

The Case of the Bald-Headed Lamplighter

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οὐκ ἀθεεὶ ὄδ' ἀνὴρ Ὀδυσσῆϊον ἐς δόμον ἵκει·
 ἔμπης μοι δοκέει δαΐδων σέλας ἔμμεναι αὐτοῦ
 κάκ κεφαλῆς, ἐπεὶ οὐ οἱ ἔνι τρίχες οὐδ' ἠβαιαί.

(Homer, *Od.* 18. 353–55)

The most singular feature of the case of the bald-headed lamplighter was that he was not bald-headed at all. The evidence of 18. 355 with its joke about light reflected on the bald head had to be discarded at an early stage, for it robs the witticism of its point.¹ Monro made the same criticism in a curiously phrased note: "The joke about Ulysses as a self-luminous body is now improved upon by the remark that the light must come from himself, since he has no hair which could help to produce it." Hair does not produce light, but Monro correctly saw that the original jibe was not about Odysseus's baldness but an allusion to the incongruous sight afforded by a withered beggar as he discharges a role filled by "golden youths" in the palace of Alcinoos (7. 100) or by girls in Ithaca, fair-cheeked ones among them. The only other references to Odysseus's alleged baldness come at 13. 399 and 431, passages which describe his hair before he lost it as "fair," thus conflicting with 16. 176, which describes it as being of a deep hue. Whether 6. 230–31 (= 23. 157–58) imply previous baldness is a matter for sterile debate: the lines say simply that Athene, born of Zeus, made him bigger and more solid to look at, and from his head she caused curly hair to grow like the hyacinth flower. So far as 18. 355 is concerned it remains only to add that light reflected from a bald head does not travel downwards, and that an expression like "down from his head" is no more possible in Greek than in English when coupled with a verb like "be." In a word, v. 355 should not be here at all.

But the question whether Odysseus is actually bald is of no importance compared with the much bigger question, how and why did he ever put himself into a position whereby a jibe like that of 353–54 or 355 became possible? Chapter 18 of the *Odyssey* is, I suppose, the most *aufschlussreich* of all the Chapters in the whole poem, yet this episode of

¹ It "nimmt dem Witze seinen Stachel," as Ameis–Hentze put it.

Odysseus undertaking the menial role of providing light to the suitors is one which has received relatively little critical attention, perhaps because it has been forced to the sidelines by other problems, such as why Penelope flaunts herself before the suitors and why Odysseus rejoices as she solicits gifts from them.

Let us set the scene. We have just come to the end of Penelope's Appearance before the Suitors, the scene instantly and forever associated in the minds of all of us with Kayser's memorable criticism "ad artes prope meretricias descendit." The suitors have, with lightning speed, had brought to them presents which apparently were only awaiting collection. These they pass on to Penelope, who offers no comment on them; nor do the suitors say so much as, "Here you are then; I hope you like the colour." Instead the Queen retires to her bedroom, and it is at this point that the peculiar episode with which we are concerned supervenes. We are told that in the hall "they"—and there is nothing yet to indicate that "they" are anything but the suitors—set three braziers for the purpose of giving light, ὄφρα φαείνοιεν (308). Well-dried logs were piled around, καὶ δαΐδας μετέμισγον, which I take to mean, though opinions differ, they (surely now the maids must be meant, although the change of subject is not made until the next sentence) dipped portable torches into the main braziers and ferried them about to act as the ancient equivalent of standard or table lamps: a tiring exercise, the poet would have us believe, to be done ἀμοιβηδῆς, by people taking turns. Odysseus's offer to take the whole of this exhausting work off their hands is phrased as follows:

αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τούτοισι φάος πάντεσσι παρέξω.
εἷ περ γάρ κ' ἐθέλωσιν εὐθρονον Ἥῳ μῖμνεν,
οὐ τί με νικήσουσι· πολυτλήμων δὲ μάλ' εἰμί.

