TELEMACHUS AND THE *TELEMACHEIA*.[1]

It has long been standard with Analysts that if the *Telemacheia* is not by another hand, then it is certainly distinct enough in treatment and integration to deserve its special name. Nor are the reasons urging its separateness only aesthetic. First of all, Telemachus' position in the *Odyssey* raises questions about the political structure of Ithaca, or at least indicates that Homer has left much unsaid about the conditions of royal tenure. Odysseus' father Laertes, who is generally a blank in heroic mythology, has withdrawn to the country in sorrow over the loss of his son, but even before his retirement he does not seem to have ruled as king.[2] If Odysseus assumed the kingship as next in line and primogeniture were the rule, we might expect that Telemachus would have clear title to the throne after Odysseus failed to return from Troy. Such is not the case. Instead, the kingship is to be awarded to whoever marries Penelope—hence the dynastic ambitions of the Suitors and their menace to Odysseus and Penelope.

The dilemma in which this situation involves the Ithacans is obvious. On the one hand the old king has been made unfit for kingship through infirmity; on the other hand Telemachus is unqualified by youth and inexperience. Ithaca is trapped in the weakness of its leaders, the weakness of old age and the weakness of youth, senility and adolescence.[3] Odysseus alone combines exuberance and experience, and he is desperately needed. It is noteworthy too that when he returns not only does he save his family and his land, but the vitality of his presence extends to

[1] This essay, in a somewhat revised form, was originally one chapter of a dissertation accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature at Harvard University (*The Lion and the Altar: Myth, Rite, and Symbol in the Odyssey*, 1960). I am indebted to Professors Finley and Whitman, who directed this dissertation.

[2] Stanford sees Homer, "suggesting a latent father-son antagonism," *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford, 1954), p. 60. Certainly mythology abounds in examples of the feared son who will depose his father; there is even the un-Homeric account of Circe's son by Odysseus slaying his father.

[3] Strength and vigor seem the qualifications for rule in Ithaca. M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York, 1954), p. 93.

his father and son. For Laertes there is a sudden and miraculous transformation.[4]

> Athene herself intervened to increase his royal stature. As he stepped out of the bath she made him seem taller and sturdier than before, so that his own son was amazed when he saw him looking like an immortal god.

Athena's powers here show symbolically how the presence of his beloved son has revitalized the aged Laertes. Nor is the Telemachus Odysseus meets in Book XVI and fights beside in XXII the same young man Athena found in I; but his transformation has been gradual, for not even a goddess can immediately infuse into a young man the wisdom accumulated in a lifetime's experience as hero and king. Laertes needed only to be revivified; he had already known the meaning of the heroic life. The process of Telemachus' introduction into that life is one of the purposes of the four books (and part of Book XV) commonly referred to as the *Telemacheia*. In a society where kingship depends upon merit as much as inheritance, the candidate must be prepared to prove his worth, as Telemachus will in Book XXII, but before the test he must know what it is he is fighting for. Pylos and Sparta can offer him examples.

The *Telemacheia* properly begins after the Council of the Gods when Athena visits Ithaca to hearten Odysseus' son and urge him to call an assembly of Ithacans and then set off to Sparta and Pylos in search of news about his father. Here she finds a despairing Telemachus lost in the dream-world that has become his since the Suitors made the real world intolerable. He is hoping that somehow Odysseus will appear "from somewhere" (115). It will be Athena's purpose in the next few books to rid Telemachus of his melancholy, to show him how in the heroic world dreams are translated into realities. Naturally, the heroic paradigm is from the Agamemnon myth.[5]

> You are no longer a child: you must put childish thoughts away. Have you not heard what a name Prince Orestes made for himself in the world when he killed the traitor Aegisthus for murdering his noble father? You, my friend

[4] XXIV, 368-71. Translation by E. V. Rieu.

[5] I, 297-302. Translation by E. V. Rieu.

> —and what a tall and splendid fellow you have grown!—must be as brave as Orestes. Then future generations will sing your praises.

