"Grief and Counterfactual Parallels in Homeric Narrative"

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When at long last, in the sixteenth book of the *Odyssey*, the disguised Odysseus reveals

his true identity to Telemachus, his son at first refuses to believe his father is really alive and

present before him (16.192–200).[1] Odysseus presents no special sign (σῆμα) to confirm his

claim, as he will when reunited with his servants, wife, and father later in the poem, but patiently

relies instead on the awe-inspiring physical transformation wrought by Athena to restore him to

his wonted appearance. Finally convinced after another speech from his father, Telemachus

embraces Odysseus and both men begin to weep and mourn uncontrollably, with such intensity

that the narrator tells us they might have gone on lamenting indefinitely (215–221):

> ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ὑφ' ἵμερος ὦρτο γόοιο·
> κλαῖον δὲ λιγέως, ἀδινώτερον ἤ τ' οἰωνοί,
> φῆναι ἢ αἰγυπιοὶ γαμψώνυχες, οἷσί τε τέκνα
> ἀγρόται ἐξείλοντο πάρος πετεηνὰ γενέσθαι·
> ὣς ἄρα τοί γ' ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἶβον.
> <u>καί νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυ φάος ἠελίοιο,</u>
> <u>εἰ μὴ Τηλέμαχος προσεφώνεεν ὃν πατέρ' αἶψα·</u>

Before their lamentation can continue, however, Telemachus' curiosity gets the better of him and

he eagerly begins to question his father—how did he get to Ithaca? Who conveyed him, and in

what kind of ship? But for this interruption, we are informed, the sun would have gone down on

their mourning; i.e., hours later at sunset (Odysseus and Eumaeus had begun preparing breakfast

at 16.1–2), the pair would still be weeping together with no end in sight, had Telemachus not

overcome his grief sufficiently to speak.[2]

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[2] As suggested by the tense of ὀδυρομένοισιν; cf. Irene J.F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the* Iliad (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), 77.

The basic idea expressed in this passage, which we might paraphrase as "lamentation would have been virtually unbounded [had not *x* occurred]", appears very rarely in Homeric poetry—only five times in total. The sequence καί νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυ φάος ἠελίοιο | εἰ μὴ occurs exactly as it does here on two other occasions, once in the *Iliad* and once in the *Odyssey*,[3] and a slightly modified form of the same essential idea appears two additional times (again, once in each poem).[4] This relative scarcity invites closer attention: how do such counterfactual expressions function on a narratological level in the specific context of mourning, and how do they relate to the larger, better-attested category of counterfactuals frequently deployed by Homeric narrators? Moreover, what can the pattern of their use in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* contribute to our understanding of the relationship between those two poems, if anything? Fortunately, the results of careful narratological analysis already conducted by Homeric scholars will provide a stable foundation on which to compose an answer to the first two questions.[5] In the case of the latter question, this paper will suggest the presence of a thematically significant point of resonance (or *responsion*) between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, centred on counterfactual expressions implying a limitless desire for mourning at certain key moments in each poem.

Before comparing the context and implications of each such expression, however, it may prove instructive to dig a little deeper into the form and taxonomy of this particular sub-type of counterfactual statement, which belongs to a larger narrative pattern in Homeric epic.[6] Throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, many counterfactual conditions include both a protasis and

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[3] *Il.* 23.154, *Od.* 21.226.

[4] *Il.* 24.713–14, *Od.* 23.241.

[5] de Jong's treatment of Homeric counterfactuals (2004, 68-81) is still an excellent starting point, and has been joined since its original publication in 1987 by the studies of Lang (1989), Richardson (1990, pp. 187-96), Morrison (1992a), and Louden (1993), whose contributions de Jong has summarized in her introduction to the revised 2004 edition of *Narrators and Focalizers*.

[6] For a more comprehensive treatment of the different types of counterfactuals in Homer than I can provide here, see the thorough-going study of Mabel Lang, "Unreal Conditions in Homeric Narrative," *GRBS* 30.1 (1989): 5-26.

apodosis which indicate hypothetical events rather than 'real'[7] ones, as for example when

Telemachus complains of his missing father to the disguised Athena in Book 1 of the *Odyssey*. In

his bitterness Odysseus' son claims, "I wouldn't be so upset over him if he were dead, [and] if he

had been vanquished among his comrades in Trojan country" (236–37).[8] Yet as the

audience/reader can plainly tell, Telemachus *is* indeed very upset, and he is well aware that

