

# Putting an End to Song

## Penelope, Odysseus and the Teleologies of the *Odyssey*<sup>1</sup>

Penelope's first appearance in the *Odyssey* (1.325–44) is to make a request of Phemius the bard, who is singing the tale of the Greeks' return from Troy, the Ἀχαιῶν νόστος (326). Phemius' song of the Greek νόστος ('return'), of course, mirrors the plot of the *Odyssey* itself, which has opened only a few hundred lines before with the plea to the Muse to sing of Odysseus and his companions' return (νόστον, 5) from Troy.<sup>2</sup> Penelope, however, interrupts the narrative flow and asks the bard to cease singing because of the pain his tale is causing her (340–42):

... ταύτης δ' ἀποπαύε' ἀοιδῆς  
λυγρῆς, ἥ τέ μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ  
τείρει...

cease from this painful song,  
which continues to oppress the heart in my  
breast...<sup>3</sup>

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1. This article has been long in the making: it started out almost exactly a decade ago as an undergraduate essay at Cambridge, and has evolved due in most part to much excellent advice from and conversation with my mentors and colleagues over the intervening years. My sincere thanks therefore go to, among many others, Emily Greenwood, Sheila Murnaghan, Helen van Noorden, Egbert Bakker, Andromache Karanika, Joel Christensen, Alex Purves, Simon Goldhill, Nancy Felson, Laura Slatkin and Gregory Nagy. I am also sincerely indebted to the anonymous reviewers at *Helios*, whose comments were enormously beneficial; any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

2. See H.G. Evelyn-White, 'The Myth of the Nostoi', *CR* 24 (1910), 201–5, at 203 and P. Pucci, *Odysseus Polutropos* (Ithaca NY, 1987), 195–208.

3. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. Emily Wilson's translation here begins Penelope's speech with an added 'Stop, / please Phemius', highlighting the interruption (E. Wilson (trans.), *The Odyssey* (New York, 2017), 116).

In telling contrast to Odysseus, who asks for a change of subject (μετάβηθι, 8.492) from Demodocus' performance of the Ἀχαιῶν οἴτον ('doom of the Greeks', 489), Penelope asks for an end (ἀποπαύε', 1.340) to the song altogether, with the verb ἀποπαύειν ('to stop, hinder, cease').<sup>4</sup> Her request, in other words, is that Phemius' song, which forms a miniature of the *Odyssey*, be stopped within the *Odyssey* itself.<sup>5</sup> So why have a poem begin with a request for an end to song? Why start the *Odyssey* with an attempt to stop the bard-figure's narrative of the νόστος – and how do read Penelope's request for endings in counterpoint to Odysseus' subtly different appeal?

In this article I will attempt to argue that the *Odyssey* is particularly pre-occupied with its own ending(s), and that this self-consciousness of endings is intimately implicated in the characterization of Penelope and Odysseus. I suggest that viewing the narrative of the *Odyssey* as a complex inter-relationship between husband and wife's responses to the poem's ending develops our understanding of both the characters and themes of the *Odyssey*, and closure in classical literature more broadly. Reading the *Odyssey* with close attention to the theme of endings leads to a significant and new understanding of the way in which the ambivalences in Penelope's characterization can be seen to derive from tensions in the poem's relation to its end.<sup>6</sup>

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4. ἀποπαύειν occurs only twelve times in the Homeric epics; its first use in the *Iliad* is of Achilles' withdrawal from battle (πολέμου δ' ἀποπαύεο πάμπαν, 'withdraw completely from the war', *Il.* 1.422).

5. On song and the poet's speech in the *Odyssey*, see Deborah Beck, 'The presentation of song in Homer's *Odyssey*', in E. Minchin (ed.), *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2011), 25–54. The Homeric question, and the issue of the poems' transmission from orality to literacy, has generated a huge amount of scholarship over the years. Introductions to the topic are provided by B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer* (Cambridge, 2002) and G. Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin, 1996); an overview of the history of scholarship on the Homeric question is provided in G. Nagy, 'Orality and Literacy', in T.O. Sloane (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2001), 532–8. I follow Nagy's evolutionary model here: see G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance* (Cambridge, 1996), 107–52.

6. The problem lies in the tension between Penelope's actions where, on occasion, she seems to recognize the beggar as Odysseus – in her comments, for example, on the beggar's similarity to her husband (19.358–60), and her insistence on his participating in the contest of the bow (21.334–42) – and on others, she seems to be completely

It allows for a re-reading of Odysseus' character development in response to his prophesied return to Ithaca as the narrative progresses, particularly as the poem opens in its final books to future endings with Tiresias' problematic second prophecy. It prepares the way for a new interpretation of the reunion between Penelope and Odysseus, when viewed as a negotiation between two characters with different relationships to and knowledge of their endings. It enables a heightened awareness of the extent of the *Odyssey's* metapoetic commentary, broadening the discussion from the much-noted figures for storytelling (Phemius, Demodocus, and Odysseus himself)<sup>7</sup> to argue for a deliberate reflection within the poem on the metapoetic theme of narrative ends. And it contributes to our understanding of closure in ancient Greek narrative, building on a burgeoning area of scholarship to argue for the *Odyssey's* central place in an understanding of closural mechanisms and the relationship to endings in narrative.

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unaware (at times insistently so, as, for example, in her denial of Odysseus' interpretation of her dream, 19.560–75) that Odysseus has returned. For an excellent summary of the controversy, and details of the inconsistencies in Penelope's recognition of Odysseus, see S. Reece, 'Penelope's "Early Recognition" of Odysseus from a Neoanalytic and Oral Perspective', *College Literature* 38 (2011), 101–17, at 104–10; see also L. Doherty, *Siren Songs: Gender, Audiences, and Narrators in the Odyssey* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 31–64. While the traditional reading placed Penelope's recognition of Odysseus at *Odyssey* 23, after the bed-test, Philip Harsh argued for Penelope's early recognition in book 19 ('Penelope and Odysseus in *Odyssey* XIX', *AJPh* 71 (1950), 1–21). Since then, there have been many attempts to interpret Penelope's 'inconsistencies', with some following Harsh (e.g. J.B. Vlahos, 'Homer's *Odyssey*, Books 19 and 23', *College Literature* 34 (2007), 107–31); some taking a feminist perspective that sees Penelope as an agent of a feminine poetics (B. Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics* (Oxford, 2004)); and others suggesting these inconsistencies are key in reading Penelope's ambivalent plot (N. Felson, *Regarding Penelope* (Norman, 1994); M. Katz, *Penelope's Renown* (Princeton, 1991); F. Zeitlin, 'Figuring Fidelity in Homer's *Odyssey*', in B. Cohen (ed.), *The Distaff Side* (Oxford, 1995), 117–54).

7. There is a large body of extant scholarship on story-telling and alternative stories in the *Odyssey*: see especially C. Segal, *Singers, Heroes and Gods in the Odyssey* (Cornell, 1994); see also M. Alden, *Para-Narratives in the Odyssey: Stories in the Frame* (Oxford, 2017), Beck (n.5), S. D. Olson, *Blood and Iron: Stories and Storytellers in the Odyssey* (Brill, 1995).

There have been many studies on poetic endings in recent years, particularly in literary theory.<sup>8</sup> The literary analysis of movements towards ending, all informed by the end, is known as narrative teleology, building on Aristotle's famous theorization of the τέλος in plot in the *Poetics*: *περὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν ὅλην καὶ τελείαν ἔχουσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσα καὶ τέλος* ('around one complete and absolute action, with a beginning, middle and end', *Poet.* 1459a).<sup>9</sup> For Aristotle, plot is seen as a causative chain of events leading towards a given conclusion (τέλος). In subsequent theorizations of the teleological model, this is expanded to produce an end which is by its nature pre-determined and fixed, so that we are constantly 'reading backwards', to introduce the term pioneered by Barthes. Peter Brooks expresses this teleological mechanism as:

the necessary postulate of classical narrative which, starting from the end as the moment of significant revelation, embraces and comprehends the past as a panorama leading to realization in the ultimate moment ... The telling is always *in terms of* the impending end ... [this is] the very nature of narrative plot, consuming itself as it projects itself forward, retracting as it extends, calling for its end from its beginning.<sup>10</sup>

The theorized teleological plot, then, embraces pre-defined endings, and a quality of backwards-reading that infuses every event in the narrative with the moment of the end. Recent studies

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8. Two early and important contributions are B.H. Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago, 1968), and F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford, 1967); see also P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York, 1984), 5–7. See further H.P. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge, 2002), 52–3 and 168–74; and (in classical literature) D.H. Roberts, F. Dunn and D. Fowler (edd.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, 1997). For a cognitive approach to narrative closure in the *Odyssey*, see J. Christensen, 'Human Cognition and Narrative Closure: The *Odyssey*'s Open-End', in P. Meineck, W.M. Short and J. Devereux (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Cognitive Theory* (Abingdon, 2018).