(18. 317-19)

His words meet with a curious response. The maids exchange looks and giggle (320). Melantho, the sauciest of them all, tells Odysseus that he is out of his mind (327). He ought, she suggests, to go and get some sleep at the smithy or club, instead of talking so much where he is. He must be drunk, or else just plain odd, to be talking such nonsense. Possibly his recent victory over Iros has gone to his head. He should be careful that some one stronger than Iros may not stand up to him and drive him out of the house.

Now these are very strange remarks to come from a serving girl, brought up, we learn here with some incredulity, by Penelope. One might expect her to jump at any chance of abandoning the tedious chore of tending fires. Odysseus's offer had not been couched in any long or rambling way, and we wonder why Melantho criticises it for having characteristics which it has in fact not got. The violence of her response is, even for this high-spirited young woman, uncalled for. So too is the violence of Odysseus's reply to her. He calls her a bitch, and threatens to report her to Telemachos,

with a view to having him tear her limb from limb on the spot. The Telemachos he describes is clearly a different person from the Telemachos we are accustomed to think of, whose footing in the palace is precarious, and who may be murdered at any moment. We have not, up to now, been accustomed to think of him as a kindred spirit of King Echetos, mutilator of all men (85). But now the mere mention of his name is enough to send the mistress of Eurymachos, if you believe in v. 325,² flying in terror along with all the others out of the room (not but what they seep back in again at 19. 60). Odysseus is now left as the sole provider of light. Eurymachos makes the joke with which we began, and having made it "at the same time" (356) turns to Odysseus whom the poet now with deliberate care, for he has not read *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, describes as the sacker of cities. He issues a challenge to him, suggesting that he is work-shy. In 362-64 he states as a matter of ascertained fact that since Odysseus has learnt ἔργα κακά, he will not be willing to go about real work, but prefer to slink among the people until he has the wherewithal to feed his insatiable stomach.

This response is, in its own way, as strange as Melantho's. To accuse a man of being of an idle disposition when he has just volunteered to take upon himself the work of relays of maidservants, if necessary all through the night, is to expose oneself to an instant and devastating rebuttal. Odysseus however meets the charge not by appealing to the evidence of the offer he has just made but by considering three possible contests between himself and Eurymachos, two from the life of a peasant, and one from the life of a noble warrior. Eurymachos is made so angry by this response that he throws a stool at Odysseus, an act plainly modelled on the similar throw by Antinoos in Chapter 17.³

We have seen enough to conclude that the theme of Odysseus providing light is one that the poet hardly knows how to integrate; yet he feels unable to dispense with it. We come back to our original question. Why did

² V. 324 is normally taken to mean, "She had no pity for Penelope in her heart." But the word in question never elsewhere means "pity," only "sorrow" or "grief." If the line were preserved by itself we would probably translate it, "Not even so did she check the sorrow Penelope felt in her heart." If we look at the passage again with that interpretation in mind, we may wonder if the sense originally intended was, "Although Penelope spent a lot of time playing with the child, she was not enough to make her forget her sorrow." If that view is right, v. 325 must be condemned as an addition based on a misunderstanding. It may be said that the ejection of v. 325, a belated attempt on our part to rescue a small fragment of Melantho's moral reputation, founders on the rock of 17. 257, the line which describes Melantheus as Eurymachos's particular friend. But it was long ago noted that although Melantheus and Melantho were under the same roof they seem to have no cognisance of each other and are never called brother and sister (I. Bekker, *Homerische Blätter* [Bonn 1863-72] I 110).

³ Disputed of course by those who see *Steigerungen* everywhere. Much good sense in H. Reynen, "Schmährede und Schemelwurf im ρ und σ der Odyssee," *Hermes* 85 (1957) 128-46.