Odysseus did *not* perish at Troy; his statement invokes a hypothetical possibility, which he (like

Athena and the audience) knows to be unrealized. Counterfactuals of this type can be

schematized according to the following sequence: "if *y* had occurred (but it didn't), *x* would be

the case (but it isn't)". The structure of such sentences calls attention, through contrast, to that

which *did* happen in the end. In addition to this simple type of counterfactual, both poems feature

a slightly different kind of construction in which the protasis calls attention to something which

did *not* 'actually happen' in the end, again by contrasting possibilities. In such sentences the

more common order of conditional clause followed by main clause is reversed, rendering a

sequence following the paradigm "*x* would have resulted/logically followed (but it didn't), if *y*

had not intervened/unexpectedly changed the course of events (which it did)".[9] The difference

between the two types of counterfactuals is thus primarily one of perspective, since both function

by bringing pairs of unfulfilled conditions into contrast. As noted by Irene de Jong in her detailed

study of this narrative device, the second type—emphasizing what did *not* happen—represents a

"special subset" of Homeric counterfactuals, which adheres to its own identifiable conventions

throughout both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[10] The sentences with which this paper is especially

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[7] That is, 'real' in the sense that they 'actually happen' at some point in the *fabula*.

[8] "ἐπεὶ οὔ κε θανόντι περ ὧδ' ἀκαχοίμην, | εἰ μετὰ οἷς ἑτάροισι δάμη Τρώων ἐνὶ δήμῳ…"

[9] de Jong, *Narrators*, 68.

[10] Ibid.

concerned, those which occur specifically in the context of mourning, thus represent a further division of this subset.[11]

Generally, according to de Jong's analysis, the main clause in this second ('did *not* happen') type of counterfactual is governed by a verb in the aorist or (rarely) the imperfect indicative, which is preceded by ἄν or κεν; the subordinate or conditional clause is always governed by an aorist indicative, and is introduced either by εἰ μή (most commonly) or ἀλλά (occasionally). Menelaus' claim in *Odyssey* 4 that he and his men would have perished becalmed on Pharos, had it not been for the intervention of Eidothea, furnishes a typical example: καὶ νύ κεν ἤϊα πάντα κατέφθιτο καὶ μένε' ἀνδρῶν, | εἰ μή τίς με θεῶν ὀλοφύρατο καί μ' ἐλέησε (363–4).

By de Jong's count, these special (second-type) counterfactual sentences—which she terms "*if not*-situations"—occur in the *Iliad* a total of 38 times, and appear there considerably more often in the narrator-text than in character speech.[12] They are distributed with remarkable equity throughout that poem, and are wholly absent from only five of the twenty-four books, with notable concentrations in Books 17 and 23.[13] Her analysis may be augmented to include matching figures from the *Odyssey*, in which there are twenty occurrences in total.[14] These are

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[11] To my knowledge, only Louden (1993, 193-94) devotes specific attention to these scenes as a special set amid the larger category of counterfactuals, though he focuses exclusively on the mutual similarities of examples in the *Odyssey* (the recognition scenes), apart from any consideration of their relationship to comparable mourning scenes in the *Iliad*. Nevertheless, his interest in "equivalent elements in separate multiforms of a type scene", with reference to counterfactuals, is the same as that which inspired this paper.

[12] Ibid., 68–69. Other scholars include these specimens under different names and definitions: "unreal conditions" (Lang), "plot decisions" (Richardson), "alternatives to the epic tradition" or "reversal passages" (Morrison), "pivotal contrafactuals" (Louden). I prefer the precision of de Jong's phrase, which models negated protases, despite its rather awkward profile.

[13] Ibid.

[14] *Od.* 4.364, 444, 503; 5.427, 437; 9.79; 11.318, 630; 11.565-67; 12.71; 13.385; 14.32, 369; 16.221; 19.282; 21.128, 227; 23.241; 24.41, 51, 529. My figures here differ only slightly from Louden's (183 n5), in that I omit 7.278-80 as

distributed less evenly than in the *Iliad*, with a much higher proportion of instances appearing in character-text (12) as opposed to those in the narrator-text (8). Interestingly, this inflation does not seem predominately to be due, as one may guess, to the special character of the apologue as Odysseus' own narrative vehicle; Books 9–12 together account for only three character-text examples in Odysseus' voice, and other explanations for the distribution are thus worth exploring.[15] But whatever the reason for this difference between the two poems, it will suffice for our purposes to note that *if not*-sentences (outside a mourning context) occur frequently in Homeric poetry and have therefore inspired close scholarly attention in their own right.

