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The return of the king, "or" how to hang up a woman : the execution of the maid-servants in the "Odyssey", XXII 457-473

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The Return of the King, Or How to Hang Up a Woman The Execution of the Maid-Servants in the *Odyssey*, XXII 457—473

οἱ ἄνθρωποι [...] τιμωρούμενοι δ' ἡδονται ('People [...] feel pleasure [...] when they take revenge').

Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1117a, 6—9

And revenge lent me a feeling of comfort and justice.

Orhan Pamuk, *My Name Is Red*

Abstract: The subject of the paper is the very gloomy and touching scene in the *Odyssey*, XXII 457—473, presenting the capital punishment received by the handmaids in Ithaca who were concubines to the suitors during the Odysseus' long absence at homeland. The author of the present article tried to look at this passage from the perspective of Homeric audience which was evidently eager to hear such (and similar) scenes: abounding with the themes of violence, cruelty and death. Given the inevitable difficulties with the situating of the poems in a historical reality (the Dark Ages or the early archaic period) and with the identification of the so-called "Homeric society," the author tried to pay more attention to the connection between the content of the poem and the expectations of its hearers. These expectations may be detected (or seen, at least) in the way the poet narrates the passage containing the violent death penalty in *Odyssey*, XXII 457—473. The execution passage allows us to look at Homer's literary technique and to speculate about the sources of its representation. The passage may also serve as a point of departure for the considerations of the differences between the Greek society of the archaic era and that of the classical period. Above all, it also allows us to see the unique nature of both Homeric society and its values.

Key words: Homer, the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, female servants, punishment, cruelty

The picture is really horrible: after the bloodbath that Odysseus and Telemachus make to the hundred and eight suitors (the major subject of the Book XXII), the vengeful hero and his son turn to giving payback to the slave handmaidens who, during the ruler's long absence in Ithaca, became mistresses to the them. Now, the girls must be punished and "to forget Aphrodite" (v. 444: ἐκλελάθωντ' Ἀφροδίτης).¹ What strikes the most in this scene, especially in the terrifying vengeance act, is the ruthless not to say methodical manner, in which the punishment is carried out.² It seems that this "mechanics of death" (to quote Larry Fulkerson's chilling phrase),³ struck also Alfred Heubeck,⁴ who rightly said of the passage that it describes "the strange and unwarranted cruelty."

In this paper I shall look at this episode by addressing one fundamental problem which, I believe, the scene brings along with: by exploring how the poet describes the whole action just before the entire punishment as well as the execution itself, I would like to ask why was such detailed description inserted at all and what can it tell us about the Homeric audience.⁵ As the question tackles the notorious problem of the "Homeric society," I will mention very briefly of the structure of the archaic, aristocratic Greek *oikos*⁶ and the importance of the episode for the evaluating of the social position of the slaves (especially female) within the household (both the vexed topics, indeed).⁷ But essentially, having only mentioned this

¹ *Homeri Odyssea*. Ed. P. Von Der Mühl. Basel 1962; all the quotations in the present study are taken from the English translation by R. Lattimore: *The Odyssey of Homer*. New York 1975.

² Cf. J. Svenbro: "Vengeance and société en Grèce archaïque. A propos de la fin de l'*Odyssee*." In: *La vengeance. Études d'ethnologie, d'histoire et de philosophie* III. Eds. R. Verdier, J.-P. Poly. Paris 1984, p. 47.

³ L. Fulkerson: "Epic Ways of Killing a Woman: Gender and Transgression in *Odyssey* 22. 465—472." *Classical Journal* 2002, vol. 97, p. 335.

⁴ J. Russo, M. Fernández-Galiano, A. Heubeck: *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Volume III, Books XVII—XXIV*. Oxford 1992, p. 296.

⁵ Cf. the excellent analysis by J.M. Redfield: *Nature and Culture in the "Iliad."* *The Tragedy of Hector*. Durham—London 1994, pp. 78—79.

⁶ Some scholars deny that Homeric society is "aristocratic," as the aristocratic ethos was a later phenomenon — e.g. Ch.G. Starr: *The Aristocratic Temper of Greek Civilization*. New York—Oxford 2002, p. 8; cf. also M.I. Finley: *The World of Odysseus*. London 1991, p. 112; cf. Margalit Finkelberg's statement: "There is little doubt that the *Iliad* originated in the cultural and political milieu of aristocratic chiefdoms which preceded the formation of the city-state" ("Homer as a Foundation Text." In: *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond. Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*. Eds. M. Finkelberg, G. Stroumsa. Leiden—Boston 2003, pp. 87—88).

⁷ Whether Homer's Ithaca was *oikos*, see A.W.H. Adkins: *From the Many to the One*. London 1970, pp. 28—29; W. Donlan, C.G. Thomas: "The Village Community of Ancient Greece: Neolithic, Bronze and Dark Ages." *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 1993, vol. 31; W. Donlan: "The Pre-State Community in Greece." *Symbolae Osloenses* 1989, vol. 64, pp. 7ff.; Idem, "Chief and Followers in Pre-State Greece." In: *From Political Economy to Anthropology: Situating Economic Life in Past Societies*. Eds. C.A.M. Duncan, D.W. Tandy. Montreal 1994, p. 36; W. Donlan: "Homeric Economy." In: *A New Companion to Homer*. Eds. I. Morris, B. Powell. Leiden—Boston—Köln 1997, p. 652; also V.D. Hanson: *The Other Greeks. Agrarian Roots of Greek Civilization*.

briefly, I will try to pay some attention to the additional problem: what kind of men were Homer's addressees when listening to such an *ekphrasis*?⁸ As the performance of the poetry was a kind of social practice in archaic Greece (and earlier, as it is usually assumed), it is unclear⁹ to what extent such scenes reflect the Greek elites' attitude towards violence,¹⁰ and what is more important, how their aesthetic expectations influenced the content of the poem — provided that this audience liked to hear these or similar κλέα ἀνδρῶν ("the famous deeds of men," *Il.*, IX 189; cf. also Hesiod, *Theog.* 100, with M.L. West's note, *ad loc.*)¹¹ at the banquets, or another public ceremonies.¹²

Berkeley—Los Angeles—London 1999, pp. 47ff; J. Halverson: ("Social Order in the 'Odyssey.'" *Hermes* 1985, vol. 113, p. 129) thinks that "kingship does not exist in Odyssey, nor polis." Accordingly, there are no "real" kings, but rather "big men", cf. S. Morris: "Imaginary Kings: Alternatives to Monarchy in Greece." In: *Popular Tyranny. Sovereignty and Its Discontents in Ancient Greece*. Ed. K.A. Morgan. Austin 2003, pp. 9—10; J.M. Hall: *A History of the Greek Archaic World ca. 1200—479 BCE*. Malden, MA—Oxford 2007, p. 127. The works of P. Carlier (*La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre*. Strasbourg 1984, pp. 143—150) and M. Finkelberg (*The Greeks and Pre-Greeks. Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition*. Cambridge 2005, pp. 65—70), remain in this respect fundamental.

⁸ Cf. generally R. Webb: *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*. Farnham—Burlington 2009, pp. 131ff.

⁹ L. Kurke: "The Strangeness of 'Song Culture': Archaic Greek Poetry." In: *Literature in the Greek and Roman Worlds. A New Perspective*. Ed. O. Taplin. Oxford 2000, p. 59.

¹⁰ See R. Osborne (*Greece in the Making 1200—779 BC*. London—New York 1996, p. 153), who says rightly that "[...] the values which the poems explore have to be relevant to, and illuminative of, the values of the audience."

¹¹ Hesiod: *Theogony*. Oxford 1966, p. 188.

