# Telemachus as a Charter

Senior H.A.B. Thesis

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**Telemachus as a Charter**

A dominant opinion in both ancient and modern philosophy is that as any child grows from an adolescent into an adult, his character is cultivated by both outside forces (i.e. examples and compulsion from his environment and upbringing) and his own efforts. Children today have people such as parents, family, teachers, and coaches who aim to give them a sense of self-worth and confidence that will allow them to succeed in life. Children look to these people for guidance, and from them they receive instruction and care that aid in their growth into adulthood. In the literature of antiquity, this concept is first seen in the story of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. The *Odyssey* recounts this boy's growth from a quiet and unassertive youth, being controlled by the suitors invading his house and by his indecisive mother, into a hero worthy of standing next to his father in life and in combat. He experiences the strong guidance of his protectoress, the goddess Athena, who is his main instructor in his journey to adulthood, and he also learns from visiting the courts of Kings Nestor and Menelaus, from whom he comes to know the proper practices of a Greek adult. However, what makes his development most complete is his growth to understand his own *kleos* ("self-identity," further detailed on page 8), separate from that of his father, an act toward which Athena directs him.

Not only is the story of Telemachus the first true account of character growth in ancient literature, it also is also a tremendous example of the importance of heeding the advice of the divine gods and other respected authority figures in one's development. Telemachus is faced with many challenges along his path to becoming a full adult worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as his father, but Athena, above all, is there with him through everything. She advises him to hold an assembly meeting,

journey to Pylos and Sparta for news of his father, stand up to the suitors, and to take control of his father's household. Moreover, Kings Nestor and Menelaus also give Telemachus much good advice and training on his path to manhood. He does not disregard any of the advice given to him by these figures, and he greatly benefits. His story serves as a "charter" (following the theory of Bronislav Malinowski) for the successful growth of a boy into a man, mainly by listening to advice from important figures (like Athena) and acting on it.

I will use four other oral myths which are handed down in literary form by Ovid to show to perils of not listening to advice from the gods or authority figures. The stories of Phaethon, Adonis, Icarus, and Narcissus clearly illustrate why all young people should adhere to the teachings of the gods and their fathers, as all four of them met with death because of their insolence. Just as the story of Telemachus serves as a positive charter for a successful growth process, these four young mythical men are the more common negative charter in the realm of achieving manhood. All four of them fail to heed the advice of the gods or other authority figures in their lives, and as a result they are ultimately stunted in their growth. This negative outcome is much more abundant in myths concerning boys, showing just how unique the story of Telemachus is.

## Malinowski's Charter Theory

The work of Bronislav Malinowski is very important in the development of modern myth theory. While stranded among the Trobriand Islanders during World War I, he used his time with the Pacific Island people to study their oral folklore, social institutions,

and culture.[1] Taking into account the context, performance, function, and belief of all the Trobriand folktales to which he was exposed, Malinowski was able to differentiate between folktales, legends, and myths, a distinction which the islanders themselves also made.[2] These determinations made possible his charter theory for which he is widely known.

The folktales of the islanders are known as *kukwaneou*, and they were told after dark in November around a fire. The performance of the narrator, who is considered the private owner of the story, is essential to the success of these tales, and these pieces are commonly regarded as fiction. In modern studies of ancient folktales, they are often considered ones of adventure, sometimes filled with fantastic beings and ingenious strategies on the part of the hero.[3] According to Malinowski, the main function of the *kukwaneou* is the amusement of the listener, and they do not serve any purpose in terms of functionality in the islanders' daily life.[4] This also holds very true for the modern view of these stories, as they primarily serve for the amusement of listeners.[5]

The islanders refer to their legends (or sagas) as *libwogwo*, which is a term that includes "historical accounts" directly witnessed by the narrator as well as "hearsay tales." They are often told during the season of the long trading voyages, but they can be told at any time, most often whenever someone specifically inquires about facts.[6] These tales are not told for the amusement of the listener, but rather for their enlightenment about a certain topic; this categorizes most societies' concept of legends. It is important to remember that these stories are all based in some historical truth,

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[1] Morford and Lenardon, 4.
[2] Bascom, 165.
[3] Morford and Lenardon, 1.
[4] Bascom, 165.
[5] Morford and Lenardon, 1.

however fanciful and imaginative they are.[7] The narrators do not privately own these stories, in contrast with the folktales; they all have some perceptible relationship to history and are believed by all to be true. Thus, the main function of the legends in general is to enlighten the listeners and to provide them with necessary information.[8]

Lastly, Malinowski distinguished the myths of the islanders, which are known as *liliu*. He determined that they are told during the preparation for rituals which take place at various times throughout the year. These myths are not conveyed in any stereotyped way, nor are they privately owned by the narrator or told for any real amusement. He also saw that the islanders regarded them not merely as true, but as stories that were venerable and sacred to them.[9] Myths for the Greeks were very much concerned with the gods and humankind's relations with them, a topic that certainly included religious ritual and explanations.[10] He ultimately determined that the main function of all myths is to serve as a justification of or a "charter" for the rituals with which they were associated. Herein lies the basis of his "charter theory." To Malinowski, myths were related to practical life, and they explained existing facts and social customs by reference to tradition, meaning that the myth confirms, or is a "charter" for, the institution, custom, or belief.[11]