Samuel Bassett, the first to address such sentences in detail, believed that they fit the Homeric pattern of introducing "extraneous matters to enrich the objective narrative…[and] enhance the listener's emotional participation in the action."[16] They helped to mark "the critical situation"—a moment in which everything hangs in the balance, as it were, and rests on a razor's edge—giving the audience time to appreciate and react to the full import of whatever crisis was at hand before moving on to subsequent events.[17] Bassett thought the device was well adapted to the swift pace of oral narrative, and one can see why by reflecting on the fact that the narrator (as in our first example, Odysseus' reunion with Telemachus) is thus enabled to raise any given moment into sharp narrative relief, all with an economy normally not exceeding the length of two verses.[18]

As de Jong notes, Wolfgang Kullmann and others later devoted less attention to the audience's response to *if not*-situations (following Bassett) than to the opportunities for plot

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belonging to the same class as Telemachus' complaint to Athena in Book 1 (see above) rather than to the more specific class of *if-not* situations.

[15] Odysseus' *if not*-statements occur at 9.79, 11.318, 630. For one attempt to account for frequency and distribution patterns of counterfactuals in Homer, see Lang, 7-9, 19.

[16] Samuel Basset, *The Poetry of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), 99.

[17] Ibid., 101–102.

[18] Ibid.

organization which they afforded.[19] Nevertheless, a more comprehensive perspective is found in

de Jong (2004a), where the concerns of both poet and listener are treated together and analyzed

in terms of their interaction.[20] Acknowledging the *if not*-construction as "a congenial feature of

story-telling," de Jong proceeds through a systematic investigation of every example in the *Iliad*

to a summary conclusion which sets out the principal uses of *if not*-situations as a "rhetorical

instrument".[21] In her view these are five, from the perspective of the narrator: (1) to bring home a

critical situation (as per Bassett's analysis), (2) to eulogize or excuse someone, (3) to incite

pathos, (4) to characterize a character or his situation, and (5) to indicate the occurrence of

something that might run counter to the audience's expectations.[22] Without recapitulating de

Jong's numerous examples for each usage, we may note that although (1) is the most common

type in Homer (referring usually to a hero's brush with death, the Achaeans' nearness to

defeat/victory, or Odysseus' proximity to a successful *nostos*), the Odyssean reunion scenes and

their Iliadic counterparts in which we are chiefly interested fall most naturally under (3) and to a

lesser extent, (4). What is more, Bruce Louden has identified an additional function served by

counterfactuals, which we may adduce as (5) to "change the direction of the plot".[23] In the

special case of *if not*-counterfactuals which occur in the context of mourning, as will emerge

from further examination of each scene, functions (3) and (5)—the generation of *pathos* in the

audience, and plot transition—are mutually reinforcing, creating a unique effect.

Armed with some appreciation of how such counterfactual statements function on the

most basic level, as well as where and how often they are deployed in Homeric epic, let us return

now to the specific subset of *if not*-situations with which we began, the paradigm "lamentation

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[19] de Jong, *Narrators*, 69.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 78.
[22] Ibid., 78–79.
[23] Louden, 185. See also Lang, 13, 23.

would have been virtually unbounded [had not *x* occurred],” as introduced in the reunion scene

between Odysseus and Telemachus from *Odyssey* 16. As noted earlier, versions of this sequence,

involving principally the sun's course in the sky, occur a total of five times in Homer; what of

the other four?

Telemachus' recognition of his father is only the first in a sequence of reunions involving

every other major figure in his life as king in Ithaca: his most trusted servants, his wife, and

finally his father (to say nothing of the household maids and his faithful dog). Of these reunions,

two others precipitate a deployment of our *if not*-paradigm in the context of lamentation. The

next in sequence occurs in Book 21 when Odysseus, still disguised as the beggar, makes trial of

Eumaeus and the cowherd just after leaving the suitors to wrestle unsuccessfully with his bow in

the *megaron*. After sounding their loyalty to his satisfaction, Odysseus reveals his true identity

and, following a pattern which will become familiar before the poem's end, he shows them both

a sign confirming his story: the scar from the boar hunt on Parnassus.[24] A moving scene follows

(21.221–29):