Odysseus ever make the offer in the first place? "It is not stated why he does it; but it only requires a bit of thought to see that the beggar wants to make himself useful so that he can remain in the house." So Wilamowitz, in his first Homer book.⁴ Many years later he developed his explanation more fully. "Odysseus now has the task of securing his objective of remaining in the hall so that he can talk to Penelope later on. And so he volunteers to undertake the brazier duty by himself; he would do it well. He says it however in the form of a command, at which the maids may reasonably be surprised."⁵ Neither Wilamowitz's first thoughts nor his second are entirely satisfactory. Making himself useful so that he can stay in the house may indeed have been part of Odysseus's motives in other versions of the story. But in the poem as we now have it the beggar's place in the palace has already been guaranteed by his victory over Iros (18. 46-49); while the threat to have him removed from the palace, guarantee or no guarantee, comes *after* Odysseus's offer to see to the lights. Wilamowitz's second thoughts, that the beggar wishes to stay behind in order to facilitate his meeting with Penelope, again does rather more than justice to the text in the form that we have it. Penelope has retired to her room, and Odysseus has sent the maids to her while he sits in the hall surrounded by suitors who may be there until dawn. The circumstances for a tête-à-tête with Penelope could hardly be less propitious.

A modern Unitarian, Eisenberger,⁶ looks at things from an entirely different standpoint. He sees Odysseus's offer, which he describes as "excellently motivated" by 346 ff., as a means of liberating the maids so that they can go to Penelope to cheer her up. But what he describes as "the attractive trait of caring for his wife"⁷ is something that most of us would put alongside Telemachos's brusque instruction to his mother to go to her room (1. 356-58 and 21. 350-53): the equivalent of "go somewhere else and leave me alone." Closest to the truth, I believe, come two scholars from the past, one the Analyst Seeck, whose belief that Odysseus was a solar myth does less damage to his work than one might think; the other the Unitarian Rothe, also not totally devoid of credibility notwithstanding his comparisons of Homer on one and the same page of his book to Jesus Christ and Bismarck. These two fearlessly independent thinkers held that the only reason for getting rid of the maids was to facilitate the removal of

⁴ *Homerische Untersuchungen* (Berlin 1884) 35: "es ist nicht ausgesprochen, weshalb er das tut, aber es bedarf nur einiger Überlegung, um zu verstehen, dass der Bettler sich nützlich machen will, damit er im Hause bleiben kann." Slightly misquoted by Hennings in his commentary (p. 493).

⁵ "Odysseus hat nun die Aufgabe, es zu erreichen, dass er in dem Saale bleiben kann, um nachher Penelope zu sprechen. Daher er bietet er sich, den Dienst an den Feuerstellen allein zu besorgen; das würde er schon leisten. Er sagt es aber in der Form eines Befehles, über den sich die Magde füglich wundern dürfen" (*Die Heimkehr des Odysseus* [Berlin 1927] 31).

⁶ *Studien zur Odyssee* (Wiesbaden 1973) 250.

⁷ "der schöne Zug der Sorge für die Gattin."

the armour (so Rothe) or at any rate to clear the decks for the death of the suitors (Seeck).⁸

Before we can assess the merits of this explanation, which as stated is still wide and unfocused, we must back-track. This apparently isolated theme of Odysseus as a provider of heat and light may reasonably be taken as a sequel to a passage occurring in Chapter 15. "I may go to the divine Odysseus's palace and tell my news to the wise Penelope, and mingle with the arrogant suitors to see if they will give me dinner, and with all the countless good things they have got. For I tell you this—and you mark my words and listen to me: by the grace of Hermes the messenger, who grants charm and glory to the works of all men, no other mortal can compete with me in hard work—heaping up a good fire and splitting dried logs, carving, cooking, and wine-pouring—the kind of thing that lesser men stand by to perform for the nobility" (313–24). It is line 322 that particularly attracts our attention. True it does not refer to light as much as to the provision of heat, but we are clearly in the same area of domestic service, a lowly one, as Iros doubtless knew when he insulted Odysseus as "like an old oven woman" at 18. 27. There are two points to make about this passage in Chapter 15 by comparison with 18. The first is that the emphasis on hard physical labour seems more justified. It is a more strenuous business to cut up logs of wood than it is to stand around holding a lamp. The second point is that the passage shows all the signs of forcible insertion. The deadly formula *ἐκ γὰρ τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δὲ σύνθεο καί μεν ἄκουσον*, and the appeal to Hermes, who sheds grace and glory on men's works, even apparently a woodcutter's, is too portentous when the sequence of thought should be simply: "I will make myself useful; I am a hard worker." When one notices the asyndeton of the line before (317) one wonders whether the insertion may not have begun one line earlier. What does seem clear however is that we are not far away here from the bald-headed lamplighter, that theme which lives on without ever being perfectly integrated into its surroundings.