9. On Aristotle and narrative teleology, see N.J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge, 2000), 62.

10. Brooks (n.8), 52.

focusing on the ending in narrative, and closure in particular, however, have challenged this notion of predetermination.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps one of the most important innovations in poetic closure, as Don Fowler summarizes it, has been in resisting the temptation to create a polarity between ‘open-ended’ and ‘closed’ texts; rather, we need to see ‘the tension between “open” and “closed” as one ever-present in the literary work’.<sup>12</sup> Crucially, in this interpretation, it is this constant tension between open and closed endings (and not the inevitability of the end) which drives the literary work forwards, creating deferments, disruptions, obstructions in the plot which enable the final resolution. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith puts it:

We enjoy, it seems, teasing our tensions, deferring the immediate fulfilment of our appetites and expectations. What we gain thereby is a local heightening of tension which, it might be supposed, makes the eventual resolution all the more satisfying. It is also true, however, that the experience of tension is not necessarily unpleasant, but, on the contrary, may be itself a source of pleasure, especially if the promise of eventual resolution is secure.<sup>13</sup>

According to this reading, it is not simply the ending of a poem which gains a special status, but each and every moment that informs, plays with, and postpones the plot on the way towards that ending.

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11. The modernist position in fact denies (and actively avoids) teleological writing: see Roberts, Dunn and Fowler (n.8), 5 and D. Sidorsky, ‘Modernism and the Emancipation of Literature from Morality: Teleology and Vocation in Joyce, Ford, and Proust’, *New Literary History* 15.1 (1983): 137-153. Sidorsky’s quotation of Edgar Allen Poe gives a good insight into the modernist position: ‘In the construction of plot, for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the incidents that we shall not be able to determine, of any one of them, whether it depends from any one other or upholds it’ (144 n.13). Jean-Paul Sartre also famously critiqued teleology in his 1938 philosophical novel, *La Nausée*, identifying a dissonance between the already-known outcome of the novel and the uncertainty of reality; for a response to and refutation of this view, see Kermode (n.8), 133-152.

12. D. Fowler, ‘First Thoughts on Closure: Problems and Prospects’, *MD* 22 (1989), 75–122, at 80. See also Smith (n.8), 211: ‘closure is a relative matter: it is more or less weak or strong’.

Building on these observations, I will analyse here the tensions between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ endings in the *Odyssey* as they map onto the characters of Penelope and Odysseus. I will examine how the ending of the *Odyssey* is signposted, foregrounded and deferred in the development of the relationship and recognition between Penelope and Odysseus; as well as how, in the problematic closural resonances of their reunion, that ending may be left open or in tension at the close of the plot. I suggest that we can trace a reciprocal inversion in the relationship to endings between Penelope and Odysseus, with Penelope moving from ‘open’ to ‘closed’ in her recognition of Odysseus, and Odysseus from ‘closed’ to ‘open’ in his uncertainty around Penelope’s fidelity, and the foregrounding of his future journey predicted by Tiresias. This enables both movement and tension in the progression of plot, as well as the problematization of endings and the possibility of full closure as the *Odyssey* comes to a close. The ways in which the poem (and the characters within it) break with the Aristotelian model of teleology to demonstrate complex, open and often polyvalent relationships to the notion of endings will be termed ‘teleologies’ in the plural, reflecting the multiple strategies available and the tensions between open and closed endings.

So what does our opening example – Penelope’s endeavour to put an end to the bard’s song with the loaded verb of ending, ἀποπαύειν – tell us about Odyssean teleologies? The paradox centres around the (attempted) stopping of a song within a song that has just begun; a poetic character, whose story is at that very moment being told *by* a bard, speaking to a bard; and the rupture of the parallels between Phemius’ song and that of the *Odyssey*, as Phemius’ song is interrupted by one of the characters of the poem he inhabits. For a moment, Phemius’ song and the *Odyssey* merged in telling the same subject, the Ἀχαιῶν νόστος (1.326), the Odyssean lines

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13. Smith (n.8), 3.

relaying Phemius' words so that the primary narrator's voice and that of the bard became indistinguishable;<sup>14</sup> now, as Penelope's voice interjects, the narrator's voice uncouples from Phemius' song – and yet the *Odyssey* goes on.

Penelope's unsuccessful attempt to end the bard's song at the opening of the *Odyssey* thus functions as a particularly resonant demonstration of the paradox of the *Odyssey*'s simultaneous manipulation of open and closed teleologies, the already-known end and the poem-in-process, and their focus around her character. Penelope's complex relationship to endings is signposted in her request for an end to song, within the song in which her story is told: her own words themselves form part of a song (the *Odyssey*) which tells the Ἀχαιῶν νόστος, just like the one she is trying to end. Ultimately, then, and paradoxically, even her request for an end to the song of the Greeks' return is complicit in its ongoing narration; and Penelope's attempt to end the song, while at the same time doing so within the constraints of the poem's narrative, marks her and her relationship to Odysseus' νόστος as a site for the fertile interaction between competing teleologies.

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14. νόστον ἄειδε / λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη ('he sang of the painful return-voyage, which Pallas Athene laid on them as they went from Troy', *Od.* 1.236-7). The merging of the voices of primary narrator and character/reported narrator occurs in the relative clause, which either forms the primary narrator's gloss on νόστος (236), or presents Phemius' song via embedded focalization (on which see I.J.F. de Jong, *Narratology and Classics: A Practical Guide* (New York and Oxford, 2014), 50–6). On metalepsis (the merging of narrative voices) in the songs of Demodocus, see I.J.F. de Jong, 'Metalepsis in Ancient Greek Literature', in J. Grethlein and A. Rengakos (eds.) *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature* (Berlin, 2009), 99–100; for the terms 'primary' and 'reported narrator', see her n.34. As Pucci (n.2), 196 points out, it must be significant that Phemius' name derives from φῆμη ('speech, saying'), perhaps suggesting that he is in some way an embodiment of the voice/speech of the narrator.

## Towards the τέλος

The Odyssean preoccupation with endings focuses around a particular ‘closural allusion’ (as Smith helpfully terms them) – the vocabulary of ending. These metapoetic teleological terms, Smith notes, are characterized by their repetition, ‘may appear at points in a poem where closure itself is undesirable, even in the same poem in which they ultimately occur as terminal features’ – and their interpretation is crucial to an understanding of the teleologies of the narrative.<sup>15</sup> As we will see, closural allusions in the *Odyssey* cluster around the figures of Odysseus and Penelope, hinting at their stories’ resonance with the poem’s teleologies.

If Penelope’s first appearance is to engage with the ends of narrative, it is significant that the first time she is mentioned in the poem – around a hundred lines earlier – the focus is also on endings. The instance arises in Telemachus’ complaint to Athena, in her disguise as Mentès (1.230ff.). Telemachus describes how Odysseus has been lost on his return from Troy; now all the nobles of the islands around Ithaca are courting Penelope (249–50):

ἢ δ’ οὐτ’ ἀρνείται στυγερόν γάμον οὔτε τελευτήν  
ποιῆσαι δύναται

she neither denies hateful marriage nor is she able  
to make an end to it<sup>16</sup>

Telemachus is clear in his presentation of the possible roles available to Penelope: denial of marriage to the suitors, and/or an ‘ending’ (τελευτή; presumably choosing to marry a suitor). And yet it is not the nature of the ending itself which is described explicitly here, but Penelope’s (in)ability to make endings (τελευτή). The term τελευτή, I want to suggest, signifies more than

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15. Smith (n.8), 178.

16. Repeated at *Od.* 16.126–7; see p.19 below. See Katz (n.6), 7–8.



just an end to the troubles brought upon the household by the suitors – it also refers to the end of the poem, which, here at the start, Penelope is as yet unable to bring about. *τελευτή* is cognate with the noun *τέλος*, also signifying ‘ending’<sup>17</sup> – which, later (as we saw, most famously with Aristotle), would gain a metapoetic meaning as ‘the end of a narrative plot’.<sup>18</sup> Rather than reading the Aristotelian sense of *τέλος* back into the *Odyssey*, I want to suggest – along the lines of Nick Lowe’s observation that Aristotelian notions of plot grew out of and were formed by the Homeric poems – that *τέλος*, *τελευτή* and (as we shall see later) the verbs *τελευτάω* and *τελέω* *did* in fact possess a markedly metapoetic undertone, even in the archaic period.<sup>19</sup> In the fifth line of the proem of the *Iliad* there is a much-remarked-upon hemistich: *Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή* (‘and the plan of Zeus was being fulfilled’, *Il.* 1.5 [emphasis mine]).<sup>20</sup> Although there is much controversy over the referent of the ‘plan of Zeus,’ many (including Bruce Heiden, Sheila Murnaghan and James Redfield) have suggested that Zeus’ *βουλή* can refer to more than simply the original plan of helping the Trojans for Thetis, and that it signals instead ‘a developing plan with proliferating parts’<sup>21</sup> in which the entire action of the *Iliad* is subsumed.<sup>22</sup> The Iliadic plot

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17. For a summary of the debate on the etymology of *τέλος* (which has variously been derived from one, two or three IE roots), see Z.P. Ambrose, ‘The Homeric *Telos*’, *Glotta* 43 (1965), 38–62, at 38–9. It should be noted that, strictly speaking, *τελευτή* is a derivative of the denominative verb *τελέω*, formed from *τέλος* (R.S.P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden, 2010), 1463).

