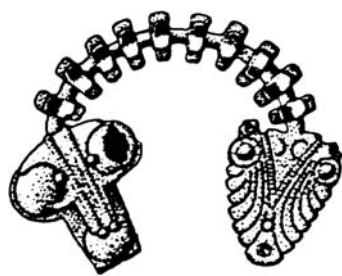


ЗБОРНИК

МАТИЦЕ СРПСКЕ
ЗА КЛАСИЧНЕ СТУДИЈЕ

JOURNAL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
MATICA SRPSKA



9

НОВИ САД
2007

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HOMER VIA VAN GENNEP: SOME INITIATORY THEMES IN THE *ODYSSEY*

ABSTRACT: In both Telemachus' journey to the Peloponnese and the final battle in the hall initiatory motifs have been already recognised; in the present paper, the "Telemachy" is interpreted in terms of a young prince's initiation, where the rituals of guest friendship played an important role, whereas the bow contest for Penelope's hand is supposed to reflect a collective warrior initiation with the Suitors representing a fatherless post-war generation, which failed to be duly initiated and ended in violating the same laws of *xeiniē*.

KEYWORDS: Homer, Telemachy, Killing of the Suitors, Initiation, Epics, Greek, Indo-European.

Telemachy: A Mediterranean Initiation?

Last year,¹ the coincidence of reading the third book of the *Odyssey* with my students and preparing a Serbian edition of Arnold van Gennep's classical book *Rites de passage* (1909) gave me the opportunity to experiment with a kind of research which was promoted with Sir James G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*. It is so the called anthropological approach to the classical mythology, which consists in interpreting it in the light of primitive or semi-civilised peoples' customs and beliefs and of modern folklore. By explaining many Greek and Romans myths as reflecting archaic rituals, Frazer inspired the formation of the so called Cambridge Myth and Ritual

¹ The present paper is in its first part based on a lecture held on September 19th, 2006 at the European Summer School of Classics in Trieste, Italy. The underlying ideas are for the first time expressed in Loma 2005a, XXXVIII ff.

school, which, in its turn, influenced some modern scholars, among others Walter Burkert. For his book Van Gennep himself took inspiration from *The Golden Bough*, as well as from the works of French sociologists Durkheim, Hubert and Mauss. In *Les rites de passage* van Gennep only establishes the scheme of the “rites of passage”, but makes himself no attempt to apply it to the interpretation of ancient texts. However, his book was inspiring for many modern interpreters of Greek myth, especially in France, for example Pierre Vidal-Naquet and his *Black Hunter*.² According to van Gennep and his followers, a rite of passage consists, generally speaking, of three phases; first, separation from a former state; second, the liminal period between two states; third, reintegration to the society and incorporation into a new social group. This structure appears most clearly in the rites of initiation, and among them in those sanctioning the transition from childhood to adulthood, where the transitory phase is especially developed; in the primitive cultures this includes as a rule retreat in the wild, diverse tests of courage and endurance, but also learning the traditional lore of the tribe. Let me call your attention to the last point. If the preparation for initiation regularly included teaching and learning of various components of the oral tradition, this ritual complex must have been of considerable importance not only for preservation, but also for development of traditional literary forms, and perhaps even the birth-place of some of them. Such an assumption was already put forward by Eliade about the epic poetry, and one might extend it to some other genres, for instance, to the fairy tale. As an example, chosen at random, I shall sum up the plots of two Lithuanian tales, both having parallels all around the world.³ Seven boys all born and baptised on the same day go in the footsteps of their fathers into a haunted castle hidden in a deep forest and stay there for seven years till the predicted night, as they, having withstood horrible intimidations, break the spell and eventually marry seven disenchanting princesses. The other tale is about a princess who falls in love with a simple boy, takes him to her castle and wants to marry him; but on the eve of the marriage he flees by sea as far as Turkey, where he becomes the favourite slave of the king; the princess makes inquiries about him and finally finds out the truth; she sails herself to Turkey, starts

² P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir et l'origine de l'éphébie athénienne*, *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 23, pp. 623—628, reprinted in: id., *Le chasseur noir: Formes de pensée et formes de société dans le monde grec*, Editions La Découverte, Paris 1981, engl. translation Baltimor/London 1986.

³ *Apẽ prakėiktą pili* and *Apẽ Kurszùkà*, reproduced by A. Leskien *Litauisches Lesebuch*, Heidelberg 1919, pp. 3—11 resp. 11—15.

working there for the king as a dressmaker, and after many peripeties and dangers joins her fiancé, who explains that he fled from her because he felt ashamed of his simplicity and ignorance; eventually they both return home, marry, and after her father's death he inherits the throne. In both tales there is a clearly expressed motif of the pre-initiatory separation combined with various tests; the former tale emphasises the collectivity of a new generation to be initiated, as well as the continuity between two generations; in the latter, the initiation is singularised, but it includes both sexes.