Athena's encouragement is not without its effect, but Telemachus' adolescent attempts to take charge are a fiasco.[6] He shocks Penelope quite unnecessarily, even cruelly, and then turns on the Suitors in a tone that must have been totally unexpected by them, for they too are taken aback. But the New Telemachus lapses back into the Old Telemachus as soon as Antinous has a chance to distract him. He discourses vaguely on the nature of kingship, then is so uncertain of his own position (if, indeed, he is to succeed Odysseus) that he concedes the claims of the other princes. He then concludes lamely that he intends at least to control his own house. Not a very convincing display of newly found authority, but in his confusion Telemachus has at least raised the great question which Odysseus will answer: Who is to be king of Ithaca? He has also asked what kingship means; and his tentative answer—an enrichment of one's house and an increase of honor (392-3)—will soon be confirmed in the glory and wealth of the courts of Nestor and Menelaus. This awakening to royal prerogatives is critical, for it will be his initial preparation for the coming struggle to preserve the same privileges of rightful kingship in Ithaca. When the first book ends with the touching scene of Eurycleia tending Telemachus as he prepares for bed, Homer has completed the picture of Telemachus' surroundings. He is in some way subject to Penelope, although he has now dared to bridle at her anthority; he is attended by an aged nursemaid; and he is bedevilled and oppressed by insolent Suitors. Odysseus is away, Laertes is off on his farm, and Telemachus has only two women to support him against the menace of 108 would-be usurpers.

Book II does little to convince us that Telemachus has profited by Athena's encouragement. His indictment of the Suitors and appeal to their non-existent sense of justice and his plea that

[6] Athena is impressed by Telemachus' physical resemblance to his famous father, but his insecurity is such that he is even unsure of his own identity. "My mother says that I am my father's son, but for myself I do not know" (I, 215-16). The burden of the next few books is to harmonize Telemachus' inner and outer selves.

they regard Zeus and Themis is clearly not the kind of speech his father would deliver, and whatever faint effect it might have had on their consciences is dissipated when he concludes his words with a sudden burst of tears. The crowd pities him, less so the Suitors, particularly the cynical Antinous, who goes on to shift the blame to Penelope for her funeral shroud ruse. Once again Telemachus' attempts at oratory have been abortive and ineffective, but once again he has raised a central theme of the *Odyssey*: the justice of Odysseus, the injustice of the Suitors. Furthermore, the terms of his speech, just as in Book I, foreshadow elements of his experience in III and IV. He describes Odysseus' kingship as fatherly in its gentleness (47), and he will see gentle and exemplary fathers in Nestor and Menelaus; the food wasted by the Suitors in their revels in Ithaca (55-6) will be consumed in order and harmony in the feasts in Pylos and Sparta; the wine that intoxicates the Suitors in Ithaca (57) will become a tranquillizer in Sparta; and the weakness he protests here (60-1) will be overcome by confidence and resolve before he sees Ithaca again. Telemachus next commences his preparations for his journey, but runs into the astonished protests of Eurycleia: "But there's no need at all for you to endure the hardships of wandering over the barren seas" (369-70). This feminine attraction to place is partly what Telemachus must overcome by becoming acquainted with the ways of the heroes who did suffer hardships at Troy and then had to return over the seas to the great centers of the Mycenaean age. But for all Telemachus' determination, Eurycleia's objection still stands; and to assert that Telemachus must rid himself of his feminine inhibitions is not a very convincing justification for his trip. That Telemachus intends to go off on a junket at this crucial time was duly noted by Analyst critics and made one of their reasons for the original separateness of the *Telemacheia*.[7] In this objection, however, they were anticipated by Homer himself, not only here but also by Odysseus in XIII, 417, and Eumaeus in XIV, 178.[8] All stress that this is the worst con-

[7] Bethe's objections are vigorous and detailed: *Homer: Dichtung und Sage*, II (Leipzig and Berlin, 1929), p. 15.

[8] See F. Klingner, "Über die vier ersten Bücher der Odyssee," *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Leipzig*, XCVI (1944), p. 14.

ceivable time for Telemachus to leave Ithaca, what with the Suitors getting impatient and Penelope at her wit's end. To them the answer is provided by Athena in XIII, 422. Yes, she could have told Telemachus the truth about his father, but she wanted him to make the trip to win *kleos*. The fact is that nothing Athena *told* Telemachus would have any lasting effect; what he needed before meeting his father was experience in heroic society, and this journey to Pylos and Sparta was the only resort. Telemachus had to be baptized into the heroic life, commune with its leaders, and be confirmed in its values or he would never be a trusted ally to his father or a fit successor to the kingship. *Kleos* ranks with *arete* as an honorific word in the heroic vocabulary, and it is only in places like Pylos and Sparta that Telemachus can absorb their meanings and prepare himself to merit them. It is true that this is a critical juncture in the affairs of Ithaca, but far from impeding Telemachus, it makes his journey all the more necessary. For it is at the truly critical periods of man's life—when he is most exposed—that he must appeal to an extra source of strength. Hence Telemachus' journey is neither unnecessary nor unmotivated, although the necessity is Telemachus himself and the motive transcends the averred search for information.

Book III brings the travellers to the first stage of their journey, Nestor's citadel at Pylos. Here we are in the heroic world and Telemachus does not know how to act, what to do, how to approach the great man. Athena encourages him as the libation is offered, and Telemachus manages nicely in his first bout with the social forms of a kingly court, though not as deftly as Nestor's son Peisistratus, who had, after all, the benefit of growing up within this mannered society.[9] Nestor then

[9] Elaborate form is part of the heroic life; and the *Odyssey* is, generally, a very polite poem. The emphasis of the *Telemacheia* on manners subtly indicates an extra dimension to the threat the Suitors embody. Not only do they want to marry Penelope and slay Odysseus and Telemachus, they also want to destroy the whole facade of heroic manners. Themselves without courtesy, regard, tact, restraint, they would utterly decivilize Ithaca. Manners are important; they buttress conduct and give life style, grace, and ease; in a formalized society they can heavily influence conduct by providing it with traditional and customary patterns of action. All of this the barabarism of the Suitors would despoil.

delivers a long speech, luxuriating in the recollected sorrows of the Trojan War and remarking Telemachus' resemblance to his famous father.[10] In reminiscing about Troy, Nestor passes from Achilles to Ajax to Patroclus and finally to his own son Antilochus. He praises Odysseus for his good sense, tells how out of allegiance and piety Odysseus stayed behind with Agamemnon, and does not forget to remind Telemachus approvingly of the sterling example of Agamemnon's son Orestes. Telemachus picks up the hint, but then awkwardly blurts out his despair of ever seeing his father again, for which he is promptly chided by Athena. In the fully integrated society piety and manners are identical and Telemachus must learn to trim his private doubts accordingly. Athena leaves that evening and Telemachus is received into Nestor's palace where he sleeps beside Nestor's son Peisistratus. The next day Nestor arranges an elaborate banquet for Telemachus' crew and even has his youngest daughter, Polycaste, give Telemachus a bath. This is almost a rebirth, for out of it Telemachus emerges, "looking like a god" (III, 468). Nestor then gives him horses and a chariot and sends Peisistratus to accompany him in his way to Sparta. Athena is no longer with him; but he has been accepted into Nestor's household, bathed by his daughter, and is now being accompanied by his son. For Telemachus this has been a tonic experience after the desperation of his life at Ithaca, and at last he is ready to break out of the shell of his depression and uncertainty and make his way in broad heroic society.

Book IV opens with a scene of feasting and family cheer (the marriages of Menelaus' son and daughter) in the splendid palace of Menelaus. Here is a prosperity, a security, and a family intimacy that Telemachus had never known in Ithaca and only lately met in Pylos. Indeed, Homer's choice of details to contrast Menelaus and Sparta with Odysseus and Ithaca is subtle and exact. The primary complication of the *Odyssey* proper is the disunion of a family, whereas here we have an immediate awareness of union (the marriages) and reunion (Helen). And compare the joy and harmony of Menelaus' banquet with the pointless carousing of the Suitors. Nor has anything in Telemachus' limited experience prepared him for the magnificence

[10] Note the continuing reference to faithful sons—Antilochus, Peisistratus, Orestes.

of Menelaus' palace, and before it even Peisistratus is impressed. Nevertheless, Telemachus is making progress; at the beginning of Book III the mere sight of a hero panicked him; here he seems quite sure of himself before Menelaus, and he can be forgiven his awe before the royal palace (his father, who has seen everything, is no less impressed by Alcinous' palace in Book VII). Manners are once again stressed: Menelaus' anger that hospitality is refused strangers, and his embarrassment when Telemachus weeps as he reminisces of Odysseus. And in the stories Menelaus tells there are little morals which can also be of use to Telemachus. Proteus, for example, tells Menelaus that he should have sacrificed to Zeus before embarking; Ajax' fate is an example to those who would blaspheme; and when Proteus tells Menelaus of what happened to Agamemnon and then urges him to hurry back to his land as quickly as he can, Homer shows us that the point is not lost on Telemachus. He refuses to protract his stay in Sparta, and when Menelaus offers him three horses he has the wit and temerity to ask for a gift he can carry, not horses which are so impractical on Ithaca. Menelaus is impressed.

The *Telemacheia* next picks up in Book XV when Athena again visits Telemachus, this time in Sparta, and urges him to hasten back to Ithaca. His reaction is almost as precipitate as it was in I, but Peisistratus checks him: after all, there are ways of doing these things, and "a guest never forgets a host who has shown him kindness" (54-5). Telemachus frets through Menelaus' moralizing and the rituals of gift-giving, but by now he is aware of his responsibilities and feels himself a man of action; now it is more than he can stand to have to return to Pylos and brave Nestor's oppressive hospitality. Telemachus has been schooled in the forms of the heroic life in Books III and IV; in XV he has earned the right to transcend them. He can dispense with social obligations, for his own are infinitely more demanding. He must be about his father's business.

The last scene of the *Telemacheia,* the Theoclymenus episode, is puzzling.[11] Why is Theoclymenus brought in? Perhaps to

[11] Page criticizes it as too long an introduction for so unimportant a person: *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford, 1955), p. 84.

palliate murder in the face of Odysseus' treatment of the Suitors? Certainly Theoclymenus, like Odysseus, can say, "It is my fate to wander about the world" (XV, 276), and he is being pursued by the kinsmen of the man he has slain. And for the rest of the poem this relic of heroic world feuds will hover uneasily in the background like Conrad's Leggat, the secret sharer in Odysseus' revenge and a disturbing reminder of the random violence and blood guilt of the heroic age. But for Telemachus this decision to accept Theoclymenus demonstrates his newly won authority, that he has the right to give asylum, even hospitality, if he wants, to a murderer. Through Theoclymenus Homer can underscore the identity of Telemachus, show that he is now coming into his own and can afford his father the assistance Odysseus might have received from another Achaean hero on the fields before Troy. In this sense it is appropriate that the *Telemacheia* end with Theoclymenus interpreting an omen, a hawk appearing on the right with a dove in its talons, which he sees as signifying that, "No family in Ithaca is kinglier than yours; you will have power forever" (533-4).[12] As a professional performance this is indeed drab,[13] and as a prophecy it is so vague as to be meaningless. But it is not a prophecy; it is an accolade, a ceremony to complete the *Telemacheia* by marking Telemachus' attainment to true sonhood. His doubts about his right to his royal patrimony are allayed, and he is rewarded with an assurance of future success. Theoclymenus' words signal an access of power that Telemachus will need in the days ahead.

After Telemachus returns to Ithaca his fortunes are subordinated to his father's. This somewhat diminishes the impact of Telemachus' personality and Homer is not always successful in giving him something to do. Although he is potentially his father's most powerful ally against the Suitors, even Odysseus seems to ignore him when he tells Athena, "I am alone" (XX, 40). Of course, Telemachus shows his mettle: only a nod from Odysseus in XXI keeps him from stringing the bow, and he seems to do his share in the fight with the Suitors. He is excep-

[12] The comparative *basileuteron* is used by Agamemnon to describe himself in *Il.*, IX, 160.

[13] Page, p. 85.

tional in his mercy, checking Odysseus from slaying Phemius the minstrel and Medon the herald, and relentless in his revenge, personally stringing up the unfaithful serving women. But if Telemachus does acquire some of his father's heroism, it is at the price of his own individuality. Homer seems conscious of this and goes to great lengths to let us know Telemachus is still around. But the glimpses he gives us are often of the "old" Telemachus, laughing (XXI, 105), sneezing (XVII, 541), and absentmindedly botching his father's plans (XXII, 154); Telemachus speaks out of turn (XXIII, 97-103), parades in borrowed feathers.

One answer here seems to be that the second half of the *Odyssey* belongs to its hero alone. Odysseus must be alone in center stage if his presence is to have the startling effect appropriate to the return of the hero. But no sooner is Odysseus back in Ithaca than he finds himself implicated in an intrigue to disarm the Suitors and an alliance to slay them. This involvement could detract from the interest in Odysseus if Homer had not manipulated his characters in such a way as to enhance the personality of Odysseus. *His family becomes Odyssean.* Penelope can even restrain herself from rushing into the arms of her husband. Instead she tests him in proper Odyssean fashion, with a self-control and cunning that must have warmed Odysseus' wary old heart. This transformation also affects Laertes, who, as we have noted, is rejuvenated by Athena. Telemachus, for his part, becomes so like Odysseus that he is indistinguishable from him, being as much a replica of his father as his own name is—or sounds like—a title of Odysseus.[14] The problem Homer faced was technical: how to show the maturity, individuality, and heroism of Telemachus without detracting from the dominance of Odysseus. If his compromises were not always successful, it is largely because the pre-logical situations of myth will not readily conform to the logic of literature.[15]

[14] Far-fighter? Cf. Astyanax and Hector. See G. Germain, *Genèse de l'Odysée* (Paris, 1954), p. 485, for a discussion and list of references.

[15] Mireaux sees Telemachus as the ritual successor of Odysseus, as Oedipus succeeded Laius and Aegisthus Agamemnon and, indeed, Telegonus Odysseus, but precluded by the exigencies of the myth—or Homer's version—from playing his sacral role. "Dans la légende odysséenne, il est vrai, Ulysse est vainqueur des prétendants; mais sa victoire, nous

Telemachus' fortunes may be checkered in the *Odyssey*, but in his own "epic" he can stand a thorough comparison with his more famous father. First, both Telemachus and his father make journeys, from which both must return home indirectly and in constant danger. Odysseus has to grapple with the world's perils and disorders and yet survive, preserving his identity and his purpose. For Telemachus the world is precisely the opposite: the well-ordered kingdoms of Nestor and Menelaus. Telemachus' progress is from the chaos of Ithaca to the cosmos of Pylos and Sparta; Odysseus seeks the stability of his home across the ragged edges of the world. But in their separate worlds there is an important difference between the two: Odysseus acts, Telemachus reacts. Although Odysseus more than once comes within an inch of his life, Telemachus' experiences (apart from the social) are vicarious: he listens, observes, absorbs. He learns about his father, not his whereabouts, but rather the full story of the Odyssean exploits at Troy. He can now better appreciate his father (particularly when it comes to infiltrating a hostile city), because he has learned of his derring-do from the greatest living authorities on heroic *arete*. It is important, therefore, that in this atmosphere of wartime heroism recollected in the tranquillity of peace Telemachus do nothing, just as it is for Odysseus in Book XI. And yet, through his own faltering efforts to make this trip and share the memories of Nestor and Menelaus, Telemachus is able to rehearse privately many of the great crises of the *Odyssey*. The stories of the heroes fighting at Troy and returning to Greece prepare him for the the coming struggle by expanding his knowledge, if not experience, of the world. He has the same vision of man's life as Odysseus sees projected in the Underworld: family (Nestor and Menelaus), moral (Ajax' blasphemy, Menelaus' delay), and women who suffered through

le savons, est celle de son fils qui a combattu à ses côtés, vaincu avec lui et peut ainsi lui succéder. Lui-même est obligé de s'exiler": *Les poèmes homériques et l'histoire grecque* (Paris, 1948-49), pp. 152-3. This is interesting, in that it offers an explanation for Odysseus' leaving Ithaca again, though this sort of explanation may seem no less mysterious than Tiresias' and even less central to the poem. The point worth emphasizing is that the archery contest and the massacre of the Suitors are essentially Odysseus' affairs, and his favored position as king makes Telemachus superfluous.

love (Helen). He hears a prophet (Proteus) who is at the same time a sea monster of the ilk that besets his father; and he too must hurry home at the warning of Athena to save Penelope from the Suitors. Homer has succeeded in packing a version of the *Odyssey* into a little more than two books, all in the passive voice.

The *Nekyia* serves in other ways to define the special quality of the *Telemacheia.* Both of these episodes presume to show us the hero learning something vital to his future welfare, yet in each the information is either not forthcoming as supposed or else could have been acquired elsewhere. Further, it is only in the *Nekyia* that Odysseus assumes the stance of Telemachus in Books III and IV, that of the passive observer of an unfamiliar ceremony. However there are significant differences. Whereas Telemachus is introduced to the heroic tradition in the front parlors of the returned chieftains where manners saturate conduct, where worldly prudence and social maturity have a climactic importance, and where the storms and struggles of life seem comfortably remote; Odysseus on the other hand has to break through the world's surfaces, has to pass, indeed, from life to death. Telemachus hears about Agamemnon and Achilles; Odysseus goes to see them. Odysseus' fate is cosmic, hence he must penetrate to the mist-bound areas beyond this life. His living presence in Hades prefigures the life that he will restore to the stricken land of Ithaca. Odysseus must go beneath the levels of the world, the very levels which Telemachus must come to know with tact and nicety. Ordinarily Odysseus is satisfied with his knack of survival in a hostile and perplexing world, but in the *Nekyia* he is in touch with powers beyond his techniques and he is immobilized by them. He comes for specific information from Tiresias, but he stays to meet the representatives of the heroic Establishment. Odysseus needs no education in the ways of this world; now his experience has been deepened by exposure to the ways of the other world. But if the *Odyssey* in XI breaks through the forms, the *Telemacheia* is content to slide along their surface, initiating their hero into the rites of a faith in which he was born but never reared. Its high priest is Nestor, its catechism the legends of Troy.

Again, Odysseus is saddled for much of his return with the

burden of his company, the responsibility for their safety and the accountability for their lesser talents. Within his larger fate are subsumed the fates of his companions. With Telemachus, however, the situation is reversed. He is under the divine protection of Athena and the fraternal guidance of Peisistratus. Since Odysseus overshadows his men when accompanied or else travels alone, his personality everywhere dominates the action even when the forces opposing him are most critical or catastrophic. Telemachus does not dominate the action; instead, he is usually at its mercy. He finds himself in social impasses, situations where he fears that his training and experience are not adequate to cope with them. He is never alone; Athena and Peisistratus are ever with him, and his final character is shaped by their tutoring or example. Their salutary presence, their promptings, assurances, commendations are the background of his development.

From the time of Porphyrio, who called it a *paideusis*,[16] the

[16] *Quaest. Hom.*, ed. H. Schrader (Leipzig, 1890), pp. 15-18, on I, 284. Whether or not Telemachus' exploits in aid of his father can be attributed to a change in his character, and whether or not this character change (or development) is directly induced by his trip to Pylos and Sparta or by Athena's appearance in Book I, has been much disputed. Favoring some sort of *Entwicklungsgang* are E. Drerup, *Homerische Poetik: Das Homerproblem in der Gegenwart*, I (Würzburg, 1921), p. 365, n. 3; J. A. Scott, "The Journey Made by Telemachus and its Influence on the Action of the *Odyssey*," *C. J.*, XIII (1917-18), p. 426; H. Herter, "Telemachos" in *R.-E.*, A 5, 1, col. 351; E. Schwartz, *Die Odyssee* (München, 1924), p. 253; R. Pfeiffer, rev. of Schwartz, *op. cit.*, and of Wilamowitz, *Die Heimkehr des Odysseus* (Berlin, 1927), *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, XLVIII (1928), pp. 2368-9; J. Geffcken, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte*, I (Heidelberg, 1926), p. 39; W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, I, trans. G. Highet (Oxford, 1939), pp. 28-9; K. Reinhardt, *Von Werken und Formen* (Godesberg, 1948), p. 47; R. Robert, *Homère* (Paris, 1950), p. 267; E. Delebecque, *Télémaque et la structure de l'Odyssée* (Aix-la-Provence, 1958), p. 137. Wilamowitz' final view was that character development is foreign to Greek literature and that there is no change in Telemachus in the later books of the poem, *op. cit.*, p. 106. F. Focke quotes Wilamowitz approvingly, but also claims that after his trip Telemachus "ist jetzt wer, eine vollwertige Persönlichkeit, von der 'man' mit Achtung spricht," *Die Odyssee* (*Tübinger Beiträge*, XXXVIII [1943]), p. 60. Cf. the view of Luigia Stella, that Telemachus is an unimportant character and the *Telemacheia* only a pretext to reinsert

Telemacheia has sometimes been taken as a kind of *Bildungsroman*; and it is true that all the elements are there. Telemachus is the callow youth, Pylos and Sparta are the paradigms of the princely court, Athena is the guide, and the result is Telemachus fighting with skill and courage beside his father against the Suitors. One distinction: the *Telemacheia* is not simply a schooling or an education; it is not something taught but something imparted; it is an experience, one young man's initiation into a world he has inherited and whose values he will soon have to defend by force.[17] And yet it is not a rite of initiation in the anthropological sense of a set of artificial dangers contrived to test a candidate's reactions.[18] Growing up

into the *Odyssey* the great figures of epic legend, *Il poema d'Ulisse* (Florence, 1955), p. 88.

Be he changed or developed, transformed or matured, and whatever his incidental difficulties in helping his father (like leaving the storeroom door open in Book XXII), the Telemachus whom Odysseus meets in XVI has been abroad in the heroic world and has come to appreciate personally the glories of a setttled kingdom enjoying the benefits of order and prosperity. This, at any rate, is a kind of knowledge he did not have before visiting Pylos and Sparta; but whatever the trip might have done for Telemachus' character, its vision of the heroic world at peace with itself certainly enriches the poem and extends its meaning.

[17] What one would most expect to happen fails to materialize, namely that either Nestor or Menelaus would volunteer to send off a detachment of their palace guard to Ithaca to restrain the Suitors, protect Penelope, and confirm Telemachus in his patrimony. Instead, they seem to assume that this is exclusively the problem of Telemachus and Odysseus.

[18] Insofar as the *Telemacheia* does suggest such a rite of passage, its truest correspondent in the *Odyssey* is the inserted account of Odysseus' naming in Book XIX, 392-466. Here Autolycus visits his son-in-law and daughter on the remote island of Ithaca and invites them to send the young Odysseus to Parnassus. In time Odysseus visits the land of his fathers, takes part in a hunt with Autolycus' sons, is wounded by a boar, and returns home laden with presents. This hunt seems less an incidental episode than a rite of initiation, wherein the young man participates in an adult act of bravery superintended by his elders, suffers the ritual wound, sheds the symbolic blood, and then returns home, his success ratified by his many presents. This is paralleled by Telemachus' experience, bloodlessly of course, because his initiatory trial operates on the social surfaces and his participation in bloodshed—Troy and the *nostoi*—is vicarious, filtered through the accounts of Nestor and Menelaus.

fatherless in a house full of scheming Suitors has given him a taste of peril; now in the *Telemacheia* Pylos and Sparta demonstrate to him the possibilities of peace, and the example of Nestor and Menelaus expose him to the precedents of *arete*.

The worlds Telemachus is exposed to—Ithaca and Pylos-Sparta—and the social images they offer him extend beyond the *Odyssey*; like so much of Homeric poetry they are archetypes of our literary consciouness. That the details of the *Telemacheia* are not wholly arbitrary and that they have a high literary convertibility can be demonstrated by a cursory comparison with a modern analogue, William Faulkner's long short story *The Bear*. Faulkner's story of Ike McCaslin's initiation into the mysteries of the wilderness through participation in a hunt for a bear named Old Ben touches Homer's work in detail and theme. The ritual element of *The Bear* is explicit, with Faulkner saying of his hero at the beginning of the story, "He entered his novitiate to the true wilderness" (p. 195),[19] and at the end, "Sam led him into the wilderness and showed him and he ceased to be a child" (p. 330). And like Telemachus in Pylos-Sparta, Ike in the big woods is more spectator than actor. "*So I will have to see him*, he thought . . . *I will have to look at him*" (p. 204, Faulkner's italics). And for the term of their preparation each is assigned a guardian. For Ike it is the appropriately named Sam Fathers, half Negro and half Indian, "childless, kinless, peopleless" (p. 246); for Telemachus it is Athena, herself half native and half intruder, also childless and kinless, and appearing as Mentor, a name also used by Faulkner to make the educative meaning of his story evident. There is also a resemblance in movement between the two stories. Each has two general episodes or stages, the *Telemacheia* moving from Nestor's Pylos to Menelaus' Sparta, while Faulkner's hero first downs a buck under Sam Father's tutelage before he is worthy to face Old Ben.[20] It is interesting that the end of the first stage in each account is sealed by an accolade. Ike's face is bathed with the buck's blood. "Sam Fathers marked his face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to

[19] Page references are to the Modern Library edition of *Go Down, Moses* (New York, 1955).

[20] Actually recounted in *The Old People*, the story preceding *The Bear* in *Go down, Moses*, but recalled twice (pp. 210, 323) in the latter story.

be a child and became a hunter and a man" (p. 178). For Telemachus, too, the departure from Pylos is solemnized by a bath given him by none other than Nestor's own daughter, from which he appears, "looking like a god" (II, 468). There are other details. When Ike finally sees Old Ben and is so reverent before its "furious immortality" (p. 194) that he is immobilized, we recall Telemachus so awestruck by Nestor that he tells Athena, "Looking at him I think I am beholding immortality itself" (III, 246). Then when General Compson, himself a kind of Nestor, lets Ike take his horse Katie, one thinks of the horses Nestor gives Telemachus to continue his journey. And as Ike protects the repellent Boon Hogganbeck when his cousin McCaslin accuses him of shooting Sam Fathers, so Telemachus accepts the murderer Theoclymenus and later spares Phemius and Medon in the slaughter of the Suitors. The planter aristocracy which helps instruct Ike may also be compared with the feudal aristocracy of the late Mycenaean age as represented in the *Telemacheia* by Nestor and Menelaus. Finally, the names of the two boys have a symbolic dimension. Faulkner first calls his hero "the boy" or "he," then "Ike"; but it is not until the end of the story that Faulkner identifies him as, "An Isaac born into later life than Abraham's and repudiating immolation" (p. 283). In the same way, Telemachus' aspiration to the conditions of heroism are suggested by his name, so apt for this young Ithacan who in the future will be the kind of fighter his father can trust and admire.

Both Telemachus and Ike lost their fathers in early childhood and both grew up in worlds where they felt they did not belong. For both these abandoned children the trial they will ultimately face is the effort to prove themselves by worthy deeds, to demonstrate before their elders and peers that they are truly the sons of their fathers. For Ike the preparation is the bear hunt, and for Telemachus, the journey to the heroic world. These are experiences in which each is received into a timeless world, ceremonies of attainment in which they are secluded from distraction and released from the entanglements of the present journeys into the exemplary past where historical pageant can already be made to yield a moral parable. For Telemachus the meetings with Nestor and Menelaus are sacraments, the visible means to the graces of heroism. Hence his search is for more

than news of his father: he seeks the social and family assurance of the heroic age, where sons are like their fathers because they have grown up in their shadows, as Antilochus was like Nestor, or where sons inherit their fathers' bravery and defend their memories, as Orestes avenged the death of Agamemnon. Telemachus has never had a father to provide the scenes and cues for his glory, and so this journey is not only for information but, as Athena admits (XIII, 422), to win him his first *kleos*. But like *The Brothers Karamazov* it deepens the search for the physical father into the profounder theme of the spiritual condition of children deprived of faith and security. For both young men this trip "into the new and alien country" (p. 207) is a maturing and purifying experience, although in its results the *Telemacheia* extends into an heroic deed the action which for Faulkner's hero culminates in renunciation. Whereas Ike leaves "the settled familiar land . . . the childish business of rabbits" (p. 171), penetrates the elementary and numinous wilderness, sees the bear, learns in his bones its greatness of courage and defiance and endurance, Telemachus on the other hand leaves the menace of the Suitors behind in Ithaca, experiences the harmony and stability of Pylos and Sparta, and then returns to help his father purge the contaminated land and restore justice and the social conventions. Ike is sequestered from society, Telemachus is exposed to it. Yet in each story the "heroic" world, whether it be a Mycenaean court reflecting recent glories or the big woods sheltering a bear who is proud of his liberty and ruthless to defend it, is opposed to the suffering homeland where the natural inheritance has been disrupted and power is passing into the hands of the dispossessors and the exploiters. Ike is tragically aware of his share in this corruption; his position is more ambiguous than Telemachus' and his opportunity for action more limited. So he repudiates his patrimony and becomes a carpenter without children or property. Telemachus' experience, in contrast, is more social; renunciation is a luxury he and his parents can scarcely afford—and so he joins his father and fights to restore his rights and ensure his succession.

It does not really matter that Old Ben, the bear, is a hunted animal, while Nestor and Menelaus are Telemachus' father's friends and allies. Both the animal and the heroes embody the

pride and assurance and skill that mark maturity and assure survival. And both are destructive; for heroic self-assertion also has its toll of grief (as Iphigeneia reminds us) and its besetting sins of bloodlust and predatory pride. These are perhaps clearer in the *Odyssey*, where the brief glories of the Trojan War are dimmed by time and by their entailments of loss and suffering, and where the action culminates in the bloody impartiality of the *Freiermord*. And if the Suitors represent the heroic age's inevitable historic successors, seizing power through an oligarchic *stasis*, then this notion is not too far from Ben's ultimate destruction by the dog Lion, "an animal almost the color of a gun or pistol barrel" (p. 216), owned by Boon Hogganbeck, "a violent, insensitive, hard-faced man" (p. 220). In Faulkner's story more than in Homer's the obsolescence of the heroic order is explicit, and Faulkner himself has underscored its significance: "That is a change that's going on everywhere, and I think that man progresses mechanically and technically much faster than he does spiritually, that there may be something he could substitute for the ruined wilderness, but he hasn't found that."[21] This is also the point of the logging operations in Part 5 of *The Bear*, a noisy and ruinous attack on the life of nature that effectively matches the idle destructiveness of the Suitors in Ithaca. Granted the old, wild, heroic order cannot forever afford the costs of its glories; yet if it must pass, it deserves worthier successors than Antinous and Eurymachus.

Thus the wilderness Ike penetrates and the heroic society Telemachus traverses are not wholly dissimilar. Each is an enclosed world with its own laws and conventions, its own mystique of wisdom and virtue, and its own concept of honor. It is in this "other world" that the young novices are absolved of the corrupting burdens of the historical world and born again of courage and truth and humility. Faulkner tells us that it seemed to Ike that, "at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth" (p. 195). This is also the final purpose of the *Telemacheia*: the birth of a hero. As such it parallels in its way the *Odyssey*, which presents the return of the hero (and with Laertes, the rebirth of a hero), and thereby completes the picture of heroic life which the *Odyssey* celebrates.

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[21] *Faulkner in the University*, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, 1959), p. 68.