18. See Lowe (n.9), 28 and 55–62.

19. Lowe (n.9), 91. On Homeric *τέλος*, see Ambrose (n.17), 38–62; D. Holwerda, ‘ΤΕΛΟΣ’, *Mnemosyne* 16 (1963), 337–63; and F.M.J. Waanders, *The History of ΤΕΛΟΣ and ΤΕΛΕΩ in Ancient Greek* (Amsterdam, 1983), 31–60.

20. There is some disagreement amongst scholars about the reading of this line: see J. Redfield, ‘The Proem of the *Iliad*: Homer’s Art’, *CPh* 74 (1979), 95–110, at 96. Aristarchus (see schol. *ad loc.*) read *ἐτελείετο* as the referent of *ἐξ οὗ*; most modern scholars (e.g. G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* (Cambridge, 1985)), however, take *ἄϊδε* as its referent.

21. B. Heiden, *Homer’s Cosmic Fabrication: Choice and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford, 2008), 28 and 161–85.

22. On the development of Zeus’ *βουλή*, see Heiden (n.21), 161–86, and J. Marks, *Zeus in the Odyssey* (Cambridge MA, 2008).

thus can be seen as becoming equivalent to the βουλή of Zeus in the proem, and the verb ἐτελείετο as a signal of the process of narrative completion, gaining a metapoetic undertone.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in the *Odyssey*, τέλος and its cognates also become a central part of the metapoetic vocabulary of the poem. An analogue to the *Iliad*'s conflation of Zeus' plot with the plot of the poem occurs at *Od.* 1.201, with the first τέλος-cognate of the poem; here, it is the goddess Athena, and not Zeus, who is associated with teleologies.<sup>24</sup> In her disguise as Mentès, Athena assures Telemachus that her prophecy – vouchsafed by the gods (in more ways than one, of course, given that Athena has just been sent by Zeus to bring about Odysseus' νόστος) – will be fulfilled (ὡς ἐνὶ θυμῷ / ἄθάνατοι βάλλουσι καὶ ὡς τελέεσθαι οἴω, 'as the gods put it in my heart and I think will be fulfilled,' 1.200–1). Her prediction to be fulfilled, φράσσεται ὡς κενέηται, ἐπεὶ πολυμήχανός ἐστιν ('he will find a way to return, since he is a man of many means,' 205) is as good as a summary of the poem itself, especially in its similar vocabulary to the programmatic proem (πολυμήχανός, 1.205 = πολύτροπον, 1.1; κενέηται, 1.205 = νόστον, 1.5). In other words, it is not only the end of the journey home, but of the poem which began with the νόστος of the πολύτροπος man, which is being forecasted here.

If fulfilment of the poem and the end of Odysseus' νόστος are brought together in Athena's prophecy at the *Odyssey*'s start, we have a similar and even more precise conjunction

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23. On the Διὸς βουλή as epic plot, see S. Murnaghan, 'Equal Honor and Future Glory: The Plan of Zeus in the *Iliad*', in Roberts, Dunn and Fowler (n.8), 23–42; problems with defining it as such, S. Bassett, 'The Proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*', *AJPh* 44 (1923), 339–348; Redfield (n.20), 105–8.

24. For Athena as the driver and representative of the plot in the *Odyssey*, see J. Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey* (London, 1983) and S. Murnaghan, 'The Plan of Athena', In B. Cohen (ed.), *The Distaff Side* (Oxford, 1995), 61–80. Athena implements the plot programmatically at the openings of Books 1 and 13, the two beginnings of the two narrative directions (return to Ithaca, return to the οἶκος), and appears regularly throughout the narrative to ensure its fulfilment, propelling the plot to its ultimate conclusion – which she also brings about (Book 24 and the pacification of Ithaca).

towards the end. In book 22, during the slaughter of the suitors, Odysseus rebukes Leiodes for praying that he might never return (322–4):

πολλάκι που μέλλεις ἀρήμεναι ἐν μεγάροισι  
τηλοῦ ἐμοὶ νόστοιο τέλος γλυκεροῖο γενέσθαι,  
σοὶ δ' ἄλοχόν τε φίλην σπέσθαι καὶ τέκνα τεκέσθαι

often, I suppose, you must have prayed in my halls  
that I would be far from my ending of a welcome return home,  
and my wife would follow you and bear you children

Here, Odysseus' νόστος is explicitly defined as his 'end': νόστοιο τέλος γλυκεροῖο ('the ending of a welcome return home', 22.323). This τέλος is further defined specifically in terms of Penelope: σοὶ δ' ἄλοχόν τε φίλην σπέσθαι ('[you must have prayed...] my wife would follow you,' 324). As Felson elaborates, 'while [Odysseus] journeyed, he envisioned Penelope as a fixed point, a stable goal, a *telos* or "fulfillment"'.<sup>25</sup> Returning to Penelope is, then, for Odysseus, his νόστοιο τέλος – the end of his wanderings. But it is also the ending of the poem. The implication of νόστος with the subject of the *Odyssey*, as we saw above, suggests that Odysseus' expression of his νόστοιο τέλος is not simply a statement of fact, announcing his return to the suitors: it is also a teleological marker, suggesting that the end of the poem is near. By contrast, Telemachus' observation in book 1 that Penelope is 'not able to make an ending' (οὔτε τελευτήν / ποιῆσαι δύναται, 1.249-50) stands as a testimony to the fact that we are at the poem's beginning, as well as Penelope's joint role with Odysseus in bringing about the poem's end. Penelope's teleological associations here connect her with open, unfinished endings, at the same time as forecasting that it will, in fact, be she who 'brings about an end'. We have seen that Odysseus, by the end of the poem in book 22, is certain of his νόστοιο τέλος and its connection to Penelope's fidelity. But, as

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25. Felson (n.6), 44.

we saw above, teleology is as much the examination of the ways in which the end is disrupted, deferred, signposted, as it is a dissection of the ending itself. So how do Odysseus' teleologies begin – and how do they come to interrelate with those of Penelope?

## Odysseus and the τέλος of song

The noun τέλος occurs only seven times in the *Odyssey*; of those, three occur in Odysseus' speech, and one is an embedded focalization of Odysseus' thoughts.<sup>26</sup> And in fact, Odysseus is associated throughout the poem with the verb τελέω and its derivatives – both in others' prophecies of his return (as we have seen with Athena at 1.201), and in his characterization as a 'doer/fulfiller'.<sup>27</sup> It is Athena, again, who first describes Odysseus' abilities of fulfilment at 2.272, now disguised as Mentis: οἷός κεῖνος ἔην τελέσαι ἔργον τε ἔπος τε ('such a man as he was, in bringing to an end both deed and word').<sup>28</sup> Just as Penelope's first characterisation by her son is as someone 'unable to make an end', Odysseus, by contrast, is given as a key characteristic his ability to 'bring to an end both deed and word'. Endings, for both protagonists, are signalled from the beginning as a key component of their characters – and their relationships to the narrative around them.

The connection between the goddess' second prophecy to Telemachus and Odysseus' ability to bring about endings demonstrates a vital component of Odysseus' skills in completion: his privileged knowledge of endings through his relationship to the gods. In book 11, guided to

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26. *Od.* 9.5, 17.476, 22.323 (by Odysseus); 5.326 (of Odysseus' thoughts). Other instances are at 17.496 (by Eurynome), 20.74 (by Penelope), and 24.124 (by Amphimedon); all are discussed below.

27. *Od.* 2.176, 2.272, 3.99 = 4.329, 5.262, 5.302, 6.174, 10.483, 10.490, 13.40, 13.212, 14.160, 18.134, 18.271, 19.305, 19.487, 19.547, 19.557, 20.236, 22.5, 22.479, 23.192, 23.199, 23.250, 23.284.

the Underworld with the help of the goddess Circe, Odysseus receives crucial information from Tiresias regarding both the general resolution of the poem (νόστον, 11.100 – the first word of Tiresias’ prophecy) and precisely how it will end. Tiresias’ prediction lays out the events of the poem to come (11.114–18):<sup>29</sup>

ὄψε κακῶς νεῖαι, ὀλέσας ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους,  
νηὸς ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρῆος: δῆεις δ’ ἐν πῆματα οἴκῳ,  
ἄνδρας ὑπερφιάλους, οἳ τοι βίοτον κατέδουσι  
μνώμενοι ἀντιθέην ἄλοχον καὶ ἔδνα διδόντες.  
ἀλλ’ ἦ τοι κείνων γε βίας ἀποτίσειαι ἐλθῶν

Late and in a wretched state will you return, having lost all your comrades,  
on another’s ship; you will find woes in your house,  
arrogant men, who eat up your possessions  
wooing your godlike wife and giving her gifts.  
But you will have revenge on their deeds of violence, when you come

As many have pointed out, the retrospective nature of the narrative to the Phaeacians means that Tiresias’ prophecy has in fact already happened, before the action of the *Odyssey* begins in book 1 with Zeus and Athena’s determination to release Odysseus from Ogygia.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, however, in terms of endings, this means that Odysseus is working through the poem from the end backwards: in every instance in which we see him, he has already received from Tiresias the

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28. Compare Telemachus’ twice-repeated description of Odysseus at 3.99 and 4.329, ἢ ἔπος ἢ ἐ τι ἔργον ὑποστὰς ἐξετέλεσσε (‘if he ever promised and brought to fulfilment either a word or any deed’).