The charter theory implies that in a traditional society every custom tends to be validated or confirmed by a myth, which states precedent for it but does not seek to explain it in any logical or philosophical sense. A great many of these mythical accounts are falsely historical, in that they claim to offer a historical event as the reason for a present state of affairs, although the event is often imaginary or at least of a

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[6] Bascom, 165.
[7] Morford and Lenardon, 1.
[8] Bascom, 165.
[9] Bascom, 165.
[10] Morford and Lenardon, 1.

different order from our direct experience of the events.[12] The islanders among whom Malinowski found himself immersed were very much of this world, and the only way that they would believe stories about mythical creatures is that, like all human beings, these stories transcended their limitations of reason and fact. Percy Cohen relates why a culture would utilize imaginary events to justify real-life customary practices, "The introduction of imaginary events takes the point of origin out of the realm of memory; and the introductions of unreal events gives the story a quality which transcends the mundane."[13] Stories of mythical nature tend to have more effect on a listening audience because they take them to a more interesting world in which they can be immersed.

This use of supernatural and imaginary events is also a strong characteristic of Greek oral mythology, which can clearly be seen throughout the constant interaction between gods, humans, and imaginary creatures. However, it is incredibly rare that we ever find an uncontaminated tale that fits solely into the category of myth, legend, or folktale. The traditional groupings of myth, legend, and folktale are but useful guides as we try to make sense out of the large variety of classical tales.[14] The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer are commonly given the distinction of legend, but there are many elements of myth and folktale in them as well. Morford and Lenardon elaborate on the blurred nature of these distinctions in stories like the *Odyssey*, "How loose these categories are can be seen, for example, in the legends of Odysseus or of the Argonauts, which contain elements of history but are full of stories that may be designated as myths and folktales."[15] The exploits of Telemachus can be considered partly under the realm of myth because of the large part Athena plays in all of it. I will

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[11] Morford and Lenardon, 4.
[12] Kirk, 60.
[13] Cohen, 344.
[14] Morford and Lenardon, 1.
[15] Morford and Lenardon, 1-2.

show how the story of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* serves as a charter for the proper development of all Greek youth, of which listening to the gods and other authority figures plays a large part. Thus, it will be seen that Malinowski's charter theory is exemplified in the tale of Odysseus' son.

## "And All of Them Bit Their Lips in Amazement at Telemachus"

Although the hero Odysseus is Homer's main focus in the *Odyssey*, extensive attention must be paid to the very evident change that occurs in the person of Telemachus, whom some scholars view as the only character in Greek literature to truly grow from boyhood into manhood. The epic opens with a focus on the current state of Odysseus' household, and Telemachus very much resembles an immature young man who is very dependent on his mother. The suitors have a stranglehold on the assets and luxuries of his father's estate, and there is essentially nothing that the unassertive teenager can or will do about it. Thus enters Athena, ever the divine protectoress of Odysseus and his family, and she tries to instill in him some confidence by sending him off in search of news concerning his father's whereabouts. He is very attentive to her advice and counseling, and he always heeds what the goddess has to say to him; moreover, he regularly takes note of the vital information supplied by other wise people and authority figures on his journey, especially that of Nestor and Menelaus. While on his own slightly epic journey, he learns much about the world outside of Ithaca and about both his father's *kleos* and, in turn, his own. He returns with new knowledge, experience, and confidence both to take back control of his father's house and to oppose the suitors, whether or not Odysseus should return. Throughout the *Odyssey*,

Telemachus grows from an immature boy into a man worthy to be his heroic father's son, all because of the encouragement of Athena, the experiences gained on his journey, and a new sense of *kleos* that he develops. It is largely because he heeds the advice of the goddess Athena and other important mortal figures that he develops into a proper and heroic Ithacan adult, and thus the myth of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* is a prime example of the charter theory of Malinowski. The story serves as a charter for the successful growth of boy into man, highlighting the importance that Greek society in the time of Homer places on listening intently to the gods and parents who are able to give good advice. If he had not accepted the call of Athena, then he would have remained the unassertive youth dominated by the suitors which he had always been.

The first glimpse that we have of Telemachus shows him to be a young man surrounded by the suitors who are destroying his household. His thoughts are centered around the return of Odysseus, who he hopes will return and rid the palace of its invaders: "He sat among the suitors…imagining in his mind his great father, how he might come back and all throughout the house might cause the suitors to scatter."[16] He sits among the reveling suitors, resenting the fact that they are destroying the lives and estate of him and his mother Penelope, but he does not believe that he can do anything to rectify the situation. Thus the boy's thoughts can only turn to hopes for his long-lost father's return and triumph, not that he himself may do something about the situation. Peter Jones sums up Telemachus' state rather simply: "He wonders whether Odysseus will return and scatter the suitors and control his household again…he is helpless and desperately in need of his father."[17] Athena finds him in this sorry condition when she comes to Ithaca.

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[16] *Odyssey* 1.114-116 (For the rest of the chapter, I will make all citations from this primary source within the text of the work).
[17] Jones, 499.