¹² The controversy **where** was the Homeric poetry delivered is crucial one and it overlaps with the question of its form. Recently, R. Osborne (*Greece in the Making...*, p. 157) paid attention to the fact that the enormous length of the poems excluded the possibility of domestic (viz. requiring a shorter span of time) performance. Rather, as he suggests, the poems were composed for panhellenic festivals (cf. also D. Steiner: *Homer, Odyssey, Books XVII—XVIII*. Cambridge 2010, pp. 11—12), what is more, Osborne adds: "[...] neither poems seem designed for a particular audience." In other words, the panhellenic flavour of the Homeric poems allows us to infer that they presuppose a wider audience; see also Lycurgus: *Contra Leocr.* 102 (and cf. A. Ford: "The Inland Ship: Problems in the Performance and Reception of Homeric Epic." In: *Written Voices, Spoken Signs. Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*. Eds. E. Bakker, A. Kahane. Cambridge, MA—London 1997, pp. 83—84). From the point of view of archaeological findings, this situation fits the 8th century, when the religious centers do appear; cf. N.J. Coldstream: *Geometric Greece*. London 1977, pp. 317—340. Osborne (p. 158) also concludes that the date of around 750 BC would be the most probable, after which the works were written (see, however, his *Archaic and Classical Art*. Oxford—New York 1998, p. 259; also J. Boardman: *The Greeks Overseas. Their Early Colonies and Trade*. London 1980, p. 19). On the other hand, as he himself rightly adds, this does not remove another difficulty, "when exactly the poems were first heard in substantially form in which we have them" (ibidem; cf. also B. Graziosi: *Inventing Homer. The Early Reception of Epic*. Cambridge 2002, p. 111). Concerning the Homeric hearers, see A. Dalby: "The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and Their Audiences." *Classical Quarterly* 1995, vol. 45, p. 270; J.P. Crielaard: "Past or Present? Epic Poetry, Aristocratic Self — Representation and the Concept of Time in the Eight and

The Action

Truman Capote's title of the thrilling novel would be certainly the most appropriate to what is reported by the poet at XXII 457ff: vengeance taken by Odysseus and his son is really done "in cold blood." Having landed in Ithaca, the hero is aided from the outset by the clever Athena. Since she puts it that νῦν αὖ δεῦρ' ἰκόμην, ἵνα τοι σὺν μῆτιν ὑφίγῃω (v. 303: "And now again I am here, to help you in your devising of schemes"),¹³ the preparations to make the revenge start immediately — as quickly as Odysseus' ship reaches the so-called port of Phorkys (Φόρκυνος δέ τις ἔστι λιμήν; XIII 96).¹⁴ By the same, knowing more than the characters, the listener is invited to participate in the hero's preparations. In making them, Odysseus is presented as a true "man of many ways" (Ἄνδρα [...] πολύτροπον; I. 1) and the goddess calls him on other occasion "wretch, so devious" (σχέτλιε, ποικιλομήτα; XIII 293), comparing to the man who is κερδαλέος and ἐπίκλοπος ("a sharp one, and a stealthy one").¹⁵ Above all, the hero is πολύμητις (XIX 382). Given Odysseus' essential aims to reestablish justice in his household, these epithets sound by no means as negative. Among the means leading to this goal the bloodshed plays also an important part. Already in the Book

Seventh Centuries BC." In: *Omero tremila anni dopo*. A cura di F. Montanari. Roma 2002, p. 258, citing also Hesiod: *Theog.* 99—100; J. Latacz: *Troy and Homer. Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*. Oxford 2004, pp. 275—277. C. Ulf ("The World of Homer and Hesiod." In: *A Companion to Archaic Greece*. Eds. K.A. Raaflaub, H. van Wees. Malden, MA—Oxford 2008, p. 81) puts the approximate time of the composing of the poems by both singers within the century between 750—650 BC (cf. his *Die homerische Gesellschaft. Materialien zur analytischen Beschreibung und historischen Lokalisierung*. München 1990, pp. 24ff). Other scholars assume the time of writing was ever later: M.L. West ("The Date of the *Iliad*." *Museum Helveticum* 1995, vol. 52, pp. 202, 218) and H. van Wees ("Homer and Early Greece." In: *Essays on Homeric Epic* [Colby Quarterly 38]. Eds. H.M. Roisman, J. Roisman. Colby 2002, p. 108) put the date of writing about — or shortly after 650 BC; cf. also J.P. Crielaard: "Homer, History and Archaeology." In: *Homeric Questions. Essays in Philology, Ancient History and Archaeology*. Ed. Idem. Amsterdam 1995, p. 202. Also J. Grethlein rightly reminds us that the Trojan heroes are more similar to the aristocrats of the archaic period ("From 'Imperishable Glory' to History: the *Iliad* and the Trojan War." In: *Epic and History*. Eds. D. Konstan, K.A. Raaflaub. Malden, MA—Oxford 2010, p. 127); cf. the arguments of K.A. Raaflaub: "Historical Approaches to Homer." In: *Ancient Greece: From the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer*. Eds. S. Deger-Jalkotzy, I.S. Lemos. Edinburgh 2006, p. 45.

¹³ Being a tale of the return, the *Odyssey* remains to the same extent a story of vengeance, see D.L. Page: *The Homeric Odyssey*. Oxford 1952, p. 153 (O. Taplin calls it "a crime-and-punishment story" in his "The Spring of the Muses: Homer and Related Poetry." In: *Literature in the Greek and Roman Worlds...*, p. 25). But, as H.J. Treiston: *Poine. A Study in Ancient Greek Blood-Vengeance*. London 1923, p. 30, thinks, the vengeance in the Book XXII is not a *poine*.

¹⁴ Everything that happens later may be embraced in the term of intrigue, reminding the Aristotelian *mythos* ("plot"; *Poet.* 1415a, 32—35).

¹⁵ Cf. E.L. Wheeler's excellent work: *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*. Leiden 1988.

XVI, the hero promises “to slaughter our enemies” (XIII 234) but he also wants to know, how many suitors there are (XVI 236), and how was the behaviour of serving men. He does so in order “to see whether any of them is true to us and full of humility, or whether one cares nothing for you, and denies your greatness” (XVI 305—307: καὶ κέ τεο δμῶων ἀνδρῶν ἔτι πειρηθεῖμεν, ἤμὲν ὃ πού τις νῶϊ τίει καὶ δείδιε θυμῷ, ἢ δ’ ὅτις οὐκ ἀλέγει, σὲ δ’ ἀτιμᾷ τοῖον ἐόντα). At the same time, the womenfolk becomes also the subject of his future plans: while Odysseus tells to his son that only they two may “judge the faith of women” (XVI 304: ἀλλ’ οἶοι σύ τ’ ἐγὼ τε γυναικῶν γνῶμεν ἰθύν), reader is gradually prepared to what will come. As the story goes on, the presence of these “fallen” women is stressed out by narrator. This is the case of that famous scene when the chieftain meets his beloved hound, Argos (XVII 291—321). His fatal physical condition and death results from the fact that “the women were careless, and do not look after him” (XVII 319: τὸν δὲ γυναῖκες ἀκηδέες οὐ κομέουσι), so — as narrator does not forget to remind us — the general rule is that “serving men, when their masters are no longer about, to make them work, are no longer willing to do their rightful duties” (XVII 320—321: δμῶες δ’ εὐτ’ ἂν μηκέτ’ ἐπικρατέωσιν ἄνακτες, οὐκέτ’ ἔπειτ’ ἐθέλουσιν ἐναίσιμα ἐργάζεσθαι). The true nature of the shameless mistresses is represented by Melanthe “of the lovely face” (XVIII 321: Μελανθῷ καλλιπάρῃος) who was Eurymachus’ sweetheart. When the cunning hero advises the servants to go into their mistress’ room and to “comb your wool in your hands there,” Melanthe scolds him, but Odysseus “the beggar” is also equally brutal not only calling her “bitch” but menacing tellingly that Telemachus will cut her into pieces (XVIII 338—339: σ’ αὖθι διὰ μελεῖστί τάμησιν). The second encounter with Melanthe occurs later when the father and son remove weapon from the hall, and the hero remains there “pondering how, with the help of Athene, he would murder the suitors” (XIX 1—2: μνηστήρεσσι φόνον σὺν Ἀθήνῃ μερμηρίζων). As Penelope with the servant-maidens enters the hall, Melanthe again attacks the beggar in order to expel him out of the door.¹⁶ Alluding to her intimate relations with suitor, the beggar is even more frank, making “the sinister prophecy” that if Odysseus will never return, Telemachus became a man, so τὸν δ’ οὐ τις ἐνὶ μεγάροισι γυναικῶν λήθει ἀτασθάλλους, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι τηλίκος ἐστίν (“none of the women will be sinful and escape”; XIX 87—88).¹⁷ Penelope also joins the guest in blaming the unfaithful girl as “shameless bitch” (XIX 91—92: πάντως, θαρσαλέῃ, κύον ἀδδεές, οὐ τί με λήθεις ἔρδουσα μέγα ἔργον, ὃ σῇ κεφαλῇ ἀναμάξεις),¹⁸ and so does the old Eurycleia, remembering the lost master (Odysseus) who experienced probably

¹⁶ She neglects the law of hospitality, cf. E.M. Tetlow: *Women, Crime, and Punishment. Ancient Law and Society II. Ancient Greece*. New York—London 2005, p. 25.

¹⁷ See T. Todorov: “Primitive Narrative.” In: *Homer. Critical Assessments*. Ed. I.J.F. de Jong, London—New York 2000, pp. 354—355, who says of “a prophetic future.”