Having looked backward to Chapter 15 we may now look forward to Chapter 19. In the highly problematic scene of the removal of the armour Eurykleia puts a question which it would not have occurred to most of us to raise: "Who will come along and bring a light? You have not let the maids come forward, who would have lit your way" (19. 24–25). She receives the answer: "This stranger here will; I will not tolerate any one idle" (26–27). The provision of light is again linked, in a way we may find rather peculiar, with hard work. The armour is duly removed.

⁸ "Die Magde, welche die Flammen unterhalten, weist Odysseus weg, um für den Freiermord reines Feld zu gewinnen . . ." O. Seeck, *Die Quellen der Odyssee* (Berlin 1887) 210. "Ihre Entfernung ist ausserdem notwendig, da sie bei dem Wegschaffen der Waffen nicht zugegen sein sollen," K. Rothe, *Die Odyssee als Dichtung* (Paderborn 1914) 141.

ἔσφορον κόρυθ' ἀσπίδας ὀφθαλοέσασ
 ἔγχεά τ' ὄξυόεντα· πάροιθε δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη
 χρύσειον λύχνον ἔχουσα φάος περικαλλὲς ἐποίει. 35
 δὴ τότε Τηλέμαχος προσεφώνεεν ὄν πατέρ' αἶψα·
 "ὦ πάτερ, ἦ μέγα θαῦμα τόδ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρώμαι·
 ἔμπης μοι τοῖχοι μεγάρων καλάι τε μεσόδμοι
 εἰλάτιναί τε δοκοὶ καὶ κίονες ὑψόσ' ἔχοντες
 φαίνοντ' ὀφθαλμοῖσ' ὡς εἰ πυρὸς αἶθομένοιο.
 ἦ μάλα τις θεὸς ἔνδον, οἷ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσι." 40
 τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·
 "σίγα καὶ κατὰ σὸν νόον ἴσχανε μηδ' ἐρέεινε·
 αὐτὴ τοι δίκη ἐστὶ θεῶν, οἷ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν.
 ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν κατάλεξαι, ἐγὼ δ' ὑπολείψομαι αὐτοῦ,
 ὄφρα κ' ἔτι δμωιάς καὶ μητέρα σὴν ἐρεθίζω." 45
 (19. 32-45)

Kirchhoff, in the course of defending this whole section and warning us of the dangers of assuming interpolation on subjective—I would prefer to say on poetic—grounds, none the less set out the case for the prosecution with a clarity that should be enough to convince us of the accused's guilt. It was not a particularly brilliant stroke, he thought, to have Athene, even if she did have a golden lantern, discharge the function of a maid (the old Alexandrian criticism), at a time when her protégés were in no immediate pressing danger; and in spite of Telemachos's answer to Eurykleia's question it appears that father and son begin their work *without* light, and then, quite unexpectedly, find their work illuminated from some mysterious source. Helpful, no doubt, but not essential; Odysseus could have stood by with the light while his son moved the armour. Like Bethe,⁹ I believe that Athene has often been imported into scenes in the *Odyssey* which were originally conceived in purely human terms. That certainly seems to be the case here. But the interpolation has itself been subject to interpolation. The Athene who stands before us, providing her somewhat theatrical and quite superfluous piece of diffused lighting, did so with a luminescence which arose from her own person. A lantern would not have given off the kind of all-round lighting which Telemachos describes, and Odysseus's answer to his son, "This is the way of the gods who live on Olympus," makes sense only as testimony to the aura that surrounds them; he cannot possibly mean that the Olympians are well known for traipsing around carrying lamps. But some more literal-minded poet has insisted on equipping Athene with a lamp, and in doing so has spoilt the whole point of his predecessor's