Upon sitting down and talking to him, Athena brings to light the obstacles confronting Telemachus in his growth into adulthood. This young man really does not have knowledge of the heroic men in his lineage, which would allow him to better assert himself as an adult. He never has had his father around him while he was growing up, and this affects him so much that he even doubts that he is Odysseus' son and wishes that his father had been a fortunate man who died of old age (1.214-220). Moreover, Athena suggests that Telemachus does not even know well his heroic grandfather, Laertes, "Your father and I claim to be guest-friends by heredity from far back, as you would know if you went to the aged hero Laertes, who, they say, no longer comes to the city now, but away by himself on his own land leads a hard life" (1.187-190). It is partly due to his unfamiliarity with the important men in his family that Telemachus has inherited none of the *kleos* that Odysseus possesses.

It is while speaking to Zeus that Athena reveals her purpose for coming to Telemachus' aid, "so that among people he may win a good reputation" (1.95). This is, in essence, the definition of the term *kleos*; it is the concept of reputation, identity, and what people say about you, which can be gained by stories of heroic deeds, songs of bards, erected monuments, or even just news of a person.[18] Athena then makes Telemachus aware of his need for *kleos* by talking it out of him. She wonders aloud whether he can be Odysseus' son, but then concludes that he must be because he looks just like him (1.206-212). We become more aware of his lack of *kleos* when he expresses doubt about this (1.216) and then wishes that he had been the son of a more fortunate man (1.217-220). Knowledge of his father's exploits would certainly not allow him to feel this way. It is not enough for the boy that Penelope is his mother, as Athena

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[18] Jones, 498.

suggests (1.222-223), because Telemachus does not really know the man whom he father is or was. His father did not die on the battlefield, and because of his unknown status, he did not win great *kleos* for himself and for his son thereafter:

> I should not have sorrowed over his dying if he had gone down among his companions in the land of the Trojans, or in the arms of his friends, after he had wound up the fighting. So all the Achaians would have heaped a grave mound over him, and he would have won great fame for himself and for his son hereafter. (1.236-240)

Telemachus himself says here that even if Odysseus had all the *kleos* in the world, it is of little use to him without a public burial by which it can be acknowledged and passed on.[19] Because Telemachus laments so, it is clear that he desires to have *kleos* for himself; however, he has not acted on it yet, and it is the impetus then provided by Athena that compels him to seek his own *kleos*.

Athena then offers help and advice to Telemachus in order to guide him in a maturation process, and she calls to his attention both his lineage and a journey by which he can gain *kleos* for himself. She is forging a link between Telemachus and Odysseus, and she is challenging him to uphold the honor and reputation that is already a characteristic of his family.[20] She first advises him to call a meeting of the Ithacan assembly in order to publicly denounce the suitors (1.272-274). He is then to go on a voyage to Pylos and Sparta in order to seek news of his father, and if he finds that Odysseus has died, he is to return to Ithaca and erect a burial mound in his honor (1.280-292). She advises him then to rid his father's house of the suitors (293-296). All

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[19] Jones, 500.
[20] Millar and Carmichael, 59.

of these events are instrumental in Athena's plan for Telemachus to gain some of the *kleos* he deserves, as they will all bring fame and renown to him through his own actions or knowledge of those of Odysseus. The next two lines of advice from Athena sum up the exact reason that Telemachus needs to do all of these things: "You should not go on clinging to your childhood. You are no longer of an age to do that (1.296-297). Athena makes it clear to the boy that he must do these deeds to become a man worthy of *kleos*. She then leaves him with a reminder of the fame of young Orestes, who had recently avenged his father Agamemnon by killing his murderer, Aegisthus, and she instructs him that he also needs to be so bold, so that later generations will too come to praise him (1.298-302).

It is clear that he appreciates the advice that the goddess has given to him and that his change into manhood has begun, because he dives right into the divine tasks of the goddess. The reader can see an immediate change in the demeanor of the youth as a result of Athena's words, and he wastes no time acting on the instructions that she gave him. The young man's growth can now commence, as Millar relates, "It is here that the change in him begins; he now has a plan to accomplish, an ideal to attain, where before he was aimless and impotent."[21] This growth in Telemachus is one of both mind and action, as he gains confidence, which leads to him begin to assert himself. First, he tells off Penelope rather rudely for objecting to the song of Phemios, the singer (1.346-359), and then he harshly rebukes the suitors for the tumult that they were raising within his house (1.368-380). Both of the parties addressed by Telemachus were surprised at the sudden confidence in his demeanor, and they were beginning to see the signs of a man before themselves.

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[21] Millar and Carmichael, 60.