> ὣς εἰπὼν ῥάκεα μεγάλης ἀποέργαθεν οὐλῆς.
> τὼ δ' ἐπεὶ εἰσιδέτην εὖ τ' ἐφράσσαντο ἕκαστα,
> κλαῖον ἄρ' ἀμφ' Ὀδυσῆϊ δαΐφρονι χεῖρε βαλόντε,
> καὶ κύνεον ἀγαπαζόμενοι κεφαλήν τε καὶ ὤμους
> ὣς δ' αὔτως Ὀδυσεὺς κεφαλὰς καὶ χεῖρας ἔκυσσε.
> <u>καὶ νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυ φάος ἠελίοιο,</u>
> <u>εἰ μὴ Ὀδυσσεὺς αὐτὸς ἐρύκακε φώνησέν τε</u>
> παύεσθον κλαυθμοῖο γόοιό τε, μή τις ἴδηται
> ἐξελθὼν μεγάροιο, ἀτὰρ εἴπησι καὶ εἴσω.

As with the Telemachus scene in Book 16, here the same device conveys the extreme depth of

the servants' and Odysseus' overwhelming grief in their reunion, an *if not*-situation neatly

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[24] For a summary of the typical structure of recognition scenes in the *Odyssey*, see Chris Emlyn-Jones, "The Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus," *Greece and Rome* 31.1 (1984): 6–7.

constructed according to the grammatical convention described above. Just as Telemachus is the

interrupting agent in Book 16, so here Odysseus diverts the poem's course away from virtually

endless indulgence in grief with a speech, bidding his servants cease (παύεσθον) their

lamentation, because it threatens to derail his plan for revenge. If one of the suitors were to hear

them as he came out of the hall, all would be lost; the risk is too great. The two-line sequence not

only excites pathos for both the servants and their master—the former not least because they

have been mistreated by the suitors in his long absence, and the latter because not many of his

humbler subjects have remained faithful to him—but also testifies to Odysseus' characteristic

cool-headedness in times of great stress.[25] Indeed, this cool-headedness emerges ever more

clearly as Odysseus comes under increasing pressure to act against the suitors in the poem's final

books. After Odysseus' reunions with Penelope, Telemachus, and Laertes, this is the most

important such scene in the poem. His servants are instrumental in the slaughter of the suitors,[26]

and the moment is significant in particular for Eumaeus, with whom Odysseus had conversed for

many hours in disguise (in Books 14 and 16), an encounter pivotal to the poem's plot and filled

with poignant dramatic irony. Their reunion is heavily freighted with emotional resonance, as

anticipated in earlier scenes, and here the *if not*-statement must represent the climax of that

resonance. In terms of the plot, by emphasizing Odysseus' composure and decisive action it also

provides an effective transition into what follows; Odysseus will soon set in motion the events

which lead to his climactic stringing of the bow at the cliff-hanger ending of Book 21.[27]

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[25] Cf. the comment of Fernandez-Galiano at line 227, in *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): "αὐτὸς reflects Odysseus' forceful character; he is the first to pull himself together."

[26] As e.g. at 22.178 ff. Compare the danger caused by the goatherd Melanthios' betrayal at 22.142 ff.

[27] A function similarly ascribed to the *if not*-situation at *Od.* 16.220–1 by Irene I.F. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 397. Also worth noting here is Bruce Louden's insight that in each case of interrupted grieving in the *Odyssey*, the interrupting agent (earlier Telemachus, here Odysseus, and later Athena) "is now in charge of the situation and will continue so for the immediate future" (194), a fact which enhances the significance of such scenes for plot progression.

Odysseus' later reunion with Penelope, by far the most complex and significant such scene in the *Odyssey*, also features the *if not*-device prominently. In Book 23, after Penelope has tested Odysseus for the final time and he has demonstrated his intimate knowledge of their marriage bed, which he had built with his own hands, the two embrace and weep together in a profound release of emotional tension which has been building since the beginning of the poem. If there is an emotional climax in the *Odyssey*, surely this is it. As Penelope clutches her husband tightly around the neck in an ecstasy of fulfilled longing, the narrator delivers a masterstroke (23.241–45):

> <u>καί νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισι φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς,</u>
> <u>εἰ μὴ ἄρ' ἄλλ' ἐνόησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.</u>
> νύκτα μὲν ἐν περάτῃ δολιχὴν σχέθεν, Ἠῶ δ' αὖτε
> ῥύσατ' ἐπ' Ὠκεανῷ χρυσόθρονον, οὐδ' ἔα ἵππους
> ζεύγνυσθ' ὠκύποδας, φάος ἀνθρώποισι φέροντας...