Common to both plots is also the motif of marriage, which is here in place, because the initiation is a precondition for marriage for both young men and girls, and usually it ends in marriage. It is especially apparent in South-Slavic poems dealing with the so-called “obstructed marriage”, where the bridegroom himself or his (young and unmarried) champion has to fulfill several tasks in order to win the bride. The underlying sense is obviously that, in the pre-historic societies, a young man could get married only after having proved his maturity by passing through a proper warrior initiation. The epic tasks are partially mythicised, the last and the hardest one being usually a duel with a dragon-like, three-headed monster; however, the ritual basis of this motif is transparent in the variants where the monstrous adversary is explained to be simply a relative of the bride or her father's servant, disguised in order to frighten the young hero, i.e. to test his courage; moreover, some of the tasks set before the epic Suitor, including a similar masquerade, are still a part of South-Slavic nuptial customs. As I tried to show in a book tracing back “The Slavic and Indo-European Roots of the Serbian Epic” (Loma 2002, 73 ff.), this theme is a common Indo-European heritage, which may be recognised in other traditional epics; thus, for instance, in the ninth and tenth “Adventures” of the *Nibelungenlied*, where the young hero Siegfried on behalf of Gunther woos Brunhilde (cf. now also Loma 2005b), or in the episode in *Shahnameh*, Persian Epic of the Kings, where Feridun — he, too, a legendary dragon-fighter — disguises himself as a fire-dragon in order to tempt his three sons returning home with their brides. Further comparative evidence — Celtic, Nordic, Indian — was already provided by Georges Dumézil (1969, 133 ff.) who also pointed out the parallelism between those Indo-European sagas and the initiation rites among some North-American Indian tribes, which culminate in a feigned duel with a marionette representing a mythical two- or three-headed snake.

As a traditional epic's theme, young hero's initiation is not lacking in Homer. A clear instance of it is the story of Bellerophon as

told in the sixth book of the *Iliad* (152 ff.). The youth refused the love of the king's wife and was consequently sent to a remote and dangerous mission during which he performed a series of exploits, among others the killing of a fire breathing monster, Chimaera, and eventually won a foreign princess. Here as elsewhere, a young hero's chastity seems to reflect the ritual prohibition of the sexual intercourse before and during the initiation.

In the *Iliad*, this is merely a digressive episode; in the plot of this poem there is no place for an initiation theme, for we meet its heroes after ten years of fighting around Troy, at a moment when all of them are already experienced warriors. It is only in the *Odyssey*, a further decade having passed and a new generation risen, that a young hero appears to be initiated, Telemachus. However, his story does not provide much ritual elements to be recognised, at least at first sight. Only Telemachus' attempt to bend his father's bow in book XXI 101 ff. (128 f.), which would have succeeded had not Odysseus nodded in warning, seems to reflect a traditional theme of young warrior initiation (cf. Eckert 1963, 52, 54; Moreau 1992).⁴ The very name *Tēlémachos*, "battler-at-a-distance", which was known to the poet of the *Iliad*, reflects his father's distinction as an archer (West 1988, 91) and thus proves the bow bending scene to have been a part of an epic legend earlier to our *Odyssey*.⁵

As for the first four books of the *Odyssey*, where Telemachus plays the central role, they apparently provide no motifs of a classical epic initiation. Let us briefly recall their contents. Having decided that Odysseus must finally return home, Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso's island to free Odysseus from her — which will be accomplished in book V — and Athena to Ithaca, where she, disguised as Odysseus' guest-friend Mentès, suggests to Telemachus to go to Pylos and Sparta to get from Nestor and Menelaus some information on his father, and encourages the youth to act against the Suitors. At a feast in Odysseus' house, he energetically warns the Suitors to leave; surprised by this manifestation of self-confidence, they nevertheless do not take the youth seriously. Next day Telemachus calls all the Ithacans and Suitors together for an assembly, where he complains to the people of the Suitors' behaviour, repeats his warning to them and finally tells about the journey he is undertaking. It is again Athena, now in the guise of his father's old friend

⁴ According to the former, further initiatory motifs of the final battle in the hall are scarification of Telemachus (cut near the wrist by Amphimedon's spear), the revelation (*epopteia*) of the totemic aegis of Athena to all present, tyrannizing of women (the hanging of the twelve maidservants by Telemachus).

⁵ Of its ritual frame and possible parallels see more below.

Mentor, who gets crew and ship and will travel together with the young man. They put out to sea and the next morning reach Pylos. Nestor receives them friendly, but has no much to say about Odysseus. On the next day Telemachus resumes his journey to Sparta with a chariot, accompanied by Nestor's son Peisistratus. Hospitably entertained by Menelaus, Telemachus learns from him that Odysseus was being held on the island of Calypso; he declines Menelaus' invitation to stay two weeks as his guest, and prepares himself for the way back. Meanwhile, the Suitors conspire to murder him as he returns home. The story is interrupted here and does not continue till book XV, where the return of Telemachus is described.

In this initial part of the *Odyssey*, which is centered on Telemachus and consequently was named "Telemachy", already the ancient commentators, who were inclined to trace almost all back to Homer, saw a kind of *paideía*,⁶ and some modern scholars share the same view.⁷ As a literary genre, the ancient Paideia, with its classical instance in Xenophon's "Education of Cyrus", is considered predecessor to the modern Bildungsroman. The German term may be translated as "novel of education" or "novel of formation"; it is a novel which traces the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development of the main character from childhood to maturity. The stress lies on the sociological aspect, consisting in the gradual accommodation of the protagonist into his society, which begins, as a rule, with the youth leaving his home, experiencing some form of loss and discontent. Thus the Bildungsroman interweaves often with the travel novel, German *Reiseroman*. The genre is well represented in Western literature, let us mention Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage of Young Anacharsis in Greece* (*Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce*, 1787), Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795) continued by *Wilhelm Meister's Travels* (*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, 1829), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Twain; Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adventures_of_Huckleberry_Finn); *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* 1922, etc. In support of the theory of ancient roots of the genre traceable back to Homer, it might be indicative that one of

⁶ Thus Porphyry, *Quaest. Homer. on Od.* I 284: εἰ μὲν πρόφρασις ἐξέτασιν εἶχε παρὸς ἐπανόδου, σκοπὸς δ' ταύτης παιδεύσις.