¹⁸ Cf. generally N.R.E. Fisher: *Hybris. A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*. Warminster 1992, pp. 151ff.

the same: “So it must be for him also that in the houses of far-off friends, whose famous homes he enters, these women tease him, as now these sluts are all teasing you, stranger, and it is to avoid their abuse and their shameful speaking [...]” — XIX 370—373). How great Odysseus’ anger is becomes evident when he even threatens Eurycleia to kill her if she reveals the truth of him to anyone (XIX 489—490: “I will not spare you when I kill the rest of the serving maids in my palace”).¹⁹ The Book XX begins with the scene with Odysseus bedding in the forecourt, who after awakening sees the women visiting the suitors. At this moment he stops from punishing them, although he knows that their behaviour deserves to be called “wicked actions” (v. 16). With the Book XXI the intrigue of Athene and hero reaches almost its penultimate phase. It consists mainly of the preparations to the contests at the symposium which the narrator calls remarkably “the beginning of the slaughter” (XXI 4: φόνου ἀρχήν). Odysseus’ obsession with the taking of revenge is so overwhelming that when he gets his arch, he triumphantly boasts that “Here is a task that has been achieved” (XXII 5: οὗτος μὲν δὴ ἄεθλος ἀάατος ἐκτετέλεσται). The famous sequence of the killing the suitors is unbearably long (vv. 8—383) and reading of it requires strong nerves from a *modern* reader.²⁰ Technically, it begins with the detailed description of the way Antinous dies, and it remains undoubtedly an amazing literary achievement in its dynamism and the notorious, usual (Homeric) care for detail: the arrow of Odysseus hits the suitor at the moment when he “was on point of lifting up a fine two-handed goblet of gold, and has it in his hands, and was moving it so as to drink of the wine” (vv. 9—11). As the man and the loaded table fell down, “all the good food was scattered on the ground, bread and baked meat together” (v. 21). With this dynamic scene reader gets the information yet still unknown to the suitors: “[...] they had not yet realized how over all of them the terms of death were now hanging” (vv. 32—33). The *nemesis*, however, has come at this moment, so the rest of the Book XXII is a realization of the murderous plan. We left all these descriptions but on the whole, a *modern* reader soon realizes that the reading becomes a difficult challenge, as he can “see” even more yet detailed, and almost physical examples of agony (to recall the death of Eurymachus, vv. 81—88, reminding so closely the images of the fallen heroes from the *Iliad*), or as he physically “scents” and “hears” the death (especially vv. 308—309: “the floor was smoking with blood, and the horrible cries rose up as their head were broken”; cf. also v. 383, on the corps of the suitors, and above all, the later cruel execution and mutilation of Melanthius, vv. 474—476).²¹ It might seem that the view of the hero, when he was seen by Eurycleia (vv. 401—

¹⁹ Cf. A. Lesky: *Homerus*. Stuttgart 1967, p. 127.

²⁰ I stress here out the different interpretations of this scene by modern reader and, what is most probable, a Homeric *hearer* as it is essential to my argumentation; see the remarks under the head “The Kingdom They (and We) Have Lost.”

²¹ A perfect example of the famous vividness (*enargeia*), cf. Demetrius: *De elocut.* 216; Lucian, *Hist. conscr.* 51; see the following footnotes in this article: fn. 63 and 70.

410),²² will end this terrifying picture of “the hard work,” as Odysseus himself calls the killing (cf. v. 377: *πονήσομαι*): she finds him in blood, like a lion devouring the ox (*ὥς τε λέοντα, ὅς ῥά τε βεβρωκὼς βοὸς ἔρχεται ἀγραύλοιο*),²³ and “among the slaughtered dead men, spattered over with gore and battle filth” (XXII 401—402: *εὗρεν ἔπειτ’ Ὀδυσῆα μετὰ κταμένοισι νέκυσσιν αἵματι καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον*).²⁴ The nurse is (unsurprisingly) terrified by this gaze but this is not the end of the macabre. In what follows, a short pause in killing comes. Recently, it has been recalled by Professor de Jong in her narratological analysis the example of “the fill-in technique.”²⁵ To be sure, regarding the technical aspect of the storytelling, the passage really provides a kind of *intermezzo* in such hard job as the killing of others certainly is, yet, for a modern reader the pause remains equally disturbing, especially if he/she remembers of the earlier remarks of the *basileus* on the punishment of the unfaithful handmaidens. On the contrary, it must be admitted that in the light of what will come the pause looks even more terrifying.²⁶ The preparation to the execution is perhaps so thrilling because Odysseus is acting *like* a judge (as J.B. Hainsworth has observed²⁷), so “justice” requires then that he order the old nurse to select out these servants (vv. 417—418).²⁸ There were fifty women

²² On the margin, one cannot stop from admiring that, looking from the point of view of how the story is told, it is a masterly scene: Odysseus tells Telemachus to call the nurse, but what happened in the *megaron* is unexpectedly “seen” by her.

²³ Cf. D.F. Wilson: *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad*. Cambridge 2002, p. 141.

²⁴ See J. Shay: “Killing Rage: Physis or Nomos — or Both?” In: *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*. Ed. H. van Wees. London 2000, p. 49.

²⁵ “Developments in Narrative Technique in the Odyssey.” In: *EPEA PTEROENTA. Beiträge zur Homersforschung. Festschrift für Wolfgang Kullman zum 75. Geburtstag*. Eds. M. Reihel, A. Rengakos. Stuttgart 2002, p. 85; see also her detailed *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*. Cambridge 2004, p. 542. To be precise, she sees the narratological pause in the verses 435—445.

²⁶ This may be seen as the instance of suspense which is present in the poem, as Ruth Scodel rightly assumes (“The Story-teller and His Audience.” In: *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. Ed. R. Fowler. Cambridge 2004, p. 5; see also N.J. Lowe: *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative*. Cambridge 2000, p. 71). But even if one agrees, as she claims, that the sympathy for the characters is peculiar to the Homeric narrative, this scene would be certainly an exception. The problem with the figure of Odysseus was for the later Greeks a broader one: on the one hand, he was a type of a positive hero, even a moral figure who is looking for his family and fighting the fate; on the other, he remained a proverbially deceitful liar; see R.B. Rutherford: “The Philosophy of the *Odyssey*.” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1986, vol. 106, p. 149; on Odysseus as a man of contrast, see H.W. Clarke: *The Art of the Odyssey*. Bristol—Wacoonda (Illinois) 1989, p. 57.

²⁷ In: A. Heubeck, S. West, J.B. Hainsworth: *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Volume I. Introduction and Books I—VIII*. Oxford 1988, p. 342 (cf. also D.M. MacDowell: *The Law in Classical Athens*. London 1978, pp. 14—16 and J. Annas: *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford—New York 1993, pp. 291ff).

²⁸ It was Simone Weil who observed that: “The true hero, the real subject, the core of the *Iliad*, is might” (“The *Iliad*, Poem of Might.” In: *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*. London—New York 1998, p. 24). To be sure, Weil was not concerned by the *Odyssey*, but had she, the scene of the execution could certainly enhance her extremely pessimistic reading of the Ho-

in the household at Ithaca and twelve of them “have taken to immorality” (v. 424). Odysseus’ further decision was not only something cruel but — being taken with some premeditation — even perverse: he orders the maid-servants to help Telemachus, the oxherd and swineherd to bring out the dead from the *megaron* and to clean the hall.²⁹ When the work “is done” (did you ever feel the scent of a fresh blood?), Telemachus is ordered in turn to kill the girls out of the door with sword, “until you have taken the lives from all” (XXII 443–444: θεινόμεναι ξίφεσιν τανυήκεσιν, εἰς ὃ κε πασέων ψυχὰς ἐξαφέλησθε). Now, what follows belongs, I think, to the most dreadful and challenging passages in the whole poem (457–473).³⁰