29. On Tiresias’ prophecy and the end of the *Odyssey*, see J. Peradotto, ‘Prophecy Degree Zero: Tiresias and the End of the *Odyssey*’, in B. Gentili and G. Paioni (edd.), *Oralità, Cultura, Letteratura, Discorso* (Rome, 1985), 425–455; see also S.D. Olson, ‘Odysseus’ “Winnowing-Shovel” (Hom. *Od.* 11. 119–37) and the Island of the Cattle of the Sun’, *ICS* 22 (1997), 7–9; and, for a comparative approach, W.F. Hansen, ‘Odysseus and the Oar’, in L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1990), 239–74.

30. J. Peradotto, *Man in the Middle Voice* (Princeton, 1990), 69.

prophecy of what his ending will be.<sup>31</sup> νόστος and τέλος are intertwined once again, since it is the knowledge of the end of his νόστος which drives Odysseus' narrative. By the time Odysseus meets Penelope for the first time in book 19, he knows that his return will happen: in fact, it *has already* happened, in the paradox of the prophecy that he makes about a return that has already taken place (19.300–2).<sup>32</sup>

This privileged knowledge of endings and its association with Odysseus is marked through closural allusions that affirm Odysseus' ability to bring to fulfilment the prophecies he has been given. At 5.302, Odysseus remarks of Calypso's predictions to him (that he would suffer before returning home, cf. 5.206–7), τὰ δὲ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται ('and indeed, these are all now being fulfilled') – echoing the fulfilment of Zeus' βουλή at *Il.* 1.5 and Athena's prophecy at *Od.* 1.201, and marking his godlike awareness of the journey towards the τέλος of his plot. When, in the midst of the storm sent by Poseidon after his departure from Ogygia, Odysseus 'avoids the τέλος of death' (τέλος θανάτου ἀλεείνων, 5.326), the formulaic phrase gains additional resonance<sup>33</sup> – because Odysseus knows from Calypso's prophecy at 5.206–7 (πρὶν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι, 'before you arrive at your native land') that it is his τέλος to return home, and that this is in the process of being fulfilled (τὰ δὲ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται, 5.302). He knows that death is not the τέλος of his story. By contrast, when Odysseus – in his disguise as the beggar – predicts for Antinous the 'end of death instead of marriage' (πρὸ γάμοιο τέλος θανάτοιο) at 17.476, it is a sure prediction of the *Odyssey's* end, which Odysseus himself will

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31. Odysseus' plot is, of course, hypotactic from the poem's start, beginning *in medias res* and then folding in on itself, looking backwards with Odysseus' narrative in books 9–12 to the Phaeacians, until Odysseus lands on Ithaca in book 13: see I.J.F. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge, 2001), 3.

32. See P. Gainsford, 'Formal Analysis of Recognition Scenes in the Odyssey', *JHS* 123 (2012), 42 on 'foretelling'.

33. On oral formulas see M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (ed. A. Parry) (Oxford, 1971), 1–239. On the τέλος θανάτου/θανάτοιο, see Ambrose (n.17), 51.

bring about.<sup>34</sup> And at 22.323, as we have seen, Odysseus at last makes clear that he knows exactly what his τέλος is, the νόστοιο τέλος γλυκεροῖο (‘ending of a welcome return home’) which the suitors tried to keep from him.

But it is not only the end of his return which Odysseus knows will happen. Odysseus is also endowed with an unusual understanding of a different type of ending: the teleologies of song. In book 8, during his stay in Phaeacia, Odysseus – just like Penelope – encounters a bard-figure, this time by the name of Demodocus. As we have seen, Odysseus does not, as Penelope, attempt in vain to put an end to song of the Greeks’ (and Odysseus’) return, or to stop the poem in which he himself is involved. Instead, his actions are to try to bring the song back to his own story. He asks Demodocus to ‘change’ (μετάβηθι, 492) his theme from a tangential foray into the tale of Aphrodite and Ares, to direct it back towards Odysseus’ homecoming from Troy. When Demodocus has finished singing (on the orders of Alcinous, not Odysseus), Odysseus makes a curious comment (9: 5-7):

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ γέ τί φημι τέλος χαριέστερον εἶναι  
ἢ ὅτ’ εὐφροσύνη μὲν ἔχῃ κάτα δῆμον ἅπαντα,  
δαιτυμόνες δ’ ἀνὰ δώματ’ ἀκουάζωνται ἀοιδοῦ

I say that there is no more delightful ending  
than when happiness spreads through the whole house,  
and the guests in the halls listen to the bard

The translation of τέλος here has caused much deliberation, particular since it stands in an unusual usage without its more common delimiting genitive, and as the subject of εἶναι.<sup>35</sup>

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34. Note that Eurynome echoes Odysseus’ τέλος-vocabulary at 17.496 in response to Penelope’s wish that Antinous might receive harm for his striking of the beggar: εἰ γὰρ ἐπ’ ἀρήσιν τέλος ἡμετέρησι γένοιτο (‘may there be fulfilment to our prayers’).

35. See Ambrose (n.17), 59-60 for a summary of ancient interpretations of the passage.

Stanford translates as ‘achievement’;<sup>36</sup> Muir gives ‘completion, result’: ‘I do not think that there is any more pleasant result than when merriment overtakes the entire company’;<sup>37</sup> while Murray’s Loeb translation is predictably literal, with his ‘fulfilment of delight’.<sup>38</sup> Ambrose<sup>39</sup> and Heubeck also give ‘fulfilment’, with Heubeck elaborating, ‘Odysseus praises as ideal the situation of a people filled with joy as they listen to a bard while feasting and drinking to their hearts’ content’.<sup>40</sup> All, following Stanford’s lead, interpret the complement of τέλος as εὐφροσύνη (‘happiness’), as if εὐφροσύνη were to be taken as a genitive dependent on τέλος (see Murray’s ‘fulfilment of delight’). But a closer look at the syntax of the sentence, as well as the important fact τέλος is unusually *not* used with the delimiting genitive, shows that it is not εὐφροσύνη alone that is defined by the τέλος – but rather, the *entire circumstance of storytelling* (signalled by the addition of ὅτ’, ‘when’). The description that follows – pleasure in the song,<sup>41</sup> the audience listening, the bard singing – suggests that the whole of the ὅτε-clause should be read as a periphrasis for ‘song’; and thus, that τέλος is standing here in direct apposition to the bard’s song. The translation along these lines would then read, ‘there is no greater τέλος than song itself.’ In other words, Odysseus’ commentary on poetic song is to point out that it is defined by its τέλος, its own fulfilment – that it is, in a way, a τέλος itself.

The bard’s song is thus, then, both a fulfilment of the desire for pleasure, but also, at the same time, an ‘ending-in-process’, a manifestation of the movement towards the ending which

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36. W.B. Stanford, *Homer: Odyssey I–XII* (London, 1996), *ad loc.*

37. J. V. Muir, *Homer: Odyssey IX* (Bristol, 1980), *ad loc.*

38. A. T. Murray, *Homer, Odyssey: Books I–XII* (Cambridge MA, 1996).

39. Ambrose (n.17), 59-61.

40. A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey: Books IX–XVI. Vol. 2* (Oxford, 1990).

41. On the pleasure of poetry in Homer, see C. Macleod, ‘Homer on Poetry and the Poetry of Homer,’ in *Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1996), 6-15, and G. B. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 3-21.



constitutes its plot. Odysseus, who predicts the τέλος of the suitors and knows his own νόστοις τέλος, who is a man of fulfilment (as characterized by Athena), is thus also a fulfiller of poems. His teleological associations go three ways, informing character, theme, and metapoetics: both in his privileged knowledge of endings as a character, the setting of his own personal τέλος as the poem's theme, and the fact that the ending of his journey coincides with the end of the poem's plot, linking character-driven teleologies with the teleologies of narrative.

This association between the τέλος of the poem and Odysseus' plot accords, in many ways, to the typical 'closed' teleology, where events are determined by a pre-defined ending. Odysseus' story invites us to know what the end will be from the beginning, with the prediction by Athena in book 1 that prophesies the completion (τελέεσθαι, 1.201) of Odysseus' νόστος. And yet, as we saw above, it is often the tension between opened and closed endings, and not immediate completion or full knowledge, which drives the narrative forwards. And there is one important element of the *Odyssey's* ending which neither Athena, nor Tiresias, nor Odysseus himself are able to foretell: the issue of Penelope's fidelity. Telemachus' delineation of Penelope's 'inability to make an ending' (1.249-50) directly dismantles Athena's prediction of Odysseus' completed νόστος (1.201), coming as a response to her ensuing inquiry as to whether the suitors are engaged in a 'wedding feast' (γάμος, 1.226); and it is clearly also a question which is very much on Odysseus' mind in the wake of Tiresias' prophecy, as he goes on to ask his mother Anticleia about the 'purpose and mind of my wedded wife, whether she stays with my son and keeps everything safe, or has someone married her, whoever is the best of the Greeks?' (μνηστῆς ἀλόχου βουλήν τε νόον τε, / ἥε μένει παρὰ παιδί και ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσει / ἢ ἤδη μιν ἔγημεν Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος, 11.177-9).<sup>42</sup> If Odysseus has full knowledge of the τέλος of

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42. Anticleia claims Penelope's continued fidelity (11.181-4), but does not speak with the prophetic knowledge of Tiresias: in fact, as Doherty shows, many of the speeches supposedly quoted in book 11 in fact serve to characterize

his νόστος, his return home to Ithaca, then, it is the question of Penelope's (in)fidelity – and the importance of her faithfulness to him in ensuring a full restoration to his οἶκος – which provides closural uncertainty for a character who is otherwise in full control of his ending. It is therefore to Penelope, and the delaying, deferment, and complicating of endings in relation to the already-secured τέλος of both Odysseus and his poem, which we now turn.