⁹ E. Bethe, *Homer. Dichtung und Sage* II: *Odyssee* (Leipzig and Berlin 1914) 336 on the use of Athene for "nichtigsten Dienstleistungen." Even Eurymachos's original jibe at Odysseus's baldness was the result of prompting by Athene so that even more pain might enter the heart of Laertes's son Odysseus (18. 347-48).

invention, just as the point about the luminosity of Odysseus was spoilt by the person who insisted on giving him a bald head.¹⁰

So out goes this lamp, the bane of many an archaeologist's life;¹¹ and out too, for the sterner breed of critic, goes Athene. But we have still to ask, why does Eurykleia raise the question of light in the first place? When we read a novel in which one of the scenes is set in the evening, we do not expect a great issue to be made out of who turned on the electric light. If the question is raised at all, it must be for a special reason. Some poet has evidently been anxious to continue with and strengthen his theme of Odysseus as a provider of light. Rival poets or successors have not wished to abandon this theme, but they have not fully understood it, and they have not been able to work it into their own poems without leaving rough edges at the joins. So here Odysseus and his son carry away the armour while Athene sheds light, *and then*—*δὴ τότε* (19. 35) the words used often denote "then, at that late stage," which is hard to reconcile with another word in the same line, "swiftly"—Telemachos is made to remark on the supernatural light which seems to suffuse the whole building. Odysseus's reply to his son's question is, "Be quiet: keep it to yourself; that is the way with Olympians; cut along to bed, while I remain here for the purpose of irritating the servants and your mother still further." The language is abrupt, the transition inept, the psychology implausible; and it is not easy to see how servants are going to be further irritated when they are not even there. As well as all this we have the problem of timing. If Telemachos is going to comment on the strange light, he must surely do so at its first manifestation, when they begin to remove the armour. But Odysseus's words, "you go off to bed now," imply that the removal of the armour has been completed. This sudden jump from beginning to end, with no middle, is a further proof that Athene has no proper place in this episode. We would very much like to know too where the multiple blazing torches of v. 48 came from as Telemachos strode through the hall. Certainly from the hand of some one who did not know, ignored, or wished to obliterate Odysseus's monopoly in that field. Again, the provision of light, and now also heat, is seen to by the maids at vv. 63–64 without any attempt to make it clear that this was the resumption of a normal duty recently interrupted by the hero. The maids' release is not explained, and they have no comment to offer on their recent incarceration. Their appearance now belongs, we must infer, to a different way of telling the story.

¹⁰ If only we could take Chapter 20 seriously which, as von der Mühl says, "gehört zum Minderwertigsten im Homer," we would add that the appearance of Athene "from heaven" (31) would be unlikely if she had just been in the palace: unless she likes duplicating her journeys like the eagle later in 19 which goes away for the sole purpose of coming back (540, 544).

¹¹ H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London 1950) 509–10.

Which raises another question. Why did those maids have to be shut up in their rooms? If an excuse was ready to meet any question from the suitors, that excuse would also serve to counter objections that might be put by the maids. Keeping them in the women's quarters makes sense only if recognition by Penelope and the killing of the suitors, or at any rate one of those two things, was meant to follow in short order. Even Homer's most ardent Unitarian apologist, Combellack, has to confess, "I suspect that no amount of ingenuity can make the shutting out of the maids plausible for the characters."¹² But if we do assume that the dénouement was to follow swiftly, removal of the maids makes good sense, and we would direct our suspicions not at the way they are taken from our sight, but at the way they are restored to it. They clear things away, which could well have waited until morning; in fact Chapter 20 does have them at work the following morning (149–54); and they provide light at the very time when most people would be thinking of dowsing the lights; and then what? Then nothing. We are never told that they went away, and yet one is reluctant to believe that the intimate conversation which is to take place between Penelope and the beggar is conducted under the gaze of many pairs of curious eyes. Bathwater may be spilt and basins clang; aged retainers may be throttled; but no word of comment issues from the lips of any white-armed serving women. As we shall learn at the very end of Chapter 19, Penelope does have her own personal attendants with her (601), presumably two in number as regularly elsewhere. But we surely do not believe in droves of young women being present throughout. Yet Homer, often punctilious on informing us of comings and goings, is on this vital occasion silent, leaving it to Wilamowitz and Franz Stürmer to tell us that of course they did actually depart at a fairly early stage. If so, they depart again, without having come back in the meantime, at 20. 6.

Pausing only for a moment to notice the highly specialised nature of the threat voiced by Melanthe at v. 69, that Odysseus may be driven out of the house *struck by a piece of burning wood*, a line which would not have been amiss in her earlier speech of 18. 327–36, let us just look at one other little problem, which the recent Italian commentary¹³ is baffled by. The editor at this point, Russo, on reaching v. 183 writes: "It is probable that Homer chose this name (i.e. Aithon) with some precise idea in his mind, but is not clear what that could have been." He goes on to talk about the colour of lions, horses, oxen, eagles, tripods, basins, and iron, before concluding that here it just means generally "brilliant." But if a special meaning is to be sought, we might fancifully speculate it is because *aithon*

¹² CSCA 6 (1974) 16.

¹³ Omero, *Odissea* (Milan 1981–86) V 235 f.

fits precisely with what Odysseus has insisted on doing. It is a sort of tongue-in-cheek joke. My name is Mr. Burns.¹⁴

Let us push speculation even further. The answer Telemachos is to return to the suitors if they ask where all the arms have gone is, "I have put them away from the smoke; they no longer look like the ones which Odysseus once left behind when he went to Troy, but have suffered harm, in so far as the breath of the fire has got to them" (19. 7–9). Any reasonably intelligent suitor would smell a rat at once, unless something had happened to make such an explanation colourable; and it would be colourable if there had just recently been an accident involving fire and smoke. Who better to engineer such an accident than the man who had the provision of fire under his sole control? To those who would soberly protest that this idea is wildly far-fetched, I would plead only that as such it does not stand alone in Homeric criticism. The scholar in whose honour this volume is published was no stranger himself to bold hypotheses on the *Odyssey*.¹⁵

Chapter 19 is a peculiar repository of disparate themes. One can strip it down until there is nothing left. The Removal of the Armour does not take place either as foreseen earlier or as events will show later. We must dispense with Melanthe, long recognised as being, together with her brother of the indeterminate spelling, Melanthios/Melantheus, a late intrusion. In her four-line speech (66–69) she commits three linguistic solecisms.¹⁶ The web story is repeated from elsewhere, and poses such chronological difficulties that many assume it has no rightful place anywhere in our poem.¹⁷ The fictitious Cretan story should not have been told, since it is at variance with the story already communicated to Penelope by Eumaios. We must remove either the footbath, or Penelope's presence at the time, since her failure to notice all the excitement is explained with the utmost barefaced ineptitude by saying Athene diverted her mind. We deduct from the rapidly diminishing total of lines another one hundred and fifty for the scar and Autolykos story, not merely because Aristotle expressly denied the story was in the poem, but also because a point of grammar shows us exactly where it has been slotted in. The self-explanatory eagle is rightly said by von der Mühl to belong to the most tasteless offerings to be found anywhere in Greek literature. Nobody has the faintest idea what put into the Queen's mind the inscrutable burst of didacticism on the subject of dreams

¹⁴ The name is known from real life, and seems to reach back to Mycenaean times: see K. J. McKay, *Mnemosyne* 12 (1959) 199. I forbear to mention that the name Ithaka was linked etymologically to αἶθω by L. von Schröder in *Kuhn's Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 29 (1887–88) 199 f.; and Ὀλυρτεύς with the root *lux* by Wüst in *RE s.v.* "Odysseus" 1907.

¹⁵ I am thinking of his confident identification of three separate authors in the spurious end of the poem: *Poetry and Poetics from Ancient Greece to the Renaissance: Studies in Honor of James Hutton*, *Comell Studies in Classical Philology* 38 (Ithaca 1975) 13–28.

¹⁶ G. P. Shipp, *Studies in the Language of Homer*² (Cambridge 1972) 346.

¹⁷ W. Kullmann, *Wiener Studien* 15 (1981) 35–38.

coming through gates of which horns (not horn) and ivory form part, and the timing of the bow contest is quite wrong. It is unmotivated, and inconsistent with the way it is introduced as an entirely fresh idea at the start of Chapter 21.

Such, in the barest outline, is the minefield of Chapter 19 through which the Analyst *incedit super ignes suppositos*, conducting controlled explosions as he goes, while the Unitarian prudently remains on the sidelines, hoping he will blow himself up. Does the bald-headed lamplighter help us to thread our way any more safely? Not if we pretend we can reconstruct some pure original story passing down through generations, of which our present text is a late debasement. Much damage has been done to the study of Homer by treating the poems as if they were transmitted in a vertical plane of time, being modified as they go, but essentially uniform if only you could arrest their descent at any given moment. Often we would do better to renounce words like earlier and later, and think more in terms of synchronous, competing versions. It is, at this late stage, usually impossible to disentangle whole versions from each other. But the separateness of component elements can often still be distinguished, and so can differences in quality. The lamplighter theme is in all probability not an *ancient* element of the *Odyssey*, since it seems linked with the recent import Melanthe, into whose province he intrudes (and perhaps even with her male counterpart Melantheus; for it is he, none other, whom the suitors order to light a fire at 21. 176). Our task is made the more difficult in that some poets have not known what to do with the lamplighter, and have sought to reduce his importance, by having first Athene, and then the maids, provide light themselves. But what might the lamplighter-poet have been after himself? At one point he seems to tell us in so many words: Odysseus used his newly acquired position to observe the suitors (18. 344).¹⁸

αὐτὰρ ὁ πὰρ λαμπτήρσι φαείνων αἰθομένοισιν
 ἐστήκειν ἐς πάντα ὀρώμενος· ἄλλα δέ οἱ κῆρ
 ὄρμαινε φρεσὶν ἦισιν, ἃ ῥ' οὐκ ἀτέλεστα γέγοντο.

(18. 343–45)

But at best this cannot be more than a minor motive, for Odysseus has had other opportunities already for becoming acquainted with the suitors' behaviour.

So we are left only with the two choices with which we began, the Removal of the Armour and the Interview with Penelope. We do not have

¹⁸ This is not absolutely certain: πάντας could mean "all the braziers," and ὀρώμενος ("looking at") could mean "looking after," as ὀρώωσα does at 19. 514: "Looking at, i.e. seeing to, my work and that of my attendants." Similarly λεῦσσε at 23. 124. This gives us a more obvious contrast, no longer between providing light and thinking other thoughts, but between being ostensibly busy and having a mind running on quite different matters.

to accept in full the validity of the Armour scene as it stands, its appearance in this very place in Chapter 19, together with all the details that conflict with what is said in Chapters 16 and 22. But the link with *a* Removal of the Armour scene seems a good one. If you are going to fight one hundred and eight suitors in a confined space, you have to do all you can to even the odds first. The armour on the wall has got to go, and that can only be done in secret. The beggar has got to have a reason for being on the premises until late—even until dawn if necessary (18. 318). The provision of light is to be that reason, and the link of light with the actual removal is still visible in Telemachos's reply to Eurykleia, and in a twisted way is testified to by the unexpected overlay of Athene in her brief role as The Lady with the Lamp.