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ πᾶν μέγαρον διεκοσμήσαντο,
 δμῶας ἐξαγαγόντες εὖσταθέος μεγάροιο,
 μεσσηγὺς τε θόλου καὶ ἀμύμονος ἔρκεος αὐλῆς,
 εἴλεον ἐν στείνει, ὅθεν οὐ πῶς ἦεν ἀλύξαι.
 τοῖσι δὲ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἦρχ’ ἀγορεύειν·
 “μὴ μὲν δὴ καθαρῶ θανάτῳ ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἐλοίμην
 τάων, αἳ δὴ ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ κατ’ ὀνείδεα χεῦαν
 μητέρι θ’ ἡμετέρῃ, παρὰ τε μνηστήρσιν ἱαυον.”
 ὥς ἄρ’ ἔφη, καὶ πείσμα νεὸς κυανοπρώροιο
 κίονος ἐξάψας μεγάλης περιβάλλε θόλοιο,
 ὑψόσ’ ἐπεντανύσας, μὴ τις ποσὶν οὐδας ἴκοιτο.
 ὥς δ’ ὅτ’ ἂν ἡ κίχλαι τανυσίπτεροι ἢ πέλειαι
 ἔρκει ἐνιπλήξωσι, τό θ’ ἐστήκη ἐνὶ θάμνῳ,
 αὐλὴν ἐσιέμεναι, στυγερὸς δ’ ὑπεδέξατο κοῖτος,
 ὥς αἳ γ’ ἐξείης κεφαλὰς ἔχον, ἀμφὶ δὲ πάσαις
 δειρῆσι βρόχοι ἦσαν, ὅπως οἴκτιστα θάνοιεν.
 ἦσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ, οὐ τι μάλα δὴν
 (“But after they had got all the house back in good order
 leading the maidservants out of the well-built palace,
 between the round-house and the unfaulted wall of courtyard,
 they penned them in a strait place from which there was no escaping.
 Now the thoughtful Telemachos began speaking among them:
 ‘I would not take away the lives of these creatures by any

meric poetry, as being not only a tale about war but concerning (to the same extent, perhaps) the far-reaching influences of war.

²⁹ I agree with J. Heath (*The Talking Greeks. Speech, Animals, and the Other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato*. Cambridge 2005, p. 114), who claims that “the poet himself treats the maids with particular contempt,” but his view that it is visible in “comparing them to animals,” remains unconvincing.

³⁰ As Aristotle (*Poet.* 1459b, 13) put it famously, the *Odyssey* was “ethical” as far as it presented the men’s character. Indeed, in the scene in question, Odysseus the avenger’s character is pervasive and it dominates the whole sequence; cf. D.B. Monro: *Homer’s Odyssey. Books XIII–XXIV*. Oxford 1901, p. 324.

clean death, for they have showered abuse on the head of my mother,
 and on my own head too, and they have slept with the suitors.’
 So he spoke, and taking the cable of a dark-prowed ship,
 fastened it to the tall pillar, and fetched it about the round-house;
 and like thrushes, who spread wings, or pigeons, who have
 flown into a snare set up for them in a thicket, trying
 to find a resting place, but the sleep given them was hateful;
 so their heads were all in a line, and each had her neck caught
 fast in a noose, so that their death would be most pitiful.
 They struggled with their feet for a little, not for very long”).³¹

When the whole action is ended, another remarkable (but really gruesome in the light of what has been done) formula occurs: τετέλεστο δὲ ἔργον (“their work was ended,” v. 479).³²

Towards a Context

As I have recalled the opinions of the modern authorities (fn. 12, above), it is impossible to establish with certainty which period of archaic Greek history such execution may be attributed to.³³ To answer this is extremely difficult, as there

³¹ As Diane Buitron-Oliver and Beth Cohen: “Between Skylla and Penelope: Female Characters of the *Odyssey* in Archaic and Classical Art.” In: *The Distant Side. Representing the Female in Homer’s Odyssey*. Ed. B. Cohen. New York—Oxford 1995, p. 48, have remarked, the scenes of the killing of the suitors are found on the vases rarely: they list the Attic red-figure *skythos* of the so-called Penelope Painter.

³² This is the same cold way of killing as one can observe in the famous description of the sacrificing of the noble sons of Trojans before the games by Achilles in *The Iliad* XXIII — made without emotions, methodically; see C. Macleod: *The Iliad, Book XXIV*. Cambridge 1982, pp. 5—6; cf. J.M. Redfield: *Nature and Culture...*, p. 79; and R. Rutherford: *Homer* [Greece & Rome New Survey in Classics, no. 26] Oxford 1996, pp. 45—46. One cannot escape the impression that Odysseus is here at his best — the tender husband whom we know from the Book V, sometimes weeping and missing often of his lost fatherland and household, becomes now the clever, merciless, cruel avenger — a true beast in fact. Yet, with a closer regard this, one must stress out unsurprisingly that his behaviour is, in fact, nothing exceptional. The Greeks knew him as the deceitful and unscrupulous man, whom also the great Augustan bard called *dirus Ulixes* (*Aen.* II 762) — alluding certainly to his sinister fame. Odysseus was notorious enough from his ruthless but pragmatic behaviour at the battlefield at Troy as well as his cunning and bloodthirsty advices (e.g. to cheat the wounded Philoctetes or, to kill the innocent Iphigenia) or actions (the slaughtering of Rhesus and his twelve companions, *Il.* X 469—484). But as far as these advices are to some extent understandable as being committed in the times of war, the punishment of maidens is the decision of quite another kind, henceforth so shocking.

³³ R. Osborne: *Greece in the Making...*, p. 153; Idem: “Homer’s Society.” In: *Cambridge Companion to Homer...*, p. 206; see also K.A. Raafaub: “Historical Approaches to Homer.” In:

is practically no external evidence as to find any evidence for the use of such penalty. To quote M.I. Finley: "Neither Homer nor his audience cared about such matters and we have no other source of information."³⁴ Naturally, this is a great paradox (and, by the same, a major difficulty): the quality and beauty of the heroic poetry lead us to ask of the society which created it but what we do have at disposal is the poetry itself, on which we must rely to gain any information.³⁵ Moreover, as Robin Osborne had rightly reminded us, the two things need to be treated here separately: the first is the time of the oral performance of the poems (or, to be more precise, of the separated songs of them), the second — the date of their writing in a form we got them.³⁶ What seems to be clear is that "Homeric society" was highly patriarchal and hierarchical.³⁷ From the other information found in the *Odyssey* one realizes that Homeric *oikos* was dominated numerically by females. At the court of Alcinous in Scheria one meets fifty women, serving in domestic labours (VII 103—107).³⁸ Raphael Sealey summarizes his chapter on "Women and Homer" by saying that the "narrowly domestic sphere" belonged to the women.³⁹ But in the Homeric *Realien* hierarchy always means power, thus according to W.L. Westermann it was "custom gave the master complete and arbitrary control over his slave."⁴⁰ Other authors of the books on the Greek slavery

Ancient Greece..., p. 455; see especially J. Whitley: "Social Diversity in Dark Age Greece." *Annals of the British School at Athens (ABSA)* 1991, vol. 86, p. 341.

³⁴ M.I. Finley: *The World of Odysseus*. London 1991, p. 112. According to M.B. Arthur ("Archaic Greece. The Origins of the Western Attitude toward Women." In: *Women in the Ancient World*. Eds. J. Peradotto, J.P. Sullivan [Arethusa Papers]. Albany, NY 1984, p. 8), Homer reflects partly the manners of the society of the Dark Age; cf. also O.T.P.K. Dickinson: "Homer, the Poet of the Dark Age." *Greece & Rome* 1986, vol. 33, pp. 20—37; but see J. Whitley: *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece. The Changing Face of a Pre-Literate Society 1100—700 BC*. Cambridge 1991, p. 35; K. Raaflaub: "Die Bedeutung der Dark Ages: Mykene, Troia und die Griechen." In: *Der neue Streit um Troia. Ein Bilanz*. Eds. Ch. Ulf. München 2003, pp. 319—320. Also A. Dalby puts Homeric epic in the seventh century BC ("Homer's Enemies. Lyric and Epic in the Seventh Century." In: *Archaic Greece. New Perspectives and New Evidence*. Eds. N. Fisher, H. van Wees. London 1998, p. 206.

³⁵ Cf. O. Taplin: "The Spring of the Muses: Homer and Related Poetry." In: *Literature in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Oxford 2000, p. 23.

³⁶ R. Osborne: *Greece in the Making*..., p. 153.

³⁷ Cf. W.K. Lacey: *Family in Classical Greece*. London 1977, pp. 20—21; M. Dillon, L. Garland: *Ancient Greece. Social and Historical Documents from Archaic Times to the Death of Socrates*. London—New York 2005, pp. 383—384.

³⁸ See J.B. Friedreich: *Die Realien in der Iliad und Odyssee*. Erlangen 1851, pp. 226—229; cf. O. Murray: *Narodziny Grecji*. Trans. A. Twarddecki. Warszawa 2003, p. 62.

³⁹ R. Sealey: *Women and Law in Classical Greece*. Chapel Hill—London 1990, p. 4; see also J. Redfield: "Człowiek i życie domowe." Trans. Ł. Niesiołowski-Spano, P. Bravo. In: *Człowiek Grecji*. Ed. J.-P. Vernant. Warszawa 2000, p. 185.