⁷ E. g. Werner Jaeger, pointing out the "educational nature" of Telemachus' trip (1934, 20 ff.). There is a general question of the presence or absence of a change in Telemachus, cf. Clarke 1963, n. 16 on 140 f.; Millar/Carmichael 1954, who conclude p. 58, that he is "the only character in Greek literature who shows any development", growing from *nēpios* and reaching the *hēbēs métron* (XIX 530 ff.).

the earliest examples of Bildungsroman in European literature, Fénelon's *Adventures of Telemachus, Son of Ulysses*, published in 1699, claimed to be "a sequel to the first four books of the *Odyssey*". Its hero pursues the quest for his father all over the Mediterranean and beyond. The action is not only adventurous, but also highly didactic: on the way Telemachus receives from his tutor Mentor an initiation into various domains: geography, warfare, arts, emotional life, etc.

Already in the Telemachy all the elements of a Bildungsroman are found (cf. Clarke 1963, 141). Moreover: the separation from the home and the family which means the end of the childhood; a long wandering which is both adventurous and educative; reintegration into society as a matured person — all this recalls an initiatory scenario. Was the Telemachy originally a story of initiation? No wonder, that some modern scholars put forward such a view, especially Eckert 1963, Clarke 1963, Moreau 1992, and most recently Sauzeau 1998, who proposes an interpretation of the Telemachy as a mystical journey between the poles of darkness and light, underworld and upper world, represented respectively by Pylos and Argos (i.e. Sparta).⁸ But rather than to discover a possible mythological background of the story, it would be necessary to recognise in it some ritual elements, which might support the theory of its initiatory provenance; and this seems impossible without reconsidering, in brief, the general problem the Telemachy poses within the *Odyssey*. This question is an old and much discussed one: whether the Telemachy was composed as an integral part of the *Odyssey*, or it was originally a separate *Kleinepos*, subsequently incorporated in an already composed poem.⁹ We cannot examine all the philological arguments pro and con, but only concentrate on the main questions of composition and coherence. Indeed, the Telemachy has no close connection with the central plot of the *Odyssey*; moreover, it lacks intrinsic logic. Athena, who is protecting Odysseus and his house, incites his young son to a long journey, although she knows that it will not achieve its purpose — indeed, any information Telemachus can possibly get concerning his father she already has! — and that it is dangerous not only to the youth, but also to Odysseus' cause at home, because in Telemachus' absence Penelope might be compelled to remarry. Telemachus himself incautiously increases this risk by provoking the Suitors before his departure. In the framework of the main action of the *Odyssey*, which is concentrated on Odysseus' happy re-

⁸ Already Moreau 1992, 97 f. interpreted the voyage to Pylos as a "descente aux Enfers".

⁹ Cf. Heubeck 1988, 17, West 1988, 52 f., with further references.

turn home and his reestablishment in all his rights and possessions, Telemachus' enterprise seems both illogical and needless,¹⁰ if not harmful.¹¹

However, the hero of the Telemachy is not Odysseus, but Telemachus. From his own point of view, apart from *Odyssey's* interests and divine intrigues, his conduct is logical and well motivated. Son of a king who is believed to be dead, the boy may aspire, according to the patrilineal principle, to succeed to his father as the ruler of Ithaca, but in this hereditary right he is endangered by another, apparently matriarchal usage, according to which a king's widow was allowed, or rather obliged to remarry, in order to choose with her new husband a successor to the throne.¹² Once he reached maturity, Telemachus starts his struggle for the kingship of Ithaca, playing the king in all respects. At home, the youth appears as the master of the king's house, solemnly receiving his father's guest-friend Menetes (I 119 ff.) and boldly addressing the unwelcome guests, his mother's Suitors (I 367 ff.). Outdoor, he tries to strengthen his position in domestic politics, by asking support from the Ithacan assembly (II 1 ff.), as well as in foreign affairs, by reestablishing connections with his father's allies, and this seems to have been the very purpose of his oversea journey.

¹⁰ The threat spoken by Telemachus in the assembly II 317 is ironically interpreted by Suitors II 325 ff. that he hoped for some military aid against them from Pylos or Sparta, but there is no mention of it during his voyage, neither by himself nor by his hosts (only Nestor III 217 admits the possibility of the σύμπαντες Ἀχαιοὶ helping to Odysseus once returned to reestablish himself in Ithaca). Cf. Clarke 1963, 141, n. 17.

¹¹ This is repeatedly expressed by the poet himself, through the mouth of Eurycleia II 363 ff., Odysseus XIII 417 ff. and Eumaeus XIV 178 ff. (cf. Clarke 1963, 132 f.); the problem has been discussed by ancient commentators (e.g. Porphyry l.c.: ἀτοπος εἶναι δοκεῖ Τηλεμάχου ἢ ἀποδημία) as well as by modern scholars (for the various modern explanations of Telemachus' journey cf. Rose 1967, 391; Jones 1988, 505 f., with bibliography). In I 95 Athena explains that she will guide Telemachus to Sparta and to Pylos ἢ δ' ἴνα μιν κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔχῃσιν "that good report may be his among men" (I 95, transl. Murray; cf. XIII 422, where she gives the same answer to Odysseus, who blames her for having instigated his son to take a dangerous trip instead of telling him truth). There is the question of the precise meaning of κλέος in the given context. The simplest interpretation is that "Telemachus will be praised for his exertions" (West 1988, 87), but Jones may be right in supposing that to be the account of Telemachus' "truest identity", "the account of himself which he needed to hear", from Nestor, Menelaus and Helen, that "he is indeed the true son of his father" (1988, 499 ff.).

¹² The contradiction is clearly reflected in Antinous' behaviour, who on the one hand recognizes Telemachus' hereditary title to throne (I 387: ὁ τοι γενεῆ πατρῴϊόν ἐστιν) and on the other aspires to make himself the king by marrying Penelope (XXII 48 ff.). Cf. Clarke 1963, 129, to the meaning of βασιλεύς in Homer West 1988, 122 f.

All this may corroborate the old hypothesis that the Telemachy was an originally independent poem, a story about young prince defending his father's throne against usurpers, which was later incorporated in our *Odyssey* and reinterpreted into a story of a son in search for his father.¹³ This was done with a great skill, which makes the Telemachy a charming introduction to the great poem, but still the way that some badly fitting details and a general inconsequence remained allow us to form an idea of the original motivation.

Generally, we can agree with its ancient interpretation as a *paidéia*, keeping in mind that the pre-initiatory separation is as a rule connected with recounting myths of the tribe to the initiates by their elders, "initiators", a role played here by Nestor and Menelaus, who transmit to the youth grown up in a fatherless feminine environment stories of heroic deeds. However, the time concerned here is not a mythical remote past, *illud tempus*, but the aftermath of the Trojan war, with the main attention paid to the exploits of Odysseus himself and of another hero's son avenging his father, Orestes. Therefore one can agree with Clarke 1963, 141 when he stresses that the Telemachy "is not a rite of initiation in the anthropological sense of a set of artificial dangers contrived to test a candidate's reactions", and with Eckert 1963, 56, who states that the "growth to maturity through paradigmatic knowledge, which is certainly the central symbolism of the *Telemachia*, differs from primitive instruction in the group myths by its emphasis upon the necessity for a personal decision on Telemachus' part". Nevertheless, the Telemachy does not lack elements which may have their origin in ritual. There is at least one recognised as such by both scholars cited above. It is the motif of Telemachus concealing his journey from Penelope (II 372 ff.), which may have been motivated by ceremonial requirements.¹⁴ According to Clarke, to be initiated into his father's heroic world, Telemachus "must rid himself of his feminine inhibitions" (1963, 132; cf. id. 1967, 31 f.), and in the same sense his rude addressing of Penelope I 356 ff. is to be understood.¹⁵ Eckert 1963, 50 f. recognises here the motif, found in the puberty rituals among the primitives, of boys being secretly removed at night and their mothers told that the

¹³ It might be indicative that Telemachus repeatedly (I 166 ff., 413 ff., III 241 f.) expresses his conviction that his father must have perished and will never return (according to West 1988, 98, he "denies what he most wishes").

¹⁴ Otherwise it may be explained by Telemachus' fear of his mother's potentially plotting with the Suitors and blocking him in his desire to succeed to the throne.

¹⁵ Anyway I see no good reason to suspect here, with Aristarchus and West 1988, 120, an interpolation.

gods have stolen them; cf. here the role of Athena = Mentor.¹⁶ Moreover, there is a further ritual aspect in what we assumed to have been the political background of the Pre-Homeric poem, which is still transparent in our *Odyssey*, but not adequately evaluated so far. In the case of a king's son, the initiation must have been more developed than that of simple youths, i.e. besides the military training it probably included a kind of introduction into state affairs. In the archaic Greece the relations of guest-friendship, Hom. *xeiníē*, between chieftains played a very important role, which equated to later alliances between states. The most natural way to be initiated into this particular field of his future activities was for a young prince to pay a visit to his father's guest-friends. In normal circumstances, it would have been the king himself who took his son with him during such a visit, but in the absence of Odysseus his trusted old friend Mentor is the most suitable person to accompany Telemachus on his initiating journey, which we may compare to the oversea adventure of the future king and queen in the Lithuanian tale.

Guest-friendship of the ancient Greeks was, just as similar customs among the semi-civilised peoples of today, highly ritualised, one of its most important ritual elements being the exchange of gifts.¹⁷ An interesting parallel is provided by the ceremonial exchange system called Kula among the Melanesians of the southeastern part of Papua New Guinea as described in Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). In the "Kula ring", which spans eighteen islands, thousands of men take part, mostly the chiefs, who travel hundreds of miles by canoe in order to exchange shell-disc necklaces and shell armbands, the former circling clockwise to the north and the latter in the opposite direction. There is no economic interest in this circulation of "valuables", for they are non-use items, but rather serve purely to enhance the social status and prestige of their temporary owners. The Telemachy, which starts with Telemachus put to a test of hospitality by Athena — which he passes by treating his father's guest — friend (*patrōios xeînos* I 175 f.) Mentos worthily and offering him a guest gift (I 309 ff.), ends with the youth coming back home with the rich *xeînia* presented to him by Menelaus (IV 589 ff.),¹⁸ and we can

¹⁶ As Moreau pointed out (1992, 97), Telemachus travels accompanied by his *homēlikíē* (III 364), the boys (*koûroi* IV 652) of the same age, which hints at a group initiation.