## Penelope: 'Unable to make an ending'

Penelope, as many have already noted, is unique in that she 'represents the necessary condition for the restoration of Odysseus' rule over Ithaca'<sup>43</sup>. We have already seen Odysseus, in his question to Anticleia in book 11, equate Penelope's fidelity with the goods in his household – suggesting that her fidelity implicates both sexual faithfulness and the safeguarding of his goods. This, ultimately, will be what allows him to return as a king to both his position as husband and his role as master of the οἶκος<sup>44</sup> (as, in the foil-narrative of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Agamemnon is unable to do).<sup>45</sup> As such, it follows that Penelope also represents the necessary condition for the poem's fulfilment or τέλος, concerned as it is with Odysseus' return (1.77 νόστον) to his home, his possessions and his wife – as the sequence of the contest of the bow, the bed-test and the final installation of Odysseus as king of Ithaca demonstrate. But it is precisely because Penelope is the pivot on which the end of the *Odyssey* hangs – whether Odysseus' return

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Odysseus' own wish-fulfilment and 'misogynistic "moral[s]"' (L. E. Doherty, 'The Internal and Implied Audiences of *Odyssey* 11', *Arethusa* 24, 2 (1991): 145–176).

43. M. Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1998), 83; see also Zeitlin (n.6), 27.

44. S. Goldhill, 'Reading Differences: The *Odyssey* and Juxtaposition', *Ramus* 17, 1 (1988): 1–31, at 2.

45. Katz (n.6), *passim*; the opposition between Agamemnon and Odysseus is strengthened in the language of the opening of book 1, where Agamemnon is pictured returning (νοστήσαντα, 1.36) only to be slaughtered by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

is successful or not – that she provides such a central focus for the possibilities and potentialities for different endings, different teleologies.<sup>46</sup> Penelope’s characterization, in other words, the apparent ‘inconsistencies’ of which have led to multiple different theorizations and interpretations,<sup>47</sup> can be read in conjunction with Odysseus as a manifestation and exploration of the tensions in the different possible teleologies of the *Odyssey*.<sup>48</sup>

The introduction to Penelope served by Telemachus at 1.249–50, as we have seen, characterizes Penelope as the obstacle to endings from the very start (οὔτε τελευτήν / ποιῆσαι δύναται, 1.249–50), in sharp contrast with Odysseus, the ‘fulfiller of words and deeds’ (οἶος κείνος ἔην τελέσαι ἔργον τε ἔπος τε, 2.272). Telemachus repeats his description of Penelope once more in the *Odyssey*, to another person in disguise (this time Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, 16.126–7); and, during a recapitulation of the events of the poem from the Underworld, the suitor Amphimedon describes Penelope in similar terms (ἢ δ’ οὔτ’ ἠρνεῖτο στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτ’ ἔτελεύτα, ‘she neither denied hateful marriage nor did she make an end to it,’ 24.126). Interestingly, although the verb τελευτάω occurs twenty-two times in the *Odyssey* – with reference to the fulfilment of oaths, journeys, and the building of Odysseus’ raft – it only occurs once in the negative, here, with reference to Penelope.<sup>49</sup> The *Odyssey* is thus – in addition to

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46. See, by way of comparison (though not framed in teleological terms), Katz (n.6), 194: ‘[Penelope] is constituted instead around a persistence of either/or that is drawn toward the unifying power of a monologic *kleos*, yet never comes fully under its sway’.

47. See n.6 above.

48. ‘Thematizing Penelope’s inscrutability as the logic of narrative truth’, as Marilyn Katz succinctly puts it (Katz (n.6), 17). In this sense I follow James Phelan’s observation that character and narrative progression are not only inseparable but mutually implicated (*Reading People, Reading Plots* (Chicago, 1989), ix).

49. Other instances are at 1.293, 2.171, 2.275, 2.280, 2.306, 2.378, 3.56, 3.62, 4.585, 5.253, 7.331, 8.510, 9.511, 10.346, 11.80, 12.304, 15.438, 15.524, 17.148, 18.59, 21.200.

Odysseus' association with his τέλος – punctuated by allusions to unsatisfied closure, clustered around Penelope and her potential alternative narratives.<sup>50</sup>

These references to Penelope's inability to 'make an ending' occur at marked moments in the plot's progression: at the poem's start where Penelope is first introduced by Telemachus, a second time just after Odysseus' return at the middle of the poem (and the first mention of Penelope to Odysseus by their son), and a final time in the last book, in the Underworld (itself a closural device as a representation of death/endings).<sup>51</sup> The last reference to Penelope and endings, however, has the verb τελευτάω in the imperfect tense. The ending is both completed (Penelope and Odysseus have already been reunited, Amphimedon is already dead) and about to come (with four hundred lines to the end of the poem), and so – as with the imperfect ἐτελείετο at *Il.* 1.5 – ἐτελεύτα at *Od.* 24.126 again becomes a forceful symbol of narrative completion. This alternation between open-endedness and endings-in-process, with the movement from the present οὔτε τελευτήν / ποιῆσαι δύναται (1.249-50) to the imperfect ἐτελεύτα (24.126), forms a snapshot-in-miniature of Penelope's paradoxical teleological role in both deferring the ending, and bringing it to a continuing close.

This combination of open and closed teleologies – the necessity of maintaining tension in the plot as well as signalling the fulfilment of those tensions – focus themselves in the figure of Penelope, and result in a combination of teleological strategies. Although she often makes clear her disdain for the suitors' behaviour, their reckless wasting of the house and ingratitude to Odysseus (4.681–95), their constant feasting (21.69), their murderous plot on Telemachus' life (16.409–33), she alternates throughout between the two major narrative possibilities (and thus

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50. Zeitlin (n.6), 206 outlines two roles for Penelope in the *Odyssey* – marriage to the suitors or not – while Felson (n.6), x suggests a total of six 'possible plots'.

two teleologies) – fidelity to Odysseus and his return, or marriage to the suitors – and remains undecided whether to leave with a suitor or to stay at home (16.73–7, 19.525–9). In contrast to Odysseus, Penelope does not have a privileged knowledge of endings – she *cannot* ‘make an end’, because she does not know which one it will be – and so must leave her options open. The only moment at which she gains knowledge from the gods is in the dream of Iphthime sent by Athena (4.795–847); but even there it is only partial knowledge: when Penelope asks to know if Odysseus will return, Athena replies οὐ μὲν τοι κεῖνόν γε διηνεκέως ἀγορεύσω, / ζῶει ὃ γ’ ἢ τέθνηκε (‘I will not speak of him at length, / whether he is alive or dead’, 836–7).<sup>52</sup>

Later in the *Odyssey*, Athena decides to intervene directly in Penelope’s decision-making and have her descend to the suitors in an important and much-discussed passage (18.158–68). A double motivation is given:<sup>53</sup> on the one hand, to affect the suitors’ hearts (ὅπως πετάσειε μάλιστα / θυμὸν μνηστήρων, ‘so that she might flutter / the hearts of the suitors’, 160–1)<sup>54</sup> and, on the other, to gain honour from her husband and son (ιδὲ τιμήσσοι γένοιτο / μᾶλλον πρὸς πόσιός τε καὶ υἱέος ἢ πάρος ἦεν, ‘and have more honour / before her husband and son than before’, 161–2).<sup>55</sup> If we force the teleology of the *Odyssey* into closure – either towards

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51. Smith (n.8), 179; also Fowler (n.12), 81, and O. Whitehead, ‘The Funeral of Achilles; An Epilogue to the *Iliad* in Book 24 of the *Odyssey*’, *G&R* 31 (1984), 119–25, at 124.

52. Even when Penelope receives the prophecy from Theoclymenus of Odysseus’ return, her response is a wish for completion rather than its confirmation: αἶ γὰρ τοῦτο, ξεῖνε, ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἶη (‘Ah, stranger, if only your word might be fulfilled’, 17.163); see further below, pp.24–26.

53. There is ambivalence as to whether the ὅπως clause at 23.160–2 represents Athena’s motivation (see C.S. Byre, ‘Penelope and the Suitors before Odysseus: *Odyssey* 18.158–303’, *AJPh* 109 (1988), 159–73, at 160) or Penelope’s (Harsh (n.6), 7). I prefer to allow both to coexist rather than emphasizing one interpretation over the other.

54. There is an ambiguity in the verb πετάσειε here – either ‘flutter’ (from πέτομαι) or ‘expand, expose’ (from πετάννυμι); either way, Penelope seems to intend to have an effect on their passions, their θυμός, as can be inferred from their eager reaction (*Od.* 18.212–13).