⁴⁰ W.L. Westermann: *The Slave System of Greek and Roman Antiquity*. Philadelphia 1955, p. 3; cf. generally W. Donlan: "The Relations of Power in the Pre-State and Early State Policies." In: *The Development of Polis in Archaic Greece*. Eds. L.G. Mitchell, P.J. Rhodes. London—New York 1997, p. 39.

also use the Homeric passages as the evidence of the absolute power of a master in the archaic *oikos*.⁴¹

Be that as it may but what about the punishment itself? W. Thalmann saw the problem in the mentality of the “Mediterranean honor-based societies.”⁴² This is generally true, but if the choice of the way of killing by hanging (Telemachus’ own plausible “invention”) seems to be clear since it was more “dishonourable and shameful” than that by καθαῖρ᾽ θανάτῳ (viz. a mere killing by sword — another paradox but in this context a logical one),⁴³ the most fundamental question still remains, why the death penalty at all? As one sees the punishment of the suitors understandable,⁴⁴ why such a merciless homicide of the women, whose guilt (in comparison with the crimes of the suitors) was evidently smaller? The whole question looks the more strangely that at one place we are openly told that it was only the suitors who are blamed: at XXII 27 reader realizes that the servant maidens were in fact violated (δμῳῆσιν τε γυναιξὶ παρευνάξεσθε βιαίως) and it is Odysseus himself who concedes this.⁴⁵ However, this line of argumentation is quickly abandoned and instead the women’s misconduct is explicated in the terms of their disloyalty. But what kind of loyalty did exactly violate the servant maidens? As William Thalmann again maintains in his another paper,⁴⁶ the reason is simple: moral quality of the female slaves is measured by their sexual behaviour, and in this context their misconduct is not only a matter of a mere infidelity or immorality (in our sense of the term) but — as this scholar observed — a clear evidence for the lack of the hierarchical order within the household. In fact, Thalmann concludes, the problem lies in the honor and authority of a master which — as it appears — may be “vulnerable through female” and (this case) has been seriously threatened by the immoral passions of the servants. Since household integrity in

⁴¹ Cf. K. Raaflaub: “Homeric Society.” In: *New Companion to Homer...*, p. 631.

⁴² W. Thalmann: *The Swinherd and the Bow. Representations of Class in the Odyssey*. Ithaca, NY 1998, p. 116. On this controversy see G. Herman: “Ancient Athens and the Values of Mediterranean Society.” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 1996, vol. 11, pp. 29—33.

⁴³ W.B. Stanford: *The Odyssey of Homer* II. London 1948, p. 389.

⁴⁴ At *Od.* XIV 83—84 Eumaeus says Odysseus in disguise that the suitors do not know shame and mercy. However, he hopes that the gods ‘οὐ μὲν σχέτλια ἔργα θεοὶ μάκαρες φιλέουσιν, ἀλλὰ δίκην τίουσιν καὶ αἴσιμα ἔργ’ ἀνθρώπων’ (“[...] have no love for a pitiless action, and but rather they reward justice and what men do that is lawful”). The argumentation seems to explicate the future vengeance act (cf. v. 110: “devised evils for the suitors”) as a just and lawful step, according to the famous Hesiodic conviction (*Op.* 279) that “Zeus gave ‘law’ to men” (see here M. Gagarin: *Early Greek Law*. Berkeley—Los Angeles 1986, p. 25); cf. generally R. Hirzel: *Themis, Dike und Vervandtes*. Leipzig 1907, pp. 18ff and 56ff.

⁴⁵ But cf. Heubeck (*Comm. Hom. Odys.* III, p. 227) on the attempts by some scholars to atheize the verse which “was originally omitted.” Notably, such explanation reminds of another famous “literary” dilemma to what degree Helen was guilty when abandoning his husband and how great and decisive was the role of the gods here, see *Il.* 3. 164; Gorgias, *Hel.* 7—8.

⁴⁶ W. Thalmann: “Female Slaves in the Odyssey.” In: *Women and Slaves in Graeco—Roman Culture*. Eds. S.R. Joshel, S. Murnaghan. London—New York 1998, p. 30.

the world of the *Odyssey* depends to the great extent on the authority over the domestic servants, “women’s [...] sexuality had to be kept in check (by their male superiors),” which has been observed by J.M. Barringer.⁴⁷ Similar interpretation was also offered earlier by Peter Walcot,⁴⁸ who adduces the scene from *Od.* VII 298ff, when Odysseus explicates Alcinous that household women must be protected.⁴⁹ According to this scholar, such thinking proves the men’s envy. It follows that for a slave woman to be other’s concubine meant to violate her first duty: to be sexually obedient to her master.⁵⁰ Needless to say that in the modern terms such treatment of women received critical notes,⁵¹ and according to this interpretation it would be easily to say of the double standards of the Greek morality: what men (here including especially Odysseus) could do, women were forbidden. This is, however, topic of another discussion.

If we follow the great Thucydides (I 3. 3), who was deeply convicted that Homer lived many years after the Trojan war, it would be reasonable to infer that reality depicted by the poet embraced (broadly speaking) the period after the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization.⁵² As every reader of Thucydides perfectly knows, his vision of the development of the Greek society (I 5. 1; I 9—11) was not optimistic at all (in seeking to dominate over the others, men always abuse the power and violence),⁵³ and his interpretation of the Homeric poetry led him to the conclusion that the epic “heroes,” especially the figure of Agamemnon, were simply mere “predators” and robbers (cf. also Aristotle: *Polit.* 1256a, 35—1256b, 2).⁵⁴ In regard with this view, it is tempting to connect the great historian’s statement

⁴⁷ J.M. Barringer: *Art, Myth, and Ritual in Classical Greece*. Cambridge 2008, p. 95.

⁴⁸ P. Walcot: *Envy and the Greeks. A Study in Human Behaviour*. Warminster 1978, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Even Leodes did not escape the death (*Od.* XXII 310—329), although — as he himself tried to stress it out — he did not do “anything wrong to any one of the women.”

⁵⁰ It is worth of citing the J. Gotschall’s interpretation of the Odysseus’ anger (*The Rape of Troy. Evolution, Violence, and the World of Homer*. Cambridge 2008, pp. 66ff): the hero’s rage is caused by “a specific sense of violated sexual ownership.” However, this “sense” is strictly connected with the establishing of the social order in Ithaca. Odysseus’ identification as man’s and master’s relies not only on his martial prowess but on his position among the women (so H.P. Foley: “‘Reverse Similes’ and Sexual Roles in the *Odyssey*.” *Arethusa* 1978, vol. 11, p. 20). Nevertheless, Gotschall is right in claiming that the connection between women and war (as the numerous mythological wars and conflicts over the women prove) was to the Greeks quite obvious. It is worth to note that the sexual obedience of the female servants to their master is the peculiar feature in the 4th-century farm of Xenophon (*Oec.* 9. 5, with the remarks of S.B. Pomeroy: *Xenophon’s Oeconomicus. A Social and Historical Commentary*. Oxford 1994, p. 35: “the double standard of sexual conduct”). It is also revealing to observe that such domination was something common, including also the late antiquity — see P. Brown: *Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. Chicago 2008, ch. 1 (Brown cites also P. Veyne’s chapter in a well-known series *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* I. Ed. P. Veyne. New York 2003).

⁵¹ Cf. P. duBois: *Slaves and Other Objects*. Chicago 2003, p. 131ff.

⁵² V.R. d’A. Desborough: *The Greek Dark Ages*. London 1972, pp. 322.

⁵³ Cf. S. Hornblower: *A Commentary on Thucydides* I. Oxford 1992, pp. 23, 31ff.

⁵⁴ A. Snodgrass: *The Dark Age of Greece*. Edinburgh 1971, pp. 6—7.

with the modern knowledge of how archaic wars looked like. Today the modern experts think that the major part of the Dark Age and archaic conflicts was waged to obtain booty and took shape of plundering raids.⁵⁵ Homer says (or mentions at least) of some of them in the *Iliad* (IX 325—333; IX 406; XI 670—684; XVIII 509—540) and the *Odyssey* (I 398; III 69—73; IX 34—42; XIV 243—284; XVI 418—428; XXIII 356—358; see also Herodotus, II 152; III 58—59). Another passage from the *Odyssey* is also revealing: at XIV 85—88 Eumaeus deplores the men who καὶ μὲν δυσμενέες καὶ ἀνάρσιοι, οἳ τ' ἐπὶ γαίης ἀλλοτρῆς βῶσιν καὶ σφιν Ζεὺς ληΐδα δῶη, πλησάμενοι δέ τε νῆας ἔβαν οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι, — καὶ μὲν τοῖσ' ὄπιδος κρατερὸν δέος ἐν φρεσὶ πίπτει. The passage is extremely intriguing: who were those “hateful and lawless” individuals? It is tempting to infer they resemble entirely the powerful personalities described by Thucydides in his famous *Archaeology*-digression. And it is by no means especially surprising to observe (according to many, not without irony) that it was Odysseus himself who was engaging in such war raids. If so, the mention made by Eumaeus might serve as an additional allusion to the chieftains' occupation and conflicts of pre-*polis* period.