¹⁷ Cf. West 1988, 114, with further references.

¹⁸ Passed on, as in the case of Melanezian *kula*, rather than given in return; cf. the repeated mention of Menelaus' wealth consisting mainly in the *κειμήλια* he collected during his wanderings all over the Mediteranean (IV 80; 90; 615 ff.). For the Theoclymenus episode see below.

imagine that by displaying this acquisition from abroad he, not unlike Papuan chiefs, increased his authority in the Ithacan community. In our *Odyssey*, the *keimélia pollà kai esthlá* (XV 159) Telemachus brings with him to Ithaca must be kept safe before the final clash with the Suitors, but the care he takes of Menelaus' *kállima dôra* (consisting of precious clothing and gold, XV 206) and perhaps even the patronymic of his comrade Peiraeus whom he entrusts with them, *Klytidēs / Klýtios*, "son of the Renowned one" (XV 539 ff.; XVI 327), suggest that they have something to do with the *kléos* the young prince won on his trip.

Let us draw a first conclusion. Whereas it is well known that Greek comedy and tragedy are deeply rooted in Dionysian rite, the ritual roots of some other genres are less obvious and still to be uncovered. In the case of the Telemachy, however, the modern anthropological literature proved to be useful also, for a better understanding of ancient texts as a ray of light fell from the remote Pacific onto the old Mediterranean.

Suitors Killing: a Story of Missing Initiation?

To supplement my Triestine lecture, I would like to point out that in the *Odyssey* the initiatory theme is not limited to the Telemachy, but recurs like a leitmotif through the whole poem. Odysseus himself takes there a twofold initiation. The first one, retrospectively narrated in XIX 392 ff., took place in his youth as he paid a visit to his maternal grandfather Autolycus and went on a hunting trip which resulted in him killing his first wild boar and being marked for life by a scar its tusk left upon his thigh (cf. Clarke 1963, n. 18 on 141). A parallel with Telemachus' journey is provided by the motif of gifts previously promised and eventually presented by Autolycus to his grandson (although these gifts are called here not *xeínia*, but *dôra*, the giver being a blood relative and not a guest-friend). In Odysseus' mature age, his wanderings and adventures represent in a way subsequent, higher initiation, mystically culminating in his visit to the Land of the Dead, which means a mystical death followed by a rebirth, for after having lost everything and endured all tests the hero is eventually restored to his former life as father, husband and king.¹⁹

¹⁹ Cf. Eckert 1963, 52 ("the voyage of Odysseus includes many motifs found in initiatory myths and rituals"), Clarke 1963, 139 ("Odysseus needs no education in the ways of this world; now his experience has been deepened by exposure to the ways of the other world"), Heubeck 1989, 8 (Odysseus loses "first his fleet and

It is well known that in ancient Greece the Homeric poems were highly esteemed not only for their literary achievement, but also for their great didactic value, as an inexhaustible source of both practical and ethical instruction. A Proto-Odyssey may have had its educational purpose too; presumably it was less concerned with bardic entertainment and more concentrated on the social life of an archaic and highly ritualised society, with the epic legends providing the main contents of the traditional lore transmitted to the young initiates during their preparatory seclusion. Its message would have been that every young man must pass the proper initiation — a moral which may be drawn not only from the positive example of Telemachus, but also from the negative one of the Suitors. The initiatory aspect of Suitors' behaviour and of their violent death is less noticed, because it was neglected by the poet of our *Odyssey*; however, the present poem contains echoes of an earlier version, where this particular aspect seems to have stood in the foreground. One of them is the bow bending motif which constitutes the framework for the denouement scene of the *Odyssey*, the killing of the Suitors. As it is said above, bending a hero's bow is an initiatory task par excellence having its close counterpart in the legend of Scythian origins as told by Herodotus IV 8—10,²⁰ where Greek and Iranian elements are intermingled.²¹ It can be specifically tied to the conquering of a bride, as in the case of Indian hero Rama, who in order to win a princess at Sita's *svayamvara* was challenged to string the bow of Shiva (he broke it into two).²² Odysseus' bow has a pedigree too: once it belonged to Apollo's grandson Eurytus (XXI 13 ff.), a famous archer who arranged an archery contest for those who wanted to win the hand of his daughter (cf. Crissy 1997). Significantly enough, in Ithaca the archery contest takes place on the

most of his men, then the rest of his companions and his last ship together with his possessions, and, finally, even his own identity; a nameless Nobody stands naked and defenceless before Nausicaa ... but here, at the lowest point in his fortunes ... there are seeds of renewed life; this is the starting-point for a final arduous journey, which ... leads to a recovery of identity, to a reestablishment of existence in human society").

²⁰ While driving Geryones' cows, Heracles came to the northern Pontus and met there Echidna, a half-serpentine woman, whom he impregnated with three sons. Upon departing he instructed her to test their sons when they grew up with his bow and his girdle he left behind; eventually it was Skythes, the eponym of the Scythians, who proved to be able to string his father's bow and gird himself with the girdle.