The connection with the Penelope interview is less obvious. Opinions about whether that interview should or should not lead up to recognition, itself the precursor to the bow contest and the revenge, are very sharply divided, and the language can become quite acrimonious. "Of course it was meant to lead to recognition," said Bethe, before proceeding to a Wilamowitzian, "Those who do not concede that are not people with whom one can discuss questions of style and poetry."¹⁹ What seems plain is that no first-class minstrel would ever have arranged matters as we now have them, either within the interview itself, or with its positioning inside the poem as a whole. We have already touched on Penelope's failure to notice the spilt water and the clanging basin, and nothing could be more tasteless than that Odysseus should wish to re-establish contact with the wife he left behind twenty years ago by using a housekeeper as intermediary. The whole pack of cards collapses if we pull one out. We could begin with Melanthe and her three mistakes in four lines. The content of those four lines matches their language in the problems they pose. The girl has inexplicably recovered all the confidence she lost at 18. 340, and accuses Odysseus of spying on women—a wholly implausible charge since he and his son have both exerted themselves to get the women out of the way. But if Melanthe is eliminated, we lose most of our motive for having Odysseus ask for some older woman if his feet are to be washed. But in any case the most obviously available woman to do that washing was not Eurykleia but Eurynome.²⁰ With no Eurykleia, we have no scar. With no scar we have no recognition. In short, we run into the sand. We observe too that what Penelope had proposed was a bath. There was nothing to say that that bath would not be of the whole person. And she had proposed it now, with another bath to follow the next morning. Such an excess of cleanliness is suspicious, and when Odysseus replies he refers only to the first of the two

¹⁹ "Wer es nicht zugibt, mit dem kann man über Stilfragen und über Poesie nicht rechten" (90).

²⁰ As A. Köhnken points out in his article in *A&A* 22 (1976) 101–14. It is Eurynome who bathes Odysseus at 23. 154.

washings. Suspicious too is the moralistic tone of the rest of Penelope's speech, a long section which Odysseus also ignores, a highly tactless thing to do if Penelope really had been drawing attention to herself as, in her own words, an intelligent woman and a generous host. As for the timing of this interview, we notice the curious mess—what more sympathetic spirits call a *Verzögerungstaktik*—at the end of Chapter 17. At 508 Penelope asks Eumaios to summon the beggar to interview. Eumaios's reply tails off into praise of him as an authoritative raconteur. At 529 she repeats her command, this time tailing off herself into a routine denunciation of the suitors. Then thirdly at 544 we have an inconsequential run of Telemachos's sneezing, the suitors' likely death, and the "another thing" which Penelope will tell Eumaios and which he is to take to heart, namely clothing the beggar if he tells the truth; all being left side by side, rather than reduced to order. Some one is clearly intent on seeing to it that the expected onward impetus of the story is held up, or perhaps one should say that no potentially Odyssean piece of poetry is left out of the Authorised Version. The arrangement finally made is that Penelope is to wait until sunset in the hall, or in the palace; the word is ambiguous. But when she does appear, nothing is said to indicate that she is keeping an appointment, and her arrival (19. 54), which should have been a simple enough matter, is marked by a textual problem, who "they" are (55) who set Ikmalios's elaborate chair for her; a problem serious enough for Kirchhoff to posit a lacuna at this point.

We have departed far from the original theme of this paper, the bald-headed lamplighter. What we may hope to have done is to show that the problems in this area of the poem are more complex than they are often represented as being, and to suggest that if one wishes to probe either further into the past, or sideways into competing versions, one must do so in a way which leaves the lamplighter as something more than, in the classic phrase, a transient and embarrassed phantom.

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