It was Professor Ian Morris who in his famous 1986 paper has said that “Homeric poetry had to be satisfactory to its audience.”⁵⁶ To follow his observation means to assume that such epic audience not only welcomed the listening to the frequent descriptions of wars and raids which provided the background and inspiration for dramatic narratives about bravery, but that the artist knew the means to tell them in an exciting way. So, vital question arises, where did Homer (and his predecessors) learn to narrate and celebrate so many violence scenes, paying especially an attention and amazing care for the details?

The Artist

Given that the problem of the historicity of Homeric society or Homer's “uses of the past” in the poems (to quote James Whitley's phrase⁵⁷) will always remain the subject of the scholarly disputes, I would like to deal with the description of the violence act in the *Od.* XXII 457—473. As every reader of Homer knows,

⁵⁵ A. Jackson: “War and Raids for Booty in the World of Odysseus.” In: *War and Society in the Greek World*. Eds. J. Rich, G. Shipley. London—New York 1993, pp. 64—65; cf. T. Rihll: “War, Slavery and Settlement in Early Greece” (in the same volume), p. 80 and H. Singor: “War and International Relations.” In: *Companion to Archaic Greece...*, p. 568; on the Lelantine War and the controversies surrounding it cf. L.H. Jeffrey: *Archaic Greece*. London 1976, pp. 64ff and J.M. Hall: *A History of Archaic Greek World*, pp. 1—7.

⁵⁶ I. Morris: “The Use and Abuse of Homer.” *Classical Antiquity* 1986, vol. 5, p. 89.

⁵⁷ J. Whitley: *The Archeology of Ancient Greece*. Cambridge 2001, p. 150.

narrative passages and the details of the dying heroes are in Homeric poetry by no means something rare, indeed the *Iliad* abounds in them.⁵⁸ Violence is also omnipresent in the *Odyssey*, although, taking it generally, the poem depicts the world at peace. We can explicate the frequency of the violence motifs by seeking their source in the experiences of the conflicts in the Dark Age and early archaic period, but still less evident is what about the curious liking for violence in Greek heroic poetry (to mention the Theban and Trojan cycles⁵⁹) and visual art?⁶⁰ It is trivial to repeat that the most simple answer is that such descriptions must have fulfilled an aesthetic taste of the hearers. It was Aristotle who famously recognised the common rule of imitation when writing in the *Poetics*, 1448b: ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὁρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἡκριβωμένας χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν. αἴτιον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅτι μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἥδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦ σιν αὐτοῦ (“[...] we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses. The explanation of this too is that understanding gives pleasure not only to philosophers but likewise to others too [...]”; trans. S. Halliwell).⁶¹ Aristotle’s explanation is psychological (henceforth it has inevitable flaws) and it does not tell the whole truth. Following S.V. Tracy’s observation that “Works of art do not occur randomly. They are created,”⁶² one would still ask of the function of such description since the question how is violence presented remains equally important for the evaluating of the audience’s expectations. The execution scene invites a modern reader to such interpretation especially as it shares the two typical features occurring frequently in other narrative units: it contains the detailed description and the very beautiful simile. It is mainly (but not exclusively) these two elements that make the Homeric epic poems... epic. Firstly, what is particularly striking in this case, is the careful composition, with the typical (Homeric) employment of the “animal” comparison. But remembering the content, the scene leaves also modern reader equally uneasy, since the preparations and death warrant occur not in a battlefield but *after* the “battle” against the suitors. Briefly — it means the execution: one even dares to say that there is something sadistic in

⁵⁸ Cf. R. Garland: “The Causation of Death in the *Iliad*: A Theological and Biological Investigation.” *Bulletin of the Institute of the Classical Studies (BICS)* 1981, vol. 28, pp. 47ff; see N. Richardson: *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume VI: Books 21–24*. Cambridge 1996, pp. 14–15.

⁵⁹ On these see M.L. West: *Greek Epic Fragments*. Cambridge, MA—London 2003, pp. 4–16.

⁶⁰ See A. Stewart: *Classical Greece and the Birth of Western Art*. Cambridge 2008, p. 163.

⁶¹ In: S. Halliwell, W.H. Fyfe, D. Russell, D.C. Innes, W. Rhys Roberts: *Aristotle, Poetics; Longinus, On the Sublime; Demetrius, On Style*. Cambridge, MA—London 1999. This curiosity was particularly visible in the tragedy which owed much to Homer, cf. S. Goldhill: *Reading Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge 1986, p. 3.

⁶² S.V. Tracy: “The Structures of the *Odyssey*.” In: *A New Companion to Homer...*, p. 360.

the Homer's exactness when focusing on these details,⁶³ when "the narrator, who speaks," becomes "the focalizer, who sees."⁶⁴ These details include: a) the topography of the action — it has been done "between the round-house" (θόλου)⁶⁵ and "the unfaulted wall of courtyard" (ἀμύμονος ἔρκεος αὐλῆς); further, one hears of "the tall pillar" (κίονος μεγάλης) and "a strait place" (ἐν στείνει); b) the tools: "the cable of a dark-prowed ship" (πεῖσμα νεὸς κυανοπρώροιο), "a noose" (βρόχοι);⁶⁶ c) realistic details of the hanging — procedure itself: the maidens' heads were all in a noose (αἶ γ' ἐξείης κεφαλὰς ἔχον); each had her neck caught fast in (ἀμφὶ δὲ πάσαις δειρῆσι βρόχοι ἦσαν); as the next, the struggling comes "with their feet for a little, not for very long" (ἥσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ, οὐ τι μάλα δὴν);⁶⁷ the realistic, "long" simile (beginning with ὥς):⁶⁸ the women were like thrustes or the pigeons which are caught "into a snare" (ἦ κίχλαι τανυσίπτεροι ἢ ἐπέλειαι ἔρκει ἐνιπλήξωσι).⁶⁹ All these features make the whole scene extremely realistic and graphic. It may be summarized by the words of Hilda L. Lorimer in her earlier paper: "The typical Homeric simile with its detailed descriptions [...] has often a very marked pictorial quality."⁷⁰ What is at stake here is the result: the shocking effect of the "visually" literal report leads reader to ask how was the reaction of the ancient hearers while listening to such declamation? As everyone perfectly knows, the internal evidence we do find in the poems allow us to infer that the hearers just liked the public performances of poetry, enjoyed it (e.g. *Od.* VIII 72—92; 266—369; 479—481),⁷¹ and, if one can rely on the evidence taken

⁶³ See the voices of the modern commentators: Stanford, Heubeck and Fulkerson. Such and similar *ekphraseis* are, according to A. Ford (*Homer. The Poetry of the Past*. Ithaca, NY—London 1992, p. 49) the vividness is the purpose of poetry.

⁶⁴ Cf. S. Richardson: *The Homeric Narrator*. Nashville, TN 1990, p. 5.

⁶⁵ See also H.L. Lorimer: *Homer and the Monuments*. London 1950, pp. 431—432.

⁶⁶ Cf. G. Autenrieth: *A Homeric Dictionary*. Norman, OK 1958, p. 63.

⁶⁷ Cf. N. Loraux: "The Strangled Body." In: *The Experiences of Tiresias. The Feminine and the Greek Man*. Princeton 1995, pp. 110ff; according to W.B. Stanford: *Odyssey of Homer II...*, p. 389: "[...] the vivid glimpse of their writhing in 473 emphasizes the horror of their agony."

⁶⁸ M. Edwards: *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume V: Books 17—20*. Cambridge 1995, pp. 26, 33—35.

⁶⁹ See I. de Jong (*Narratological Comm...*, p. 543); cf. R. Buxton: "Similes and Other Likenesses." In: *The Cambridge Companion to Homer...*, p. 142. As Nicole Loraux has remarked reminding the Eurypidean Phaedra, "The hanged woman is like a bird" ("The Strangled Body...", p. 110).