At this pivotal moment of lamentation, an *if not*-situation not only conveys the extraordinary passion of husband and wife, but also provides a workable narrative structure for the remainder of the reunion scene. By this time in the story, night has fallen on the same day which had begun at 20.91, and there is still much to be done; dawn, rather than dusk, occupies the crucial line's final position, providing a clever frame for the tender moments which follow.[28] The introduction of a goddess (Athena) also serves to heighten the effect of 241–242,[29] in harmony with the traditional pattern of *if not*-situations of all varieties, in which the intervening force is more often a god or goddess than anything else. Divine intervention is a staple of the convention, and here it

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[28] As noticed by Heubeck, in his note on 241-46.
[29] Ibid.

is renewed in an unusual way, as usually gods intervene to save or destroy lives, as distinct from less urgent scenarios.[30]

Moreover, unlike in the previous two recognition scenes, on this occasion the intervention represented by εἰ μὴ actually *enables*, rather than interrupts, progress towards the full measure of emotional release. It is only Odysseus' speech at 247 which provides a transition from mourning to conversation, and thence to lovemaking, but the emphatic repetition of τέρπω (ἐταρπήτην 300, τερπέσθην 301) suggests both satiety and an unhurried progression from one pleasure to another, in contrast to the disruption we find in the other examples. The scene does not end until Odysseus falls asleep while relating the final stage of his *nostos* to Penelope (drifting off in mid-sentence, as it were); later Athena only decides to rouse the dawn when she "supposed Odysseus, in his heart, had had his fill [ταρπήμεναι]" of sleep and of his wife's presence (345–46). There is no hint of the urgency created by Telemachus' impetuous curiosity, or by the imminent danger of the suitors' presence, though after rising Odysseus admittedly does refer to the gathering menace of the suitors' vengeful kinsmen (362–3). Nevertheless, the goddess (or rather the narrator) has made sure that Odysseus can enjoy his long-sought rest in peace, at least for a little while, and the narrative pattern pegged to an *if not*-statement, which we have seen deployed in similar situations earlier in the poem, accordingly bends and flexes to accommodate him.

So much for the counterfactuals of lamentation in the *Odyssey*; what light can the Iliadic occurrences of the sequence shed on this intriguing device in Odysseus' poem? Our first *comparandum* occurs in Book 23; the occasion is Patroclus' funeral, the mood as sombre as any

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[30] As at, e.g., *Il.* 5.22–3, among many others. Cf. de Jong, *Narrators*, 70–75.

in the *Iliad*. Achilles has just been visited by his friend's shade, and after receiving instructions

to bury his body, he sets the whole Achaean camp to mourning (108–110):

> ὣς φάτο, τοῖσι δὲ πᾶσιν ὑφ' ἵμερον ὦρσε γόοιο·
> μυρομένοισι δὲ τοῖσι φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠὼς
> ἀμφὶ νέκυν ἐλεεινόν.

Here the key words (μυρομένοισι δὲ τοῖσι) are used without the conditional frame, and there is

nothing counterfactual about the scene. In one sense this is what it looks like for the condition we

have hitherto entertained in considering Odysseus' and Penelope's "long night" to be fulfilled,

though in a different context. The surrounding language of lamentation is no different than what

we have encountered already in the *Odyssey* (cf. 16.215, "ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ὑφ' ἵμερος

ὦρτο γόοιο" and 219 "ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἶβον"), with the caveat, of course, that here

we are dealing with an actual νέκυς. The apparent connection between dawn and mourning has

been noticed here and elsewhere, where the rising sun "is several times linked with the theme of

human sorrow or trouble."[31]

A few lines later, after the Achaeans have assembled for the funeral and the Myrmidons

have borne Patroclus to the appointed place, covering him with locks of their hair and the timber

of his pyre, Achilles makes a heart-wrenching speech (144–151). Addressing a river of his native

territory, Spercheios, the grieving hero explains that the lock which he had saved for dedication

to the river must rather be given in tribute to his dead friend instead, since in any case Achilles

himself will never return to Phthia. In effect, he denies that a *nostos* is now possible for him,

using the typical formula for "return home" which is familiar from its repeated use in the

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[31] Nicholas Richardson, *A Commentary on the Iliad*, Vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) on *Il.* 23.109 (p. 179).

