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Odyssey 19, 440-443, the Boar in the Bush:
Formulaic Repetition and Narrative Innovation

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Ever since Milman Parry's important work emphasizing the powerful force of tradition in Homeric poetry, there has been a steady stream of dissenting scholarship that continues to insist that this tradition allows the poet far more freedom than Parry envisaged¹. This paper is a small contribution to that ever-growing stream. It is especially fitting that it appears in a volume honoring Bruno Gentili, because his own prodigious scholarship has always emphasized the strong role of tradition in Greek poetry, viewing orality not in the narrow intellectual framework offered by the tenets of strict Parryism, but locating it instead in the creative dynamics of performance. My study will focus on one instance where, in the creative dynamics of narration, the poet of the *Odyssey* was free to depart from automatic repetition when adapting an existing motif to a new context.

The fifth book of Homer's *Odyssey* closes with a scene in which Odysseus, having barely survived the wreck of his raft and a battering on the rocky coast of Scheria, finds shelter in an enclave formed from two kinds of olive tree, the familiar *elaia* intertwined with the *phylia*, which is regularly understood to mean a wild olive. These two trees have

¹ Parry's narrow view of poetic freedom to innovate may be illustrated by a passage from 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style', *Harv. Stud. Class. Philol.* 41, 1930, p. 146 (= A. Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse*, Oxford 1971, p. 324): "Unlike the poets who wrote, he can put into verse only those ideas which are to be found in the phrases which are on his tongue... At no time is he seeking words for an idea which has never before found expression...". The scholarship dissenting from this view is too copious to cite, but the reader should note two strong attempts within the American scholarly tradition to rescue Homeric artistry from the crippling embrace of strict Parryism: M. N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1974, and N. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1975, esp. Ch. 1. The best short critique of Milman Parry's approach remains that of Adam Parry's 'Introduction' to *The Making of Homeric Verse*.

grown together so as to offer a protected inner space insulated from the blast of damp winds, the piercing rays of the hot sun, and the rain. The description of this shelter runs as follows (*Od.* 5, 476-482):

δοιούς δ' ἄρ' ὑπήλυθε θάμνους
 ἔξ ὁμόθεν πεφυῶτας, ὁ μὲν φυλῆς, ὁ δ' ἐλαίης.
 τοὺς μὲν ἄρ' οὐτ' ἀνέμων διάει μένος ὕγρον ἀέντων,
 οὔτε ποτ' ἠέλιος φαέθων ἀκτίσιν ἐβάλλεν,
 οὐτ' ὄμβρος περάσσει διαμπερές· ὡς ἄρα πυκνοὶ 480
 ἀλλήλοισιν ἔφυν ἐπαμοιβαδῖς. οὐς ὑπ' Ὀδυσσεὺς
 δύσει'...

An attentive reader of the *Odyssey* will notice that part of this description reappears almost verbatim in a later passage in Book 19, 435-454, the boar hunt on Parnassos, referring to the boar's lair (5, 478-480 is identical to 19, 440-442; 5, 483 is very close to 19, 443; 5, 476-477, describing the bushes as olives, is omitted from the repeat). We must ask the question, Why is this description repeated and an almost identical shelter given to the boar that wounds Odysseus and is killed by him? (and, parenthetically, why are the two verses identifying the olive trees *not* repeated?). Is it enough to adduce the force of tradition, the convenience afforded by repetition in Homer's traditional formulaic style, or is there some more important connection to be found between the two passages? It is my contention that while the use of these verses in Book 5 may ease the way for their return in 19, the full motivation for their reappearance comes not from the mechanical workings of a traditional diction, but from the poet's wish to innovate creatively within that tradition.

In Book 19, maternal uncles have taken the adolescent Odysseus hunting in what looks like an initiation rite into manhood: the young aristocrat is being introduced into the adult world of killing. The animal hunted and killed is the wild boar, the regular adversary in such initiation rites and in many other cases where the animal hunt serves as a prime demonstration of manly prowess². Odysseus' participation in the