²¹ Cf. Raevskij 1977, 39 ff.

²² Ramāyaṇa I 10. For the comparison with Indian epics cf. G. Germain, *Genèse de l'Odyssee. La fantastique et le sacré*, Paris 1954, 13 ff. (cited by Moreau 1992, 101).

feast of Apollo (XXI 258 f., 267 f., 338, 364 f.), who is not only *klytótoxos* (267), the famed archer, but also *akersekómēs*, with unshorn hair, the divine personification of ephebes standing on the threshold of manhood and thus the patron of the male initiation (cf. Burkert 1985, 144 f.). In India, *Śiva-* 'the Kindly One' is the later, euphemistic name of Vedic god Rudra, also named *Śarva-* 'the Archer',²³ the arrow being his essential attribut; he is leader of *Māruts*,²⁴ the cohort of storm and war gods which represents a celestial counterpart to Indo-Iranian bands of young warriors (*marya-*). It has been shown by Roger Goossens more than half a century ago that Rudra and Apollo go back together to a common Indo-European prototype of the Divine Archer presiding over the initiatory rites of the *Männerbünde* (Grégoire 1949, 127 ff., esp. 161—164); and maybe we can speak of the Proto-Indo-European epic theme of archery contest in a context both initiatory and matrimonial.

Does that mean that the Suitors, or at least some of them, originally exemplified still uninitiated young men? At first glance it is improbable, for they were all older than Telemachus and consequently of mature age, past *ephebeía*. Some were old enough to remember Odysseus before he left for Troy twenty years before (thus Antinous, XXI 93 ff.). Normally they should all have been initiated long before the date of Odysseus' return; however, they seem not to have been, although this fact is never explicitly stated in our *Odyssey* but only implied by its plot. According to XVI 245 ff., the Suitors came from Dulichium, Same, Zacynthus and Ithaca. The latter three islands are those wherefrom Odysseus recruited the contingent he led in twelve ships against Troy (Il. II 631), whereas the Dulichians are said to have come under command of his nephew Meges (ib. 625 ff.). There is no mention of Meges in the poem; moreover, another king named Acastus is mentioned as ruling over Dulichians at the time of its main action.²⁵ It may be significant that neither information about Odysseus nor help against the Suitors is hoped for from this island so close to Ithaca and from its dynasty related to Odysseus' house, which would have been normally the case, if Meges and/or a part of his men did come back. But the poet of the *Odyssey* was obviously uninterested in establishing prosopographic ties between Odysseus' contingent at Troy as mentioned in the

²³ This name is perhaps the oldest, for it is common to the ancient Iranians, cf. the Avestan demon *Sa^urva-*.

²⁴ Sometimes called their father (*pitar marutām*, voc., Rigveda II 33, 1).

²⁵ By Odysseus himself, in the feigned story he tells to Eumaeus XIV 336. There was a tradition, reflected in the great fresco painted by Polygnotus at Delphi, according to which Meges survived the capture of Troy, cf. Paus. X 25 f.

Iliad, his crew in the Wanderings²⁶ and the people of his homeland in the Return.²⁷ An earlier epic dealing with the Return may have been less indifferent to this problem. The men who went against Troy should have been — at least according to epic logic — the best and noblest of their countries; consequently, the loss of them all must have caused in Odysseus’ kingdom, and probably also in Dulichion, a generation crisis. This was not without impact on the wooing of Penelope, the implication being that her Suitors, said to be from the noblest houses of those islands and all of an age over twenty, were, for the most part, sons of those who followed Odysseus and Meges to Trojan war and never returned to their families. The poet, who concentrates on the situation in Odysseus’ house, fails to envisage this circumstance, that not only Telemachus, but also most Suitors had grown up without their fathers;²⁸ and what we learn from the Telemachus’ journey is that a father was needed to introduce his son into heroic life.²⁹ A grandfather, such as Laertes, was not a proper substitute, so that the goddess Athena herself, disguised as Mentor, must jump into the role of initiator;³⁰ and much of the youth’s subsequent learning is based on the stories about his father’s person and deeds, as told by Nestor and Menelaus.³¹ Even if we allow that the initiation could be performed by a relative from the maternal side,³² this possibility would also have been limited under the circumstances. Because of the intermarriage between the

²⁶ Only the number of Odysseus’ ships matches that of the fleet with which he had once come to Troy: in the beginning, they were twelve (IX 159, cf. II. II 637).

²⁷ On the other hand, Heubeck (1989, 10 f.) points out “a certain similarity between what the poet tells us of Penelope’s Suitors and the actions and fate of Odysseus’ men during their wanderings”, both groups being “envisaged as rivals to Odysseus” and “subject to folly and blindness”.

²⁸ In XVIII 125 ff. Odysseus mentions father of the Suitor Amphinomus, Nisus of Dulichium, as known to him by hearsay; Melaneus, the father of Amphimedon, is said XXIV 102 ff. to have been a guest friend of Agamemnon, without mentioning his eventual participation in the expedition led by the latter against Troy; Antinous’ father Eupheithes lives to see the death of his son and to lead the revolt against Odysseus (XXIV 423 sq.).

²⁹ Cf. Clarke 1963, 143 f.: Telemachus’ “search is for more than news of his father: he seeks the social and family assurance of the heroic age, where sons are like their fathers because they have grown up in their shadows”.