55. On this passage, see Byre (n.53) and C. Emlyn-Jones, ‘The Reunion of Penelope and Odysseus’, *G&R* 31 (1984), 1–18.

Penelope's marriage to one of the suitors, or the ending of Odysseus' return – then Penelope's actions seem at best cautious and at worst calculating; if we require psychological consistency in her characterization then the two alternative motives seem very much at odds. When viewed as a tension between two different teleologies, however – both maintaining the tension of the plot between the ending and its deferment in Penelope's indecision, and anticipating the *Odyssey's* pre-determined end as we know it through Odysseus – the double motivation clearly embraces the paradox that is involved in maintaining Penelope's options, as both the potential bride of the suitors and the loyal wife of Odysseus. On the one hand, the drive towards Odysseus' τέλος means that Penelope here creates herself as an object of desire and worth to the suitors, conferring honour upon her husband, and maintaining loyalty in her honourable motivations and Odysseus' eyes (18.281–3). She has fulfilled the requirements of the narrative arc in which Odysseus returns, simultaneously maintaining loyalty and encouraging competition for her hand which will in turn confer status upon Odysseus; and she has even managed, according to Odysseus' interpretation at least, to shape her character into the mould of deceptive cunning which his model of ὁμοφροσύνη ('like-mindedness') would require from a like-minded wife.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, her appearance to the suitors, and the attribution of a desire to 'make their hearts flutter', maintains the open, contingent possibility of an alternative outcome – that Penelope might eventually choose a suitor if Odysseus does not return.

That this is significant in the teleology of the poem is shown by Penelope's use of closural vocabulary just after the scene occurs. Speaking to Eurymachus after her descent, Penelope recalls Odysseus' words to her before his departure, focalized in her voice into uncharacteristic (for Odysseus) teleological uncertainty: 'I do not know whether a god will send

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56. *Od.* 6.182–4. See Felson (n.6), 54–5.

me back, or whether I will be seized by death there in Troy’ (τῷ οὐκ οἶδ’ ἢ κέν μ’ ἀνέσει θεός, ἢ κεν ἄλώω / αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ, 18.265–6). Penelope caps Odysseus’ speech in her own words: ‘so he spoke; and these things are all now being fulfilled’ (κεῖνος τῶς ἀγόρευε· τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται, 18.271). The use of τελεῖται and the repetition of Odysseus’ formulaic phrase from 5.302 marks out the comment as both teleologically informed, and constructing a comparison between the alternate teleologies of Odysseus and Penelope. While Odysseus used the closural τελεῖται to refer correctly to the actual outcome of a prediction made by a goddess, which also incorporated his return home, Penelope’s reference is to the guesswork of an Odysseus who – pre-Tiresias’ prophecy – did not know what his τέλος would be (οὐκ οἶδ’ ἢ ... ἦ). Meanwhile, her inference that Odysseus’ prediction of his absence is ‘being fulfilled’ is patently incorrect, in that Odysseus himself is present and listening to her as she cites his false prediction. Here, closural allusion is made to an ending that will *not* come about – thus exploiting the dramatic irony of the situation, hinting at the end to come, and palpably maintaining the narrative tension between Odysseus and Penelope’s teleologies.

This tension between Penelope’s simultaneous maintenance of open and closed teleologies is symbolized by the weaving and unweaving of her web, and tied into closural vocabulary throughout the poem in the repeated formulaic phrase, ὥς τὸ μὲν ἔξετέλεσσε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλουσ’, ὑπ’ ἀνάγκης (‘so she completed it though she did not want to, under constraint’, 2.110 = 19.156 = 24.146).<sup>57</sup> Penelope’s weaving has often been connected to the processes of oral

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57. On beginning/ending and the temporality of Penelope’s web, see A. Karanika, ‘Women’s Tangible Time: Perceptions of Continuity and Rupture in Female Temporality in Greek Literature,’ in E. Eidinow and L. Maurizio (eds.), *Engendering Time in the Ancient Mediterranean* (London, est. 2019). On weaving and poetry in Homer, see A. Bergren, ‘Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought,’ *Arethusa* 16 (1983), 69–95, at 79, and M.C. Pantelia, ‘Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer,’ *AJPh* 114 (1993), 493–501, at 494.

poetry and recomposition<sup>58</sup> – but it also works as a model for two different teleologies: one which progresses towards endings and completion (ἐξετέλεσσε), and the other which is left open with the potential to be threaded in different configurations. The irony and demonstration of the tensions and paradoxes between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ teleologies is that the *unfulfilled* narrative ending (the potential open ending at tension with Odysseus’ τέλος – Penelope’s marriage with the suitors) is symbolized by the *completion* of Penelope’s web, upon which she has to choose a suitor. As long as it remains incomplete and teleologically open, the prophesied narrative ending of Odysseus’ return may be fulfilled.

## Penelope and Odysseus: Making ends meet

In book 19, we arrive at a pivotal moment in the narrative where Penelope and Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, speak to each other directly for the first time – and where Penelope goes on to decide to set the contest of the bow, finally narrowing down her open options towards an apparent ending.<sup>59</sup> At one point during their initial conversation, in answer to Penelope’s inquiries about her husband, Odysseus the beggar makes a prediction which – as his very presence and performance of the words demonstrates – he already knows to be true (300-302):

ὥς ὁ μὲν οὕτως ἐστὶ σόος καὶ ἐλεύσεται ἤδη  
ἄγχι μάλ’, οὐδ’ ἔτι τῆλε φίλων καὶ πατρίδος αἴης  
δηρὸν ἀπεσσεῖται

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58. Clayton (n.6), 123. See also S. Lowenstam, ‘The Shroud of Laertes and Penelope’s Guile’, *CJ* 95 (2000), 333–48.

59. On which see O. Levaniouk, *Eve of the Festival: Making Myth in Odyssey 19* (Cambridge MA, 2011), 195–212. This scene is where one of the cruxes of scholarly interpretation rests, and the juncture at which many opinions divide over the extent of Penelope’s knowledge, the moment of recognition, and thus the consistency of her characterization: see n.6 above.



So, I say, he is safe, and will come to you  
soon; not for long will he be far from his friends  
and his homeland

He goes on to swear an oath that he will come ‘in the course of this very month’, to which Penelope replies (309):

αἶ γὰρ τοῦτο, ξεῖνε, ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἶη

Ah, stranger, if only your word might be fulfilled

Taken literally, Penelope’s reply is a standard oral formula.<sup>60</sup> And yet Penelope makes use here of the verb *τελέω* – which, as we have seen above, occurs with a markedly metapoetic twist at *Il.* 1.5 and *Od.* 1.201, in the latter case with specific reference by Athena to Odysseus’ νόστος (ὡς *τελέεσθαι* οἴω... φράσσεται ὡς κε νέηται, 201-5) – while *τελέω* and its derivatives have been used throughout the poem with reference to the fulfilment of Odysseus’ νόστος-theme. And *ἔπος* here, in its conjunction with *τελέω*, can also be read with a metaliterary force. For, even if Andrew Ford’s surmise is correct, and *ἔπος* does not come to contain a poetic sense until the sixth century BCE,<sup>61</sup> the *ἔπος* to which Penelope refers is inherently metaliterary in and of itself. Odysseus’ last words – the *ἔπος* which Penelope wishes fulfilled – were the prediction of his own return. In other words, his *ἔπος* was a delineation of his νόστος (‘homecoming’) – which, as we have seen, is the theme and τέλος of the *Odyssey* itself. Odysseus’ spoken *ἔπος*, here, then, which Penelope hopes will be fulfilled, becomes at the same time a recital-in-miniature (*ἔπεα /*

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60. On the formula *ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἶη*, repeated at 15.536 and 17.162, see R. B. Rutherford, *Homer: Odyssey Books XIX and XX* (Cambridge, 1992), *ad loc.*

61. A. Ford, *A Study of Early Greek Terms for Poetry: ‘Aoidē’, ‘Epos’ and ‘Poiesis’* (PhD Diss, Yale 1981), 137–52; see also R. P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca NY, 1989), 13 and D. Bynum, ‘The Generic Nature of Oral Epic Poetry’, in D. Ben-Amos (ed.) *Folklore Genres* (Austin TX, 1976), 35–58, at 47–54, who argues that it was Aristotle who introduced the sense of ‘epic’ to *ἔπος*.

epic) of the *Odyssey* and a signal of its impending closure. It is thus possible to read Penelope's reply as both, 'may your words be fulfilled', and as a metapoetic comment: 'may the epic end in this way'. As Odysseus predicts an end for the epic that does, indeed, involve his own νόστος, Penelope hints at something more than the formulaic wish for the fulfilment of speech. She suggests, in fact, with the optative αἶ γὰρ ... εἴη ('may it be'), that she wishes that she knew the ending of the epic in which she is involved. Odysseus, who received the prophecy of his return from Tiresias and who has already arrived on Ithaca in book 19 – meaning that he knows that his 'prediction' has already come true – knows that νόστος is his τέλος. But Penelope does not have the privileged knowledge of endings that Odysseus has. Even when she receives the prophecy from Theoclymenus of Odysseus' return (she does not see the bird omen herself), her response – tellingly – is the same: αἶ γὰρ τοῦτο, ξεῖνε, ἔπος τετελεσμένον εἴη (17.163).<sup>62</sup>

Penelope's response to Odysseus' prediction and her wish for its fulfilment is characteristically teleologically ambivalent. She makes her own – false – prediction that Odysseus will not return, countering Odysseus' prophecy to maintain two open teleologies: either Odysseus will return (if Odysseus-the-beggar's prediction is correct) or he will not (if her prediction is right). Similarly to book 18, Penelope – whether deliberately or not – misinterprets Odysseus' words, and thus maintains the tension between their two teleologies. In their continuing conversation (after Odysseus' recognition by Eurycleia), Penelope specifically articulates the two narrative options available to her in a characteristic 'either... or' structure (19.524-9):

ὥς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,  
ἠὲ μένω παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσω,

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62. Note that this is also the phrase used by Telemachus in response to Theoclymenus' prophecy at the moment of the omen (15.536).