² Many passages in Greek literature of different periods describe the boar hunt as a key masculine activity: *Iliad* 9, 524 ff., the Calydonian boar hunt; Herodotus I 34 ff., the boar hunt which Croesus' son Atys insists upon to re-assert the virility he believes is impugned by his father's over-protective measures; the story in Athenaeus I 18a about the thirty-five year old Macedonian, Cassander, who, although a good hunter, was not allowed to dine with the adult men because he had never managed to kill a boar without the aid of nets; and the boar contests described by Pausanias (III 14, 10)

hunt forms part of his claim to a legacy bestowed by his maternal grandfather on the day of his birth. It was Autolykos who named the newborn Odysseus, and did it in a most significant fashion: he named the baby "Odysseus" in an etymological play upon his own career as a troublemaker and "giver of pain" (the apparent meaning of "Odysseus")³, and requested at this baptism that Odysseus, when he reached early manhood, make a journey to visit him to claim the gift due from a grandfather. The visit to Autolykos and the boar hunt on Parnassos, then, take on a considerable burden of symbolic meaning. The name Odysseus is given as an act of claiming a special bond between grandfather and grandson and projecting a future career for the child that will be an enactment of this continuity: as Autolykos ("Lone Wolf" or "The Very Wolf") has made a career of "odysseusing" men and women throughout the land (19, 407-409), so in naming his grandson "Odysseus" he would pass on to him a legacy of troublemaking, of giving and receiving pain and distaste. This legacy explains why, while Odysseus in the epic tradition cuts a properly heroic figure as esteemed leader and warrior, he always carries with him his dark side, his Autolykan inheritance, making this hero unique in Greek literature⁴. In some ways Odysseus

as tests of young men's martial prowess, in which hand-reared boars are used to represent symbolically the combat between groups of youths. The centrality of the boar-hunt as a male initiatory rite is emphasized by M. Detienne, 'L'olivier, un mythe politico-religieux', in M. I. Finley, ed., *Problèmes de la terre en Grèce ancienne*, Paris-La Haye 1973, p. 303, followed by A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros, masques*, Paris 1981, pp. 138-139. J. S. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena*, Princeton 1983, p. 77 with n. 46, notes that the wild boar is "the beast who is known in the similes of the Epic as the animal most destructive in rage and might", citing *Od.* 17, 21-22 and Aristotle, *Hist. anim.* 630a, 2-3. For a more general treatment of Greek hunting practices see J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1985.

³ The literature on this significant name is copious. See W. B. Stanford, 'The Homeric Etymology of the Name Odysseus', *Class. Philol.* 47, 1952, pp. 209-213; L. P. Rank, *Etymologiseering en verwante verschijnselen bij Homerus*, Assen 1951, pp. 51-65; M. Sulzberger, 'Onoma eponymon: les noms propres chez Homère et dans la mythologie grecque', *Rev. ét. gr.* 39, 1926, pp. 388-389; G. Dimock, 'The Name of Odysseus', in C. Taylor, ed., *Essays on the Odyssey*, Bloomington 1965, and *The Unity of the Odyssey*, Amherst Mass. 1989, pp. 3-4, 258, 306, 329; the commentary *ad loc.* (*Od.* 19, 407 to 439-443) of J. Russo, *Omero, Odissea V*, Roma 1985, pp. 248-250; and J. S. Clay, *op. cit.* pp. 59-65. The obscure verb *odyssthai* seems to combine the meanings "to cause pain" and "to hate"; and its middle voice form suggests reciprocal action, to simultaneously cause and be the recipient of harm and resentment.

⁴ This theme is well recognized and discussed by W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses*

resembles the Trickster figure of world mythology, a culture hero who is simultaneously a respected creator of culture and an embodiment of the more primitive, unrepressed and unsocialized energy of the human psyche that enjoys harmful and selfish acts⁵.

Let us return to the concluding scene of *Odyssey* 5, and note its place in the larger context of the narrative. Odysseus is in transition between the unreal world of Calypso and the Ithacan world to which he belongs. He is soon to meet the Phaeacians who occupy a special place between gods and men and who will effect his final transition home-wards. The function of the protective enclave, at this crucial juncture, is to give Odysseus the special space he needs for a period of withdrawal into sleep, a regenerative sleep that will give him new life and energy for the challenges that await him in his movement homeward. Homer could not be more explicit in his use of a detailed symbolism that unambiguously suggests rebirth. Finding a great heap of fallen leaves

Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero, Oxford 1954, chs. 2 and 3, 'The Untypical Hero' and 'The Grandson of Autolycus'. An excellent recent discussion of Odysseus' Autolykan inheritance is in J. S. Clay, *op. cit.* pp. 74-89, focussing on the story of the boar's-tusk helmet and Odysseus' role in *Iliad* 10. She views Odysseus' wearing a boar's-tusk helmet as an act of disguise governed by *metis*, since the guile of the wolf not the strength of the boar is appropriate to Odysseus at this point. I would say that his mastery of *metis* entitles Odysseus to the nature of the wolf and of the boar simultaneously, exemplifying his mastery of ambiguity.