Odyssey (νέομαι / ἱκνέομαι + ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν, cf. *Od.* 9.79), thus implicitly foreshadowing his

own death. At this, the gathered host reacts accordingly (152–159):

> ὣ εἰπὼν ἐν χερσὶ κόμην ἑτάροιο φίλοιο
> θῆκεν, τοῖσι δὲ πᾶσιν ὑφ' ἵμερον ὦρσε γόοιο.
> <u>καί νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυ φάος ἠελίοιο</u>
> <u>εἰ μὴ Ἀχιλλεὺς αἶψ' Ἀγαμέμνονι εἶπε παραστάς</u>
> Ἀτρεΐδη, σοὶ γάρ τε μάλιστά γε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν
> πείσονται μύθοισι, γόοιο μὲν ἔστι καὶ ἆσαι,
> νῦν δ' ἀπὸ πυρκαϊῆς σκέδασον καὶ δεῖπνον ἄνωχθι
> ὅπλεσθαι·

Just as sunrise found the Achaeans still mourning, so too would sunset have overtaken them in

the same state, had Achilles not asked Agamemnon to dismiss the rest of the Achaeans, while he

and other dedicated mourners complete Patroclus' rites. It is noteworthy that when he says this,

Achilles himself has not yet had his fill of mourning—that will come at 23.257. He functions

here as the interrupting cause, which sets events on the right course and averts the condition's

hypothetical, alternative reality, though he himself reserves the right to continue expressing his

grief for a little longer.[32] Here again we see the familiar *if not*-counterfactual of mourning at

work, both accentuating an emotional climax and providing a smooth transition to the events—in

this case, an even more intense emotional crescendo—which follow, as well as giving us some

insight into Achilles' character, as γόοιο μὲν ἔστι καὶ ἆσαι constitutes a landmark concession for

him and indicates a turning point in the poem.

     The bT scholion which survives for line 155 accordingly pays tribute to the intensity and

importance of the *if not* moment, remarking that 'So great was the funeral lament [for Patroclus]

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[32] Achilles' prominence in the scene which follows also exemplifies the pattern noticed by Louden (*supra* n25).

that even Achilles considered it excessive.'[33] At line 158, when Achilles bids Agamemnon to

have the men prepare their dinner, the b scholion adds that the hero must be talking about the

midday meal, explaining away the phrase καὶ νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυ φάος as hyperbole.[34] To

have taken the phrase literally in the first place would hardly have been unjustified, as the

coming of dawn at 109 (which employs almost identical language) is obviously literal, but the

scholiast grasped the fundamentally symbolic significance of the phrase in a conditional setting:

it stands for a grief that does not conform to hourly cycles or indeed, any sort of natural limits, a

boundless grief.

    In other words, the Iliadic instances of our special formula seem to have a great deal in

common with their Odyssean counterparts. This holds true as well for the final *Iliad* passage

which requires attention. In the poem's last book, the arrival of Priam in Troy with Hector's

body arouses overwhelming grief in the city's people, who run up to the wagon in lamentation

(712–717):

> κλαίων δ' ἀμφίσταθ' ὅμιλος.
> <u>καί νύ κε δὴ πρόπαν ἦμαρ ἐς ἠέλιον καταδύντα</u>
> <u>Ἕκτορα δάκρυ χέοντες ὀδύροντο πρὸ πυλάων,</u>
> <u>εἰ μὴ ἄρ' ἐκ δίφροιο γέρων λαοῖσι μετηύδα·</u>
> εἴξατέ μοι οὐρεῦσι διελθέμεν· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
> ἄσεσθε κλαυθμοῖο, ἐπὴν ἀγάγωμι δόμονδε.

This time another variant of the *if not*-paradigm of mourning appears, differing from the others in

syntax if not in essential meaning, and as always in the *Iliad*, closely connected to a death which

is of the highest narrative importance to the plot and the story generally. Again, the interrupting

agent (Priam) refers to the necessity to hold off the unrestrained indulgence of grief (at least for a

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[33] bT *ad* 23.155: lit. "recognized [its] excess", τοσοῦτος ὁ θρῆνος, ὅτι καὶ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἔγνω τὴν ἀμετρίαν. *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*, Vol. 5, edited by Hartmut Erbse (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1977).

[34] Ibid. τὴν πρὸ τοῦ δόρπου τροφήν. ὑπερβολικῶς οὖν εἶπε τὸ „καὶ νύ κ' ὀδυρομένοισιν ἔδυ φάος"

little while), and makes possible a smooth transition to an even more significant emotional

climax, in this case the triple lament of Andromache, Hecabe, and Helen over Hector's body.