Telemachus then begins to carry out the plan that Athena conveyed to him by calling a meeting of the public assembly (2.6-8). He makes a forcible speech to the people about the evils the suitors are committing within the house of Odysseus (2.40-79), but it does not go over as well as he hoped, with Antinoos giving him a rather offensive answer in reply (2.85-128). His hopes are somewhat hurt, but he does not let this poor outcome get him down because he knows that following Athena's advice was the correct thing to do (which he is shown by the omen of the two eagles at 2.146-154). Telemachus knows that Athena's suggested tour of the Peloponnese the proper course for him, so he rejects the false kindness of Antinoos and the suitors and predicts their destruction as a result of his voyage (2.309-320). She, in the guise of Mentor, aids him in getting a ship and crew together, and he sets out on his journey to gain news of his father's whereabouts (2.382-434). Further showing that he is growing independent of his mother, he manages to leave the palace without her even finding out, lest she try to retain him there (2.373-376). Thus, Telemachus realizes the importance of the advice that Athena is giving to him, and he follows it in hopes that he may rid his house of the suitors and learn information about his father, gaining his desired *kleos*.

Once Telemachus reaches Pylos and the citadel of King Nestor, it becomes quite obvious that he still has a lot of growing up to do.[22] He tells Athena that he has never been in the presence of such a regal and heroic figure as the elderly Nestor, and he has literally no idea how to act, behave, or approach the great man: "Mentor, how shall I go up to him, how close with him? I have no experience in close discourse. There is embarrassment for a young man who must question his elder" (3.22-24). Telemachus is fortunate in that he has the divine intervention of Athena on his side, and she,

[22] Reece, 59.

disguised as Mentor, guides him through the greeting and libation processes. He is still aware of his need for her guidance in such matters, so he rightly follows her lead (3.63-65). Telemachus identifies himself as the son of Odysseus upon Nestor's inquiry (3.83-84), and then Nestor remarks about the wonderful resemblance of Odysseus that Telemachus makes (3.122-125); this is just the first good thing that Nestor does for Telemachus in his quest for *kleos*. He also greatly urges the young man to live up to the good reputation that Odysseus has gained for his family: "So you too, dear friend, for I see you are tall and splendid, be brave too, so that men unborn may speak well of you" (3.199-200). Nestor later senses the support that Athena is giving to Telemachus, likening it to the constant guidance that she would give to Odysseus, and he assures the young man that he will never fail as long as the gods are guiding him as they are now (3.374-379). The king is showing the youth the importance of following the divine advice given to him, because the goddess will allow him to do great things. These are great boosts that Nestor gives to the adolescent, as they are causing his confidence to climb higher; the garrulous old man gives him a greater sense of the *kleos* that both he and his father possess by speaking of them in a reverent way. In addition, Nestor grants unto him the same piece of advice that Athena had given to him while in Ithaca: to be mindful of the *kleos* Orestes won when he killed Aegisthus (3.306-316). He is mindful of this advice when he returns home to rid his house of the suitors with his father. Telemachus makes some mistakes during the visit, as he blurts out his lack of confidence that the gods will help him get rid of the suitors (3.226-228), for which he is immediately chastised by Athena (3.230-238). He is on the path to manhood, but he still needs to endure more visits and episodes to get there, which is why Athena endorses Telemachus' next trip to Sparta (3.357-358).

Athena leaves Telemachus while he journeys to Sparta, but he is accompanied by Peisistratus, the son of King Nestor. Upon approaching and entering the palace of Menelaus, Telemachus is instantly taken aback by the grandeur that he beholds, an amount that he had not previously witnessed (4.43-48). Despite his awe at the sight of Menelaus' palace and despite the fact that he is visiting one of the most important kings in the history of the Greeks, Telemachus handles himself much better in the presence of this hero than he did in front of Nestor: "Telemachus is making progress; at the beginning of Book 3 the mere sight of a hero panicked him; here he seems quite sure of himself before Menelaus."[23] Again, manners are stressed within the Spartan household, as Menelaus becomes angry when his servants do not immediately give hospitality to the strangers (4.31-36) and as he overhears Telemachus whisper secretly to Peisistratus about his possessions rivaling those of Zeus (4.78-79). Telemachus receives more assurance of the *kleos* that he possesses, as both Helen and Menelaus remark to each other about how much he resembles Odysseus physically. Helen, much to the amazement of Telemachus, recognizes the boy as Odysseus' son before she is even told who his father was: "I think I never saw such a likeness, neither in man nor woman, and wonder takes me as I look on him, as this man has a likeness to the son of great-hearted Odysseus" (4.141-143). Menelaus immediately agrees with his wife's assessment (4.148-150), as he had already recognized him but kept silent (4.116-119), and later confirms that Telemachus is of a superior line: "You are of true blood, dear child, in the way you reason" (4.611). Telemachus also receives examples of morals and divine reverence for his life from the stories of Menelaus: Proteus tells Menelaus he should have sacrificed before embarking (4.472-480), Ajax blasphemed against the

[23] Clarke, 135.

gods in order to receive his fate (4.502-509), and Proteus told Menelaus to return home at once after informing him about the death of Agamemnon (4.543-547). Clarke indicates that Telemachus particularly learned from this last example: "Homer shows us that this example is not lost on Telemachus. He refuses to protract his stay in Sparta."[24] In the end he impresses Menelaus by turning down the gift of three horses because horses are so impractical on Ithaca (4.600-608), prompting him to comment positively on Telemachus' wisdom (4.611), as previously mentioned.

These two visits to prominent members of Greek society do wonders for the maturation of Telemachus and his confidence in himself. He ends up impressing both of the statesmen during his visits, especially Menelaus (as at 4.600-608), as he grows in experience throughout his stays and learns from what he sees and hears. The time he spends in the house of Menelaus helps him achieve the manhood encouraged by Athena, especially evidenced by the fact that he and Menelaus converse man to man (no longer man to child) as the month goes on.[25] Throughout the course of his visits, he hears on many different occasions that he is worthy to be the son of the great man Odysseus, something which he doubted earlier and of which he needed assurance. Indeed, Telemachus learns proper morals and manners from his time with Menelaus, and from his stories he hears that Odysseus does indeed possess great *kleos*; he is also convinced that he has a right to that *kleos*. He asks both of the kings to tell him the truth about his father not because of what he himself has done, but because of what Odysseus has done (in the formulaic lines 3.98-101 and 4.328-331). In other words, Telemachus is stating in public his right to inherit the consequences of his *father's* actions. Thus in the first four books, he discovers that he *can* lay claim to his father's

[24] Clarke, 135.
[25] Millar and Carmichael, 61.

*kleos* and own it himself.[26] He now has earned the adjective of *pepnumenos*, “prudent,” with which Homer so frequently refers to him. He plans future actions with the foresight and common sense of a mature adult. This is evident as he gives positive orders to Eumaios to return to the estate (16.147-153), and as he politely questions the plans of his father to make trial of everyone in the house (16.308-320).

Telemachus’ new confidence and independence is best represented in his increased authority when addressing the suitors as well as his mother. Before Telemachus sailed for Pylos and Sparta, the suitors took his rebukes *grano salis* (1.381-382), for even though they were surprised, they by no means respected his authority. However, after he returns, there are three prime examples of Telemachus exerting this sway that are likely respected by those whom he addresses. In Book 18, Telemachus orders the suitors to go home for the night after Eurymachos throws a footstool at the beggar Odysseus and tumult erupts (18.394-409). The suitors suddenly realize that he means business, and they peacefully and almost immediately acquiesce to Telemachus’ orders (18.410-428). During the bow contest, Telemachus openly chastises Penelope, saying that only he has the power over the bow of Odysseus: “My mother, no Achaian man has more authority over this bow than I, to give or withhold, at my pleasure” (21.344-345). Moreover, he makes the very bold statement that his alone is the power over the household, which indeed is a difficult pill for his mother to swallow (21.352-355). Then his boldest assertion of authority is to the suitors, as Ktesippos misses the beggar Odysseus with the “guest-gift” of the ox hoof (20.299-303). Telemachus informs the assailant that he would now be dead if the hoof had struck Odysseus, and he adds that he himself would rather die than see his father’s palace

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[26] Jones, 501.

destroyed by the suitors any longer (20.304-319). Everyone is struck by his boldness, as this challenge calls forth the strongest words that Telemachus has yet spoken (20.320). All of the suitors remain silent at this, respecting the authority of this new man among them, and Agelaus then warns them to strike the stranger no more (20.322-325). It is evident that everyone is beginning to see the confidence within the son of Odysseus, and they are also beginning to respect his authority over the household and listen to his orders as a result.

While on his journey, Telemachus also develops a very adult sense of responsibility which he could not claim to possess before he left. After searching for news of Odysseus across the Peloponnese, he does not receive much that is very promising, as it has been years since Menelaus last heard of his father. Thus it is plausible to believe that he doubts there is much chance for his father to return home; he knew this before he set sail for Pylos and Sparta, but he just did not want to come to grips with it, in his immaturity. Along with accepting this sad fact, Telemachus is now determined to care for the embattled estate (which he ironically tells to the disguised Odysseus) that is now rightly his responsibility (16.118-129). Millar and Carmichael reiterate Telemachus' new sense of duty to his household: "He has had time to realize that his father must be dead, and he shoulders the responsibility for the house in Ithaca and family fortune without obvious hesitation."[27] Athena bids him to remember his possessions, the suitors going through them, and finally to leave Sparta immediately (15.10-42); this is all Telemachus needs to convince him to return at once, as his reverence for divine advice and his sense of responsibility have developed since he has been away. He explains his position to Menelaus, mainly how there is no one to look

[27] Millar and Carmichael, 62.

after his possessions in his absence, and he takes his leave of the king (15.87-91). After he returns home, he also shows his prudence by asking Piraeus to look after his many valuable gifts from Menelaus, as he does not wish the suitors to get a glimpse of them if he should be killed (17.78-83). He is also conscientious and sensible in his growth, knowing that it is not right by the gods to harm singers, so he pleads with his father to spare Phemius, who did nothing wrong (22.356). He also knows that it would be wrong to slay the man who raised him up from a child, Medon the herald, and he also wisely entreats his father to spare this one (22.357-358). Telemachus develops great senses of adult responsibility and prudence from the guidance of Athena and his experiences on his voyage.

Coupled with his clearer acceptance that Odysseus is most likely dead, Telemachus is also coming to grips with the situation in which his mother finds herself. The situation with the suitors is nearing a breaking point, Eurymachus is closing in on an engagement and Penelope's family is urging her to choose him (15.15-18). He is smart enough to know that he cannot face the suitors alone, but he also knows that his estate will run out of resources within the year if something is not done about them (1.287-292). He is also starting to believe that his mother may be ready to marry one of them, which expedites his decision to return home from Sparta (16.33-35, 73-77). Telemachus now grows tired of his mother's wishy-washy behavior, as his possessions are dwindling and she still has not made up her mind on what she will do (16.122-128).

There is steady friction between Penelope and her son that we see at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, and it becomes increasingly grating on both of them after Telemachus returns. Our first evidence of the rift is Telemachus' scolding her as she objects to Phemius' song (1.346-359). She becomes additionally hurt by his departure

for Pylos and Sparta without even cluing her in, and she gives him a motherly chastisement when he returns (17.41-44). The incident during the bow contest suffices as another example, as Telemachus orders Penelope to the loom and claims Odysseus' bow to be a matter of men, namely himself (21.344-353). This tension is partly due to the fact that Penelope cannot quite grasp the fact that her son has indeed grown up,[28] and Eva Brann echoes this sentiment, "The relations of this newly assertive son of the house to his mother naturally are quite changed…he had been a little rebellious before he left, but now his independence is more adult."[29] Penelope ultimately decides upon the bow contest in order to end the ordeal of the suitors' eating up the possessions of the house, and this is mainly due to the fact that she fears Telemachus, the only link to Odysseus that she has left, is growing impatient with her: "My son, while he was still a child and thoughtless, would not let me marry and leave the house of my husband; but now that he is grown a tall man…he even prays me to go home out of the palace, fretting over the property" (19.530-534). Thus it is her acceptance of Odysseus' certain death and Telemachus' impatience, due to his increasing maturity, that ultimately cause Penelope to resort to the bow contest.

There is one crucial point to show the growth and maturation of Telemachus: he has won *kleos* on his own. A passage at the end of Book 13 gives great insight into the son's success in this endeavor, and here Pallas Athena directly tells Odysseus that he set out to discover his own *kleos* and was successful. After she informs Odysseus that his son had traveled the Peloponnese to seek news of his father (13.413-415), he then asks the goddess why she did not tell Telemachus that his father was about to return (13.417-419). Athena replies that he set out in order to win *kleos* for himself, "It was I

[28] Millar and Carmichael, 63.
[29] Brann, 252.

myself who saw him along on that journey, so he would win reputation by going there" (13.421-423). It is important to note that Athena was the impetus for his journey, but Telemachus himself is the one who is winning his own reputation. Then she follows with words to assure Odysseus that his son is worthy of *kleos*[30]: "He has no hardship, but now is staying at his ease with the son of Atreus, and all abundance is by him" (13.423-424). Thus, Athena answers Odysseus' obvious question – did my son gain *kleos*? – before he could even answer it. The fact that Telemachus is staying comfortably under the roof of Menelaus is reassuring, but because "all abundance is by him," Athena is telling Odysseus that his son has indeed gained heroic respect. One of the most important proofs of heroism consists in the bestowal on the hero of material goods,[31] and she is informing Odysseus of the great generosity that Menelaus has shown to Telemachus (4.611-619) and that Helen will show (15.104-108). This is an important moment in the *Odyssey*, as Athena is informing Odysseus that his son is indeed worthy of *kleos* and of him.

Thus when Odysseus calls on his son to be responsible for behaving amongst the suitors in the exact same way that he himself must, Telemachus honors his father's and his own *kleos* by doing so. In Book 16, Odysseus informs his son that he must endure the pains that the suitors inflict on his father even though it is difficult for him, and that he must speak softly to the suitors even though they will not listen to him (16.274-280). Also, Odysseus, having said, "If you truly are my own son, and born of our own blood," tells Telemachus that he must not inform anyone at all of his father's return until the faithfulness of the household has been tried (16.299-305); he is trusting

[30] Jones, 502.
[31] Jones, 502.

his son alone to assist him in dispelling the suitors, a sure sign that he acknowledges his son's worth and *kleos*. Telemachus has matured a great deal up to this point, and he certainly does not forget what brought him there. He remains steadfast in his obedience of Odysseus' advice (as in 17.489-492), as his father is still in a position of authority over him and holds knowledge that he would be wise to heed. All of this emulation by the son leads ultimately to the furthering of his own *kleos*, and Telemachus' consistent obedience of Odysseus in the final books seems to be critically connected with Athena's promise of *kleos* early in Book 1.[32]

Thus, I find it very reasonable to claim that Telemachus develops from an immature young man into a responsible adult worthy of his own *kleos* and that this development is largely due to his willingness to follow the advice of Athena and others with wisdom around him. The growth of Telemachus into manhood stands as a charter in myth for the proper change of youth into adult; his process of growth by listening and experience reflects the Greek attitude at the time of Homer toward the positive transformation of youth. Telemachus is attentive to the guidance of Athena and the other authority figures (like his father) who were directing him on his path to manhood. He began the *Odyssey* as a young man with no real direction other than his dislike for what the suitors were doing to his house and mother and his desire for his father to return and rid the house of those suitors. Through the guidance of Athena and his voyage to Pylos and Sparta to visit with Nestor and Menelaus, Telemachus develops into a responsible man with purpose, and he realizes that he indeed can lay claim to the *kleos* of his father. He then honors that reputation and obeys his father in his plan to rid their house of the plague of the suitors. Telemachus' entire encounters are not just an

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[32] Jones, 505.

education, but rather a new world experienced,[33] whose values he would later utilize to display his *kleos*, as Clarke agrees, "It is not something taught but something imparted; it is an experience, one young man's initiation into a world he has inherited and whose values he will soon have to defend by force."[34] All in all, Telemachus uses the experience that he has gained to establish his own identity, but at the same time to continue to glorify the lineage of Odysseus.