⁵ This Trickster-aspect of Odysseus appears in many details throughout the *Odyssey*: his use of poisoned arrows, frowned upon both by human society and the gods (1, 260 ff.); his material acquisitiveness (13, 215 ff.; 23, 355 ff.); the reckless greed that prevents him from taking his men's advice to leave Polyphemos' cave (9, 224 ff.); his excessive teasing of his father Laertes before revealing his identity (24, 232-320). In the *Iliad* too there are clear suggestions of this Autolykan persona in Agamemnon's rebuke to Odysseus at 4, 339 (quite distinct, in its allegations of treachery and greed, from his rebuke to Diomedes a few lines later), and in the singular exploit of the unheroic night raid with Diomedes in 10, including Odysseus' lying and deceitful treatment of the enemy Dolon (whose name, "Trick", suggests that Trickster-Odysseus can out-trick even a wily rival Trickster). For a good description of the Trickster figure see the classic account of Paul Radin, *The Trickster*, New York 1956, which includes a brief Introduction describing the Trickster, lengthy Winnebago mythological texts narrating his exploits, and interesting essays by Jung on the Trickster archetype and Kerenyi on Prometheus as Trickster. Odysseus' Trickster qualities are usually explained by calling him a survivor from an earlier level of folkloric narrative (so P. Philippon, 'Die vorhomerische Gestalt des Odysseus', *Mus. Helv.* 4, 1947, pp. 8-22, who would emphasize chthonic origins; and K. Marot, 'Odysseus-Ulixes', *Acta Antiqua* 7-8, 1959-1960, pp. 1-6).

under the bowerlike structure, Odysseus uses them as bedding under which he buries himself like a seed that is planted for future growth. Homer here applies one of his most striking and elaborately apt similes, comparing the buried hero to a buried "seed of flame", *sperma puros*, such as a man on the edge of a field buries under a heap of ash to ensure its survival into the next day, when it will be a source for kindling a new blaze (*Od.* 5, 487-491):

ἐν δ' ἄρα μέσση λέκτο, χύσιν δ' ἐπεχεύατο φύλλων.
ὥς δ' ὅτε τις δαλὸν σποδιῇ ἐνέκρουσε μελαίνῃ
ἀγροῦ ἐπ' ἔσχατιῆς, ᾧ μὴ πάρα γείτονες ἄλλοι,
σπέρμα πυρὸς σώζων, ἵνα μὴ ποθεν ἄλλοθεν αὔοι, 490
ὥς Ὀδυσσεὺς φύλλοισι καλύψατο...

The withdrawal into a protected and protective womb-like enclosure, the comparison to a seed that will allow a new flame to arise the next day, and the location of the activity in the simile in a marginal space, on the outer limits of normal human life, all contribute to endowing Odysseus' sleep and future awakening with strong symbolic overtones. We feel that a larger, deeper meaning is being adumbrated, involving a significant re-emergence of the hero into a restored and enhanced identity. His re-awakening will suggest a birth into new life; his entry into the cycle of sleeping and waking evokes entry into the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, the assumption of a new self to replace the old. It is this deep motif of regeneration of the self, or rebirth as one's true self, that links this passage in Book 5 to that in Book 19.

When the young Odysseus, in the hunt, encounters the wild boar and both gives and receives a wound, he is doing several things at once. On the level of narrative and of social ritual, he is completing the invitation offered by Autolykos at his birth to formally mark his emerging adulthood by receiving gifts and undergoing the rite of passage into the world of adult men who know how to kill. On the level of name symbolism, as Dimock noted, he is acting out the reciprocal dimension of the middle voice of the verb *odyssasthai*; he is both giving and getting pain, stirring up the anger of the boar and matching it with his own anger⁶. The trip to Parnassos represents the completion of a process of growing up whose very beginning was shown in the baptismal act of giving the child a name. The full meaning of that name must be acquired, and

⁶ 'The Name of Odysseus', p. 57.

lived up to, by performance of an action that is simultaneously the first "odysseusing" and a paradigm example of what it means to "odysseus"⁷. The famous scar, which is to become the sign of his identity, is not simply the record of Odysseus' having entered the world of heroic performance, it is the emblem of his taking on, through action, the meaning of the name given him at birth, the visible sign of his having given and received hurt.