⁷⁰ H.L. Lorimer: "Homer's Use of the Past." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1929, vol. 49, p. 150. F.I. Zeitlin, in her exceptionally interesting paper "The Artful Eye: Vision, Ecphrasis and Spectacle in Euripidean Theatre." In: *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*. Eds. S. Goldhill, R. Osborne. Cambridge 1994, p. 163, analyses the visual aspects of three plays of Euripides. She pays attention to "a strong affective engagement of a viewer" and it would be useful to apply the same phrase to Homeric art of making many sequences so vivid.

⁷¹ See also J. Peradotto: *Man in the Middle Voice. Name and Narration in the Odyssey*. Princeton 1990, p. 31.

from the poems themselves, they did often react emotionally, often even crying.⁷² But there is something ambiguous in such attitude of the Greeks toward the epic poetry. As their emotions were, generally, very strong, one may also agree that the listening was for them rather a pleasant thing. Was this also in this particular case? We do not know but what is certain is that although death in Homeric poems is a deplorable, tragic necessity, it remains also a great spectacle. Nothing new, one would rightly argue, as it was always the subject of the pictorial representations both in the Near East and Greek art too.⁷³ But given so, this observation leads us to another paradox. As Colin Macleod (see fn. 32) has acutely observed, in the Homeric poetry pain and death constitute an important motif since they are in fact the essence of poetic performance: to put it briefly — one quickly realizes that the suffering of others is the source of a pleasure for its witnesses. Violence and death, if *narrated* and *heard* or *pictured* and *seen* aim often at causing pleasure.⁷⁴ To this end serve the literary (epic) techniques: similes and the detailed descriptions.⁷⁵

⁷² Cf. H. van Wees: "A Brief History of Tears. Gender Differentiation in Archaic Greece." In: *When Men Were Men. Masculinity, Power, and Identity in Classical Antiquity*. Eds. L. Foxhall, J. Salmon. London—New York 1998, pp. 11—12.

⁷³ S. Woodford: *The Trojan War in Ancient Art*. Ithaca, NY 1993.

⁷⁴ E. Belfiore: "Pleasure, Tragedy and Aristotelian Psychology." *Classical Quarterly* 1985, vol. 35, pp. 349ff; Eadem: *Tragic Pleasures*. Princeton 1992.

⁷⁵ Many scholars strive to find the connection between the visual representations of the mythological motifs and Homeric narrative. The leading authority on the field, Anthony Snodgrass (*Archaic Greece. The Age of Experiment*. Berkeley—Los Angeles 1980, pp. 65ff; cf. Idem: *Homer and the Artists. Text and Picture in Early Greek Art*. Cambridge 1998, pp. 151ff) thinks, however, that the Trojan war was rarely the subject of the visual arts. If we accept the low date of the writing of the poems (about 650 BC; cf. footnote 12), the question is not, whether the visual arts in Greece were under the influence of the epic poetry (see R. Kannicht: "Poetry and Art. Homer and the Monuments Afresh." *Classical Antiquity* 1982, vol. 1, pp. 73—74) but the reverse: how did the content of heroic poetry depend on the visual representations in the Greek (Mycenaean?) art and the art (and literature) of the Near East? The two influential modern experts, W. Burkert and M.L. West (see especially the latter's *The East Face of Helicon*. Oxford 1999, pp. 334ff and 402ff), claim that the epithets and similes bear overt oriental reminiscences. According to Burkert, "Affinities and similarities between oriental epic and Homeric poetry can no longer be ignored in interpreting Homer. This means that certain limits must be set to deriving Homer in his totality either from purely Indoeuropean stock or from Mycenaean prehistory. Homer epic is many-sided phenomenon" — cf. Idem: *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis. Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture*. Cambridge, MA—London 2004, pp. 46—47.

The Meaning, Or The Kingdom They (and We) Have Lost

In stressing out the Greeks' high estimation (if not a plain approval) for the "cunning intelligence,"⁷⁶ it was my goal to focus attention on the strange fact that the use of violence (it still remains an universal phenomenon, being by no means the peculiarity of the ancient Greeks) was not merely an inherent sign of the authority within the archaic Greek *oikos* but — above all — the core of their morality: both its representation and expression of a "shame-culture."⁷⁷ Homer's heroes do not discuss their own behaviour, they only do act.⁷⁸ Critical reflection is far from Homeric man.⁷⁹ Since Homer's heroes are unable to look both at themselves and their own actions from a critical distance, their relations with others (and with peers and slaves) are created in terms of honour and shame,⁸⁰ not of pity, mercy, or abstract (reached by consensus) "law" which binds the community.⁸¹ Accordingly, such is the heroic ethics:⁸² in Homer's "world," what is bad or what is good depends on the place a hero occupied within this society.⁸³ I stress out this factor since, I believe, this is the best way

⁷⁶ J.-P. Vernant, P. Vidal-Naquet: *Cunning Intelligence among the Greeks*. Chicago 1991.

⁷⁷ Cf. A.W.H. Adkins: *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values*. Oxford 1960; see also Ch. Ulf: *Die homerische Gesellschaft*. München, pp. 24—40. Pace A.A. Long: "Morals and Values in Homer." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1970, vol. 90, p. 122 — with Adkins' reply: "Homeric Values and Homeric Society." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1971, vol. 91, pp. 1—14; cf. too Redfield, *Nature and Culture*, p. 116 — 117, and M. Canto-Sperber, "Ethics." In: *Greek Thought. A Guide to Classical Knowledge*. Eds. J. Brunschvig, G.E.R. Lloyd, P. Pellegrin. Cambridge, MA—London 2000, pp. 96—97; especially W. Donlan: "The Aristocratic Ideal in Ancient Greece." In: *The Aristocratic Ideal and Selected Papers*. Wauconda (Illinois) 1999, p. xvi.

⁷⁸ Cf. Gagarin's remark when quoting E. Havelock: "[...] justice in early Greece was 'a procedure not a principle' and that no Greek at that time would have thought to ask the question: 'What is justice?'" (*Early Greek Law*, p. 25); cf. also J. Bryant: *Moral Codes and Social Structure in Archaic Greece. A Sociology of Greek Ethics from Homer to the Epicureans and Stoics*. Albany, NY 1996, pp. 18—19. As E. Havelock wrote elsewhere: "There is no concept of justice in Greek epic, in our sense of that word" (*The Greek Concept of Justice*. Cambridge, MA 1978, p. 192).

⁷⁹ See Ch.H. Kahn: "Pre-Platonic Ethics." In: *Companion to Ancient Thought 4. Ethics*. Ed. S. Everson. Cambridge 1998, pp. 27—28.

⁸⁰ On this aspect cf. D.L. Cairns: *Aidos. The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*. Oxford 1993, pp. 48f; also Ch. Gill: *Greek Thought* [Greece & Rome New Surveys in Classics No. 25]. Oxford 1995, pp. 6, 20—21.

⁸¹ This was also observed by W. Jaeger in his classical analysis: *Paideia. Formowanie człowieka greckiego*. Trans. M. Plezia, H. Bednarek. Warszawa 2001, pp. 60—61.

⁸² T. Irwin: *Classical Thought*. Oxford 1989, pp. 9—13.

⁸³ According to M.I. Finley: *The Ancient Economy*. London 1973, pp. 35—36; the important factor in the status of a master was also his wealth; see also B. Russell: *Power. A New Social Analysis*. London 1975, p. 157.

to understand Homeric Odysseus, when making the cruel and inhuman decision about death penalty: in this respect vengeance was *a value* highly estimated among the Greeks — to put it briefly, honour lies at the roots of the heroic “administration of justice.”⁸⁴

How can this point be made more clearly? As I have already mentioned at the beginning of this section, the austerity of the Homeric ethics may be understood more clearly if we could look at it from a comparative perspective, and here I do not suggest making any comparison to our own ethics (which would be, of course, an obvious anachronism) but to that of the ancient Greeks themselves, living a few centuries later — roughly speaking, in the first half of the 4th century BC. With the coming of the sophistic thinking based on a critical consciousness, the Greeks of the era of Socrates began to understand two things: firstly, the relativity of the values — here I refer to the conviction (found also in Herodotus’ *apodexis*, Protagoras’ philosophy or the anonymous treatise called *Dissoi logoi*) that different people can have (and indeed do have) different values; secondly, that there was possible to held a critical stance by evaluating values: rejecting ones or accepting others. To quote M. Finkelberg again: “Contrary to the system of values established with the rise of polis, according to which the distribution of honour should follow personal achievement, the distribution of honour in pre-city-state corresponded to a person’s social status, which was determined by superiority in birth and wealth.”⁸⁵ The consciousness of this made the Homeric epic a somewhat remote work at the end of the 5th century BC, although it does not mean that the later Greeks abandoned totally the heroic notes of *time* and *andreia* — on the contrary, some items of Homeric ethics were always vivid and highly appraised, to cite Pindar (*Isthm.* VII 31—36), Aristophanes (*Ran.* 1013—1055), Xenophon (*Conv.* III 5), or Arrian (*Anab.* I 12), as well as some institutions that persisted until the later times (I mean the practice of the gift-giving, the institutions of *hetaireiai*, or banquets⁸⁶) — not to mention the “epic” roots of the institution of the medieval knighthood.⁸⁷ However, if anyone else,

⁸⁴ Cf. J.E. Lendon: “Homeric Vengeance and the Outbreak of Greek Wars.” In: *War and Violence*. p. 3. See also N. Fisher: “Hybris, Status, and Slavery.” In: *The Greek World*. Ed. A. Powell. London 1995, p. 49 on the moral description in the terms of honour and reciprocity; the point was stressed out by E.R. Dodds: *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley—Los Angeles 1951 (I rely on the Polish translation 2002, pp. 29—30).