## When Good Advice Goes Unheeded

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, published in the early first century A.D., is a vast collection of literary myths from both the Greek and Roman oral traditions (as well as a few others) that highlights the relationship between gods and men.[35] Within this work are the famous stories of Orpheus, Midas, and Europa, as well as many other well-known tales. However, in looking at the *Metamorphoses*, my intent is to focus on certain stories that inform readers of the perils of avoiding divine or authoritative advice during the growth to manhood. We have seen through the example of Telemachus just how important it is to heed the wisdom of divine and kingly figures, but the examples of Phaethon, Narcissus, Icarus, and Adonis give insight into the dangers of shunning these important warnings. Telemachus grows quite seamlessly from a boy into a man during the course of the *Odyssey*, whereas these four Ovidian characters meet an early downfall because of their insolence, and they are further proof of the "charter" status of

[33] Clarke, 141.
[34] Clarke, 141.
[35] Innes, 9-10.

the Telemachus story for the proper growth of Greek youths.  They are all examples of the negative charter for the growth of Greek youths, showing that boys who are inattentive to authoritative advice will not reach full adulthood.

The character Phaethon is the mortal son of Apollo, but he is questioning whether he really is the god's offspring.  So, in order to prove himself to be his father, Apollo rather foolishly grants Phaethon anything that he would wish (2.57-61), and the foolish youth asks to drive his father's heavenly chariot of the sun (2.62-64).  Apollo begs him to reconsider, stating that a mere mortal cannot hope to control the sun's chariot, "You are but a mortal, whereas the thing you desire is not one that a mortal can attempt" (73-75); however, this is to no avail, as Phaethon eagerly accepts the chariot. It is in this neglect of his father's advice that Phaethon meets his downfall; he should most certainly have listened to Apollo telling him that he would be unable to control the chariot.  The four divine horses realize that the weight of the chariot is different, and they in turn are startled and take Phaethon far off course.  The sun becomes too close to the earth, scorching all of the life on the planet and bringing discomfort to the gods (2.278ff).  Zeus hears the cries of the gods whose world is being destroyed, and he resolves to hurl a thunderbolt at the chariot and bring Phaethon out of the sky.  He is flung through the air and lands dead in the river Eridanus, where nymphs bury him and his mother Clymene mourns him (2.424-453).  We see through Phaethon's story just how important it is to heed the warnings of the gods.  He does not listen to the dangers foretold by his father Apollo, and in his hubris, he meets an unfortunate fate.  He should have tested his paternity in another way, like the god suggested; however, he would not be swayed by the advice that he was given.  Phaethon's dismissal of Apollo's warnings is a stark contrast to the actions of Telemachus when Odysseus reveals his plans to

him. The father warns that Telemachus cannot take action whenever the suitors assault him, disguised as a beggar, or his cover would be blown and his plans for judgment of the household would be ruined (16.274-305). Though it is difficult (as in 17.489-492), he respects his father's wishes and their plans are ultimately successful, as the son reaffirms his *kleos*.

Ovid tells the story of Adonis, the mortal man who becomes a lover of Venus. He is a very handsome young man, truly a beauty worthy of Venus. The goddess even prefers his company to that of her own son, Cupid (10.626-636). Venus takes him hunting, but she is sure to avoid those wild animals that could hurt him or her, like wild boars and lions (10.639-646). She cares for him very much, and she advises him to never go after animals which are just as keen to go after him, "It is not safe to be daring when the animal you are hunting is daring, too….Do not provoke wild animals which nature has armed against you, lest your desire for glory should cost me dear" (10.648-652). Venus' advice is certainly clear: Adonis must be sure to avoid all creatures that can harm him, or else he may die, causing her grief. Then, upon her departure, his curiosities somehow get the best of him right away. His dogs find a wild boar, and he attacks it with courage; suddenly the boar shrugs off the huntsman's attacks and clamps its teeth down on his groin (10.826-834). Adonis, as foretold by his mother, is mortally wounded because he pursued a dangerous animal, and Venus mourns him (10.838-849). The case of Adonis is another example of the pitfalls of resisting divine advice. Venus plainly told him to avoid animals that could harm him back, but he turned a deaf ear to her pleas and met an untimely end as a result. Telemachus continues to look better after hearing these other myths, as he followed all the advice given to him by Athena in order to gain his adulthood. When she told him to sail away from his home to

Pylos and Sparta for news of his father (1.280-292), he did just that; when she told him to be mindful of his possessions and mother at home (15.10-42), he acknowledged his responsibility and went home. He follows all the directions Athena gives him, even though they may be new and difficult, and this allows him to achieve and affirm his manhood, unlike the negligent Adonis.