κτῆσιν ἐμήν, δμῶάς τε καὶ ὑπερεφές μέγα δῶμα,  
εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δήμοιό τε φῆμιν,  
ἧ ἤδη ἄμ' ἔπωμαι Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος  
μνᾶται ἐνὶ μεγάροισι, πορῶν ἀπερείσια ἔδνα.

so my mind goes back and forth, in two ways:  
whether I should stay with my son and keep everything safe –  
my possessions, my slaves, and the great high-roofed hall –  
respecting my husband's bed and anticipating what the people will say,  
or whether I should go now with whoever is the best of the Greeks  
and courts me in the halls with countless wedding-gifts.

The double choice that Penelope has to make between Odysseus and the suitors and which she consistently delays is represented in the adverb δίχα, 'in two ways', repeated twice of Penelope in the *Odyssey*: once by Telemachus, and the second time here by Penelope herself.<sup>63</sup> Here, in the wake of Odysseus' teleological prophecy and Penelope's deliberate maintenance of open teleologies, it becomes emblematic of the narrative model of plot progression in which both 'open' and 'closed' options are allowed to co-exist.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the wording of the two choices directly quotes (with elaboration) Odysseus' articulation of Penelope's options in his inquiry to Anticleia in the Underworld, linking her teleological openness to his own narrative uncertainty regarding her fidelity.

This tension between Odysseus and Penelope's teleologies is further driven home in Penelope's discussion of her dream, where she asks Odysseus to interpret a dream-omen of the killing of her twenty geese by an eagle<sup>65</sup> – and where τελέω-vocabulary is clustered particularly densely, in ways that demonstrate the tensions between Odysseus' closed and Penelope's open teleologies. The eagle (whom Odysseus later interprets as representing himself) unusually gives

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63. μητρὶ δ' ἐμῇ δίχα θυμὸς ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μερμηρίζει ('as for my mother, her heart in her breast goes two ways', 16.73), ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα ('so my mind goes back and forth, in two ways', 19.524).

64. On double choices and the structuring of narrative, see Peradotto (n.30), 42.

65. On which see A. Rozokoki, 'Penelope's Dream in Book 19 of the *Odyssey*', *CQ* 51, 1 (2001): 1–6.

an interpretation within the dream itself: οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἐσθλόν, ὃ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται ('this is not a dream, but a vision of a good reality, which will be fulfilled', 547). Penelope here focalizes through Odysseus, the eagle of the dream, to speak in his customary language of fulfilment with the future perfect indicative of τελέω – in sharp contrast to her own optative wish earlier in the book at 309. Reinforcing the link between the closural prophecy of Odysseus' return and its fulfilment, and the connection between eagle and Odysseus, Odysseus repeats the verb in his interpretation outside the dream: ἐπεὶ ἦ ῥά τοι αὐτὸς Ὀδυσσεὺς / πέφραδ', ὅπως τελέει ('since Odysseus himself has told you, how he will bring it to fulfilment', 556-7). Yet, in spite of two closural assurances from Odysseus, Penelope follows by negating the verb – οὐδέ τι πάντα τελείεται ἀνθρώποισι ('not all [dreams] are fulfilled for people', 561) – and denying the teleological truth of dreams, relating the fable of the 'two gates of dreams' (562), where some dreams come true and some do not.<sup>66</sup> From the perspective of teleologies, it is interesting to note that the double structure here (δοιαὶ πύλαι, 'two gates') mirrors Penelope's 'either-or' decision-making – between the two different endings available to her, fidelity to Odysseus or marriage to the suitors – highlighted above at 524 with the adverb δίχα. If Odysseus' full teleological knowledge comes from dreams, prophecies and portents from the gods, then, Penelope's strategy is to maintain a tension between open and closed endings by countering Odysseus' interpretations – by arguing for the fulfilment of some dreams, and the non-fulfilment of others.

The irony of this is that Penelope's continued countering of Odysseus' prediction of the end leads to her ostensibly closing down her options and deciding, in the wake of her refusal to accept Odysseus' interpretation of the dream, to set the bow-contest (570-75). Scholarship has focused, as we have seen, on whether Penelope recognizes the beggar or not, and therefore

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66. See B. Haller, 'The Gates of Horn and Ivory in Odyssey 19: Penelope's Call for Deeds, Not Words,' *CPh* 104, 4 (2009), 397–417.

whether she sets the contest knowing that it will ensure Odysseus' return.<sup>67</sup> From a teleological perspective, however, the contest of the bow is a fascinating example both of apparent movement towards closure – Penelope at last making a decision towards an end – and the maintenance of open options: marriage to the suitors, if Odysseus has not returned; and reunion with her husband, if he has. It is highly significant, therefore, that Penelope's only use of the noun *τέλος* (as opposed to the verbal form *τελέω*) occurs at the beginning of book 20, on the morning before the contest will take place. Praying to Artemis, she asks to be killed or carried off by the wind like the daughters of Pandareus, before the 'fulfilment of their bountiful marriage' (*τέλος θαλεροῦ γάμοιο*, 20.74). For Penelope, the setting of the bow-contest will lead to the 'end' of her story with marriage. Though she assumes that this will be marriage to a suitor, the irony is that her story *will* end with the *τέλος γάμοιο*, but with Odysseus, not a suitor.<sup>68</sup> just as Odysseus' story ends with the *νόστοιο τέλος* (22.323). Even in her usage of closural *τέλος*, then, Penelope's options are still left open, allowing for interpretation between marriage to the suitors and reunion with Odysseus.

This illusion of open options is also maintained by Telemachus, who by this point knows that his father has returned. He responds to the suitor Agelaus' demand that Penelope choose a suitor for her husband with a sequence of lies organized around a complex negation of *τελέω*: he acknowledges that his father has died (which he knows not to be true, 20.340); he says that Penelope should marry whoever she wishes (perhaps a veiled allusion to Odysseus' presence, 341-2); and he prays that 'the god may not bring this to pass' (*μὴ τοῦτο θεὸς τελέσειεν*, 344) that Penelope should leave the house unwillingly. Of course, Telemachus knows that this will not happen, since Odysseus has returned and is shortly to exact his revenge on the suitors; but it

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67. In particular Harsh and Vlahos (n.6).

68. In the false wedding-feast which Odysseus orders at 23.129-40.

works to maintain the narrative tension and sustain the tension between the closure and openness of the plot.

As the bow-contest draws nearer, allusions to the τέλος increase, and Penelope is drawn into Odysseus and Telemachus' closural certainty. Telemachus' near-stringing of the bow seems to bring the end near, only open it again as he refrains on a sign from Odysseus: instead, he encourages the others to 'try the bow, and bring an end to the contest' (τόξου πειρήσασθε, καὶ ἐκτελέωμεν ἄεθλον, 21.135). Antinous repeats his words twice at lines 180 and 268, punctuating the unsuccessful attempts of the suitors to string the bow and highlighting the irony that it will not, in fact, be they who 'bring it to an end'; and it is, in fact, Penelope who first uses ἐκτελέω correctly to refer the actual outcome, predicting the promise she will fulfil to clothe the beggar if he successfully strings the bow (ὧδε γὰρ ἐξερέω, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται, 'I will say this, and it will be fulfilled', 337). As the end approaches, Penelope is drawn into Odysseus' closural vocabulary, moving from her vague optative of 19.309 to a certain statement of 'what will be fulfilled'. And her words are mirrored and capped by Odysseus, who declares after he has strung the bow – in his first speech as the newly-revealed Odysseus – that 'this decisive contest has been completed' (οὗτος μὲν δὴ ἄεθλος ἀάατος ἐκτετέλεσται, 22.5).<sup>69</sup>

Yet in spite of this increasing movement towards closure, and the first instance of imitation between husband and wife in their use of closural τελέω-vocabulary, Penelope's teleologies are still maintained open. Book 23 opens with Eurycleia rebuking Penelope for refusing to recognize Odysseus, and claiming that Penelope's 'long wish has been fulfilled' (νῦν δ' ἤδη τόδε μακρὸν ἐέλδωρ ἐκτετέλεσται, 54): Odysseus has returned. As with her interpretation of the dream of the geese, Penelope rejects the closure claimed by Eurycleia and, still keeping

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69. Note that, at 22.479, the narrator imitates Odysseus' statement to mark the end of his slaughter of the suitors with the succinct τετέλεστο δὲ ἔργον ('the work was completed').