³⁰ Already in the guise of Mentos she speaks to Telemachus ὥς τε πατὴρ ὦ παῖδι I 308.

³¹ According to Rose 1967, 398, Telemachus in the Telemachy gradually becomes worthy of being the son of Odysseus.

³² As in the case above-mentioned of Autolycus initiating Odysseus himself, which is a clear instance of Indo-European avunculate.

noble families of Ithaca and other islands, fathers-in-law would also be missing! Consequently the Suitors are representatives of a fatherless post-war generation, which is a handicap resulting in their social immaturity. Despite their age, they prove themselves to be unprepared not only for the roles assigned to them by birth, those of leading warriors and petty kings, but also for the ordinary ones of masters of households and husbands. All over the world marriage is prohibited before one is formally admitted to adulthood, which in the archaic societies presupposes male initiation; and until a youth passes it his sexual life is subject to restrictions. But what happens in Ithaca? In spite of their social and legal incapacity, the noblest youths from all over the region dare to woo no less than the absent king's wife and additionally to court his maids. This unruliness of the Suitors provokes what we may call a nuptial blockade. The queen resists for three years, and none of her Suitors, who are more than a hundred most desirable bachelors in this part of the Greek world, looks for any other bride. In Sparta, which otherwise serves the poet as contrast to the Ithacan disorder, the situation is opposite. There Menelaus, a heroic father who came back from the war, celebrates with his *geítones* and *etaí* a double marriage of his son and daughter at the moment of Telemachus' arrival (IV 1 ff.). Only with Odysseus' return is the social order reestablished in his kingdom, but in a drastic way: he subjects the Suitors to a collective initiatory trial, they all fail to pass it and their failure is followed by the violent death of them all. Although this may be understood as an act of personal revenge, Odysseus himself explains it (XXII 411 ff.) as a lot assigned to them by gods (*moíra theôn, pómos*) because of their reckless deeds (*schétlia érga, atasthalíai*), for they "honoured no one of men upon the earth, were he evil or good, whosoever came among them". Penelope says the same, with almost the same words (*hýbris, kakà érga, atasthalíai*) at XXIII 63 ff. Otherwise formulated, the Suitors deserved their fate for they steadily violated the laws of hospitality both as intrusive guests in Odysseus' house and as usurping masters of it. The contrast is especially sharp between their behaviour and what we called here Telemachus' initiation, which starts with the youth appropriately receiving a guest (Mentes) and proceeds mainly by him learning and training the same rules of guestfriendship. The emphasis put on it is paralleled by the importance given in the poem to Zeus *Xeínios*, the only deity believed to be common to all civilised peoples (Greeks, Egyptians: XIV 283 f.) but ignored by barbarians (Cyclopes: IX 270 ff.), who watches not only over *xeiniē* but generally over all relations between the non-

-consanguineous, including foreigners, refugees (also called *Hikési-os*), and captives.³³ As I have long surmised,³⁴ Zeus may have inherited this particular function from his Indo-European prototype *Dyéus*, the divinised Sky, in view of the importance the early Indo-Europeans attached to those relationships, as reflected both in vocabulary (the same words PIE **ǵhostis*, Greek **xénwos*, Vedic *arí-* meaning 'guest', 'foreigner' and 'enemy', gentlemen being designated as 'guest-masters': Slavic *gospoda*, Vedic *aryá-*)³⁵ and in some archaic customs concerning war-prisoners and hostages. Thus whereas the repeated attempts to detect Near-Eastern influences in the *Odyssey* might be plausible for some details of Odysseus' wanderings,³⁶ the story of his return proves to be deeply rooted in Indo-European traditions — although typological parallels to it may be found as far away as Oceania.

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³³ Those who regard Theoclymenus as an intrusive figure in the *Odyssey* (cf. Hoekstra 1989, 245 f.) should notice a consistency between the episode in XV 220 ff., where he as a suppliant gives Telemachus a chance to take over the kingly prerogative of asylum and by a prophecy asserts to the youth that "no family in Ithaca is kingly than yours" (XV 533; cf. Clarke 1963, 136), and Theoclymenus' role in XX 350 ff., where he interprets the bad omens after a drastic violation of the rules of hospitality by a Suitor (Ctesippus, who under the mocking name of *xéimion* has hurled a missile at Odysseus disguised as a beggar, 287 ff.).

³⁴ Loma 2004, 2006; more on the etymology of the words in question in my paper entitled "Krieg und Frieden — vom Indogermanischen zum Griechischen", to appear in the Proceedings of the XII Conference of Indo-European Society held in Cracow 2004.

³⁵ This does not mean that hospitality was a privilege of noblemen; there is, in the *Odyssey*, the example of Eumaeus the swineherd which proves the contrary.

³⁶ Eckert 1963 is obviously wrong in deriving the early literature of the Greeks in general (51) and the initiatory patterns of the *Odyssey* in particular (55 f.) from Near East; it should be noted that his comparative horizon seems to be limited here to the Bible.