⁸⁵ See fn. 6. Cf. also H. van Wees’ admirable book *Status Warriors. War, Violence and Society in Homer and History*. Amsterdam 1992, pp. 68—69, 138—139; also B. Snell: “Mahnung zur Tugend.” In: *Die Entdeckung des Geistes. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denken bei den Griechen*. Göttingen 1975, pp. 156—177.

⁸⁶ See W.J. Slater: “Symptotic Ethics in the *Odyssey*.” In: *Symptotica. A Symposium on the Symposion*. Ed. O. Murray. Oxford 1994, pp. 214ff.

⁸⁷ In his most recent book, J. Lendon: *Song of Wrath. The Peloponnesian War Begins*. New York 2010, pp. 6ff, holds that vengeance also played an enormous role in the motivation of the classical *polis* communities when waging the war. On the reception of Homer in the Middle Ages, see

it was one man in the 4th century who perfectly understood the strangeness and uniqueness of Homeric ethics: this man was Plato. He rightly saw a great danger in the democratic relativity of values, yet nevertheless his case appears to be revealing. If one follows Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ad Pomp.* I 13), he/she may wonder why did Plato reject Homeric poetry from his ideal state?⁸⁸ Eternal topic, true, and Dionysius' explanation was that it was the Plato's envy that mattered. No one can prove this statement but another explanation might be here equally adduced. As everyone knows, according to Plato, Homer was lying about the gods⁸⁹ and behind this statement stood perhaps the conviction that Homeric heroes and "society" were immoral like their gods.⁹⁰ In effect, rejecting Homeric morality Plato preferred to construct an alternative, theoretical model how *true ethics* and *true social relations* in a community should look like.⁹¹ As to my purposes, this point is particularly relevant, since it shows that the Greeks of the "classical" era (or some of them, at least) understood very well both the exceptional importance of the Homeric poetry and society which had created it. Essentially, even if a *polis* elite of the 4th century highly estimated and adopted the Homeric ideals of bravery and pride,⁹² the absorption of these "epic" values occurred in different social circumstances. It is these circumstances that help us to realize that it was really Homer's intention to make his "world" an illusion of a distant past. Seen in this light, it remains also equally true that this "remoteness effect" was reached in Homeric epic by pointing out the fundamental feature of this past: the identity of "heroic" values with social order which had been based in turn on these values.⁹³ On these grounds the Homeric poems presented to the Greeks living in "the age of Socrates" a distant, yet highly attractive world: it was not only because epic "poetry — as James Redfield wrote⁹⁴ — is not about

M. Borgolte: "Europas Geschichten und Troia. Der Mythos im Mittelalter." In: *Troia. Traum und Wirklichkeit*. Eds. B. Theune-Großkopf et al. Stuttgart 2001, pp. 196—197. It is also something obvious that the modern scholars use the medieval terminology to describe Homeric heroes, e.g. in the terms of "chivalry." I believe that today such is the case: regarding the problem of the values, we "read" Homeric poetry in a highly selective way.

⁸⁸ D. Konstan: "Before Jealousy." In: *Envy, Spite and Jealousy. The Rivalrous Emotions in Ancient Greece*. Eds. D. Konstan, N.K. Rutter. Edinburgh 2003, p. 15; see also P. Murray: *Plato on Poetry*. Cambridge 1996, pp. 19—21.

⁸⁹ A. Henrichs: "What Is a Greek God?" In: *The Gods in Ancient Greece. Identities and Transformations*. Eds. J. Bremmer, A. Erskine. Edinburgh 2010, pp. 35—36.

⁹⁰ That is, Homer only repeats what men do; see D. Hammer: "The *Iliad* as Ethical Thinking: Politics, Pity, and the Operation of Esteem." *Arethusa* 2002, vol. 35, p. 203.

⁹¹ Cf. A. Gouldner: *Enter Plato. Classical Greece and the Origins of the Social Theory*. London 1965, pp. 166ff.

⁹² Cf. J. Ober: *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens. Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*. Princeton 1989, pp. 55—65.

⁹³ On the differences between the "Homeric" hero and the modern concept of man, see E. Fränkel: *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*. Oxford 1975, p. 9.

⁹⁴ J. Redfield: *Nature and Culture...*, p. 79.

the typical but about the wonderful [...].” There was something more important, too: the importance of the epic poetry — if we can make such observation — began to fall with the rise of *polis*, with its more differentiated social structure. It was a slow process and it went together with the demise of the world of *basileis* and heroes. On the social and political level, this phenomenon has been perfectly explained by Thucydides in his excursion on “archeology.” This demise of epic reached its peak today: it was Professor R. Rutherford who in his stimulating book observed recently that “in the modern world epic as genre is no more.”⁹⁵ This is a somewhat pessimistic observation, but I suppose that such situation is by no means a coincidence. Concerning Homeric poetry this was, to some degree, already true about 250 years after its writing: the unique position of these great verses had gone, in some sense, already in the classical age. The title for this section which is a paraphrase of the title of the classic book by Professor Peter Laslett about the pre-industrial England⁹⁶ could be used perfectly to describe the condition which we are situated today.

Let me end this paper with the very frightening words which Robert Garland wrote in his still admirable and astonishing book about the viewing of “the others” in ancient Greek society:

Life in the ancient world was nasty, brutish and short. The most privileged were those who happened to be freeborn, well-to-do males in perfect health. But the overwhelming majority did not, of course, belong to that ideal category. For those unable to fend for themselves, notably the poor, slaves, widows, spinsters, minors, and the chronically sick and disabled, life was fraught with lethal dangers. These dangers included proneness to accident, vulnerability to physical abuse, availability to benign or malign neglect, susceptibility to disease, and so forth.⁹⁷

To be sure this, observation, very suggestive as it is, does not refer directly to the *Odyssey*, yet I am deeply convicted that by a strange coincidence it tells us something important about the poem itself: behind the glamorous fashion and heroic dimension of the life that the great *basileis* led, the prosaic, far darker side of existence in such communities emerges. Plato understood this point clearly enough when in the *Ion* (535c, 5—8) had to say his hero that when he reads in Homer something sad, he weeps, and if something horrific and painful, his heart beats of fear (“For I must frankly confess that at the tale of pity, my eyes are filled with

⁹⁵ R. Rutherford: *Classical Literature. A Concise History*. Malden, MA—Oxford 2005, p. 19.

⁹⁶ P. Laslett: *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age*. New York 1965 (2nd edition 1971).

⁹⁷ R. Garland: *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in Graeco-Roman World*. New York 1995, p. 11; cf. also R. Lane Fox: *Travelling Heroes in the Epic Age of Homer*. New York 2008, p. 6.

tears, and when I speak of horrors, my hair stands on end and my heart throbs;” trans. B. Jowett).⁹⁸ One may regret that Platonic Ion was not more precise and did not say which of Homeric verses had he particularly in mind but I think the execution passage in the *Odyssey*, Book XXII, would remain here, in some sense, the test case.⁹⁹ When reading this chilling scene one enters not only a remote past but, by the same, a quite alien world too.

⁹⁸ Cf. A. Rijksbaron’s note: *Plato, Ion. Or: On the Iliad*. Amsterdam 2007, pp. 185—188.

⁹⁹ However, it is also telling that Socrates mentions of “the apparition of Odysseus leaping forth on the floor, recognized by the suitors and casting his arrows at his feet appearing before the suitors and shooting the arrows.”