It is not difficult to see that a latent symbolism of birth and rebirth undergirds Homer's presentation of the progress of Odysseus throughout the entire *Odyssey*⁸. Homer associates Odysseus with a variety of elements or motifs which take on symbolic power in representing renewal and rebirth (e. g., temporary existence in a cave or womb-like enclave, rekindling of fire, sleep and awakening, emergence from the sea, bestowal of a new appearance, bestowal of a new name, etc.). It is often noted that the olive tree occupies a preeminent place among these elements, as the symbolic representation of salvation and security for this hero and the fixed cornerstone, as it were, of the conjugal bed toward which his homecoming brings him. While its association with Athena is not explicitly given by Homer, it may be seen as implicit in such scenes as 13, 116 ff., where the Phaeacians lay the sleeping Odysseus at the foot of an olive tree (line 122, with the name of Athena appearing in the previous line); and the well-known scene between Odysseus and the goddess must be seen as taking place next to this symbolic tree⁹.

Such a network of renewal-symbolism is appropriate for a *nostos*-poem, Odysseus' journey to find – or better, to re-create – his original identity. The key question we must answer in searching for the underlying meaning of 19, 440-443 is, Why is the motif of the protective enclave re-activated *here*, and applied *not to the hero but to his adversary the boar*?

⁷ See J. Russo's commentary on 19, 407 and 413 in *Omero, Odissea V*, cit. pp. 248-249.

⁸ I am greatly indebted here to the seminal essay of C. P. Segal, 'Transition and Ritual in Odysseus' Return', *Parola d. passato* 40, 1967, pp. 321-342. The recent study of R. Newton, 'The Rebirth of Odysseus', *Gr. Rom. Byz. Stud.* 25, 1984, pp. 5-20, deals only with the symbolism of the Arete-episode in 7, 133-206.

⁹ See G. Germain, *Genèse de l'Odyssee*, Paris 1954, pp. 211-215 and 308-309; C. P. Segal, 'The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return', *Arion* 1, 1962, pp. 62-63 (nn. 31, 41); R. Luyster, 'Symbolic Elements in the Cult of Athena', *Hist. of Relig.* 5, 1965, pp. 148-150.

The first part of the question may be answered easily enough: we are in a narrative flashback that has taken us back to Odysseus' birth and baptism. If the enclave motif is associated, as I would claim, with Odysseus' regaining his full identity, then the poet's intuitive understanding of traditional motifs and their applicability to the action he is narrating would bring this motif to the surface and prompt its use. What is more difficult to explain is why it is not Odysseus but the boar who receives the protective enclave and who then would be, if we applied the symbolic references in a literal or simplistic manner, the person reborn. I suggest that we have here a transference of attributes between Odysseus and the boar, and that such a temporary merging of the two is possible because of the special relationship that obtains between the hunter and the hunted in this ritual activity. The boar is the perfect adversary, perfect because he is, of all the animals possible to hunt, the nearest equivalent to a man. The lion is too large and too overwhelming to be a realistic adversary, and the Greek lion-hunt is in fact not an experience of the real world but one confined to art, myth, legend, and the world of Homeric similes, which always depict him as matched against a small army of men and dogs¹⁰. It was the least dangerous animals that were the most often hunted, the hare being the most common¹¹. But it is the boar that is the quarry *par excellence* for hunting that is to be a display of individual manly valour. There are numerous illustrations of this important fact of Greek life, from the legend of the Calydonian boar hunt to the poignant tale in Herodotus I 34 ff. of Croesus' son Atys, who feels his manhood is undermined if he is not allowed to prove himself in a boar hunt¹². When Odysseus, therefore, matches himself against the wild boar in the hunt on Parnassos, he is facing an adversary who is also his partner in a decisive ritual act. Odysseus and this partner exchange wounds, a spear wound for a tusk wound (we may recall that Croesus' son Atys specifically points out that boars' weapons are not spears but tusks). Each has struck his best blow

¹⁰ The importance of the lion as symbolic presence throughout Homeric epic is masterfully treated by A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon (above, n. 2), whose ch. 7, 'Les chasses homériques', among other important observations, notes that "Les chasses héroïques... sont des chasses possibles... Mais le lion... n'existe qu'au niveau de l'idéologie sociale", p. 141.