her ending open, refuses to acknowledge that Odysseus has returned (67-8), failing to recognize him – so the narrator informs us – because of his ‘poor clothes’ (95). Yet there is a closural net drawing around Penelope, who had promised that it ‘would be fulfilled’ (21.337) that Odysseus the beggar, if successful in the bow-contest, should receive new clothes. As Odysseus is re-clothed and fashioned by Athena into a figure recognizable by Penelope, the work done by Athena is compared to that of a craftsman ‘accomplishing his task’ (ἔργα τελείει, 23.161). Odysseus’ transformation is thus not only linked to Penelope’s earlier promise, drawing the two characters together into the τέλος. It also, in the comparison to the craftsman (άνηρ / ἴδρις, ‘skilful man’, 160-1), creates an analogy between Odysseus’ full realization and the bard’s completion of the song, where the bard – also an άνηρ ἴδρις<sup>70</sup> – is close to completing (τελείει) his own work (ἔργον). Interestingly, Odysseus is not only linked to the τέλος here as the object created, but also as the creator:<sup>71</sup> in the bed-test set for him by Penelope, it is his ability to bring the bed to completion which he emphasizes twice with the verb τελέω (τῷ δ’ ἐγὼ ἀμφιβαλὼν θάλαμον δέμον, ὄφρ’ ἐτέλεσσα, ‘building around it our chamber, until I finished it’, 192; ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἀρχόμενος λέχος ἔξεον, ὄφρ’ ἐτέλεσσα, ‘beginning with this, I carved out the bed, until I finished it’, 199). Penelope’s test of the bed thus becomes both the symbol of their reunion, and the signal, through its association with Odysseus’ abilities of completion, of the upcoming τέλος of the poem.

Here, at last, with the bed-test, Penelope closes her options after a series of closural tests. The contest of the bow has been completed (οὗτος μὲν δὴ ἄεθλος ἀάατος ἐκτετέλεσται, 22.5); the killing of the suitors has been finished (τετέλεστο δὲ ἔργον, 479); and Odysseus himself has

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70. Compare the bard as αἰοιδὸς άνηρ (‘bard man’) at 3.267, and the list of δημοεργοὶ (‘craftsmen’) at 17.383, which includes seers, doctors, carpenters and bards.

both been fashioned into his completed self by Athena (ἔργα τελείει, 23.161), and returned to his role as fulfiller and accomplisher in his description of the making of the bed (ὄφρ' ἐτέλεσσα, 23.192, 199). Penelope, in turn, can now act with a view towards the end, and – by the end of the poem, where closure has been reached and the tension between open and closed is no longer viable – the inconsistencies of her open-ended character are redefined in the light of a closed teleological narrative. In Agamemnon's eulogy (24.192–202), her story is set against the alternative plot pattern of adultery and betrayal represented by Clytemnestra; she becomes the prototype of loyalty and wifely ἀρετή; her κλέος is conjoined with that of her husband in matrimonial harmony.<sup>72</sup> In this retrospective telling of the tale – a process realized as Odysseus and Penelope reformulate the past together in their conversation in the marriage bed, mirroring the telling of the epic tale<sup>73</sup> – the suitors' role is cast. An ἀΐδηλος ὄμιλος ('destructive crowd', 23.303), they were a bane to be endured (ἀνέσχετο, 23.302), and Penelope's paradoxical desire to 'flutter their hearts' at 18.158–68 is elided entirely. In the context of the poem's conclusion, this becomes as Odysseus interpreted it: a faithful wife's deception, and her provision of an opportunity for the husband to assert his return. Odysseus – who, in his foreknowledge of the τέλος, understands the motives of his wife as his own – could attribute coherence and, more importantly, allegiance to a definite narrative to Penelope's actions before she could herself.<sup>74</sup>

But, crucially, we must not allow this process of backwards-reinscription in the light of the fulfilment of the τέλος to overlay the openness and contingency of Penelope's teleology

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71. On Odysseus as poet, a common trope throughout the *Odyssey* and much remarked upon, see Segal (n.7), 85–112.

72. Katz (n.6), 192–6; see *Od.* 24.196. As Nagy has pointed out, it is no coincidence that κλέος, cognate with κλύω, can refer to encomiastic narrative, i.e. epic poetry, as the vehicle of fame (G. Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge MA, 1974), 231–55).

73. *Od.* 23.300–9.



throughout the poem. Immediately after Penelope recognizes Odysseus through the bed-test in book 23, Penelope makes a comment which highlights the importance of acknowledging the operation of characters who have no divine knowledge of their τέλος, as a consistent tension between their incomplete knowledge and the τέλος of the plot (218–21):

οὐδέ κεν Ἀργεῖη Ἑλένη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,  
ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἄλλοδαπῷ ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ,  
εἰ ἤδη ὅ μιν αὖτις ἀρήϊοι υἱεὶς Ἀχαιῶν  
ἄξέμεναι οἴκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδ' ἔμελλον.

even Argive Helen, daughter of Zeus,  
would not have lain in love with a foreign man,  
had she known that the warlike sons of the Achaeans  
were to bring her home again to her dear native land.

In other words, everyone acts differently if they know how their story will end. The paradox of the juxtaposition of Penelope's ambivalence towards the suitors alongside her loyalty to Odysseus is, then, nothing less than the staging of the complexities of Odyssean teleologies, where, on the one hand, Penelope's strategies mirror the delays and deferrals of closure which drive the plot forwards, and, on the other, the τέλος-driven narrative of Odysseus which binds the *Odyssey* into his poem, and Penelope into his plot.

## The open end(s) of the *Odyssey*

At the poem's end, one might expect the tension between the prophesied closural ending (represented by Odysseus' τέλος) and its deferral, disruption, and displacement (represented by Penelope's inability to make an ending) to be resolved through the characters of Odysseus and Penelope. The problem of where to place the end of the *Odyssey* has always been the focus of

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74. νόος δέ οἱ ἄλλα μενοίνα ('her mind was planning otherwise,' 18.283), focalized through Odysseus.

any discussion of the *Odyssey*'s end(s);<sup>75</sup> here, however, instead of positing an end for the *Odyssey*, I allow the instability and tension between opening and closure in books 23 and 24 to remain – in fact, allowing it to inform a reading of the *Odyssey* as deliberately playing with endings, deferring and complicating the end, as we have seen throughout the poem, both in order to maintain tension and to form a part of the poem's self-conscious exploration of its own teleologies. Thus, while we see a resolution of Odysseus' τέλος towards the end of the poem, and the working out of Odysseus' and Penelope's alternate teleologies as they reinscribe their tale from the end backwards in their retellings to each other in book 23, we see at the same time a simultaneous complication of endings in the deployment of τέλος-vocabulary and its association with Odysseus and Penelope. These closural allusions are mediated by references to unendedness and openness, playing with our expectations as the poem seems to close and then open up once again. False closure (to borrow Don Fowler's term), in other words, is an integral part of the *Odyssey*'s exploration of the deferral – and deployment – of the ending.<sup>76</sup>

This is first signalled in the wake of the recognition between Penelope and Odysseus in book 23. While (with the Alexandrian commentators) we might anticipate an ending in

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75. The scholia to the *Odyssey* refer back to an Alexandrian tradition (upheld by Aristophanes and Aristarchus) of ending the *Odyssey* at 23.296, after the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope: Ἀριστοφάνης δὲ καὶ Ἀρίσταρχος πέρας τῆς Ὀδυσσεΐας τοῦτο ποιῶνται ('Aristophanes and Aristarchus consider this the end of the *Odyssey*', M, V, Vind. 133); τοῦτο τέλος τῆς Ὀδυσσεΐας φησὶν Ἀρίσταρχος καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης ('Aristarchus and Aristophanes say that this is the end (τέλος) of the *Odyssey*', H, M, Q). See J.A. Russo, M. Fernández-Galiano, and A. Heubeck, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, vol. 3: Books XVII–XXIV*, (Oxford, 1992), ad 23.297. For an introduction to the debate and bibliography on the end of the *Odyssey*, see H. Erbse, *Beiträge zum Verständnis der Odyssee* (Berlin, 1972), 166–244.

76. Fowler (n.12), 97–101; and see C. Kaesser, 'False Closure and Deception', in F. F. Greiving, B. Acosta-Hughes, and A. Kirichenko (eds.) *The Door Ajar: False Closure in Greek and Roman Literature and Art* (Heidelberg, 2013), 29–42, at 33, who notes that the scholiast to *Od.* 23.296 'does not consider the possibility that Homer could have employed at that passage those closural features that the two scholars must have observed in order to deceive his audience'.

Odysseus' final recognition by his wife and restitution to his rightful place in Ithaca, the scene is instead bounded by a strange failure of closure: the long night which Athena does not allow to end, but instead holds back ἐν περάτῃ ('at the farthest boundary', 23.243).<sup>77</sup> The reunion of Penelope and Odysseus thus takes place in a moment of problematic closure, an artificially lengthened time that is held in suspense, out of teleology (or rather, in the tension between opening and closing), on the moment of closure just before dawn.<sup>78</sup> In this moment of extended closure that is also not-closing, Odysseus begins his speech to Penelope with a swathe of closural allusions (248–50):

ὦ γύναι, οὐ γάρ πω πάντων ἐπὶ πείρατ' ἀέθλων  
ἤλθομεν, ἀλλ' ἔτ' ὄπισθεν ἀμέτρητος πόνος ἔσται,  
πολλὸς καὶ χαλεπός, τὸν ