

The Return of Odysseus:
Discovering the Homeric Wisdom of
αἴσιμα

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It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood, . . . he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. The truth of this second point is shown by experience: . . . we delight to view the most realistic representations . . . The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind.

Aristotle
(*Poetics*: 1448b[3-15], or Ch. 4, 1-5)



ἄμεινω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα.

Homer
(*The Odyssey*: Loeb, 7.310 and 15.71)

Preface

The motivation for this essay was a question that sometimes opens a seminar covering Odysseus' departure from Calypso's island of Ogygia: "Why did he say no?" That is, why did Odysseus reject Calypso's offer of immortality and agelessness? One of my summer 2005 Literature seminars opened with this question. It has lingered with me since.

I would like to think that this revised submission offers a more focused, succinct, and tightened-up discourse while also injecting relevant new material. However, not without some remorse do I relegate most previous Aristotelian references to footnotes and an appendix. Aristotle not only illuminates certain methods and purposes of Homer, but philosopher and poet share connections, perhaps even dependencies, that merit appreciation and deserve attention – albeit not here.

One sentiment I cannot completely discard, although I have attempted to expunge its repetitions from this edition, is Aristotle's notion that "to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures." These words from the tutor of Alexander capture the essence of discovering something unexpected and fresh. Favorable circumstances while reading for and ruminating on this essay during the summer of 2010 resulted in not one but several delightful discoveries.

Stepping away from my writing for a few months before taking it up again, mindful of helpful comments regarding its content, led me to a greater appreciation of regrettable redundancies and wordy extras within. My initial submission was very un-Odyssean. When he finishes his tales to the Phaeacians at the end of Book Twelve, Odysseus wisely refuses to repeat the story of his time with Calypso and his arrival on Scheria: "Just yesterday, here at hall, I told you all the rest, / you and your gracious wife. It goes against my grain / to repeat a tale told once, and told so clearly." I certainly do not claim Odyssean clarity. On the contrary, I muddled my explanation of the central discovery by recovering too much ground, recording too much process, and noting too many secondary discoveries (often no less personally delightful). I hope a more informed understanding of this literary balance now helps me properly attend to the primary theme in this resubmission.

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Calypso offers. Odysseus rejects. He rejects immortality and agelessness coupled with an incomparably beautiful goddess. Why did he say no? Trade places. Consider the offer personally. What would you say? Homer, I submit, has his audience in mind.

We know what Odysseus asserts. Twice he maintains that Calypso “never won the heart inside me, never” (7.297, 23.380).¹ The Phaeacians hear it on Scheria, from their guest who remains temporarily a stranger. Penelope hears it on Ithaca, from her husband who first dispatches the suitors and then unmask himself by divulging intimate, corroborative details about their marriage bed.

But is something to be learned from what he does not assert? If we take our storyteller to simply mean neither more nor less than he maintains, if we search no further, then we may miss that “greatest of pleasures” which Aristotle claims poetry affords the philosopher and, indeed, all mankind.² If Odysseus’ decision also involves on a more subtle level something truly philosophical, like reason and mind, then we might aspire to pleasant discoveries and real learning.

Odysseus’ all too patently obvious answer leaves the reader feeling empty, not delighted. He crawled into bed with Calypso every night for “seven endless years” (7.298) but by day wept uncontrollably for home and hearth. Homer, who earlier serves as witness that Odysseus most certainly rejects Calypso’s offer (5.150 – 155), also serves as witness to Odysseus as unwilling lover (5.170 – 175). What, I ask, might be the real reasoning behind his incessant weeping and unending grief, especially after essentially winning the lottery?

¹ Line numbers refer to the Fagles translation of *The Odyssey* unless otherwise indicated or obvious. For assistance, Appendix A cross-references most Fagles line numbers with equivalent Greek/Loeb line numbers.

² Aristotle’s quote that opens this paper articulates the general essence of poetic discoveries. But other Aristotelian writings may share even stronger, more specific relationships with Homer and *The Odyssey*. Appendix H previews some possible, seductive connections.

For he is offered Calypso's devoted and fawning love; no more worries; no more cares; an endless, island paradise vacation – and immortality and agelessness. What is hidden in that wily warrior's purging act of grief and weeping? Is his storytelling helpful? Does Homer offer clues that might key us to deeper insight and truth within Odysseus' stories?

In setting up his stories for the Phaeacians, Odysseus asks, "Well then, what shall I go through first, / what shall I save for last?" (9.14) He begins by revealing his identity. Where I begin this essay may not be nearly as critical, is certainly not as poetic, and ultimately not as important as where we, with Odysseus, end. Both Odysseus and Homer, the suppliant with his hosts and the bard with his audience, begin geographically on Calypso's remote island of Ogygia. We will begin there, too, after some quick trip planning and preparation.

We must first anchor ourselves so that this voyage makes sense in light of our purpose. This essay does not voyage to discovery but rather sails in support of newly discovered territory. That newly discovered territory owes much to serendipity. A course was initially set for something thought to be known but, like the voyage of Columbus, something else delightfully got in the way.

The search for a deeper answer to why Odysseus said no began with unpacking the journey of Telemachus in hope that it would help inform the larger journey of his father. In this student's third reading of *The Odyssey* in yet another translation,³ repeated epithets, naming conventions, and certain phrases⁴ grew more noticeable, some of them at times so redundant as to be glossed over listlessly. But repetitions soon became something to look for as guideposts, like markings on a treasure map.

³ High school: Rieu. Seminar: Fitzgerald. This essay: Fagles, then Lattimore (and portions of others).

⁴ I understand from both Lattimore (20-21) and Brann (141-142) that many phrases get reused formulaically to identify characters, aid with meter and rhyme, and serve as memory aids.

Following a close reading of Telemachus' journey in Books Three and Four, the odyssey and return of Odysseus in Books Five through Fourteen was slowly navigated. Upon reaching Book Fifteen, we remember that Telemachus is still at Sparta. Here Homer completes his return. And in Book Fifteen a concise phrase rings familiar: "Balance is best in all things" (15.78).⁵ Menelaus is advising Telemachus. The treasure hunt begins in earnest. Why is this phrase vaguely remembered? It feels different than other recognizable poetic repetitions and often encountered epithets. A little digging turns up the identical Homeric words of wisdom in Book Seven, when Phaeacian King Alcinous acknowledges and advises like-minded Odysseus.

I propose for discussion that this wisdom of balance is the deeper meaning behind Odysseus' rejection of Calypso's offer. (Could it even be Homer's grand purpose?) I have looked carefully for other guideposts to support this proposal regarding αἴσιμα. What follows provides a journal of sorts of that textual voyage.

ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα

By the time Odysseus washes up on the island of the Phaeacians, his experiences span twenty years, including at least seven years essentially alone. He has suffered and endured. He has benefitted from time to reflect and opportunities to reason. An account of the several different versions⁶ of Odysseus' autobiographical stories helps us situate his seven solitary years virtually and physically – virtually on Ogygia, but physically most likely in Egypt. The

⁵ *amèinon d' aisima panta* [better (in ability or worth), braver, superior, preferable | ? | everywhere, throughout]

⁶ Appendix E synthesizes three of Odysseus' versions of his return.

stories he tells the Phaeacians are deeply personal. They have an outward feel of poetic travels, but they are more importantly Homeric descriptions of an inward journey of learning.

Homer gives us hints. Strength of mind (Alcinous) rules together with excellence and virtue (Arete) on the imaginary island home of the Phaeacians. Odysseus wants to get back to his tangible island home of Ithaca where his wise, enduring queen and partner is fending off shameless suitors led by a completely unmindful prince (Antinous). With names alone Homer offers us contrasts, allusions, and inspiration.

Homer informs us with stories, too. For example, Odysseus visits the home of the Cyclops, who live by no law, no reason, whatever one desires, and are to-each-his-own god haters. Odysseus escapes but does not quite make it to Ithaca. He sleeps. He's not ready. Desire rules minds not awake. But at the home of the Phaeacians, mind rules. If desire exists, it is for song and dance, games and contests.⁷ The gods see to all their needs.

Gods fathered both the Cyclops and the Phaeacians. They share the same father: Poseidon. At the beginning of Book Six, Homer physically connects their two homes:

Years ago
[the Phaeacians] lived in a land of spacious dancing-circles,
Hyperia, all too close to the overbearing Cyclops,
stronger, violent brutes who harried them without end.
So their godlike king, Nausithous, led the people off
in a vast migration, settled them in Scheria,
far from the men who toil on this earth. . . (6.4 – 10)

Very early, they lived on neighboring islands but could not get along. The lawless and single-minded Cyclops hounded the more reasonable Phaeacians, raiding and plundering them.

⁷ "It's fit and proper for you to know your sports. / What greater glory attends a man, while he's alive, / than what he wins with his racing feet and striving hands?" (8.169 – 171)

That the Phaeacians' original island home was called Hyperia offers another clue. Lattimore writes that Homer uses Hyperion as an epithet for Helios (1.24) and affirms he is the father of Helios (12.176).⁸ The Loeb translates the Greek as "the lord Helios Hyperion" (12.176). The Greek Word Study Tool at the Perseus Project translates Ὑπεριονίδαο as "son of Hyperion." That said, if we recall Homer's suggestion that Helios sees all and knows all,⁹ then we could grant that the Phaeacians on their first island home have perfect knowledge – but not wisdom. As the Phaeacians battle the Cyclops, so do reason and knowledge battle desire; the relationship is unhappy, unbalanced. Through their determined opposition to the unyielding desire of the Cyclops and their choice to move to Scheria, the Phaeacians gain in wisdom. They become strong in mind. Homer repeatedly and purposefully revisits this struggle between reason and desire throughout *The Odyssey*.

When Odysseus becomes a guest of the strong-minded Phaeacians, they recognize almost immediately his strength of mind. It would not have been evident twenty or even ten years ago; they would have instead recognized in him strength of desire and a warrior spirit. Odysseus has used the intervening years to successfully work on balance. At Queen Arete's early insistence, Odysseus submits a small part of his story. He tells of his most recent seven years with Calypso and of washing up on Scheria, meeting the king's daughter, and arriving at the palace. When Odysseus concludes, King Alcinous voices concern that his daughter's reasoning was faulty for not escorting Odysseus to the palace. Odysseus expertly explains why he and Nausicaa arrived separately. Upon hearing wise Odysseus, King Alcinous avows

⁸ Lattimore's glossary, p. 366, contains this helpful note.

⁹ This suggestion arises from events we hear about in Odysseus' adventures, events that take place on the island of the Sungod (see p. 29). Demodocus suggests it, too, in his song of the gods' affair (8.307 – 308).

their similar outlooks and calls Odysseus “my friend” (7.353). On Scheria, even love succumbs to reason.

Father Zeus, Athena and lord Apollo! if only –
 seeing the man you are, seeing we think as one –
you could wed my daughter and be my son-in-law
 and stay right here with us. I'd give you a house
 and great wealth – if you chose to stay, that is. (7.356 – 360)

However much a spark of love and desire had ignited for Nausicaa and Odysseus when they met on the beach, reason wins out. Alcinous offers Odysseus the opportunity to wed his daughter or safe, unimpeded transport home – or wherever he wants to go. We know what Odysseus chooses. We will soon learn why.

Minimal discussion takes place, yet Alcinous declares Odysseus his equal. In “seeing the man you are, seeing we think as one” (7.357 – 359), the strong-in-mind king acknowledges Homer’s now equally strong-in-mind man (the still unidentified king). “Balance [ἄστυα] is best in all things” (7.355): Alcinous affirms their shared understanding. Given this voluminous work with all its intricacies, one subtle instance of such a concise phrase might seem unremarkable. To reiterate its importance, Homer stamps it on our conscience a second time.

We left Telemachus in Book Four, about to retire for his second night in Sparta. Menelaus invites the young man to remain for a dozen days. Telemachus feels a little uneasy, eager to get back to his shipmates and return to Ithaca, “the best of islands” (4.685). He tactfully says as much, and Menelaus praises him for the good blood running in him and for his well-chosen words (4.688). In Book Fifteen, we take up again with Telemachus, as does Athena. Upon waking, Telemachus asks Menelaus to please excuse him to return quickly to Ithaca, his heart longing for home. From Menelaus, who recognizes that a host

should not delay a guest eager to leave nor send off a guest desiring to stay, we hear again those now familiar words: “Balance [αἴσιμα] is best in all things” (15.78).

“ἀμείνω δ’ αἴσιμα πάντα” (Loeb, 7.310 and 15.71). Fagles translates the Greek text identically in both locations, as does Murray in the Loeb. Other translators, though offering similarity, do not maintain identity. Table One lists various interpretations.

Table One: Greek to English Translations of αἴσιμα

Translator	αἴσιμα	ἀμείνω δ’ αἴσιμα πάντα
Chapman (7.436)	Noblest ever	The noblest ever should the most prevaile.
Chapman (15.92)	Meane	<i>The meane in all acts beares the best estate.</i>
Fagles (7.355, 15.78)	Balance	Balance is best in all things.
Fitzgerald (7.332)	Sense of measure	Better a sense of measure in everything.
Fitzgerald (15.96)	Measure	Measure is best in everything.
Lattimore (7.310)	Moderation	Always moderation is better.
Lattimore (15.71)	Balance	In all things balance is better.
Loeb (7.310, 15.71)	Due measure	Better is due measure in all things.
Pope (7, p. 106)	Honesty	Whate’er is honest.
Pope (15, p. 221)	Golden mean	Who love too much, hate in the like extreme, And both the golden mean alike condemn.
Rieu (7, p. 120)	Fairness	We must always be fair.
Rieu (15, p. 231)	Moderation	There should be moderation in all things.
Rouse (7, p. 87)	Fairly and squarely	It is better to have everything done fairly and squarely.
Rouse (15, p. 170)	Moderation	The best rule is moderation in all things.

The general sense of αἴσιμα seems to be middle ground and measured response. An Aristotelian flavor arises: mean, due measure, balance, moderation, golden mean. Homer sings that we should tend toward fair actions as much as possible; they set the best course. I also get the sense that the principle of balance-seeking applies to individual actions as much as it applies to a well-lived life on the whole.

With the discovery of ἀμείνω δ’ αἴσιμα πάντα, a sort of Homeric aphoristic notion, we next must ponder its support. How does Homer entertain its wisdom? Does he allow for its practical difficulty? One way Homer encourages our thinking is by weaving together the separate journeys of father and son. They strangely and magically overlap. Homer suspends

the telemachy of Telemachus by turning to the odyssey of Odysseus. The experiential journey of Telemachus complements the virtual journey of Odysseus. Telemachus prepares us for Odysseus. He then returns in a well-timed reminder of Odysseus' learned wisdom. Homer lets us hear it again: ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα. He wants us to hear it again. But Odysseus occupies the center of attention. Now, with Odysseus, we will begin.

The Virtual Tour

Homer lets Athena give us a general idea of the whereabouts and predicament of Odysseus as Book One begins, but he strategically delays until Book Five the departure of Odysseus from Calypso's island. There the sea-goddess recalls her offer to Odysseus while she and Hermes discuss the fate of our homesick hero. Homer tells a story within a story here; Odysseus is not privy to this information.

Theoretically, Calypso has been holding Odysseus captive and must now, without hesitation, free the hero-king to finish the last leg of his return home from Troy. When Odysseus washed up on the shore of Ogygia he was barely alive, a sole survivor of his storm-wrecked ship, clinging to a makeshift raft that he lashed together from its only two remaining seaworthy pieces – its mast, without which a ship cannot sail, and its keel, a ship's foundation running down its center.¹⁰ So he floated, adrift for ten days.

Calypso, daughter of Atlas, kindly welcomes Odysseus and nurses him back to health. Much more than savior, she becomes lover. Her desire to keep Odysseus as her

¹⁰ Personally, I can only attest to somewhat similar functions of aircraft parts, but from Wikipedia we get this: "The keel is generally the first part of a ship's hull to be constructed, and laying the keel, or placing the keel in the cradle in which the ship will be built, is often a momentous event in a ship's construction — so much so that the event is often marked with a ceremony, and the term lay the keel has entered the language as a phrase meaning the beginning of any significant undertaking." <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keel>>

husband is so intense that she makes what seems an unbeatable offer. We hear it in her protests to Hermes:

And I welcomed him warmly, cherished him,
even vowed to make the man immortal, ageless, all his days . . .
But since there is no way for another god to thwart
the will of storming Zeus and make it come to nothing,
let the man go – if the Almighty insists, commands –
and destroy himself on the barren salt sea! (5.150 – 155)

She wants the man but not his mortality. Shortly after Hermes departs, Calypso delivers to her lover his good news. Homer sings to us of Odysseus' current state of mind:

[Calypso] found him there on the headland, sitting, still,
weeping, his eyes never dry, his sweet life flowing away
with the tears he wept for his foiled journey home,
since the nymph no longer pleased. In the nights, true,
he'd sleep with her in the arching cave – he had no choice –
unwilling lover alongside lover all too willing . . .
But all his days he'd sit on the rocks and beaches,
wrenching his heart with sobs and groans and anguish,
gazing out over the barren sea through blinding tears. (5.167 – 175)

In contemplating Homer's song, we may wonder whether Odysseus weeps for his "foiled journey home" or unqualifiedly for "home." Fagles makes it sound like the former. The Loeb translation speaks of weeping for "his return"; Lattimore for "a way home." And Fitzgerald attributes his tears to "anguish over his exile." Perhaps the difference is not worth considering. Or perhaps there exists a Homeric concept of home central to his wisdom of balance. Clearly, though, Odysseus wants to be somewhere other than on Ogygia with Calypso. Even more emphatically, agreed to by all the above mentioned translations, Odysseus is dying. Yet he elects to turn down immortality.

Homer goes further, again letting Athena inform us. In her pleading with Zeus at the gods' assembly, she lets us know that "Odysseus longs to die . . ." (1.71). Even if not utterly suicidal or near physical death on Ogygia, our hero is undoubtedly suffering, contemplative,

longing for home, and buried in memories. His solitude, now total, brings about a metaphorical death and eventual rebirth. Although he longs for Ithaca, he does not mention Penelope until Calypso, unable to comprehend his rejection, presses him: “Hardly right, is it, / for mortal woman to rival immortal goddess? / How, in build? in beauty?” (5.234)

Odysseus cannot help but agree: “All that you say is true, how well I know. / Look at my wise Penelope. She falls far short of you, / your beauty, stature. She is mortal after all / and you, you never age or die . . .” (5.238)

But in his crafty acknowledgment that his mortal wife falls far short of an immortal goddess, Odysseus quietly reveals a trait that Penelope may yet hold over Calypso: wisdom. In referring to “my wise Penelope” Odysseus provides a clue to his preference for mortal life. In his discreet reference, Odysseus lets us know that he could never truly call Calypso “mine” because Penelope holds a decisive advantage over the goddess.

Odysseus departs Calypso’s island on his handcrafted raft. On this solo trip he steers accurately and avoids sleep for seventeen days (5.298 – 305).¹¹ His attentiveness and more reasoned nature contrast with his former undisciplined self, the excessively spirited man of his soon to be revealed virtual adventures. On the eighteenth day, after he spots Scheria, the island home of his nearly inaccessible deliverers, Poseidon’s anger becomes a raging sea and throws him from his raft. Calypso’s heavenly clothes symbolically weigh him down, burying him under water for a near deadly amount of time. Odysseus finally rises to the surface and makes it back to his raft, wisely deciding to remain aboard until it may be totally destroyed. He concludes that only at such time will he finally discard the last of Calypso’s attachments.

¹¹ Mere coincidence or another Homeric clue? Odysseus’ seventeen days of constant wakefulness compellingly offer us a literal summation and poetic reminder of the two times he disastrously slept: ten days out from Aeolus, in sight of Ithaca, and just before his men feasted on the cattle of Helios for seven days.

And so it happens. A colossal wave destroys his raft. Odysseus leaps aboard one timber and straddles it, balanced, as if riding a horse. He lets go of his belongings, stripping off his last, weighty ties to Calypso. Clothed with his lately acquired wisdom, in the form of a magical scarf, he swims for shore.

He manages to survive by wisely deciding how to safely attain land. The next morning, on the beach, Odysseus becomes half of an erotically charged meeting with the island king's daughter, Nausicaa. Following her at a distance, he arrives at the palace where king and queen, descendants of gods they frequently host, live in showy, heavenly splendor:

a rush of feelings stirred within his heart,
bringing him to a standstill,
even before he crossed the bronze threshold . . .
A radiance strong as the moon or rising sun came flooding
through the high-roofed halls of generous King Alcinous. (7.95 – 99)

Odysseus' first view of this home¹² mirrors Telemachus at Sparta and Hermes on Ogygia. Seeing this high-roofed house emotionally moves him, perhaps with memories of Ithaca.

We continue following Odysseus as he takes in even more wondrous sites. On the outside of the palace he finds bronze plated walls topped with a blue glazed frieze as far as he can see, solid gold doors with silver doorposts and gold handles, and dogs of gold and silver, strangely alive: “forged by the god of fire with all his cunning craft / to keep watch on generous King Alcinous' palace, / his immortal guard-dogs, ageless, all their days” (7.107 – 109). Inside he finds chairs running the entire length of the walls both left and right, thrones really, draped with “finely spun brocade” (7.113), and gold statues of boys on pedestals, holding aloft torches to light the darkness. Outside the courtyard, Odysseus finds an orchard of fruit-bearing trees that are also strangely alive. They ignore the seasons and bear fruit year

¹² Appendix D contains a side by side comparison of the three main homes we explore in this section: the island of the Cyclops, Circe's island home of Aea, and the Phaeacian island home of Scheria.

round, fruit of all kinds: pomegranates, pears, apples, figs, and olives. These trees flourish beside vineyards and beds of greens that never die, “glistening fresh, year in, year out”

(7.149) – a perpetually producing garden.

Two springs provide life-giving water. One spring nurtures the courtyard garden via irrigation channels. Another spring flows under the palace gates and creates an enormous fountain, shooting higher than the palace roofs, providing water for all the people of the city.

“Such were the gifts, the glories showered down by the gods / on King Alcinous’ realm”

(7.156 – 157). Odysseus finally has his fill and wanders into the palace.

Experiencing this home with Odysseus reinforces the magical mystique surrounding the Phaeacians begun by Zeus at council: “Announce to the nymph with lovely braids our fixed decree: / Odysseus journeys home – the exile must return. / But not in the convoy of the gods or mortal men” (5.34 – 36). While some may argue that Fagles merely precludes the description of Odysseus on his raft, Lattimore’s translation is more emphatic: “. . . he shall come back / by the convoy neither of the gods nor of mortal people” (5.31 – 32).

Zeus informs us that the Phaeacians will indeed send Odysseus home in a ship (5.41). So at once we suspiciously note that the Phaeacians are neither god nor mortal. Helped along by our earlier, Book Six discussion of their geographical and genealogical relationship to the gods and the Cyclops, we sense that neither their first nor current home is particularly real, certainly not of this world. King Alcinous later provides further evidence of the Phaeacians’ extraordinary nature:

And tell me your land, your people, your city too,
so our ships can sail you home – their wits will speed them there.
For we have no steersmen here among Phaeacia's crews
or steering-oars that guide your common craft.
Our ships know in a flash their mates' intentions,
know all ports of call and all the rich green fields.
With wings of the wind they cross the sea's huge gulfs,

shrouded in mist and cloud – no fear in the world of foundering,
fatal shipwreck. (8.623– 631)

The Phaeacians maneuver their black ships (8.39) quite unnaturally.

When Odysseus wanders into the palace, all the lords and ship captains are pouring out their last, most honored libation to, coincidentally, messenger and giant-killer Hermes. They generally make their final offering just before bedtime, but Odysseus extends their gathering when he supplicates at the queen's knees. As previously noted, Queen Arete obtains some information from their guest at that time. However, not until the next evening, after songs,¹³ dance, acrobatics, and games, does Odysseus begin the extended version of his adventures by first proclaiming his name.

Before setting off with Odysseus from Troy, it won't hurt to note who the Phaeacians bring forward for Odysseus during his first day on Scheria: Hermes, the Cyclops, and quite possibly the Laestrygonians ("wild Giants" at 7.242). Hermes they honor with their last libation. The other two mythical beings Alcinous introduces to Odysseus when, not knowing the identity of his suppliant, he questions whether Odysseus might perhaps be a strange, godly being in disguise. He boasts of the relationship the Phaeacians enjoy with the gods that is on par with these beings (7.235 – 242). By making Hermes current and by interjecting the other two sets of non-god-non-mortal beings, Homer puts the reader on notice that the upcoming stories may require understanding on a completely different level than the adventures of Telemachus.

¹³ Interestingly adding to their mystique, all day long the Phaeacians tell no personal stories of war. They share no tales of homecoming. Their blind bard Demodocus instead sings of the Achaeans and Trojans, and of the lovemaking exploits of the gods. Other than their relationship with gods and giants, the Phaeacians seem strangely ahistorical.

The sun descends. Gifts are presented. Arete instructs Odysseus about personal responsibility and tying good knots, a fourth connection to our hero's stories. Odysseus bathes, and in the process bids an intimate goodbye to Nausicaa. Demodocus sings one last song, to which we will return later. Odysseus begins his stories.

Before he intrudes in the cave home of the giant Cyclops Polyphemus, Odysseus reminds us that upon leaving Troy he remains ensconced in warrior mode – raiding, plundering, and killing with his full contingent of ships and men. After ten years at war he seems hardly ready or able to return to the domestic role of beloved husband, father, son, and benevolent, loving king of Ithaca. Departing Troy, Odysseus speeds his fleet north to Ismarus where he and his crew kill the native Ciconian men, rob them of their riches, and make slaves of their wives. However, the raiding, plundering, and killing finished, his troops ignore reasoned orders to set sail. Instead, they desire to party on the beach. The avenging Cicones gather reinforcements. Odysseus ends up losing seventy-two men, six from each ship, before finally beating a hasty retreat out of the harbor. It marks the first step toward great loss and solitude.¹⁴ A very personal journey has begun.

After escaping the Cicones, Odysseus and his fleet encounter a hurricane, a tidal wave, and ferocious north winds. Driven off course for almost two weeks, they finally round Cape Malea, the southeastern finger of Greece, but end up at the “land of the Lotus-eaters”

¹⁴ Thucydides (Chapter 1) thinks Homer, in *The Iliad*, provides us with a max and min number of rowers per ship. In his account of the captains of Achaea and the massing of troops, Homer begins with the Boeotian contingent, hauling 120 “young Boeotians” per ship (*Iliad*, 2.600). Near the end of his great gathering of armies, Homer mentions the fleet of Philoctetes, carrying 50 oarsmen each (*Iliad*, 2.820). Fine, but we learn in Book Ten of *The Odyssey* that Odysseus has 46 men on his ship, counting himself (10.227). This accounting occurs after adventures with the Cicones and Polyphemus cost his ship 12 men. So, departing Troy Odysseus' ship carries 58 men. With 12 ships, Thucydides would put his total loss of men between 600 and 1,440. However, Homer informs us exactly how many men Odysseus lost on his return. If Odysseus divided his men equally among his ships departing Troy, then Homer puts the death toll at 695 men.

(9.95). Here, Odysseus saves comrades whose memories of home vanish upon eating fruit from that magical, flowering plant.

In one sense his men forget home; in another sense, or on another level, they sleep and dream. Appetite literally fuels their desire to remain with the Lotus-eaters, outweighing their reasoned purpose: to return home. They become hopelessly addicted to this foreign, magical, plant-based drug. Odysseus and several other crew members abstain. He single-handedly intervenes, returning his addicts to the boats and tying them down. With his remaining able-bodied shipmates, they push off. Forced reason overcomes the alluring but illusory desire of Lotus highs.

In just two quick adventures, Odysseus draws our attention to the ever-present struggle between reason and desire. He also offers clues that his journey is transitioning to an inner project. In his first adventure, he begins losing his men; in his second, he starts using extraordinary creatures and locations.

The next adventure lands Odysseus at the home of the round-eyed, single-minded Cyclops, so well-provided for by the gods that they never need to plow or sow their own crops. Each giant remains a law unto himself; they make no common law and hold no council meetings. Anchoring at an island just off the coast of the Cyclops' home, Odysseus and his men feast on local game and enjoy wine raided from the Cicones. But after a day, Odysseus' unquenchable curiosity and adventuring spirit compel him to explore the Cyclops' home. With his ship and crew he rows over. They spy a huge cavern just at the shore. He sets off after selecting a dozen shipmates to man his cave expedition. Stubbornly, Odysseus ignores a premonition that occurs just before leaving his ship, warning him he will soon encounter a powerful, lawless giant.

He enters the unoccupied cave with his men. The encounter comes to pass, but not before his men try to prevent it by coaxing him back to the ship with their stolen goods – some cheeses, lambs, and kids – before the owner returns. No, Odysseus stands firm in his insatiable desire to meet the owner and receive parting gifts honoring the long-standing guest-host customs so well-ordered by Zeus. His own single-minded desire pits enduring hero against lawless giant and gets him into dire straits. He loses six of his comrades before his wily ways implement a successful escape plan.

Putting aside the question of whether Odysseus in some way strays from Zeus' decorum rules, as if it would have made a bit of difference to Polyphemus and the eventual outcome, at least two other questions arise from this misadventure. Why did Odysseus feel the need to explore? And what did he discover?

Simply put, he explores because he is being himself, minding his own business (in an inverted Platonic sense¹⁵) as he currently understood himself. If we look at the return story Odysseus tells his loyal swineherd Eumaeus when finally back at Ithaca, it enlightens our answer to the first question. Disguised as a beggar, he begins:

By heaven, Ares gave me courage, Athena too, to break
the ranks of men wide open, once, in the old days,
whenever I picked my troops and formed an ambush,
plotting attacks to spring against our foes –
no hint of death could daunt my fighting spirit!
Far out of the front I'd charge and spear my man,
I'd cut down any enemy soldier backing off.
Such was I in battle, true, but I had no love
for working the land, the chores of households either,
the labor that raises crops of shining children. No,
it was always oarswept ships that thrilled my heart,

¹⁵ Odysseus was certainly tending to his business as he knew it at the time. But Socrates spoke of how each part of the soul should "mind its own business" (586e5) in a balanced way. Odysseus was still following the spirited part of his soul primarily, behaving as an unbalanced, adventuresome, glory-seeking warrior, still the man from Troy.

and wars, and the long polished spears and arrows,
 dreadful gear that makes the next man cringe.
 I loved them all – god planted that love inside me.
 Each man delights in the work that suits him best. (14.246 – 260)

According to his more factual story here, Odysseus married but had no love or inclination for domestic life. His nature, literally implanted by god, is that of a fearless warrior: scheming, plotting, ambushing, sailing, and killing. He delights in this “work” because it suits him best. We hear Odysseus searching and explaining his soul as a married man before even leaving Ithaca for Troy. In his virtual story to the Phaeacians, we see his nature still ruled by desire. It is ordered such that he can do nothing else but explore the cave of the one-eyed giant. At this stage no other choice presents itself. Both virtually and factually, Odysseus is the single-minded man he describes to Eumaeus.

My answer to the second question – What did he discover? – is that he discovered himself. In the cave he looks in a mirror and sees his basest self. The single-eyed giant that Odysseus meets provides the most obvious visual feature of his own nature. Polyphemus and all his brothers live alone in separate caves. Each tends a personal flock of sheep and keeps an individual store of cheese and other food stuffs. They hardly converse, sail not the sea, fear not the gods, even Zeus, contact no other worldly peoples, and basically do what they want when they want. No one visits them, let alone thinks of raiding them. These mountain-sized loners’ daily routines consist of unremarkable habits. They are asleep to thinking and reasoning, and unconcerned with learning. Basic needs met, they aspire to nothing more. Odysseus as “Nobody” confirms their simplistic, single-level nature. He encounters here a home even more base than Telemachus encounters at Pylos.¹⁶ In this virtual adventure,

¹⁶ Telemachus at Pylos is discussed in “The Home Tour” section (p. 32) and also in Appendices B and C.

Odysseus faces desire-based single-mindedness taken to an extreme. Soon enough he, too, will be similarly cut off and mired in routine.

Odysseus successfully executes his escape plan and scrambles to his ship with his remaining six men and some stolen sheep. He launches out to sea again, not of course without some final taunting back and forth with Polyphemus. The Cyclops' taunts are mostly physical, those of Odysseus verbal and psychological. He teases and mocks their ignorance and single-mindedness, evidenced earlier by Polyphemus' lack of comprehension when Odysseus uses magic wine to incapacitate him. Indeed, all the island giants are asleep to his wily trick of naming himself "Nobody." Even after Odysseus divulges his true identity, they only recognize him as the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. In this virtual adventure story, the now-wise Odysseus mocks and taunts his own ignorance and single-mindedness.

Finally safely away from danger on the far side of the island, Odysseus and his surviving crew join his other ships. After feasting and making sacrifices (thoroughly ignored by Zeus), they sleep. Setting sail the next morning, they reach the "great floating island" of Aeolus. Its virtual king marries his sons to his daughters, generously roasts meats for eating, and sleeps on simple, corded bedsteads. He hosts Odysseus and his men for a month before sending them off to Ithaca. Seemingly, he ensures their arrival by knotting¹⁷ the unfavorable winds in a sack, leaving only the favorable West Wind free to blow them home. Odysseus, though, is not ready to return home; he does not yet understand the concept of balance.

¹⁷ The idea of the knot and responsibility for the knot is another notion traceable to those other-worldly Phaeacians. Queen Arete places all the generous Phaeacian gifts inside a polished chest for Odysseus' voyage home, and she tells him: "Now look to the lid yourself and bind it fast / with a good tight knot, so no one can rob you on your voyage – drifting into a sweet sleep / as the black ship sails you home." (8.495 – 498)

As Odysseus steers his fleet to Ithaca, dangerous, enticing sleep (that obvious Homeric clue) undoes him. When he succumbs to weariness, his men succumb to desire. Thinking the bag of winds contains troves of treasure meant only for their captain, they undo its burnished silver cord, unleashing all the bound-up, unfavorable winds. With Ithaca in sight and Odysseus now roused awake, the squall winds blow the fleet back to Aeolia. This virtual adventure situates desire in Odysseus' men, and it introduces consequences for letting up, for not maintaining awareness.

King Aeolus refuses to assist their return a second time, fearing that the gods have cursed Odysseus and may in turn punish him. With no favoring winds, Odysseus and his men must row. And row they do, reaching Laestrygonian land and its "fine harbor" (10.96) after a week. Desire in the form of giants once again proves disastrous – monumentally so this time. Displaying characteristic insight but arguably poor leadership, Odysseus drops anchor away from the rest of his fleet, "well clear of the harbor's jaws" (10.105). Moored tightly together in the peaceful waters, eleven ships and crew meet their unlucky demise at the hands of the Laestrygonian giants. We don't learn much of these giants beyond their Cyclops-like desire to make meals of human visitors. Over ninety percent of Odysseus' fleet is now gone. His virtual isolation is nearly complete. He is quickly discarding his baggage and stripping his soul to its bare essentials. His story of self-discovery continues.

Odysseus and his personal crew, devastated, set sail in his remaining ship. They land on the island of Aeaea, home of the nymph goddess Circe. From the top of a crag on a solo scouting mission, Odysseus eyes smoke rising from her halls. He thinks about what to do:

Mulling it over, I thought I'd scout the ground –
that fire aglow in the smoke, I saw it, true,
but soon enough this seemed the better plan:
I'd go back to shore and the swift ship first,
feed the men, then send *them* out for scouting. (10.166 – 170)

We listen as Odysseus reasons. He decides to send his men to explore rather than go further himself, perhaps owing to his earlier misadventure with the Cyclops. Returning to his ship, he spots and takes down with ritualistic grace a huge stag. Literally balancing it around his neck, Odysseus reaches his ship and rouses his men from their demoralized, hungry state, promising them no trip to the House of Death – at least not yet, hints Homer.

After a good night's rest, Odysseus musters his crew:

Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship,
 we can't tell east from west, the dawn from the dusk,
 nor where the sun that lights our lives goes under the earth
 nor where it rises. We must think of a plan at once,
 some cunning stroke. I doubt there's one still left.
 I scaled a commanding crag and from that height
 surveyed an entire island
 ringed like a crown by endless wastes of sea. (10.207 – 214)

Still grieving at having lost nearly all his men, Odysseus is now geographically and mindfully lost, too. He struggles to devise a plan. From his vantage point he is on an island he knows not where, ringed by water as far as he can see. He needs a compass. Internal questions depicted as muddled sailing conditions force him to explore this time, unlike previously when unmitigated desire led him to the Cyclops' cave. His remaining, dejected men wail “live tears” (10.220). He has reached a desperately low point, but Circe soon sends him even lower physically and mentally in order to help him find his bearings, balance, and way home. Before going down into that abyss with Odysseus, we should experience the island home of Circe, the second substantial home on his virtual tour.

Odysseus continues to reason through his plan. He thinks that sending a scouting party without him would be best. The decision as to who goes ultimately rests on drawing lots. The task falls to Eurylochus and his twenty-two man platoon. They go inland to explore, leaving Odysseus and his equally-manned platoon with the ship (10.225). The

scouting party wanders into bewitched woodlands filled with naturally ferocious lions and wolves, made impotent and unnaturally friendly by Circe's magic drugs. Lured inside her gleaming doors by her spellbinding singing, Eurylochus' men fall under her spell. Circe's wicked drugs "wipe from their memories any thought of home" (10.260). Her magic wand transforms them into swine, but "the men's minds [voũç] stayed steadfast as before" (10.265). Circe's manipulation of the scouting party's memory complements the mind-manipulation of Telemachus and Menelaus by Helen at Sparta (see p. 37), and also reminds us of Odysseus' men with the Lotus-eaters. Homer is inviting us to consider deeply the memory and mind aspects of balance.

Odysseus gives us something to ponder next. He ambushes Circe with the reputed help of Hermes. Odysseus' tale seems peculiarly similar to Menelaus' magical tale to Telemachus, where the Spartan king seizes the shape-shifting Proteus with the help of Eidothea, daughter of the Old Man of the Sea. Hermes offers Odysseus his magic antidote to Circe's power: "Look, here is a potent drug. Take it to Circe's halls – / its power alone will shield you from the fatal day" (10.318). But we do not see Odysseus drink this antidote or secretly mix it into Circe's poison potion as a neutralizing agent. Hermes does not give Odysseus a preventive shot. As best we can tell, Odysseus pockets the magic herb. We see Odysseus overpower Circe with strong-minded tactics:

In a golden bowl she mixed a potion for me to drink,
 stirring her poison in, her heart aswirl with evil.
 And then she passed it on, I drank it down
 but it never worked its spell –
 she struck with her wand and 'Now,' she cried,
 'off to your sty, you swine, and wallow with your friends!'
 But I, I drew my sharp sword sheathed at my hip
 and rushed her fast as if to run her through –
 She screamed, slid under my blade, hugged my knees
 with a flood of warm tears and a burst of winging words:
 'Who are you? where are you from? your city? your parents?'

I'm wonderstruck – you drank my drugs, you're not bewitched!
 Never has any other man withstood my potion, never,
 once it's past his lips and he has drunk it down.
 You have a mind [νόος] in *you* no magic can enchant! (10.351 – 365)

Hermes offers a drug, but Odysseus remains drug-free. His mind or mind-power, if you will, is his drug of choice. A god acknowledges his strength of mind. Odysseus overcomes adversity primarily through νόος. He uses arms only as a scare tactic.

After being subdued, releasing Odysseus' men from her spell, and watching them bond with their captain, Circe changes. Touched by their tearful reunion and passionate sobbing (another Homeric pointer¹⁸), she sympathizes. She converts from the bewitching, dangerous nymph-queen with lovely braids, a force of nature feared and misunderstood by mortals, to a concerned, lustrous goddess who for a year hosts, feasts, and lovingly cares for Odysseus and his men. One year allows for a full cycle of the four seasons and for the sun to complete an earth orbit, a full circle. In Greek, “Circe” shares the same root with “circle, ring,” while literally meaning falcon or hawk – birds known to soar in circles. The allusions evoke notions of growth – cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. Circe's home allows time and space for reflection.

After a year, though, Odysseus' recovery seems oddly unfinished. He originally desires not to stay with Circe, but he now seems in no hurry to leave. In both circumstances, external reason has to overcome internal desire. On arrival, Circe convinces him to stay: “Her urging won my stubborn spirit over” (10.448). A year later, his men convince him to leave: “Their urging brought my stubborn spirit round” (10.524). His men reason that even if Odysseus is being well cared for, the time has arrived to think again of home – to

¹⁸ In Greek, Circe's island of Aeaia, Αἰαίην (10.135), shares the same root as αἰακτός (lamentable, wailing, miserable). <[http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=ai\)akto/s](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=ai)akto/s)>

remember home – and to focus on their return. We know Odysseus shares Circe's bed (9.35). Like Calypso, she wants him to stay with her. But Circe, too, only succeeds for a while.

Odysseus approaches the goddess to ask that she send him and his crew on their way. Circe complies. But she breaks the news to him that he must first set sail on an almost unprecedented journey: Odysseus must journey to the House of Death to partake of the wisdom of the seer Tiresias. At least five important conversations in Hades provide Homeric hints that inform our inquiry.

First, Odysseus encounters the ghost of Elpenor who reminds him of life's many levels. Elpenor bedded down on a roof up high the night before Odysseus departed Circe's island. Due to wine – or sleepiness – he failed to consider his state of affairs, his current level. Instead of reasonably climbing back down the ladder from the roof, he stumbled and fell; he lost his balance. The consequences were disastrous. Elpenor requests a fitting (and foreshadowing) burial when Odysseus returns to Circe's island.

Second, Odysseus speaks with the seer Tiresias¹⁹ who, unlike the other flittering shades, recognizes our hero even without needing to first drink Odysseus' sacrificial blood. But only after his meal does Tiresias profess his wisdom. To reach home, Odysseus must curb his desire and his crew's also (11.119). If not, he'll come home late, broken, and alone (11.129). Tiresias maps out what Odysseus will find and what he must do, until he dies peacefully, an old man.

¹⁹ Homer and Odysseus know the background of Tiresias; Homer's audience would have known, too. Various mythological accounts provide versions of how Tiresias went blind. They also tell of a seven-year stint he spent as a woman. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiresias>) Tiresias was born seeing, went blind, and now sees all; he contains qualities of both man and woman. These traits indicate knowledge of oppositions. Odysseus would identify with Tiresias as he contemplates his mid-life struggle with the opposing natures of desire and reason.

and you will find a world of pain at home,
 crude, arrogant men devouring all your goods,
 courting your noble wife, offering gifts to win her.
 No doubt you will pay them back in blood when you come home!
 . . .
 go forth once more, you must . . .
 carry your well-planed oar until you come
 to a race of people who know nothing of the sea,
 whose food is never seasoned with salt, strangers all
 to ships with their crimson prows and long slim oars,
 . . .
 then plant your bladed balanced oar in the earth
 and sacrifice fine beasts to the lord god of the sea,
 Poseidon – a ram, a bull and a ramping wild boar –
 then journey home and render noble offerings up
 to the deathless gods who rule the vaulting skies,
 to all the gods in order.
 And at last your own death will steal upon you . . .
 a gentle, painless death, far from the sea it comes
 to take you down, borne down with the years in ripe old age
 with all your people there in blessed peace around you. (11.132 – 156)

Yes, the “broken man” (11.129) will return to essentially a broken home. He will take care of things, of course, according to his usual nature. But then Tiresias gets interesting. Is the returning Odysseus the same man who left? Where does Odysseus go next? Who are these people he meets who live in a sort of ignorance? What significance can we assign to his metaphorical balanced oar, thought by these people to be an essential “fan to winnow grain” (11.146)? We cannot answer these questions just yet, but perhaps we will find more clues as we continue.

Third, Odysseus speaks to his mother. Anticleia died while he’s been gone from Ithaca, apparently before the suitors arrived; she does not mention them. She tells her son of a home different from the one he left when he sailed for Troy, a home out of balance. She tells him of suffering yet enduring Penelope, descriptions applied equally to Odysseus; of his son Telemachus making do, acting as administrator and judge, but not yet kingly; and of his father who tends his own farm, no longer venturing into town, sleeping in the winter by the

fire with his servants, in the summer on the ground in his vineyard. She also tells him of death, of what becomes of the body, the spirit, and even perhaps the mind – fluttering about. So, Odysseus now knows exactly what to expect following the end of his mortal life.

His mother gives way to a “grand array of women” (11.258), after which Odysseus interrupts his tale and intermits in Scheria, suggesting sleep. A spellbinding hush envelops his audience. Queen Arete breaks the silence. She punctuates the significance of his grand array of women that began with his mother by royally stamping Odysseus’ “looks, his build, the balanced mind inside him” (11.382). Virtuous woman recognizes virtuous man.

We will intermit now, too, but not for sleep (hopefully). Rather, it is appropriate here to point out the only other time we encounter the identical Greek phrase Queen Arete voices to extol the virtues of Odysseus. In Book Eighteen, Homer lets Eurymachus, leading suitor behind Antinous, extol the exact same virtues of Penelope. Following another conversation between mother and son, this time Penelope and Telemachus, Eurymachus praises Penelope for her “build and beauty, refined and steady mind” (18.280).²⁰ Odysseus, disguised, is home now and witnesses joyfully as his wife wittily takes those words of praise, twists them into a sad lament, and tricks the unbalanced suitors into showering her with gifts. Homer wants us to consider the balance of strong-minded, equal partners.

We, along with Odysseus, return now to the House of Death. Agamemnon approaches. His wailing and tears begin the fourth important conversation guiding Odysseus’ inner journey. They talk of Agamemnon’s ill-fated return and of the women of Atreus, Helen and Clytemnestra, for whom so many men died. Most importantly,

²⁰ In the Greek, we delightfully find again a phrase duplicated: “εἶδος τε μέγεθος τε ἰδέε φρένας ἔνδον εἶσας” (Loeb, 11.337 and 18.249). Appendix G offers search results, a brief lexicon, and several translations.

Agamemnon praises Penelope, reiterating her virtue and wisdom. Homer is reinforcing her similarity with Odysseus.

In the fifth and arguably most significant conversation, Odysseus sees and engages Trojan War hero Achilles. He compares Achilles' god-like status when he was alive to his apparent god-like status over the dead, imploring him not to grieve. In perhaps one of literature's most notable changes of mind, Achilles replies:

No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus!
by god, I'd rather slave on earth for another man –
some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive –
than rule down here over all the breathless dead. (11.555 – 558)

Achilles despises the decision he made while alive, electing a short, heroic life over a long, peaceful life of anonymity. He's had time to think about it. But the opportunity to practice balance is no longer available to Achilles.

The penetrating exchange with Achilles brings to a close Odysseus' dialogues in Hades. Although he glimpses several additional mythological figures, summarizes their stories,²¹ and hopes to speak with even more shades individually, they begin to surround him en masse. They raise such supernatural cries that he flees in terror to his ship and soon finds himself back on Circe's island.

Having returned from the House of Death, his first order of business is to properly bury Elpenor. It is a Homeric metaphorical stroke linking the words of Tiresias regarding balance with the words of Elpenor regarding imbalance. It also foreshadows with present imagery the fated last voyage of Odysseus after returning to Ithaca. With his reverential

²¹ To the Phaeacians and to us, Odysseus mentions the stories of Ajax, Minos, Orion, Tityus, Tantalus, Sisyphus, and Heracles (who hails Odysseus, and who also made a journey to Hades while alive). Brann calls Hades the "safe-depository of tales, the treasure house of myth" (203).

planting of Elpenor's "balanced oar" (12.15) on the burial mound, Odysseus perhaps finally recognizes and acknowledges, too, that the wisdom of balance is what he seeks.

The remaining allegorical tales Odysseus recounts to the Phaeacians deal even more specifically with finding a balance, hitting a mean. Homer continues to give us clues. Prior to leaving Circe's island a second time, Odysseus and his men rest for a day. One revolution (of the Greek sun) completes before they set sail again for home. Odysseus listens to Circe's description of his itinerary. She tells him of the Sirens who lure with their seductive voices, and of how to avoid their trap. She warns how next he must maneuver between the deadly Clashing Rocks on one side, a danger the likes of which no ship has ever escaped, "[n]ot even birds can escape" (12.69), and two enormous crags, Scylla and Charybdis, on the other side. With Circe unable to offer advice on how to steer successfully between those two opposing dangers, their discussion moves to the best option: avoid the Clashing Rocks by favoring the Scylla-Charybdis side. Yet, that side poses its own problems and a second level of balancing to consider, for one lingers up high with deadly potential, while the other lurks below, in the water, also with the power to destroy. Circe's words of advice do not sit well:

No, hug Scylla's crag – sail on past her – top speed!
Better by far to lose six men and keep your ship
than lose your entire crew. (12.119 – 121)

Odysseus' warrior spirit and appetite for arms rises up undiminished; our hero displays his still unpolished wisdom of balance:

Yes, yes, but tell me the truth now, goddess . . .
Deadly Charybdis – can't I possibly cut and run from *her*
and still fight Scylla off when Scylla strikes my men? (12.122 – 124)

Circe reprimands:

'So stubborn!' the lovely goddess countered.
'Hell-bent yet again on battle and feats of arms?
Can't you bow to the deathless gods themselves?' (12.125 – 127)

“Can’t you be reasonable, Odysseus?” we find ourselves asking. Circe finishes her description of his upcoming trip by reiterating the words of Tiresias regarding the cattle of the Sun.

Morning dawns; our sailors set sail. Odysseus knows what lies ahead. They sail past the Sirens, Odysseus lashed to his mast. He listens to their ravishing, inescapable voices sing of his fame, bidding him to stop and visit, promising him wisdom, perfect knowledge. His men, ears plugged with beeswax, row ever harder while lashing Odysseus even more tightly, until they are out of hearing range. Odysseus has witnessed and successfully avoided the first unbalanced – and deadly – adventure on this leg of his return.

After escaping the Sirens by heeding Circe’s advice, Odysseus orders his men to steer clear of the Clashing Rocks and head toward the deadly crags. However, he fails to follow the goddess’s warnings about Scylla. Instead, he puts on his armor, girding for a fight and allowing his one-dimensional warrior spirit to rule his mind. The crew successfully avoids the whirlpool Charybdis. Odysseus grows weary of watching for Scylla and averts his gaze. They all watch Charybdis as it gulps down its contents and then spews forth its exploding spray. Scylla catches them off guard and snatches six men, demolishing them unmercifully. Imbalance and inattention again lead to disastrous consequences.

Demoralized but finally clear of that near-impossible balancing act, Odysseus and his men now face the problem foretold by both Tiresias and Circe: don’t harm the beasts belonging to the Sun god. But as trying as was the Scylla-Charybdis choice, circumstances while moored and resting at Thrinacia make for an even more complex situation. Odysseus’ men persuade him to dock for the night and sail the next morning. However, for a month the South Wind blows nonstop, thwarting plans to push off and set sail for home. Eventually,

Circe's generous food supplies run out. The men begin to starve. Odysseus holds them to their promise of not touching the cattle of the sun. Sadly, in yet another untimely lapse, Odysseus again sleeps. It symbolizes a human imperfection: constant awareness fatigues. While Odysseus sleeps, his men debate over imminent starvation and possible future destruction at the hands of revengeful gods. They probably don't debate for long. The consequences of their desire (fueled by hunger) unmitigated by Odysseus' reason (silenced by sleep) are poetic history. Nothing escapes the Sun god's eyes. Seeing all, knowing all, illuminating all mankind, Helios is perfect knowledge.

At the request of Helios, Zeus and his killer squalls crush the last ship of Odysseus when it finally sails from Thrinacia. While far out to sea, no land in sight, a murderous blast of wind splinters the ship. All perish but Odysseus. We have come full circle to Odysseus on his mast and keel raft. Both physically and emotionally, he is finally alone, no one to save but himself. However, before washing up on Calypso's shore, Odysseus tests himself. Sans armor and completely independent now, he maneuvers his craft back to the killer crags of Scylla and Charybdis. He challenges Charybdis with only his body and his mind. As she sucks down his raft he jumps to catch hold of the trunk of a fig tree.

But I held on . . . waiting for her
 to vomit my mast and keel back up again –
 Oh how I ached for both! and back they came,
 late but at last, at just the hour a judge at court,
 who's settled the countless suits of brash young claimants,
 rises, the day's work done, and turns home for supper –
 that's when the timbers reared back up from Charybdis.
 I let go . . . (12.471 – 478)

Odysseus this time exhibits balance – on a couple levels. He hangs on to the trunk, unable to climb higher but also unable to get a good foothold: "... like a bat I clung to its trunk for dear life – not a chance / for a good firm foothold there, no clambering up it either, / the roots

too far to reach, the boughs too high overhead” (12.467 – 469). While balancing his body he also balances his mind at a place roughly midway, allegorically, between deadly Scylla and threatening Charybdis. His reasoned middle ground ensures his survival; he is centered.

Then Odysseus lets go. It’s such a powerful allusion, yet overused these days: letting go. Homer’s timely placement of Odysseus’ realization, late but finally, “day’s work done,” describes how determinedly we hold onto things and ideas, and it marks when we generally start thinking about the wisdom of balance. It also echoes the forecasts of both Tiresias and Circe: “And even if *you* escape, you’ll come home late [ὄψέ]

(11.129 and 12.152). Fagles needlessly assists Homer’s project by italicizing and emphasizing “you,” calling attention to the prophecy that only Odysseus, alone in body and mind, completes this journey. Knowing that he loses all his ships and men before he returns to Ithaca offers opportunities to consider these losses on several levels. In one sense, to succeed Odysseus must work out his issues within himself, maybe even in isolation. Others may try to help, but the responsibility rests with him alone – rests within each one of us. Homer addresses the “how” of balance.

Homer also addresses the “when” of balance. We should not confuse or conflate two timely events. Odysseus “turns home for supper” late, long afterward, in the evening. He gains home at dawn:

And then, that hour the star rose up,
the clearest, brightest star, that always heralds
the newborn light of day, the deep-sea-going ship
made landfall on the island . . . Ithaca, at last. (13.105 – 108)

Homer is not implying literal times of day. Odysseus sleeps through the night while the Phaeacians sail him home, but this sleep is magical rather than metaphorical. They deposit him on the beach, still asleep, as the morning sun rises. But the wisdom of balance happens toward the end of day, a bit later in life. It could not happen for a youthful, uncompromising,

strong-headed, bold Achilles. It did not happen for wily Odysseus until after he spent years at Troy and almost as long reflecting on and mending his marauding ways. It happens generally when we pause and heave a sigh of relief, when we transition from our active day to a place for repose.

Odysseus' metaphorical judge, older and wiser, has "settled the countless suits of brash young claimants." He has administered justice. He has rebalanced matters where matters were unbalanced, in cases where people were too young or unwise to understand the importance of balance and due measure in the first place. By his actions, he mentors. From his bench he rises; he reflects on his day's work, and he looks forward to rest. He knows it is but one day's work. He knows that tomorrow, armed with knowledge and experience gained from today, he will make another go of it, a better attempt at balancing and rebalancing.

So Odysseus lets go. We know the rest of the story. He climbs back on his raft and drifts for ten days, until in the dark of night he beaches on Calypso's island. His seven year internal struggle begins. Odysseus has reached that time in life, middle age, when memory provides enough significant past actions and important life decisions on which to seriously and beneficially reflect. He arrives at a place geographically and in his mind that allows time for such reflection. In the middle of his stories he descends to the House of Death, about as low and deep as one can go. He then starts working his way back up. Middle age is about the time when thoughts of death more heavily inform reasoned living; youthful intensity pushes away such thoughts. In *The Iliad*, single-mindedness, youth, and passion drive Achilles' thoughts toward immortality and fame. In *The Odyssey*, middle-age, contemplation

of death, and internal struggles between reason and desire engender in Odysseus, finally, wisdom of balance.

The Home Tour²²

Homer sings the wisdom of *αἴσιμα* first and foremost through Odysseus. Telemachus (far-away fighter or fighter at a distance)²³ hears it from Menelaus. It culminates his personal journey, ostensibly arranged by Athena for him to seek news of his father. Unlike the ten year, post-Troy journey of Odysseus, Telemachus' expedition away from Ithaca together with his return spans just twelve hours shy of a week. He visits the royal homes of Nestor in Pylos and Menelaus in Sparta, Achaeans who fought alongside his father at Troy. We probably can agree that this princely journey is a ploy to craft a worldlier, more confident Telemachus. But it also shows the reader two versions of home; it offers two choices that inform the young man's wisdom of balance.

Sailing from Ithaca at night, Telemachus pulls into the port of Pylos at sunup. On the beaches he finds somewhere in the neighborhood of 4,500 Pylians sacrificing a significant number of cattle. The math works out to a total of 81 bulls. Telemachus' first impression, then, of a home other than Ithaca is one of copious blood and death. Athena prods him along, urging him to introduce himself to Nestor and to gain news of his father. Luckily for

²² The idea for this section, even its title, is not original. I owe a debt of gratitude to my essay advisor, Mr. Philip LeCuyer, for suggesting it as a launching point. The remaining section titles in this essay are, alas, my own. Tables in Appendices B and C contain side-by-side comparisons of Nestor's and Menelaus' homes synopsized chronologically and subjectively.

²³ My knowledge of Greek remains extremely limited. Meanings derived for Greek names, words, and phrases arise from tutor suggestions, referral to Greek textbooks, and research at the online Perseus Digital Library (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>).

the shy Telemachus, Nestor's son Pisistratus, a young man of the same age, greets him quickly and brings him to meet the king on the beach where they are banqueting.

They sit on simple fleece blankets and enjoy a massive barbecue. Pisistratus serves them goodly shares of innards and wine; he follows Zeus' rules of hospitality. Interestingly, he honors age by asking Athena (as Mentor, older by far than Telemachus) to offer the first prayer, to Poseidon of all gods, the favorite of Nestor's home but the bane of Athena and Odysseus. Homer notes somewhat wryly in her prayer the tension between the two gods: "Hear me, Sea-lord, you who embrace the earth – / don't deny our wishes, bring our prayers to pass!" (3.62 – 63). He then adds a touch of ingenuity by concluding, "So she prayed, and brought it all to pass" (3.70). The one offering the prayer makes things happen, striking a bit of balance between the two gods.

After enjoying their meal of sacrificed bulls and wine, Nestor asks for introductions. The words of Telemachus, reminiscing about his father's suffering and fame, send Nestor to a place in his own mind that conjures up costly memories. Stories of days gone by – a shared "living hell" (3.115) at Troy, feuding kings, more sacrifices to the gods, and the gruesome return of Agamemnon – follow. Answering questions from Telemachus, Nestor offers a final story explaining his version of Menelaus' lengthy absence during events that include his brother's murder and his nephew Orestes' eventual revenge. Nestor tells his unhappy stories factually, with little embellishment, as if to get the history correct and to impress on everyone the sadness of the whole affair at Troy and afterwards.

Night encroaches. When time for sleep arrives, Nestor objects to Telemachus and Mentor returning to their ship. Athena deftly excuses herself from sleeping in the palace and flies away. Recognizing her, Nestor quickly offers another prayer. Telemachus follows

Nestor and Pisistratus from the beach to their palace with its storied halls but simple adornments. It is furnished with wooden chairs and benches, and plain bowls for wine. Telemachus retires to a corded bed (essentially a framed hammock) on the porch. Nestor retires to his inner chambers, where his wife attends to and shares his bed. In this very stark and manly home, no women of the home have yet been named.

Dawn arrives. Before the departure of Telemachus for Sparta, Nestor and his six sons prepare a feast with more bloody sacrifices. When the women shriek at a gilded heifer's slaughter, we finally learn Nestor's wife's name: Eurydice. But why the gilded horns now, the first note of any kind of outlandish adornment in Nestor's palace? Why a female animal? Apparently, Nestor only deems such extreme artistry as appropriate for sacrifices to gods, in this case to Athena, "so the goddess' eyes might dazzle, delighted with the gift" (3.489).

Only one other woman of the palace gets named: Polycaste. She is but one of we know not how many daughters or daughters-in-law of Nestor. She bathes Telemachus in preparation for breakfast. For Homer, a woman bathing a prince or king seems to create a mysterious bond. It calls attention to balance in relationships, symbolizing both contrast and harmony.²⁴ The morning sacrifices remain otherwise stark – a simple, flower-braided serving bowl for water and a plain basket for barley – and again bloody.

Host and guest exchange no gifts, probably assuming that Telemachus will return after visiting Menelaus. That return visit does not happen, so we can make no comparisons of gifts. We know only that one house gives gifts, one house does not.

Telemachus leaves his ship in the harbor and travels overland to Sparta, Pisastratus at the reins of their chariot. They arrive at nightfall on the next day and find the home of

²⁴ Some accounts later note that Telemachus and Polycaste marry (<http://www.ancientlibrary.com/smith-bio/3322.html>).

Menelaus and Helen in the midst of a double-wedding feast. Both son and daughter get named straight away: Megapenthes and Hermione. Menelaus invites the two travelers to come into his high-roofed palace, strangely illuminated as if through a skylight, and join the celebration. Attendants take care of their horses and chariot. The two young men are bathed and clothed. When seated next to Menelaus, the king offers them food and drink before any formal introductions – and no sacrifices and prayers in this house, not now.

While dining, Telemachus gazes at the surrounding sights in this far-different home, whispering to his new friend:

Look Pisistratus . . .
 the sheen of bronze, the blaze of gold and amber,
 silver, ivory too, through all this echoing mansion!
 Surely Zeus' court on Olympus must be just like this,
 the boundless glory of all this wealth inside!
 My eyes dazzle . . . I am struck with wonder. (4.79 – 84)

Menelaus overhears. He objects to comparison with the god of heaven but does not fail to compare himself with other mortals. We remember that Nestor most identified with Poseidon, god of the deep, dark sea.

The treasures of Menelaus come from far off places: Cyprus, Phoenicia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sidonia, Erembia, and Libya. His journey home took eight years. He explored those lands and amassed his fortune accompanied by his recently recovered wife, beautiful Helen. Tears soon flow in this home as Menelaus remembers his brother Agamemnon and his comrade Odysseus. At the mention of his father, Telemachus also succumbs to grief and weeping. Upon seeing his guest's tears, Menelaus recognizes the son of Odysseus but debates within himself, in his mind and heart, how best to proceed.

Helen comes to the rescue. What an entrance she makes.

Helen emerged from her scented, lofty chamber –
 striking as Artemis with her golden shafts –

and a train of women followed . . .
 Adreste drew up her carved reclining-chair,
 Alcippe brought a carpet of soft-piled fleece,
 Phylo carried her silver basket given by Alcandre,
 King Polybus' wife, who made his home in Egyptian Thebes
 where the houses overflow with the greatest troves of treasure. (4.135 – 142)

Within about one-hundred lines, we get a strong sense that Menelaus and Helen are absorbed in their treasures and in the ways of far-off, foreign lands. They adorn their home with silver bathing tubs, tripods, bars of gold, golden spindles, and a gold-rimmed, solid silver basket that runs on casters. It carries the violet yarn with which Helen weaves richly brocaded, beautiful robes.

Not only does Helen's entrance firmly underscore their home's opulence, but her presence quite overshadows even her husband's kingly role. While Menelaus searches his mind and heart for a way to get Telemachus to reveal his name, spirited Helen wastes no time. Upon recognizing him she comes right out and confirms his identity to all. Menelaus almost sheepishly defers: "My dear, my dear, / now that you mention it, I see the likeness too . . ." (4.164 – 165).

Menelaus continues to blunder. One Homeric passage seems purposely planted with double meaning. Besides revealing a more of out-of-touch Menelaus, it reinforces our present discussion of the meaning of home and of why Odysseus leaves Calypso and her home of immortality. Menelaus muses about long-lost Odysseus:

Why, I'd have settled a city in Argos for him,
 built him a palace, shipped him over from Ithaca,
 him and all his wealth, his son, his people too –
 emptied one of the cities nestling round about us,
 one I rule myself. Both fellow-countrymen then,
 how often we'd have mingled side-by-side! (4.192 – 197)

Here we are, struggling to discover the meaning and importance of "home" to Odysseus, to Telemachus and Penelope, too. Yet Menelaus thinks he can just uproot the man and his

family who are so clearly rooted to Ithaca. Odysseus opens *his* tale of woes to the Phaeacians with a detailed account of his homeland's geography (Book Nine). Later, he and Penelope affirm their identities by acknowledging their marriage bed that is literally rooted in the soil of Ithaca (Book Twenty-Three). Knowing those facts, the reader might seriously question Menelaus' claim of being Odysseus' "dearest friend" (4.186).

The home of Menelaus and Helen presents the mind of Telemachus with two contrasts to the home of Nestor: medication and stories. On her return journey from Troy with Menelaus, Helen brings back a drug from an Egyptian woman that gives her the means to induce people to forget their pains, both past and present. Now, she uses it to alleviate the pain and grief of our hosts and guests at Sparta. She drugs everyone's wine when their memories conspire to cause them all to weep uncontrollably. What had begun as a double-wedding feast had become too maudlin for her tastes.

[S]he slipped a drug, heart's-ease, dissolving anger,
 magic to make us all forget our pains . . .
 No one who drank it deeply, mulled in wine,
 could let a tear roll down his cheeks that day,
 not even if his mother should die, his father die,
 not even if right before his eyes some enemy brought down
 a brother or darling son with a sharp bronze blade. (4.245 – 251)

Helen wants her men to joyfully and with warm hearts listen to the tales they tell. Imagine, not even the death of mother or father in front of you, or even witnessing a brother or son being slaughtered, can make you weep or feel pain after taking this medication.²⁵

²⁵ Homer wants the reader to be present. In fact, translator Fagles seems to suggest that blind bard Homer may have been present at the wedding feast, although Fitzgerald, Lattimore, and the Loeb translation do not similarly impress. Of course, someone must have been present who could pass along these intricate details about the foreign birthplace of Helen's drug and its overpowering effects, just like someone must have been present who could pass along the even more intricate details of Odysseus' multi-leveled tale to the Phaeacians.

At Sparta, the stories take on a far more optimistic and fairytale-like quality than at Pylos. Helen goes first, setting the tone as she is wont to do in this household. She tells of Odysseus' foray into the citadel of Troy to spy and gather information. She alone recognizes him but does not expose him (4.281 – 286). She even bathes him, so in one sense exposure takes place.²⁶ Menelaus follows Helen, his customary position in this home. He tells of hiding in the Trojan horse and how Odysseus saved him and all the other warriors from detection. The optimistic stories of Helen and Menelaus seem designed specifically for the benefit of Telemachus – a means of increasing his reverence for his father while simultaneously bolstering his self-confidence.

All soon retire. At Sparta, Telemachus sleeps not on a plain corded bed as at Pylos, but on a framed bed richly adorned with sheets of royal purple and covered with blankets and fleecy robes. In the morning, when Menelaus visits Telemachus on the porch where he's sleeping, the young man asks for news of his father. In response, Menelaus provides the only information he knows. And he provides it in the form of a day-long, fantastic tale of his personal return from Troy, a supremely magical story complete with shape-shifting gods, monsters, and riches. Homer wants us to contrast this return story with the story Nestor told of Menelaus' return.²⁷

At the end of his lengthy tale Menelaus implores Telemachus to stay for a dozen days, while strangely offering him useless departing gifts – a chariot and three stallions. Telemachus probably for the first time rode a chariot on his journey from Pylos to Sparta. He tactfully declines, explaining that the geography and rugged island terrain of his home in

²⁶ As we've already seen, Homer associates some nuance with that act of bathing someone.

²⁷ Homer might also want to prepare us for some of Odysseus' magical adventures.

Ithaca are more appropriate for goats than stallions. Menelaus proceeds from the solidly impractical to the simply unneeded. He gives instead an ornate and generous two-handled cup and a glittering, solid silver mixing bowl.

Dinnertime rolls around once again. Here, Homer intermits. He segues to current events with Penelope and her suitors in Ithaca and then presents the central section on the return of Odysseus, where we first encounter the wisdom of αἴσιμα.

We take up and finish Telemachus' home tour the next day, at the beginning of Book Fifteen. Mentored by Athena just before dawn, Telemachus decides to cut short his Sparta visit and promptly return home to Ithaca. Moved by the young man's early morning request, Menelaus shares with Telemachus the exact motto Alcinous earlier²⁸ shared with Odysseus:

I'd never detain you here too long, Telemachus,
not if your heart is set on going home.
I'd find fault with another host, I'm sure,
too warm to his guests, too pressing or too cold.
Balance is best in all things. It's bad either way,
spurring the stranger home who wants to linger,
holding the one who longs to leave – you know,
'Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest!' (15.74 – 81)

Menelaus embraces and surrounds Homer's wisdom of αἴσιμα with his own explication.

Earlier we heard Alcinous exclaim and then Odysseus explain with his virtual stories. The home at Sparta might give one pause to place much relevance on words from Menelaus.

However, the past twenty years have surely weighed thoughtfully on him, too.

Just before Telemachus departs on his chariot bound for Pylos, two more Homeric clues illuminate our understanding of this home. First, he reminds us of – literally repeats –

²⁸ The only definitive sense of “earlier” refers to reading the story. Its chronological sense is vague. Working backward from the meeting of Odysseus and Telemachus with Eumaeus, “earlier” is accurate. Working forward from Athena's trip to Olympus, which seems to occur twice, we must account for twenty or twenty-one days from Ogygia to Scheria. Time in Odysseus' virtual world follows its own course.

the absurd gifts of Menelaus from Book Four, but then he adds a gift from Helen. Helen's gift here seems the most practical and personal: her largest and most beautiful robe, created with her own hands and glistening like a star – a fine, well-considered gift appropriate for the future wife of Telemachus.

Next, Zeus sends an omen: an eagle clutching a white goose in its talons, flying by on the right. Menelaus hesitates. Helen takes charge again. She interprets the omen, as if Homer wants to doubly and triply ensure that his audience positively understands that a woman really runs the home at Sparta and the notion of balance deserves attention.²⁹

Telemachus cannot fail to assimilate the meaning of such stark contrasts between the two homes he has now finished visiting. We can safely call them two extremes. On the one end, we see Pylos: fundamental, base, practical, patriarchal, steeped in tradition and bloody animal sacrifice, looking mostly backwards, and certainly plain. On the other end, we see Sparta: richly ornate, medicinal, magical, impractical, matriarchal (dominated by Helen), heavenly, but not overly concerned with the gods. We can almost feel Telemachus' urgency to return to Ithaca now to restore it to his newly acquired, worldlier idea of home and balance.

αἴσιμα³⁰

Homer's *Iliad* contains a meager three instances of αἴσιμα; balance is rare indeed at Troy. Homer triples that number in *The Odyssey*. Besides its central role in Homer's twice-touted poetic wisdom, seven other appearances of αἴσιμα create a ballet of balance while offering up irony and comedy.

²⁹ Eva Brann's chapter on Helen superbly illuminates her character, both at Troy and home at Sparta.

³⁰ Appendix F lists references to αἴσιμα in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and offers a brief lexicon.

Ushering in its first appearance, Mentor uses reverse logic against the abominable suitors when speaking to a full assembly of Achaeans at Ithaca:

Hear me, men of Ithaca. Hear what I have to say.
 Never let any sceptered king be kind and gentle now,
 not with all his heart, or set his mind on justice [αἴσιμα] –
 no, let him be cruel and always practice outrage.
 Think: not one of the people whom he ruled
 remembers Odysseus now, that godlike man,
 and kindly as a father to his children.
 I don't grudge these arrogant suitors for a moment,
 weaving their violent work with all their wicked hearts –
 they lay their lives on the line when they consume
 Odysseus' worldly goods, blind in their violence,
 telling themselves that he'll come home no more.
 But all the rest of you, how you rouse my fury! (2.256 – 268)

Most translations of αἴσιμα from Table One (p. 7) would work in this passage: justice, balance, due measure, moderation. When we recall from Book Eleven the kind of home that Tiresias tells Odysseus he will find on his return, “you will find a world of pain at home, / crude, arrogant men devouring all your goods, / courting your noble wife, offering gifts to win her” (11.132 – 134), we recognize the theme introduced here by Mentor: out of balance men are driving Odysseus’ home out of balance. The revenge that Tiresias knows Odysseus will inflict on the suitors becomes a method of rebalancing, even though we may question whether that revenge is itself out of balance.

The second instance of αἴσιμα occurs in Book Five where Athena continues her earlier conversation from Book One with father Zeus, in council, imploring him to direct Calypso to release Odysseus:

Father Zeus – you other happy gods who never die –
 never let any sceptered king be kind and gentle now,
 not with all his heart, or set his mind on justice [αἴσιμα] –
 no, let him be cruel and always practice outrage.
 Think: not one of the people whom he ruled
 remembers Odysseus now, that godlike man,
 and kindly as a father to his children. (5.8 – 14)

Her words echo Mentor's words from Book Two. In fact, after her opening line, the two speeches are identical for six lines. Homer impresses again the theme of ἀΐσιμα.

The duplication in these two passages also draws the reader's attention more closely to the shared roles of Athena and Mentor throughout *The Odyssey*. Athena repeatedly takes on the form of Mentor, especially when advising Telemachus. And at the very end of his poem, Homer closes with Athena handing down her "pacts of peace" (24.599) in the "build and voice" (24.602) of Mentor. One could certainly question whether the wisdom of balance arises from personal insight or divine inspiration.

As to the translation of ἀΐσιμα in these two near-identical speeches, Fagles and Lattimore agree: justice. If "mind" and "thought" connote similarity, Fagles and Lattimore still agree. Fagles gives us "set his mind on justice" (2.258 and 5.10); Lattimore, "one whose thought is schooled in justice" (2.231 and 5.9). The Loeb translation, however, differs in an interesting way: Mentor proclaims "let him heed due measure in his heart" (2.231); Athena, "let him heed righteousness in his mind" (5.9). This encounter of ἀΐσιμα as righteousness imparts to it an air of virtue. Besides again raising the question of personal insight or divine inspiration, Homer might also be offering ἀΐσιμα as both an activity and a state of being – something Odysseus attains when he finally lets go – ἀΐσιμα as sometimes action and sometimes inaction.

The third appearance of ἀΐσιμα, apart from hearing Alcinous proclaim it "best in all things" in Book Seven, occurs when Demodocus sings it into the mouth of Poseidon as the sea god attempts to free Ares from the chains of Hephaestus: "Let him go! / I guarantee you Ares will pay the price, / whatever you ask, Hephaestus, / whatever's right in the eyes of all the gods" (8.388 – 391). Considering, too, the Loeb translation, "all that is right" (8.348),

Homer reinforces our now established sense of *αἴσιμα*: balance, justice, due measure, fairness, “whatever is right.” One could also imagine another Homeric clue here. Did these Phaeacian bard lyrics crystallize something in Odysseus as he listened, something that influences both his emotional breakdown (p. 48) and his theoretical storytelling?

We hear the fourth occurrence of *αἴσιμα* back at Ithaca. Eumaeus uses it in conversation with Odysseus when attributing the love of justice to the gods: “Trust me, the blessed gods have no love for crime. / They honor justice, honor the decent acts of men” (14.96 – 97). We recognize its theme again; we grow more confident about it as a concept that implies proper action and right decision making. In fact, it seems to do double duty in this passage. From four different translations we find these combinations: justice and decent acts, justice and righteous deeds, justice and what is lawful, and discipline and right behavior.³¹

Homer uses *αἴσιμα* a fifth time when singing about Eumaeus, calling “his sense of fairness perfect” (14.491). Fairness is the general consensus among the various translations, although Fitzgerald says Eumaeus “knew best the amenities” (14.510). But Fitzgerald, too, metaphorically symbolizes fairness as Eumaeus carves the dinner meat equally among his crew of swineherds and his disguised guest, Odysseus.

Up to this point *αἴσιμα* has been mentioned by wise and trustworthy men (Mentor, Eumaeus), gods (Athena, Poseidon), kings (Alcinous, Menelaus), and Homer himself when he sings about Eumaeus. One could say that the bard Demodocus, like Homer, sings of *αἴσιμα* when he tells about Poseidon’s request concerning Ares. Next, we sense a bit of

³¹ In searching for a Greek word with similar meaning near the occurrence of *αἴσιμα*, I found none. Hence, I credit it in this passage with doing double duty. In addition to Fagles, translations consulted here include Loeb (14.84), Lattimore (14.84), and Fitzgerald (14.103).

Homeric irony. Partnered with Telemachus, Odysseus is back at Ithaca, just about to string his bow, reveal his true self, and destroy the suitors in what Athena and Tiresias have called a type of required rebalancing action. Homer allows the soon to be dead leader of the suitors, Antinous, to insinuate that Odysseus is out of balance:

The wine has overpowered you, heady wine –
the ruin of many another man, whoever
gulps it down and drinks beyond his limit [αἴσιμα].
Wine – it drove the Centaur, famous Eurytion,
mad in the halls of lionhearted Pirithous. (21.327 – 331)

Homer packs delightful fun into this passage. Just who has really been drinking all the wine at Odysseus' home in Ithaca? Just who is about to face ruin? We see the man who now knows his limits, who now understands the meaning of balance, receiving advice about αἴσιμα from the man causing the imbalance. The passage contains a wine-drunk Centaur reminding us of a wine-drunk Cyclops. And just who will soon suffer in the halls of Odysseus as the Centaur suffers in the halls of Pirithous? Antinous reveals here that his mind is truly not well.

At the beginning of this penultimate rebalancing act,³² Odysseus attends first to the sentence of Antinous, letting fly an arrow through his throat just as Homer satirically puts one last goblet of wine to his lips. The suitor who next assumes command by default, Eurymachus, becomes Homer's last character to invoke αἴσιμα:

[If] you're truly Odysseus of Ithaca, home at last,

³² I consider the ultimate rebalancing act the exchange that takes place between Odysseus and Penelope: playful tests of recognition and acts of seduction wholly unavailable in the Odysseus-Circe and Odysseus-Calypso relationships. Some may argue that their dialogues are a reacquainting rather than a rebalancing; however, the point is that such moments remain unavailable to unbalanced mortal-god relationships. For example, although Homer sprinkles nine occurrences of δαίμονη (under the influence, to be possessed of a God) throughout his *Odyssey*, only Penelope and Odysseus manage to make an intimate, playful game of it: "Strange woman...Strange man" (23.186 – 193). We cannot imagine Calypso and Odysseus ever engaging in such romantic play.

you're right [αἴσιμα] to accuse these men of what they've done –
 so much reckless outrage here in your palace,
 so much on your lands. (22.46 – 49)

In this instance of αἴσιμα another suitor, another man out of balance, another man in the wrong, acknowledges this time the rightness and balance of Odysseus. Where unaware and out of balance Antinous ridiculously accuses the beggar Odysseus of being madly out of balance, now fully aware but still out of balance Eurymachus, realizing his fate, reasoning for his life, rightly proclaims the revealed Odysseus to be in balance. Homer in this way creates for us a neat and skillful final appearance for αἴσιμα.

Disembarking

ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα appears only twice in a tale covering ten years, or some might say an extended tale covering twenty years. Of the twenty-four books of *The Odyssey*, eight books separate its two occurrences. In those eight books, Odysseus dines in the halls of King Alcinous and Queen Arete; hears songs of Achaean fighting men, himself included; excels in contests of skill; tells of his journey since Troy; and finally sails home to Ithaca. There he sups with Eumaeus, where he tells a completely different but more geographically and materially realistic story of his return, all before we catch up with Telemachus and hear Homer recapitulate his notion of balance.

What is so curious about these two separate yet complementary occurrences of the phrase? The first time we hear “Balance is best in all things,” a wise king of exceptionally strong mind, who rules over a home resplendent with excellence and virtue so heavenly and untouched by human experience that it may represent pure ideals, addresses an equally wise man, who has lived to middle age and experienced much in life, who has been to the abyss if not factually, then at least emotionally, and worked his way back up and out, and who is

about to finally go home. The host tells the guest, as prelude to a journey, that they both understand the same truth. King Alcinous affirms what Odysseus has experienced and learned over the past ten years. Only after that affirmation does Odysseus begin his stories, stories through which Homer tells us why a balanced life is the best life, even better than immortality and agelessness. Odysseus makes a kind of theoretical departure from “Balance is best in all things,” telling mind-oriented stories of his virtual tour, at the end of which he goes home.

The second time we hear “Balance is best in all things,” a worldly-wise king who may not be quite as wise as his queen, and who rules over a home of cosmopolitan splendor and beautiful art, addresses an adventuresome boy who barely shaves, and who besides his youthful experiences at home has only experienced these two other homes, two homes of such different natures that they implicitly point to balance as preferable to their extremes. The host tells the guest, as summary of a journey, that they both understand the same truth. King Menelaus affirms what Telemachus has experienced and learned in barely five days. Telemachus makes a kind of empirical approach to “Balance is best in all things,” his physical tour, at the end of which he goes home.

Both father and son learn the same Homeric notion. Their journeys reinforce its truthfulness and universality. The father has been away for twenty years; the son mere days. The former has been son, husband, father, king, sailor, warrior, commander, conciliator, spy, lover, and tactician. The latter still struggles with his identity as a son and prince. The former began his journey with twelve ships and probably more than six-hundred men, yet has been essentially alone – enduring, suffering, struggling in his mind, reliving memories, and re-evaluating choices – for the last seven years. The latter, we can say, has hardly had

enough time to experience such an eventful life or feel the need and inclination for such serious self-reflection, at least until the arrival of the suitors. Odysseus shares the barest of conversations with strong-minded Alcinous, a man (or allegorical figure) probably of similar age, before recognition of their common understanding emerges. Telemachus spends four days touring homes and listening to stories before Menelaus, a father figure, puts into words exactly what the maturing boy intuits.

Odysseus was not only dying on Ogygia, endlessly pining for home and family, but he was dying because Ogygia, Calypso, and the prospect of ageless immortality under those conditions put him, indeed kept him, out of balance, opposed to αἴσιμα. His reason and desire, his mind and body, were not and could not be perfectly aligned without completing his return to Ithaca.

In his stories to the Phaeacians, Odysseus reveals virtual learning about balance, his Homeric truth, while journeying home from Troy. Calypso and Ogygia mark his period of reflection. Achilles in the House of Death marks his point of transition. But his point of internalization occurs on the island of Scheria. Odysseus weeps as Demodocus sings of the Achaeans' long struggle at Troy and of their sufferings. But after the Phaeacian games, when he asks Demodocus to sing of happier times, of the wooden horse and the cunning trap set by Odysseus (his identity still unrevealed), the “true to life, all too true” (8.548 – 549) blind bard's singing instead makes Odysseus' condition even worse:

And he sang how troops of Achaeans broke from cover,
streaming out of the horse's hollow flanks to plunder Troy –
he sang how left and right they ravaged the steep city,
sang how Odysseus marched right up to Deiphobus' house
like the god of war on attack with diehard Menelaus.
There, he sang, Odysseus fought the grimmest fight
he had ever braved but he won through at last,
thanks to Athena's superhuman power.

That was the song the famous harper sang

but great Odysseus melted into tears,
 running down from his eyes to wet his cheeks . . .
 as a woman weeps, her arms flung round her darling husband,
 a man who fell in battle, fighting for town and townsmen,
 trying to beat the day of doom from home and children.
 Seeing the man go down, dying, gasping for breath,
 she clings for dear life, screams and shrills –
 but the victors, just behind her,
 digging spear-butts into her back and shoulders,
 drag her off in bondage, yoked to hard labor, pain,
 and the most heartbreaking torment wastes her cheeks.
 So from Odysseus' eyes ran tears of heartbreak now. (8.577 – 597)

Odysseus breaks down – he literally has a meltdown – as Homer places him in the role of a defeated woman. The combination of Odysseus' memories with Demodocus' true-to-life singing puts Odysseus back at Troy. But instead of happily reliving his role as the winning warrior, he falls into the role of the weeping woman, the widow of the man he just killed. Rather than experiencing his glory days again, and the supreme satisfaction of victory in his grimmest fight ever, he experiences the abject suffering and pain of a woman who watches her husband slaughtered in front of her very eyes. He does not have access to Helen's drug.

Odysseus has finally broken through his youthful heroic self – and he is ready to go home. He can finally return to his equal, his wise, enduring, and even playful Penelope. She has understood the wisdom of *αἴσιμα* for a long while. No one had to tell her. Calypso will never comprehend it. Calypso only desires Odysseus; she cannot understand him. One hears it in her protests to Hermes. Mortal Penelope excels immortal Calypso in exactly this understanding.

Penelope also embodies a balance of both masculine and feminine.³³ She has ruled Ithaca – and herself – as a wily and cunning “kingly queen” (Brann, 263) for twenty years. Odysseus, if you will, now understands he can be a wily and cunning queenly king. With his

³³ Eva Brann weaves a wonderful chapter (42) on Penelope, extolling her manly and balanced qualities.

emotional display of womanly grief in the presence of Alcinous, he finally embraces and embodies feminine together with masculine. He can now attend to the mindful, lifelong pursuit of balance, partnered with his equal. Not even immortality and agelessness could balance the scales were he to partner with Calypso. In such a life, Odysseus could never hope to learn, practice, or experience the Homeric wisdom of αἴσιμα. So he said no.

Appendix A: Equivalent Line Numbers

Fagles	Loeb		Fagles	Loeb		Fagles	Loeb
1.67	1.55		6.4	6.4		10.351	10.316
1.71	1.59		6.10	6.8		10.448	10.406
2.256	2.229		7.95	7.82		10.524	10.475
2.258 [†]	2.231 [†]		7.107	7.92		11.119	11.105
3.62	3.55		7.113	7.96		11.129	11.113
3.70	3.62		7.149	7.128		11.132	11.115
3.115	3.103		7.156	7.132		11.146	11.128
3.489	3.438		7.235	7.199		11.258	11.225
4.53	4.46		7.295	7.256		11.382 [‡]	11.337 [‡]
4.79	4.71		7.297	7.258		11.555	11.488
4.135	4.121		7.298	7.259		12.15	12.15
4.164	4.148		7.353	7.309		12.69	12.62
4.186	4.169		7.355 [*]	7.310 [*]		12.119	12.109
4.192	4.174		7.356	7.311		12.122	12.112
4.245	4.220		8.39	8.34		12.125	12.116
4.281	4.250		8.388 [†]	8.347 [†]		12.467	12.433
4.685	4.608		8.546	8.487		12.471	12.437
4.688	4.611		8.548	8.489		12.487	12.450
5.8	5.7		8.577	8.514		13.105	13.93
5.10 [†]	5.09 [†]		8.623	8.555		14.96 [†]	14.84 [†]
5.34	5.30		9.14	9.14		14.246	14.216
5.81	5.73		9.18	9.17		14.491 [†]	14.433 [†]
5.150	5.136		9.35	9.31		15.74	15.68
5.167	5.151		9.95	9.84		15.78 [*]	15.71 [*]
5.170	5.154		10.166	10.151		18.280 [‡]	18.249 [‡]
5.215	5.194		10.207	10.189		21.327 [†]	21.294 [†]
5.223	5.203		10.220	10.201		22.46 [†]	22.46 [†]
5.234	5.211		10.225	10.207		23.380	23.337
5.238	5.215		10.260	10.236		24.599	24.546
5.298	5.271		10.265	10.240		24.602	24.548
5.305	5.278		10.318	10.287			

* ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα.

† αἴσιμα

‡ εἶδος τε μέγεθος τε ἰδέ φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας

Appendix B: The Home Tour (Chronologically)

Sequence	Home of King Nestor at Pylos	Home of King Menelaus at Sparta
Arrival	Left Ithaca by ship at night and arrived in early morning (about a 12-hour sail). Greeted by an orderly, military-like gathering of people on the beach (reminiscent of Troy): 9 divisions, 500 each. Sacrificing to the gods 9 bulls per division.	Arrived by chariot late in the evening (about 36 hours after leaving Pylos), sun going down. Drove up to Menelaus' grand, high-roofed palace, in the midst of a double-wedding feast. Sending off daughter Hermione to marry Achilles' son; receiving Alector's daughter as bride for son (by a slave) Megapenthes ("great sorrow"). Much <i>apparent</i> revelry, song, and dance (soon replaced with tears).
As strangers	Shy Telemachus and inspiring Mentor (Athena); King Nestor amongst sons and friends. Son Pisistratus, same age as T., seats T. beside brother Thrasymedes and father Nestor, all on beach blankets.	Telemachus and Pisistratus, strangers at the gate; announced by Eteoneus, aide to Menelaus. Bade to come inside and share the feast. Entered magnificent palace of polished, shimmering walls; radiant illumination through the roof.
First things first	Pray to the gods, offering libations to Poseidon according to age: Athena first, then T. Afterward, eat.	First bathed and clothed, then seated with honor next to Menelaus. Next, dining on the choicest meat passed by Menelaus.
Probing	Straightforward: Nestor asks who, from where, and why. T. explains all: Ithaca, Odysseus, etc.	Roundabout: Menelaus responds to T.'s amazement at palace and possessions rivaling Zeus. T. weeps at mention of Odysseus and family. Helen arrives to reinforce Menelaus' suspicion of stranger's identity. Pisistratus confirms for both that they, indeed, recognize Odysseus' son.
On returns	Nestor remembers. Odysseus at Troy; Odysseus sails with Nestor and Menelaus; feuding Agamemnon stays at Troy, sacrificing to Athena; those who sailed feud, and Odysseus returns to Agamemnon. Nestor sails home, much indebted to Poseidon. Others return home safely. Agamemnon, meets his death at hands of Aegisthus (Clytemnestra not mentioned until the	Menelaus muses. Odysseus, the only man fated by Zeus not to return. Stirs all to grieve. Much weeping; even Pisistratus, remembering Antilochus. Helen comes to the rescue; mixes magic drug with wine.

Sequence	Home of King Nestor at Pylos	Home of King Menelaus at Sparta
	later story about Menelaus' whereabouts).	
Small talk	T. mentions suitors. Nestor and Athena converse with T.	Helen's magic drug takes effect.
More stories	Nestor recalls more of Agamemnon's return, mentioning Clytemnestra now, and her lustful affair with Aegisthus. Menelaus, suffering sailing troubles on return, opts to sail to Egypt; amasses a hoard of riches; arrives home on the day Orestes buries Aegisthus and his hated mother. Nestor finishes at sunset.	Helen begins! Her story is of Odysseus as spy, going into Troy disguised as a beggar (so we know he can pull it off). She alone spotted him. Menelaus follows with his story of Odysseus, the Trojan Horse, and how Odysseus saved the Achaeans from being discovered within it.
Sleep	Nighttime. More libations on the beach. T. and Athena start off to their ship. Nestor objects. Athena excuses herself. Recognizing Athena, Nestor prays to her. Everyone else retires to the palace for sleep. T. sleeps in a hammock outside on the porch. Palatial storied halls, simply adorned: low and high backed chairs, plain bowl for wine, corded bed for T. No palace women named, not even the queen (yet). Nestor retires with her as bedfellow and comforter.	Telemachus requests sleep. Helen and her servant women make up luxurious beds outside on the porch. Menelaus and Helen retire to their chambers deep within the palace, Helen dressing very seductively. We can only guess!
Morning	Nestor and six sons prepare feast within palace. More libations. Heifer, horns wrapped in gold, sacrificed. Women shriek at sacrifice; Eurydice, Nestor's wife, finally named, but no other women, including daughters or sons' wives named at this time. Barley in plain basket, water in flower-braided bowl. More blood at sacrifice. T. is bathed by Polycaste, Nestor's youngest daughter. How many daughters? Seven sons total	Menelaus visits with T. (at his bed?) and tells his return story, a magical story of subduing shape-shifting Proteus (Old Man of the Sea, Poseidon's servant), who then tells Menelaus how to secure his return (sacrifice appropriately to Zeus and the other gods). Proteus provides further news of other Achaeans returning from Troy, including brother Agamemnon's fate and Odysseus' captivity on Ogygia. This morning bedtime story apparently consumes the time from dawn to dinner,

Sequence	Home of King Nestor at Pylos	Home of King Menelaus at Sparta
	(Antilochus killed at Troy).	another day.
Departure	After 24 hours in Pylos, morning departure for Sparta. Pisistratus drives chariot for two days and two nights, resting first night in halls of Diocles.	Morning, second day. Menelaus begs Telemachus to stay longer and receive a princely sendoff. T. tactfully declines, along with declining an inappropriate gift (chariot and three stallions unfit for rocky Ithaca). Menelaus heaps on him other treasures, and then dinner is prepared. Book 15: Yet another morning. More treasures. Quick breakfast. Departure for Pylos, staying first night with Diocles again.
		Telemachus spends about 36 hours at Sparta, and then takes the chariot with Pisistratus on the 36 hour ride back to Pylos. Does not revisit Nestor, but departs that evening/night on his ship, bound for Ithaca. All told, his telemachy (departure from to return to Ithaca) spans 12 hours shy of seven days.

Appendix C: The Home Tour (Subjectively)

Particulars	Home of King Nestor at Pylos	Home of King Menelaus at Sparta
First impressions	Telemachus and Mentor (Athena) arrive by ship in early morning. Sacrifices on the beach. Blood, death, and barbecue of 81 bulls.	Telemachus and Pisistratus arrive by chariot late in the evening, sun going down. Double-wedding feast perhaps signifying beginnings, birth, and life.
Lodgings	First location: beach and blankets. Second location: regal palace. Golden cups for wine. Low and high backed chairs (benches and chairs). Telemachus sleeps on a corded bed (a hammock?) in the open air, under a roof supported by columns; Pisistratus beside him.	Magnificent palace of polished, shimmering walls; radiant illumination through the roof. Burnished tubs for bathing. Graceful golden pitcher for water. Silver basin for rinsing. Gleaming table for eating bread, appetizers, platters of meat (meats of every sort). Golden cups. T. in whisper to Pisistratus: "...sheen of bronze, the blaze of gold and amber, silver, ivory too, through all this echoing mansion! Surely Zeus' court on Olympus must be just like this, the boundless glory of all this wealth inside! My eyes dazzle . . . I am struck with wonder." (4.80) More of Menelaus' treasures, given by King Polybus of Egyptian Thebes, are described with Helen's riches (see "The Queen" below): a pair of silver bathing tubs, two tripods, and ten bars of gold. But palace has similar low and high backed chairs in Book 15, when setting out food for a quick breakfast – no ceremony, no feasting. Telemachus and Pisistratus sleep on the porch, like at Nestor's, but on real beds with sheets of royal purple, covered with blankets and fleecy robes.
Food	Bulls' innards, burning thighbones (for the gods), roasted meats, skewered strips for broiling, wine (seasoned, mellow). Roasted meats on spits for breakfast, involving more sacrifices.	Meats of every sort. Bread, appetizers. Wine. (Not quite the BBQ style of Nestor.)
The Queen	Mentioned by name (Eurydice)	Helen plays a very active role. First,

Particulars	Home of King Nestor at Pylos	Home of King Menelaus at Sparta
	only once, when the women shrieked at the morning, gilded heifer's sacrifice. Serves as Nestor's bedfellow; not a seductive wife like Helen.	emerging in all her glory from her scented chamber, she's as beautiful as Artemis; with a train of women servants; a carved reclining chair; a carpet of soft-piled fleece; a silver basket rimmed with gold – on casters, even; a golden spindle; multitudes of yarn for weaving. And, importantly, she has a most excellent magic drug to ease the heart, dissolve anger, forget pains, and disable grief and tears, even if one's mother or father die, even if eye-witness to the death of one's brother or son by an enemy. At the last, at Telemachus' departure, Helen even speaks for her husband, as a prophet, reading the omen of an eagle.
Princes and Princesses	All seven sons named. Pisistratus accompanies Telemachus to Sparta. "Dear son" Antilochus, killed at Troy, is remembered, revered. Only Polycaste, of an unknown number of daughters (and who later marries Telemachus, though not in <i>The Odyssey</i>), is mentioned by name when she bathes him.	Only two, but named. Son Megapenthes and daughter Hermione. Entirely forgotten after the arrival of Telemachus and Pisistratus. Daughter is about to be sent off; son's bride is soon to arrive. Megapenthes helps out with T.'s departure in Book 15.
Stories	Stories of return, but also of life's terrible moments. Memories of "living hell" (3.115) at Troy; feuding between kings; sacrificing to the gods; deaths of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus. Inspiration for T. to be like Orestes; avenge the hated suitors.	Stories of ingenuity and life. Odysseus as spy, crafty man, and hero. Inspiration for T. to be like his father; giving him an idea of who he is. In the morning, at T.'s bedside, Menelaus tells a supremely magical story of his return, with gods and monsters and riches.
Gifts	None. But then, no chance was given by T. because he hastily detoured to his ship upon return	Initially a chariot and three stallions, quite unfit for Ithaca. After T. tactfully demurs, many other rich and artful gifts are

Particulars	Home of King Nestor at Pylos	Home of King Menelaus at Sparta
	from Sparta.	bestowed. A retelling occurs in Book 15, and even more gifts are bestowed, including a robe – the largest, loveliest, and most richly brocaded robe – that Helen wove herself and presented to T. for his future wife.
Gods	Much blood and sacrifice, perhaps in the extreme. Libations specifically to Poseidon and Athena – curiously, the two gods currently opposed. Nestor would never fail to give the gods their due, observing all necessary rites and prayers.	Hardly a thought of the gods. Menelaus mentions Zeus’ name in response to T.’s comparison of his palace with Olympus. He at best “wishes” from Zeus, Athena, and Apollo that the Odysseus he knows would return. And he admits his failure to give the gods their due, suffering a delayed return from Troy as a consequence. Libations are poured – but no gods named – at T.’s departure back to Pylos.
Extra clues		T’s talk of heart and home inspires a response from Menelaus about balance – “best in all things.” Do we take these words to heart, coming from Menelaus? Perhaps he realizes his home IS out of balance, but accepts it – especially the domination of Helen – as a way of practicing balance within himself.
Conclusion	Of an older mindset. Life is lived outside and is very sparse, very religious and custom-oriented in nature; very bloody; surrounded by death; stories recall death; plain in adornment (except for the gilded calf, maybe because Athena visited during their feast for Poseidon). Women have their place – mostly unspoken, unheard, and unnamed; sons are revered for strength in battle and military prowess. Hard-core Spartans.	Surrounded by profuse, rich, and artful adornments. Regard for gods is scarce. Life seems easy and of the interior – both physically, in the palace, and somewhat in the mind, though not necessarily in a practical, reasoned way, as shown by Menelaus’ impractical initial gift to T. Nighttime banquets, use of magical drugs, and as Nestor said of Menelaus, cruising to foreign ports of call, perhaps Helen has brought back from the east much more than just herself. And Menelaus seems comfortable with these softer ways – a move away from traditional Spartan life. Helen seems co-equal – or even more!

Appendix D: The Virtual Tour

The Cyclops' Island	Circe on Aeaea	The Phaeacians on Scheria
<p>1.82: First mention of Cyclops. Zeus provides background as to why Poseidon is angry with Odysseus. Mentioned again at 2.19: Homer tells of Aegyptius' son Antiphus, who accompanied Odysseus to Troy, and who was eaten last by the Cyclops Polyphemus.</p>	<p>10.148: Lands on Aeaea, home of Circe, child of the Sun (Helios) and Perse (nymph daughter of Ocean).</p> <p>On third day, Odysseus climbs a crag and sees smoke from a home. Decides to send his men out to scout this time. Why? Maybe because of the Cyclops.</p>	<p>The island where and the people to whom Odysseus tells his tale. Initially "far from men who toil on this earth" (6.10), and in the end most likely completely cut off from civilization because vexed Poseidon piled "a huge mountain round about our port" (13.201).</p>
<p>6.6: Next mention of the Cyclops when Odysseus gets to Scheria. Homer sings of their constant harassment which caused the Phaeacians to pack up and move from neighboring Hyperia to Scheria. Two neighboring islands of the mind?</p>	<p>10.207: Necessity rather than desire dictates exploring the island this time because they are completely lost. He divides his men in half; the exploring party responsibility falls by lot to Eurylochus and his platoon.</p>	<p>7.63: People are descended from gods. Nausicaa from Alcinous, Alcinous from Nausithous, Nausithous from Poseidon. And Arete ("She lacks nothing in good sense and judgment" at 7.84) from Nausithous' other son Rhexenor.</p>
<p>Book 9: Cyclops/Polyphemus</p> <p>9.119: "and reached the land of the high and mighty Cyclops, lawless brutes, who trust so to the everlasting gods they never plant with their own hands or plow the soil."</p> <p>9.125: "They have no meeting place for council, no laws either, no, up on the mountain peaks they live in arching caverns – each a law to himself, ruling his wives and children, not a care in the world for any neighbor."</p>	<p>10.229: Deep in the woods the men find Circe's home. Unnaturally friendly wolves and lions come fawning, like dogs eager to see their master. They hear Circe singing inside. The men call to her. She opens her gleaming doors and invites them in. They sit on high-backed chairs while she mixes some wine with cheese and barley – and wicked drugs to erase any thoughts of home from their memories. She then turns them into swine, but their minds remain steadfast, remain as minds of men.</p>	<p>7.94: Odysseus approaches the palace much like Telemachus approaches the palace at Sparta. It brings him to a "standstill" and stirs his heart. He sees a bronze threshold; a radiance through the high-roofed halls (like Sparta); walls of bronze; circling frieze of blue glaze; golden doors with silver doorposts and golden handles; guard dogs of gold that are eerily alive, immortal, and ageless; thrones line the walls; statues of young boys hold torches for night light; women excel at weaving; orchard,</p>

The Cyclops' Island	Circe on Aeaea	The Phaeacians on Scheria
9.138: "For the Cyclops have no ships with crimson prows, no shipwrights there to build them good trim craft."		vineyard, and garden that continuously bears fruit and greens; magnificent irrigation system and fountain.
9.142: "Such artisans would have made this island too a decent place to live in . . . No mean spot, it could bear you any crop you like in season."	10.269: Eurylochus, who feared a trap and stayed hidden, ran back to the ship to inform Odysseus.	7.160: Odysseus finds the Phaeacians drinking libations to the gods, honoring Hermes with the last pour.
Artisans and shipbuilders would have balanced out the islands of the Cyclops, I suppose, if they could have survived the Cyclops.	10.287: Odysseus arms himself and gets into warrior mode. He takes no one with him. On the way he meets Hermes, who provides him a potent drug to shield him from Circe's magic.	7.243: Reminiscent of Menelaus chiding Telemachus for comparing his home to that of the gods, Odysseus chides Alcinous for thinking him a god in disguise.
9.201: Home is a towering cavern (big enough for a Cyclops, I guess), overgrown with laurel, with a front yard fenced off by huge carved boulders sunk into the ground. Apparently, the giants are lawless loners, flocks of sheep never mixing. Even inside the cavern, spring-born, mid-yearlings, and fresh sucklings never mix.	Homer provides us no sign that Odysseus takes this drug. He doesn't eat it; he doesn't drink it. It's a magic herb. Maybe he just carries it. Hermes also draws out the battle plan for Odysseus. But it's more of a battle plan that uses reason and trickery.	8.87: No stories of returns or even of heroic Phaeacians. Instead, their bard Demodocus sings of Achaean "fighting heroes" and their struggles at Troy. Instead they play games, revel in sporting contests, and dance. Also, long song of love and war amongst the gods (Ares, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, Helios, Zeus) at 8.300.
Odysseus' desire to learn of these giants, perhaps even do battle with one of them, keeps him there; his men want to leave! 9.245: Inside the cave: drying cheeses, three groups of sheep; containers – pails and hammered buckets – full of	10.365: Circe to Odysseus: "You have a mind in <i>you</i> no magic can enchant!" Does Circe attest to the strong mind of Odysseus? It sure sounds like it. At least it was strong in this adventure. After Odysseus makes Circe swear to no more tricks, he	8.130: Seafaring names of champions of games and contests: Topsail, Riptide, Rowhard, Seaman, Sternman, Surf-at-the-Beach, Stroke-Oar, Breaker, Bowsprit, Racing-the-Wind, Swing-Aboard, Seagirt, Greatfleet, Shipwrightson, Launcher, Broadsea. Only King Alcinous' sons seem to have

The Cyclops' Island	Circe on Aeaea	The Phaeacians on Scheria
whey.	sleeps with her (10.385)	real names.
9.309: "We Cyclops never blink at Zeus and Zeus's shield of storm and thunder, or any other blessed god – we've got more force by far. I'd never spare you in fear of Zeus's hatred, you or your comrades here, unless I had the urge."	10.390: We get an idea of inside Circe's home: chairs draped with fine crimson covers, linen cloths, silver tables, golden trays, a silver bowl for wine, golden cups for drinking, silver studded chair with a footstool for Odysseus, a silver basin for rinsing hands.	8.169: King Alcinous' son Laodamas to Odysseus: "It's fit and proper for you to know your sports. What greater glory attends a man, while he's alive, than what he wins with his racing feet and striving hands?"
No respect for gods; no fear, either. Cyclops do only what they want, individually. They are all desire and little to no reason. Polyphemus is unable to trap Odysseus (Where's your ship? at 9.314) or detect lies, either subtle (Poseidon destroyed my ship at 9.319) or not so subtle ("Nobody – that's my name. Nobody" at 9.410). Easily taken advantage of with wine – again, all desire, no thinking. Fooled easily again when men escaped tied underneath his sheep at 9.475.	10.418: Circe wonders why Odysseus does not eat. He explains his worry for his comrades whom she turned into swine. She changes them back – and is moved by their tearful reunion, so moved that she becomes a different type of goddess, no longer bewitching and beguiling, but now empathetic, generous, and helpful. Odysseus convinces his men of Circe's good intentions, despite Eurylochus' accurate description of Odysseus as hotheaded and rash (10.481)	The people of Scheria literally are excellent in mind, wisdom, and virtue: Alcinous – strength of mind, and Arete – excellence, virtue 7.127: "That is Athena's gift to them [the Phaeacians] beyond all others – / a genius for lovely work, and a fine mind too." 7.226: "then we will turn our minds to [Odysseus'] passage home 7.357: "seeing we [Alcinous, Odysseus] think as one"
9.584: Polyphemus prays to his father Poseidon – results in all Odysseus' troubles: "let him come home late and come a broken man – all shipmates lost, alone in a stranger's ship – and let him find a world of pain at home!"	10.514: Odysseus and his men stay for a full one-year cycle, until his men reason him to thinking about home again. 10.539: Circe directs Odysseus "down" to the House of Death – "another journey" he must complete before going home. 10.596: Morning arrives. Circe rises from her golden throne, throws on a "loose, glistening	Ships aren't steered; they simply <i>know</i> the intentions of the crew. 8.625: For we have no steersmen here among Phaeacia's crews or steering-oars that guide your common craft. Our ships know in a flash their crew's intentions, know all ports of call and all the rich green fields. With wings of the wind they cross the sea's huge

The Cyclops' Island	Circe on Aeaea	The Phaeacians on Scheria
	<p>robe," a "brocaded golden belt" and a scarf around her brow.</p> <p>10.608: Elpenor falls from roof.</p> <p>12.3: Return from House of Death; bury Elpenor; Circe forecasts rest of journey.</p>	<p>gulfs, shrouded in mist and cloud – no fear in the world of foundering, fatal shipwreck.</p>

Appendix E: Odysseus' Tale Thrice Told

To Phaeacians (Books 9 – 12)	To Eumaeus (Book 14)	To Penelope (Books 19, 23)
<p>Ogygia (Calypso).</p> <p>7.280: In reply to Queen Arete, tells of life with Calypso and how he arrived at Scheria, but does not reveal his identity.</p> <p>9.21: Reveals himself as Odysseus. Tells of Ithaca.</p> <p>9.33: Tells again of Calypso, and of Circe, too.</p>	<p>14.220: His story – the whole truth.</p> <p>14.228: hails from Crete, a rich man's son, but not of a lawful wife. Father died. Left almost nothing. Married rich, but detested the domestic life – no lover of working the land, household chores, or raising children. (This beginning of his life, though false to protect his identity, gives the impression that we may not have known Odysseus as well as we thought when he left Ithaca for Troy.)</p>	<p>Two stories to Penelope, the first in his beggar disguise. Does not attest to its truthfulness. Says it will plunge him into grief (19.188). Says it's all she needs to know (19.193).</p> <p>19.194: Begins in Crete like the story to Eumaeus, but the similarity ends there. Odysseus names himself: Aethon. He is the younger born of two boys. Quickly he moves to sighting and hosting Odysseus on his way to Troy.</p>
<p>Ismarus (Thrace) and the Cicones.</p> <p>9.44: First tells of leaving Troy, homeward bound, but being blown off course to Ismarus, where he sacked the city, killed the men, hauled away wives and riches. Men got drunk and Cicones retaliated.</p>	<p>He was truly a warrior and loved it. He reveled in telling his old war stories. Hand-picked his own troops. Cut down many men. Oarswept ships and wars thrilled his heart. Led nine commands raiding and looting foreign lands before taking Achaeans to Troy.</p>	<p>19.234: Homer claims it is all falsehood.</p> <p>19.248: Penelope tests his knowledge of what Odysseus was wearing. Odysseus claims the 20 years gone by make it difficult, but then describes in exact detail the clothes she dressed him in when he left.</p>
<p>Land of Lotus-eaters.</p> <p>9.71: Again blown off course. Reaches Lotus-eaters on 10th day. Has to save men who forget about home.</p>	<p>14.270: Familiar story of nine years of war, sacking Troy in the tenth – the story of <i>The Iliad</i>.</p>	<p>Are they testing each other? Does Penelope recognize Odysseus?</p>
<p>Cyclops.</p> <p>9.118: Arrives at island across from the coast of the Cyclops' island.</p> <p>9.190: Odysseus determined to</p>	<p>14.277: Home for a month with family and plunder. Set sail again with 9 ships. Left for Nile, Egypt. His men plundered, raped, and murdered. Egyptians</p>	<p>19.309: Now tells the "whole truth" of Odysseus returning. He's nearby in Thesprotia, bringing home a hoard of treasure. He lost his entire crew and his ship off Thrinacia</p>

To Phaeacians (Books 9 – 12)	To Eumaeus (Book 14)	To Penelope (Books 19, 23)
<p>visit their island and learn about them – and to get gifts from them, or plunder them. Takes his own ship, then 12 of his men. Enters cave uninvited. “Nobody” escapes. Loses 6 men. Poseidon now pissed.</p> <p>Interesting story to Phaeacians who already know of Cyclops.</p>	<p>retaliated. Odysseus literally begged the king for his life and won protection. King feared the wrath of Zeus, lord of hosts. For seven years remains in Egypt, amassing great fortune. Is this period of time equivalent to the seven years he spends with Calypso on Ogygia?</p>	<p>to a storm; Zeus and Helios angered by his men who killed the cattle of the Sun. He survived, washed up on Scheria. The Phaeacians showered him with gifts and would have sailed him home, but he decided to roam the world gathering up even more plunder.</p>
<p>Aeolia.</p> <p>10.1: Guests of king who sends home with favorable wind.</p>	<p>Swindled in the eighth year by a Phoenician scoundrel. Sets sail for Phoenicia. Remains a year.</p>	<p>19.331: Beggar learned from King of Thesprotia that Odysseus is ready to sail for Ithaca.</p>
<p>Ithaca (almost).</p> <p>10.32: Falls asleep and men unleash unfavorable winds, with Ithaca just in sight. Odysseus cannot counter.</p>	<p>14.332: In ninth year, same scoundrel cons Odysseus to board boat bound for Libya, where he was to be sold into slavery. Zeus/storm destroys boat; all lost except Odysseus, who clings to huge mast for nine days. On tenth, at night, he washes up on Thesprotia beach.</p>	<p>So, he is safe, with great wealth. But he is at Dodona to learn the will of Zeus – whether to come home openly or in secret. (Similar to Odysseus’ story to Eumaeus.) The beggar arrives before him.</p>
<p>Aeolia.</p> <p>10.60: Blown back to Aeolia but cursed at by king this time, who fears the gods that are against Odysseus. No help from king. Sets sail.</p>	<p>14.360: King Phidon of Thesprotia saves him. Tells him of “real” Odysseus and shows him Odysseus’ treasure. Odysseus at Dodona learning the will of Zeus for his return to Ithaca. Beggar perhaps spends a year here? Doesn’t say.</p>	<p>Book 23 (as Odysseus), beginning at line 349. Penelope listened – ENCHANTED! Essentially the same story he told the Phaeacians, until almost making landfall at Ithaca the first time. He blames his bad luck on a sudden squall (rather than on falling asleep while his greedy men unleash the winds from the bag). Does he think she will not understand his story on the level of the mind?</p>

To Phaeacians (Books 9 – 12)	To Eumaeus (Book 14)	To Penelope (Books 19, 23)
<p>Telepylus (Laestrygonians).</p> <p>10.88: Arrives at Telepylus but anchors his ship away from other 11 ships. Three of his crew went exploring. Only two escaped Antiphates back to the ships. Giants destroyed the 11 ships with rocks; speared the men. Only Odysseus, his ship and crew escape.</p>	<p>14.378: King Phidon puts him on ship bound for Dulichion. Crew, however, strip him, make him a slave, and sail for Ithaca. The gods help set him free, and he arrives at the home of Eumaeus.</p>	<p>Odysseus' story to Penelope picks up on Telepylus again and remains the same until his trip back to Circe's island after completing his visit to the House of Death.</p>
<p>Aeaea (Circe).</p> <p>10.146: After Odysseus/Hermes neutralize her, she changes from Circe, the bewitching nymph with lovely braids, to Circe, the warm and lustrous goddess. Odysseus and his one remaining ship's crew spend a year on Circe's island.</p>		<p>Tells.</p>
<p>House of Death at Book 11. Tiresias and women first. See essay for more details.</p>		<p>Tells.</p>
<p>Scheria. Odysseus pauses in his story to the Phaeacians. Queen Arete praises him at 11.381: "Phaeacians! How does this man impress you now, his looks, his build, the balanced mind inside him?" King Alcinous continues similarly at 11.411: Odysseus would not cheat them, would never commit fraud, he tells his story with grace and skill, it makes good sense!</p>		<p>n/a</p>

To Phaeacians (Books 9 – 12)	To Eumaeus (Book 14)	To Penelope (Books 19, 23)
House of Death. Finishes at 11.437 with heroes/Achilles.		Tells.
Aeaea (Circe): Returned to Circe's island to bury Elpenor. Told her the story of his trip to the House of Death. Circe told Odysseus of what lies ahead in his travels. Rested for the day. Circe resupplied them with a month's worth of food, etc. Set sail in the morning.		No mention to Penelope of this second trip to Circe's island to bury Elpenor. Probably not significant enough to discuss.
Sirens: Survives by plugging all the crew's ears with wax and being lashed tightly to the mast. Hears the Sirens' song. What can be gleaned from it?		Tells.
Scylla: Circe presents as a choice of two extremes (one extreme of which itself is two extremes). On one side, the Clashing Rocks. On the other side, two enormous crags. One crag houses Scylla halfway up, in a cave. Beneath the other crag, the awesome Charybdis whirlpool/vortex gulps the water down and vomits it back up three times a day. How does Odysseus handle the two extremes, the crags and the Clashing Rocks? Why does he still put on his armor? What to make of Odysseus' protest and Circe's comment at 12.122 – 132, and Odysseus' thoughts/actions at 12.245+??		Odysseus tells Penelope of all these remaining adventures: the Sirens, the Clashing Rocks, Scylla and Charybdis, the cattle of the Sun and how Zeus' revenge left him the sole survivor, drifting at sea until finally reaching Ogygia, Calypso's island.
Thrinacia (Sungod's cattle): spent one month on the island,		Tells.

To Phaeacians (Books 9 – 12)	To Eumaeus (Book 14)	To Penelope (Books 19, 23)
<p>thwarted from sailing by gale force winds. Circe's food eventually ran out. They tried fishing, killing birds, anything, but they began starving. Eurylochus hatched a plan to kill some of the Sungod's cattle. Odysseus fell asleep. The men feasted for six days. On the seventh, the winds abated. They sailed. Zeus demolished the ship. Only Odysseus survived, lashing together a makeshift raft from the ship's mast and keel. Drifts for the rest of the day and the night until reaching Scylla and Charybdis again.</p>		
<p>Charybdis: Odysseus survives the whirlpool vortex by grabbing a branch. Then when the vortex gushed forth his mast-and-keel makeshift raft, he dropped and grabbed it. He gets away and drifts for ten days, when he finally washes up on Ogygia.</p>		Tells.
<p>Ogygia (Calypso): We've circled back and already know this part of the story.</p>		Tells of Calypso's desire for him as a husband, her offer of immortality and agelessness. She never won his heart.
<p>Scheria (the Phaeacians; King Alcinous and Queen Arete)</p>		Tells how he reached Scheria; of his god-like treatment by the Phaeacians; how they loaded him down with riches; and how they sailed him home to Ithaca.

Appendix F: References to αἴσιμα

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0136>

Homer, *Iliad* Less
(Greek) (English)
book 6, card 37: ... ἄφαντοι. ὡς εἰπὼν ἔτρεψεν ἀδελφειοῦ φρένας ἥρωας αἴσιμα παρεϊπών· ὁ δ' ἀπὸ ἔθεν ὤσατο χειρὶ ἥρω'
book 7, card 92: ... δηϊότητος. ὡς εἰπὼν παρέπεισεν ἀδελφειοῦ φρένας ἥρωας αἴσιμα παρεϊπών, ὁ δ' ἐπέειθετο· τοῦ μὲν ἔπειτα γηθόσυνοι
book 15, card 184: ... μοῖραν ἔειπες· ἐσθλὸν καὶ τὸ τέτυκται δὲ ἄγγελος αἴσιμα εἶδῃ. ἀλλὰ τὸ δ' αἰνὸν ἄχος κραδίην καὶ θυμὸν

Homer, *Odyssey* Less
(Greek) (English)
book 2, card 224: ... πρόφρων ἀγανὸς καὶ ἦπιος ἔστω σκηπτοῦχος βασιλεὺς, μηδὲ φρεσὶν αἴσιμα εἰδῶς, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ χαλεπὸς τ' εἶη καὶ αἴσυλα
book 5, card 1: ... πρόφρων ἀγανὸς καὶ ἦπιος ἔστω σκηπτοῦχος βασιλεὺς, μηδὲ φρεσὶν αἴσιμα εἰδῶς, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ χαλεπὸς τ' εἶη καὶ αἴσυλα
book 7, card 287: ... τοιοῦτον ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ μασιδίως κεχολῶσθαι· ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα. αἶ γάρ, Ζεῦ τε πάτερ καὶ Ἀθηναίη
book 8, card 343: ... δέ τοι αὐτὸν ὑπίσχομαι, ὡς σὺ κελεύεις, τίσιεν αἴσιμα πάντα μετ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν." τὸν δ' αὖτε
book 14, card 72: ... ἔργα θεοὶ μάκαρες φιλέουσιν, ἀλλὰ δίκην τίουσιν καὶ αἴσιμα ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων. καὶ μὲν δυσμενέες καὶ ἀνάρσιοι, οἳ
book 14, card 401: ... ἀολλέα· ἂν δὲ συβώτης ἴστατο δαιτρεύσων· περὶ γὰρ φρεσὶν αἴσιμα ᾗδῃ. καὶ τὰ μὲν ἔπταχα πάντα διαιμοῖρ' αὐτὸ δαΐζων
book 15, card 48: ... ἔξοχα μὲν φιλέησιν, ἔξοχα δ' ἐχθαιρήσιν· ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα. ἴσόν τοι κακὸν ἐσθ', ὅς τ' οὐκ
book 21, card 256: ... καὶ ἄλλους βλάπτει, ὅς ἂν μιν χανδὸν ἔλη μηδ' αἴσιμα πίνῃ. οἶνος καὶ Κένταυρον, ἀγακλυτὸν Εὐρυτίωνα,
book 22, card 42: ... "εἰ μὲν δὴ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἰθακῆσιος εἰλήλουθας, ταῦτα μὲν αἴσιμα εἶπας, ὅσα ῥέζεσκον Ἀχαιοί, πολλὰ μὲν ἐν μεγάρῳσιν

αἴσιμος destined, due, suitable, right;
 (Show lexicon entry in [LSJ Middle Liddell Autenrieth](#)) (search)

αἴσιμα adj pl neut nom
 αἴσιμα adj pl neut voc
 αἴσιμα adj pl neut acc

[Word frequency statistics](#)

Search hide

Get Info for in Greek

How to enter text in Greek:

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Hom. II. 1.1 μῆνιν αἶδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
 mh=nin a)/eide qea \ *phlhi+a/dew *a)xilh=os

Appendix G: References to εἶδος τε μέγεθός τε ἰδὲ φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0136>

Homer, *Odyssey* Less
 (Greek) (English)

book 11, card 321: ... ἀνὴρ ὃδε φαίνεται εἶναι εἶδος τε μέγεθός τε ἰδὲ φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας; ξείνος δ' αὐτ' ἐμός ἐστιν, ἕκαστος δ' ἔμπορε
 book 14, card 148: ... τέκ' Ὀδυσσεύς, Τηλεμάχου: τὸν ἐπεὶ θρέψαν θεοὶ ἐρνεῖ ἴσον, καὶ μιν ἔφην ἔσσεσθαι ἐν ἀνδράσιν οὐ π... καὶ εἶδος
 ἀγῆτον, τὸν δὲ τις ἀθανάτων βλάψε φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας ἢ ἐ τις ἀνθρώπων: ὁ δ' ἔβη μετὰ πατρός
 book 18, card 206: ... προσεφώνεον, ὃν φίλον υἱόν: "Τηλέμαχ', οὐκέτι τοι φρένας ἔμπεδοι οὐδὲ νόημα: παῖς ἔτ' ἔων καὶ μάλλον ἐνὶ φρεσὶ
 κέρδε' ἐνώμας: νῦν δ' ὅτε δὴ μέγας ἐσσι... μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος ὁρώμενος, ἀλλότριος φῶς, οὐκέτι τοι φρένας εἰσὶν ἐναίσιμοι οὐδὲ νόημα.
 οἶον δὴ τότε ἔργον... δαινύσ'ατ', ἐπεὶ περίεσι γυναικῶν εἶδος τε μέγεθός τε ἰδὲ φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας."

Matching Lemmas (5)

hide

- φρήν: "midriff, diaphragm" (entry in *LSJ Middle Liddell Slater Autenrieth*)
- εἴσας: "alike, equal" (entry in *Middle Liddell*)
- ἔνδον: "within" (entry in *LSJ Middle Liddell Slater Autenrieth*)
- ἐνδίωμι: "to give in" (entry in *LSJ Middle Liddell*)
- ἴσος: "equal, alike" (entry in *LSJ Middle Liddell Slater*)

Translator	εἶδος τε μέγεθός τε ἰδὲ φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας
Chapman (11.456)	So goodly person'd, and so match'd with mind*
Chapman (18.361-62)	In Stature, Beauty, Forme in every kinde / Of all parts outward, and for faultlesse minde.
Fagles (11.382)	his looks, his build, the balanced mind inside him
Fagles (18.280)	in build and beauty, refined and steady mind
Fitzgerald (11.392-93)	in your eyes, this captain, the look and bulk of him, the inward poise
Fitzgerald (18.312-13)	Beauty like yours no woman had before, or majesty, or mastery
Lattimore (11.337)	for beauty and stature, and for the mind well balanced within him
Lattimore (18.249)	for beauty and stature and for the mind well balanced within you
Loeb (11.337)	for looks, and stature, and for the balanced mind within him
Loeb (18.249)	in beauty and stature and in good sense
Pope (11, p. 167)	His comely port, his ample frame express a manly air, majestic in distress.
Pope (18, p. 271)	Loveliest of the lovely kind, in body perfect, and complete in mind.
Rieu (11, p. 180)	the looks and stature of our guest and have sampled his wisdom
Rieu (18, p. 282)	for in beauty, stature, and sense
Rouse (11, p. 131)	fine figure of a man, and clever enough for anything
Rouse (18, p. 209)	for you are the pearl of women for beauty and intelligence too

* <<http://www.bartleby.com/111/>>

εἶδος	ei)=dos
τε	te
μέγεθός	me/geqos
τε	te
ἰδὲ	i)de/
φρένας	fre/nas
ἔνδον	e)/ndon
εἴσας	e)i/sas

appearance, looks
and, in particular
stature, height
and, in particular
and
midriff, diaphragm
within
alike, equal

Appendix H: Seductive Aristotelian Connections Previewed

Could we end up delighted that Homer's supremely entertaining poetry also offers enduring philosophy? The possibility first reminds us of an ongoing debate. Both Plato and Aristotle certainly agree about poetry as entertainment, citing its original nature of pleasing the audience by eliciting emotions of pity and fear:

"Then, Glaucon," I said, "when you meet praisers of Homer who say that this poet educated Greece, and that in the management and education of human affairs it is worthwhile to take him up for study and for living, by arranging one's whole life according to this poet, you must love and embrace them as being men who are the best they can be, and agree that Homer is the most poetic and first of the tragic poets; but you must know that only so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city. And if you admit the sweetened muse in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will jointly be kings in your city instead of law and that argument which in each instance is best in the opinion of the community." (Plato, 606e – 607a)

Tragedy is, then a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude – by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions. (*Poetics*, vi.2 – 3)

. . . tragedy represents not only a complete action but also incidents that cause fear and pity, and this happens most of all when the incidents are unexpected and yet one is a consequence of the other. (*Poetics*, ix.11 – 12)

In the *Republic*, Socrates fears an addictive effect of poetry, warning that it might become as valued as law, argument, and reason. Maybe he even withholds stating a personal fear that poetry could become too valued in a polis, too desired by one's soul, and consequently, a detriment to reason. He sees no advantage to admitting poetry into his polis except for those few verses that teach right reverence to gods and right remembrance of heroes. Aristotle acknowledges the same entertainment value of poetry, its elicitation of pity and fear, but is not as wary of it, going so far as to see it as a positive form of writing that provides relief to such emotions. So our two philosophers differ as to poetry's role, at least in these passages. Aristotle's opening epigram to this paper additionally grants poetry further import. When we learn something through it, it can be philosophically delightful. Aristotle even grants poetry a higher standing than history:

The real difference [between a historian and a poet] is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts. (*Poetics*, ix.3)

So, agreement acknowledging poetry's entertaining, emotional nature exists, and readers for centuries have been moved and entertained by *The Odyssey*. But what connections does Aristotle share with the Homeric notion of balance?

A little searching leads to the discovery of at least two connections. The first regards poetry and this Aristotelian passage:

The merit [ἀρετή – Arete, excellence, virtue] of diction is to be clear and not commonplace. The clearest diction is that made up of ordinary words, but it is commonplace. . . That which employs unfamiliar words is dignified and outside the common usage. By “unfamiliar” I mean a rare word, a metaphor, a lengthening, and anything beyond the ordinary use. . . We need then a sort of mixture of the two. For the one kind will save the diction from being prosaic and commonplace, the rare word, for example, and the metaphor and the “ornament,” whereas the ordinary words give clarity.” (Poetics, xxii.1 – 7)

Aristotle points to a fine balance of words as necessary for meritorious diction and the best poetry.

The second connection deals not with art but with ethics. Almost all our translators hint at it. Chapman's not so subtle translation of Menelaus' utterance of ἀμείνω δ' αἴσιμα πάντα comes closest: “*The meane in all acts beares the best estate*” (15.92). Aristotle says it thus: “Therefore virtue is a kind of mean, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate” (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1106^b27-28). He then puts into philosophical terms truths which Homer puts into his poetry during Odysseus' virtual tour and Telemachus' home tour. “With regard to giving and taking of money the mean is liberality. . . With regard to honour and dishonour the mean is proper pride. . . With regard to anger also there is an excess, a deficiency, and a mean” (1107^b9 – 1108^a5).

At least one more possible connection arises from the struggle between reason and desire, a struggle that Homer keeps revisiting. And it is helped by thinking of the homes at Pylos and Sparta, the former being common and according to custom (actuality) and the latter being rare and sensual (potentiality). In another of his works, *On the Soul*, Aristotle may help physically locate these concepts. Books II and III may be most useful.

Just these few possible Aristotelian connections to Homer seduce, Siren-like, a reader to further exploration. But one must focus. And there is so little time.

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