution, the cause of which was not moral opprobrium but vengeance by the spirit of the dead (Parker 107-08). It is difficult to see how a state of war would safeguard a killer from such vengeance. Although, in classical times, Athenian soldiers did not undergo purification after battle, Plato does prescribe purification after killing in war (*Laws* 9: 865a-b).

The epics were composed centuries before Plato, and the attitudes informing them are not those of classical Greece, but arguing "back to the future" has some merit. Although Foucault claims that cultural phases are radically discontinuous, most historians agree that cultures evolve. The continuity essential to evolution justifies an assumption that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the attitudes of a later age are rooted in the preceding age.

Continuity of this sort has been discussed by Robert Parker concerning pollution brought on by killing and the removal of pollution by ritual purification. As a literary motif, pollution belongs to the classical period. There are no instances of it in Homer, not even for Orestes or Oedipus. However, Parker thinks that the later emergence of pollution and purification gives form to earlier beliefs (135-36, 143). Even in Homeric times, killing for material and sexual gain was thought to merit divine punishment (132). In assuming continuity between Homeric and

later periods, Parker agrees with Dodds, who writes that "an idea is often obscurely at work in religious behaviour long before it reaches the point of explicit formulation" (37). If, then, the explicit indictment of and purification from moral guilt in classical times suggests moral guilt in Homeric times, it is even more strongly suggestive of psychological guilt in Homeric times.

The extent to which guilt may have been conscious and, therefore, moral may exceed what is suggested even in the *Odyssey*. Those who composed the epics may well have ignored or minimized common beliefs and practices not approved of by aristocratic patrons. One such practice, writes Dodds, would be the purgative scapegoat-ritual which Homer and his audiences "must have seen" but which were excluded from the epics (43-44). "The notions of pollution, of purification, of divine phthonos" (jealousy), writes Dodds, seem to be "part of the original Indo-European inheritance" (44). What emerged explicitly in literature of the 7th and 6th centuries--in response to profound social upheavals and insecurities--is probably "the reappearance of old culture-patterns which the common folk had never wholly forgotten" (Dodds 45).

Because of the folk memory of Homer and his audience, the long absence from home of Odysseus and Menelaus may have had connotations of pollution. Odysseus was kept from home by the wrath of Poseidon, of course, but an ancient audience may have registered the affinity between his absence and exile owing to pollution.

A further cause for guilt over the sacking of Troy is that the city was "sacred" (1: 2). Its sacking and the despoiling of its temples must have been felt on some level to have been a multiple sacrilege. This feeling was mitigated in the composition of the *Iliad* by having gods who, having favored and defended the city, desert it and work toward its downfall. There is, however, an aspect of tradition that preserves the sense of sacrilege. Stephen Scully can write that "destruction of a sacred city does not, in and of itself, imply sacrilege" but that "Greek impiety in the taking of Troy...stemmed more from the wanton destruction of Athena's temple" (38).

We know that for post-Homeric Greeks sacrilege caused pollution. Parker writes that purification for sacrilege is rare in Greek literature "because such offenses are inexpiable [rather] than because no contagious danger attaches to them" (144). In post-Homeric Athens, temple-robbery was one of the worst of crimes. Even during war, the moveable wealth of Panhellenic temple-treasuries was never included among permissible spoils. When Alexander the Great razed Thebes, he spared its temples. After the Phocians occupied Delphi in 356 BC and expropriated

its treasure, those involved in the "temple-sacking" were declared "accursed," and various catastrophes that subsequently befell them were attributed to divine rancor. Most Greeks of the later, pre-classical age, for which evidence survives, thought that the consequence of sacrilege was "bad hopes" for the future (Parker 171-73, 175).

It would be ludicrous to suppose on the basis of paucity of evidence from earlier times that dread of sacrilege is a late development. Even in Homeric literature there are instances of divine anger striking those who violate the sanctity of temples or sacred images (Parker 168). Fear of sacrilege is hinted at in the *Iliad* when Agamemnon's disrespect for a priest brings plague upon the Achaeans (1: 9) and in the *Odyssey* when the only male at Ismarus spared by Odysseus is a captured priest of Apollo (9: 197). Those who composed and listened to the *Odyssey* may well have had profound religious reservations about what happened at Troy. The absence in the epics of overt expression of anxiety on this score may be the sort of silence especially interesting to psychologists as indicative of repression of knowledge of guilt.

Scully writes that to the ancient Greeks "impiety in the taking of Troy" was "evident from the many disasters that occurred during the army's return or once home" (38). Perhaps the largest of these disasters is a direct consequence of sacrilege--the slaughter of the oxen of the sun-god. Evidence of a link between this act of sacrilege and the destruction of Troy and its temples may be glimpsed in the fact that Apollo, to whom the oxen were sacred, was one of the gods allied with Troy. By opposing the slaughter of the oxen and refusing to take part in it, Odysseus may be symbolically or psychologically exonerating himself for his part in sacrilege at Troy. He may further exonerate himself when he ends the irreverence involved in the suitors' continual feasting.

At meals the suitors neither sacrifice nor pray. We saw that withholding sacrifice symbolizes "original" greed. In Book 14, Eumaeus sacrifices before eating. In Book 18, Odysseus pours libation before drinking. In the first meal Telemachus experiences after leaving home, thousands of people feast at Pylos but only after ritual sacrifice has been performed. There Nestor advises his visitors to pray before they eat. Happy "to find him so right in thought and deed," Athena, disguised as Mentor, prays aloud and elaborately. Before this--in the first meal described in the epic, which Athena describes as "grossness"--the suitors feast without sacrificing or praying.

Success generates psychological guilt. If this is true today--for lottery winners, for example, who suffer terrible emotional distress--it was certainly true for ancient peoples, who

could feel safe after a victory only by attributing it to the gods. In post-Homeric literature, Aeschylus and Herodotus express the notion that "too much success incurs a supernatural danger, especially if one brags about it" (Dodds 30). This danger was present for Odysseus when he cried out boastfully to the blind Polyphemus, "the one who blinded you was Odysseus the city-sacker" (9: 502). The danger is not only in identifying himself by name or in boasting but also and primarily in having been the chief agent of the greatest of successes. After slaying the suitors, Odysseus disclaims responsibility when he forbids Eurycleia her shout of victory: "these men have perished," he tells her, "because the gods willed it so and because their own deeds were evil...they brought on themselves this hideous end" (22, 413-16). In the proem of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is "the man...who had sacked the sacred town of Troy" (1: 2). He takes care not to be, at the end of the epic, "the man who slew the suitors."

In Helen's decision to change husbands, the ancient Achaeans had cause to fight, but hardly a cause that justified the slaughter of the adult male population of Troy, the enslavement of its women and children, and the destruction of its shrines--to say nothing of the loss of Greek lives. Even before the ultimate catastrophe, a sense of disproportion between cause and consequence is suggested in Book 2 of the *Iliad* when, given a choice between continuing the fight and going home, the Achaeans want to leave. Twice, in Books 9 and 14, Agamemnon himself wants to quit fighting and go home. In Book 3 the Achaeans want the matter settled and the bloodshed ended in a duel between Paris and Menelaus. While all this doubtless expresses impatience with nine years of unsuccessful war, it may also indicate a sense of disproportionate consequence.

For the Greeks of a later time, we know that cause alone did not justify consequence; cause and consequence had to be proportionate. Otherwise, the consequence was unjust; it was vengeance, which offended their moral sensibilities. Well writes that Homeric Greeks "were, first of all, geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue" (15). Obsessed with balance, symmetry, proportion, they sought them everywhere, believing them characteristic of the universe. The Greek word *cosmos* means "order." Cedric Whitman has shown that symmetry and balance pervaded vase-design in the post-Mycenaean and pre-classical periods (255). We have seen that symmetry typifies the esthetics of Homeric epic. It is also evident in content. The excursion against Troy was initially launched by a desire to reestablish balance. The death of Elpenor balances Odysseus's emerging from Hades. And, as we noted, the suffering of Odysseus

may counterweigh to some degree the suffering of the Trojans. Disproportionate consequence is a theme in the tale of the Cyclops Polyphemus, who violates hospitality by eating six of his guests. His being blinded by Odysseus far from balances the giant's multiple homicide. The retribution by the giant's father, Poseidon, against Odysseus therefore further skews the balance. Poseidon's act is not justice but merely vengeance on behalf of kin. It is unjust because it is disproportionate, and because it is disproportionate, it is uncivilized.

The post-Homeric audiences of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* watched just cause tumble into vengeful disproportion, as the killing of a daughter is reciprocated by the killing of her father and his innocent concubine and the exile of his son. Unease at such excess compelled the cosmic readjustment at the conclusion of the trilogy when the Furies (avengers against violations of kinship) become the Eumenides (defenders of the city of Athens). It is a transformation anticipated in the *Odyssey* by the change from retaliative violence at Troy to defensive violence in Ithaca.

The triumph of Odysseus over the suitors symbolically reestablishes balance. It rights a wrong--consciously perhaps for us, perhaps unconsciously for the first Homeric audiences. The goodness that lost in the destruction of Troy wins in Ithaca. Odysseus who first entered Troy in disguise to visit Helen, now comes in disguise to Penelope in Ithaca. Now as then he appears as a beggar. His disguise also recalls the more elaborate concealment by which he gained his final entry to Troy. Then, ostensibly, he rescued Helen; now he rescues Penelope. Then he was implicated in what involved, at least, sacrilege; now he is an instrument of divine punishment of impiety. Then he was the aggressor; now he is, albeit aggressively, the defender.

As the defender, he takes Hector's place but the new Hector triumphs. While Andromache and her son were left desolate, Penelope and Telemachus are not. Troy fell; Ithaca does not. The Trojan men were slain; Odysseus and Telemachus are not. The Trojan women were taken into captivity; Ithaca's queen remains safe at home, united with her husband.

The slaughter of the suitors symbolically incorporates and reverses the sack of Troy, canceling psychological guilt that was stirred by greed, sacrilege and disproportionate revenge. While two wrongs do not make a right, a right can imaginatively balance or make up for a wrong. It does so here, largely because the present eclipses the past--as, in the past, a more recent event may take ontological precedence over a less recent event. A contemporary analogy is the

victory over Iraq which was seen as healing the wound in U.S. national pride left by its defeat in Vietnam, even though these two military operations hardly parallel one another.

In a similar sense, the slaughter of the suitors reverses and sets right the murder of Agamemnon. As the story is recalled in the *Odyssey*, Aegisthus used twenty men to ambush and kill Agamemnon. From Ithaca the chief suitor, Antinous, sent twenty men to ambush and kill Telemachus. He would have suffered the fate of Agamemnon. So might Odysseus, for whom the story of Agamemnon is a warning. Instead the suitors die at a banquet, in corrective balance to the murder of Agamemnon at a banquet.

In the *Odyssey*, what for centuries had troubled the psyche, if not the conscience, of the Greeks is symbolically reversed. This reversal must have had a purgative effect on the audience. Recitation of the epics played a central role in Homeric society. Hearing them, a people entertained and instructed itself. In listening to the *Odyssey*, it also absolved itself. By symbolically restoring Troy in a successfully defended Ithaca, the conclusion of the epic alleviated psychological guilt felt by those who identified with Odysseus. The Achaean suitors die as substitutes for the Achaeans who sacked Troy. They are, for Odysseus and the audience, something like scapegoats. By an imaginative equivalent to substitutive sacrifice, the epic restored peace to a troubled people. This must have been a large part of its subconscious appeal. The concluding violence therefore resembled, in its relationship to the sack of Troy, the fire and sulphur by which Odysseus purifies his hall. By effecting imaginative purification, the *Odyssey* resembled the drug Helen puts into the wine in Book 4 that "banished remembrance of every trouble."(\*)

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