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ДО ХОМЕРА ПРЕКО ВАН ГЕНЕПА: НЕКЕ ИНИЦИЈАЦИЈСКЕ ТЕМЕ У *ОДИСЕЈИ*

Резиме

У прва четири певања *Одисеје* средишњу улогу игра Одисејев син Телемах, па се тај део пева каткад назива „Телемахијом”, а има стручњака који претпостављају да је он могао бити засебна епска песма пре него што је уклопљен у нашу *Одисеју*. Телемах, који је у доба очеве одласка под Троју био новорођенче, сада је израстао у двадесетогодишњег младића, кога не само у његовом наследном праву на престо, него и у улози господара властитог дома угрожавају мајчини просци; испољавајући новостечену самосвест, он оштро иступа против њих, најпре у двору, а затим у скупштини, па у пратњи богиње Атине у лику Одисејева пријатеља Ментора предузима далек пут преко мора, на Пелопонез, не би ли дознао нешто о своме оцу од његових сабораца. Нестор у Пилу и Менелај у Спарти лепо га дочекују, али му о Одисеју не могу рећи ништа више од онога што Атина већ зна; стога је са гледишта главне радње *Одисеје*, усмерене на Одисејев повратак и његово поновно преузимање места које му у породици и друштву припада, Телемахово путовање пуко губљење времена, и то прилично опасно, јер је иза себе код куће оставио раздражене просце, који би у његовом одсуству могли присилити Пенелопу да се преуда (заправо, они се спремају да га у повратку из заседе убију). Оно што Телемах на том путу добија, пре свега је посредно упознавање са сопственим оцем кроз Несторова, Менелајева и Хеленина казивања о њему и потврда, из њихових уста, да је прави и достојан син тога оца; но осим те психолошке, самоспознајне, његов боравак у Пилу и Спарти има и ширу „педагошку” димензију, због чега је још у антици „Телемахија” означавана као својеврсна *paideía*, претеча нововековног „образовног” романа (*Bildungsroman*). Тамо Телемах има прилику да се упути не само у усмено предање о јуначким подвизима претходног и сопственог нараштаја (тројански јунаци, Орест), него и у правила понашања у „великом свету” који представљају Не-

сторов и Менелајев двор. Стога се може прихватити тумачење по којем је „Телемахија” својеврсна иницијација, вангенеповски „обред прелаза” из дечаштва у јунаштво, премда је једини досад препознат ритуални елемент у њој Телемахово потајно напуштање мајчиног окриља у којем је одрастао. Овде се указује на други могући одраз обредне подлоге Телемаховог путовања, и то на основу просторно и временски далеке аналогije коју пружа меланезански обичај звани *кула*, описан у књизи Бронислава Малиновског *Арџонауџи зајадноџ Пацифика*. У „прстену *куле*”, који обухвата осамнаест острва, учествују хиљаде људи, већином поглавице, који прелазе у чуновима стотине миља да би размењивали огрлице и наруквице од шкољки, при чему оне прве круже у смеру казаљке на сату, а ове друге у обрнутом смеру; у тој размени нема економског интереса, јер ти предмети служе само да истакну друштвени положај својих привремених власника.

У хомерском друштву је она сфера коју бисмо модерним терминима означили као „међународно право” и „спољнополитички односи” била обухваћена појмом „гостинског пријатељства” (*xeinīē*), и управо оно је тема која прожима „Телемахију”, на чијем почетку Телемах достојно дочекује очевог *xeīnos*-а Мента, а која се наставља младићевом првом пловидбом преко мора у посету очевим „гостинским пријатељима” и завршава његовим повратком у лађи крцатој гостинским даровима које је добио од Менелаја, и који је свакако требало да оснаже углед младог претендента на престо у његовом завичају. Појам *xeinīē* игра важну улогу и у расплету *Одисеје*, у убиству просаца, јер се оно оправдава њиховим нарушавањем гостинских обичаја. Како је то већ запажено, надметање просаца у затезању Одисејева лука, које претходи њиховом покољу, има ритуално, и то иницијатичко, значење. Оно се може поредити са грчком легендом о постанку Скита код Херодота, али и са такмичењем за руку принцезе Сите у *Рамајани*, коју осваја Рама пошто је једини успео да затегне (заправо сломи) Шивин лук. И Одисејев лук има посебно порекло, он је некада припадао славном стрелцу Еуриту који се равнао с Аполоном; уосталом, затезање лука у Одисејеву двору одвија се управо на празник тога бога, а он је не само божански стрелац, него и оличење ефеба и покровитељ младићке иницијације, повезан дубинским везама прасродства са староиндијским Рудром-Шивом, који је такође „Стрелац” (*Śarva-*) и предводник небеске чете Марутâ која оличава земаљску ратничку дружину, те се овде може говорити о још праиндоевропском епском мотиву са јасном иницијатичком подлогом. Како се испиту подвргавају сви просци, имплицитно излази да они, иако већ у зрелим годинама, још нису били иницирани; то се објашњава чињеницом да су они представници генерације одрасле без очева, будући да потичу из најугледнијих породица са подручја одакле је Одисеј двадесет година раније одвео борце у дванаест лађа под Троју, од којих се нико није вратио осим њега самог, који преузима улогу иницијанта и смрћу кажњава њихов неуспех. Његово образложе-

ње: да нису поштовали законе гостопримства, појачава контраст према Телемаху, једином који се показао кадрим да затегне лук, јер је он, премда је и сам одрастао без оца, Атининим залагањем успео оно што они, иако старији од њега, нису: да у социјалном смислу сазри и израсте у личност саобразну своме пореклу и друштвеном положају.