¹¹ Anderson (above, n. 2), p. 31.

¹² See above, n. 2, for further illustration.

with his best weapon; the one is killed and the other survives with a memorial wound, the scar that is the bridge into and out of the entire digressive episode. Odysseus has met his "animal other", killed him, and taken on the animal power of the boar as a constituent element of his new manhood. It is in his capacity as adversary, partner, and "animal other" in the ritual hunt that the boar is granted, by an intriguing act of transference, the protective enclave that normally surrounds the emerging Odysseus. The bed of leaves in which Odysseus lay down in Book 5 (εὐνήν, 482, λέκτρο, 487) has become the λόχη from which the boar rises up in 19, 441.

It is in this very fact of momentary equivalence falling short of true equation that we may also find the answer to the question we posed parenthetically at the outset: why, when a description of several verses is repeated, are the verses identifying the olive trees left out? We have already noted that the olive reappears throughout the *Odyssey* as a tree that carries a special power to aid or protect the poem's hero¹³. But when the poet in Book 19 comes to describe a sequence that involves both the literal birth of Odysseus and one of his symbolic re-births, while he is forcefully drawn toward re-use of the familiar "protective enclave" which is appropriate on the motivic level, his creativity and sense of realism on the narrative level lead him to transform the enclave into a hiding place for the boar, i.e., to transform the λέχος into the distantly related λόχη¹⁴. And once it is the boar who is protected and

¹³ In addition to the passages in Books 5, 13, and 19 discussed in this paper, we find that the handle of the axe Calypso gives Odysseus to build his raft is made of olive (5, 233-237); the stake used to blind Polyphemos is made of olive (9, 320; 378; 382; 394); and the conjugal bed of Odysseus and Penelope has been built upon the trunk of an olive tree (23, 190-204). These passages are noted by Germain and Segal (above, n. 9), who would connect them with the magic and saving power of trees generally. For the most elaborate study of all occurrences of olive tree or wood in the *Odyssey*, see A. Bonnafé, 'L'olivier dans l'Odyssee et le fourée de Parnasse: reprises de termes et reprises des thèmes', *Quad. di storia* 21, 1985, pp. 101-136. Her complex analysis, based on a thoroughgoing opposition between the wild and the cultivated, makes many good points but may be attempting to bring too many details into subtle relationships. Her most important observation, for my purposes, is that while the boar-hunt in the Meleager story presents the opposition of the boar and the olive as that of the wild and the cultivated, the boar hunt on Parnassos presents Odysseus as one who unites both elements harmoniously. Her argument, too complex to summarize here, while unrelated to mine, seems complementary with it.

¹⁴ See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris 1968-1980, s. v. λέχεται, for the etymological and semantic chain λόχη-λόχος-λέχος-

not Odysseus, Homer quietly suppresses the presence of the olive: this thicket is πυκινή (19, 439) as the bushes of the earlier scene were πυκνοί (5, 480), but we are not told what kind of bush grows there to create such density.

Our discussion has shown that an understanding of the apparently narrow issue of verbal repetition between *Odyssey* 5 and 19 requires an examination of some far larger questions: the importance of birth, re-birth, and renewal in the *Odyssey* and the poet's use of significant motifs which carry these symbolic implications. An entire generation of Homerists, especially in the United States, entered the post-Parry era conceiving of tradition as a question of familiar and repeated diction and the convenience this affords in narrative performance. A concomitant limitation was the conception of innovation as merely a matter of verbal variation from an inherited matrix. In this study of a verbal nexus that occurs twice in Odysseus' physical and symbolic journey towards his true identity, I hope to have shown that Homer's powers of innovation extend to the subtle manipulation of language and motifs that are certainly traditional, but take on complex levels of new meaning when the compositional technique is that of a great poet.

λέκτρον-λεχώ, which we may note unites all the themes of this passage: lair, ambush, bed, and childbirth.