The story of Narcissus begins with the prophecy of the seer Tiresias when asked whether the boy would live to a ripe old age: "Yes, if he does not come to know himself" (3.449). This son of a nymph, aware of the prophecy about him, grows to the age of sixteen as handsome as they come. Mortals and divinities alike throw themselves at him, but out of pride he resists them all (3.454-457), even the beautiful nymph Echo, whom Narcissus bluntly rejects (3.498-505). She is hurt, but she continues to follow and watch him (3.506-510). When Narcissus sits down at a stream to get a drink, he is taken with his own reflection, thinking that it is another person (3.533-537). He would talk to it, and the hidden Echo could only repeat his words aloud, as was her nature. Narcissus tries repeatedly to reach out to embrace his reflection, but he never can take hold (3.551-554). Upon realizing that he is actually in love with his own reflection, he begins to cry and his tears disturb the water and the image before him (3.616-622). He stays by the river pining for his reflection, eventually wasting away out of grief for his plight, and then Echo mourns her deceased beloved by turning him into a flower (3.643-648). Just as Tiresias had predicted, it was a love of himself that was his ultimate end. If he had heeded the prophecy of the seer and not been too proud to accept the advances of those in love with him, he would not have pined away for his own form. Narcissus, like Phaethon and Adonis, fails to heed the voice of divine advice around him; the holy seer Tiresias made known that which would bring an end to Narcissus,

and he did not take heed. This is again unlike the story of Telemachus, whom Athena instructed to journey to Pylos and Sparta to find news of his father, in order that he might gain *kleos* and rid his house of the suitors (1.280-296). The boy could have been too proud to follow the divine advice (as Narcissus was), and he could have attempted to take on the suitors by himself, but he was aware of the probable failure of this path. Hence, he respected Athena's guidance and followed her suggestions, which led to his future success and growth.

Lastly, Ovid's story of Icarus shows the perils of disregarding the advice of a respected authority figure. Icarus' father Daedalus grows weary of Crete and wishes to return to his home; however, the king has blocked him in by sea (8.252-255). Daedalus, being a great inventor, then devises wings made of wax and feathers, by which he and his son would be able to fly away from Crete (8.260-269). When the time of departure finally arrives, he excitedly puts the wings on himself and Icarus, and then he advises his son of exactly what he should do. His words are clear and to the point; he wants his son to follow right beside him, and that he "must follow a course midway between earth and heaven, in case the sun should scorch your feathers, if you go too high, or the water make them heavy if you are too low. Fly halfway between the two" (8.281-285). They take off into the air, but soon the boy becomes far too curious. He is amazed by his ability to soar and swoop, and he raises himself much too close to the sun's rays, melting the wax on his wings and sending him plummeting into the deep (8.312-321). The boy fails to listen to his father, and he pays for it with his life, much like the other three characters from Ovid which we have examined. Daedalus' instructions are very clear, and they ensure the boy's safety, but Icarus is too self-centered to realize that he is endangering himself. Unlike Icarus, Telemachus is wise to

accept the advice of fatherly figures like Nestor and Menelaus, from which he benefits greatly. The best contrast to the fate of Icarus, though, seems to be the advice Odysseus gives Telemachus in Book 16 (274-305). The disguised father needs Telemachus to stay on the straight-and-narrow and not blow his cover, and the growingly prudent son brings about their success by keeping his cool (17.489-492).

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In light of these four Ovidian characters, the story of Telemachus can easily be seen as a positive charter for the maturation of boys into men. The son of Odysseus begins the *Odyssey* as a timid youth who is controlled by the suitors invading his house, when Athena comes to give him direction. She presents him with a journey that he must complete to seek news of his father and gain *kleos* for himself, and completely obeys. He leaves his house in secret and ventures to Pylos and Sparta, where Nestor and Menelaus give him positive experience and affirmation of the *kleos* of his father. Athena bids him home, where he needs to be mindful of his possessions, and he goes right away. There he meets his father, and he assists perfectly in Odysseus' plan to rid the house of the suitors. Telemachus proves himself worthy of *kleos* in his own right by heeding all the advice of the goddess Athena and by aiding his father well in the destruction of the suitors. It is because he follows the advice and examples of authority figures and the divine that Telemachus successfully changes from an unassertive youth into a man worthy of *kleos* and honor.

The Ovidian characters of Phaethon, Adonis, Narcissus, and Icarus are sharp contrasts to the charter of positive development put forth by Telemachus. All of these

boys fail to heed the warnings and advice of the authorities around them, and they all meet downfall because of it. They are all halted on their growth into manhood because they go against what they are instructed to do by divine sources. Even when they are specifically told that they will meet with death if they do not avoid certain things, they do not pay any attention to the warnings. Telemachus' actions were the exact opposite of this, as he follows all of the orders that are given to him by Athena in his path to *kleos*. Negative developments, like those of these Ovidian characters, are far more prevalent in Greek mythology, which affirms that the tale of Telemachus' positive development must serve as a charter for the proper growth of boys into men.

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