Thus it is clear from our Iliadic *comparanda* that counterfactuals of lament in both poems

consistently share important characteristics. In each poem, the paradigm is used sparingly and

reserved only for the most emotionally intense scenes, and employed in such places not only to

heighten and accentuate the poignancy innate in each context, but also to signal the narrative's

proximity to and forward progression towards plot peaks of even greater consequence. The large

number of *if not*-counterfactuals of a more general type in both poems testifies to their

adaptability to a variety of uses, some more consequential than others. Yet only this unique

semantic subset enjoys 'top billing,' as it were, fixed prominently in parallel locations at the

respective nuclei of epic lamentation in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—the funerals of Patroclus (in

which Achilles' death and burial are also foreshadowed) and Hector on the one hand, and

Odysseus' long-delayed reunions with son, servants, and wife on the other.

There may be more to say on a deeper level, however, about this parallelism between the

uses of counterfactuals of mourning in both poems. What if there is more to the similarity of

contexts in which we find sunset/sunrise *if not*-statements than just emotional stress? In Homeric

poetry, grief is at the core of these climactic moments, even for Odysseus and his subjects and

family members, who of course also have substantial reasons to rejoice. We have seen participial

and finite forms of ὀδύρομαι and μύρομαι in each case, and although it is conceivable that these

words may sometimes mean simply "become very emotional [either from grief or joy] to the

point of shedding tears", the parallelism of unambiguously grief-dominated moments in the *Iliad*

with verbally comparable moments in the *Odyssey* argues against such an interpretation.

What, then, is at the core of the lamentation in which Odysseus' son, wife, and servants all indulge? It makes sense to assume that in each case, grief arises not from the good news of Odysseus' return (which would be counter-intuitive, to say the least) but rather from the closure—or better, *consummation*—of past suffering which can be achieved only by either (1) the restoration of what was lacking (father, husband, and master) or (2) the availability of some means to establish a formal limit on such suffering. As observed by Brian Breed, these are precisely the conditions which the *Odyssey* establishes from Book 1 forwards, in anticipation of Odysseus' interminably delayed return to hearth and home in the poem's later stages.[35] This paper has not yet explored Laertes' reunion with Odysseus, and for good reason: it is there that Breed finds the clue to an important dynamic which spans the length and breadth of the *Odyssey*. In Laertes' speech at 24.288–96, he reveals the true nature of his grief when questioning Stranger-Odysseus, whom he has not yet recognized:

> πόστον δὴ ἔτος ἐστίν, ὅτε ξείνισσας ἐκεῖνον
> σὸν ξεῖνον δύστηνον, ἐμὸν παῖδ', εἴ ποτ' ἔην γε,
> δύσμορον; ὅν που τῆλε φίλων καὶ πατρίδος αἴης
> ἠέ που ἐν πόντῳ φάγον ἰχθύες, ἢ ἐπὶ χέρσου
> θηρσὶ καὶ οἰωνοῖσιν ἕλωρ γένετ'· οὐδέ ἑ μήτηρ
> κλαῦσε περιστείλασα πατήρ θ', οἵ μιν τεκόμεσθα·
> οὐδ' ἄλοχος πολύδωρος, ἐχέφρων Πηνελόπεια,
> κώκυσ' ἐν λεχέεσσιν ἑὸν πόσιν, ὡς ἐπεῴκει,
> ὀφθαλμοὺς καθελοῦσα· τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων.

It is the fact that Odysseus has been denied proper burial (as Laertes thinks), as well as the ritually-prescribed oblations of his family—the γέρας which is the right of all dead men—which is most disturbing to those left behind on Ithaca.[36] This theme may also be traced elsewhere in

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[35] Brian Breed, "Odysseus Back Home and Back from the Dead," in *Nine Essays on Homer*, eds. Miriam Carlisle and Olga Levaniouk (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 199), 137–165.

[36] Breed, 138.

the *Odyssey* (e.g. Telemachus' complaints at 1.158–77 and 234–44) and in Breed's view represents a grief shared among the family which is "strangely hollow [and] unfulfilled."[37] I would add that Eumaeus feels this same grief in close identification with the family, as revealed by his bitter remark at 14.463 that the gods spitefully denied Odysseus the chance to die either at Troy or at home, "in the arms of his loved ones" (φίλων ἐν χερσίν), but that he has rather been snatched away from them ἀκλειῶς, "unsung" or "without tidings" (as Lattimore renders it). In Breed's words, the family and Eumaeus lack the ability "to make their tears meaningful with funeral rituals."[38]

It seems possible then that the response of those Odysseus left behind, when they finally do reunite with him, reflects the resolution of this deeply distressing tension and empty grief. The healing consummation of their past suffering, which has been augmented by the cruel uncertainty of Odysseus' fate, can finally take place only once his fate is certainly known to them. This interpretation, I would argue, is significantly strengthened by the evident parallelism between the contexts of the lamentation-focused *if not*-counterfactuals in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. We have seen that in all three Iliadic passages which are relevant to the question, the occurrence of the counterfactual immediately precedes the performance of funeral rights for dead heroes by those who were dearest to them in life, both in the case of Patroclus and in that of Hector. In each case the attendant mourners give in to uncontrolled expressions of grief, which are either interrupted or deferred until another time. The same happens in the *Odyssey* passages we have examined, with the sole exception of Penelope's reunion with Odysseus, in which divinely-ordered circumstances protect the pair from precisely such interruptions.

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 139.

In addition, two similes connected to Odysseus' reunions with Telemachus and Penelope respectively evoke death or near-death scenarios immediately before the *if not*-counterfactual. The narrator compares Telemachus and Odysseus in their uncontrollable wailing to sea eagles or vultures whose young have been carried off while still immature (16.216–18); in other words, they act as though they have been bereaved of offspring whose potential was yet unrealized, in a violation of the natural cycle one might expect. Just so, Telemachus has grown up without a father, lacking even definite knowledge of whether he was alive or dead, and Odysseus himself has suffered a massive twenty-year disruption of a 'natural' heroic lifespan, which would otherwise end ideally either in battle or in the midst of one's own kingdom and fatherland.

Similarly, when Penelope embraces her husband in Book 23, she is compared to a shipwrecked sailor in a celebrated simile which poignantly reverses her role with Odysseus' for one brief moment (233–40). Here too death's dread presence may be felt: "only a few" escape from such a wreck (παῦροι δ' ἐξέφυγον), and the force of the comparison lies in the extreme relief felt by the lucky survivor, who has escaped misfortune by the slimmest of chances—this is the relief which Penelope feels. Odysseus himself, of course, is the key to this simile: he is the sailor who really has survived such wrecks, and lived to tell the tale. In his return he is like one who has escaped from death to life.

In both situations, the similes focus attention on circumstances which call for mourning (in Book 16) or highlight the near-triumph of death (in Book 23), precisely at the moment when Odysseus and his family members give themselves up to a form of lamentation which duplicates the language and highly specific counterfactual expressions used of those mourning real corpses in the *Iliad*. The obvious similarity between the emotional tenor of these scenes, which in each poem are among the most empathetically evocative, will only get us so far. To understand their

deeper connection, we must also understand that the *reasons* for that emotion—closure and

consummation—are also thematically parallel, and that this is reflected in the narrative structure

of the scenes themselves. Thus, the distinctive formal signature of the *if not*-counterfactual

verses is the key to this inter-poem resonance. When the living man finally arrives, his family

(and Eumaeus) can finally bestow on Odysseus—a mere name whom they have been previously

unable to honour even as a νέκυς—the rite of closure and fulfilled mourning for which they have

yearned over so many years, almost as much as they yearned for his safe return beyond hope.

When this moment finally arrives, they unite with Achilles and with the Trojans in their

uncontrollable grief, and like them mourn as though they could go on mourning indefinitely. So

deep runs the need to "have one's fill" (τέρπεσθαι) of grief in the traditional imagination of early

epic, which resonates across both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in emphatic emotional responsion.

    In conclusion, we have seen how a relatively straightforward but unique type of

conditional sentence functions on two significant levels at key moments in Homeric epic, both as

an effective narratological device for smoothing the transition into critically important plot

events, and as a thematic link binding Odysseus' reunions with the funeral rites of the *Iliad* in

giving parallel expression and meaning to deeply motivated feelings of grief. Though seemingly

not a conspicuous feature of Homeric language at first glance, *if not*-counterfactual sentences are

cleverly and consistently deployed to remarkable effect, quite out of proportion to their brevity

and relative scarcity. In part because of their subtle influence, our perceptions of Homeric

narrative and even our emotional engagement with the personalities depicted therein still respond

with alacrity to ancient cues, across the vast distance in time and space which separates us from

Homeric song.

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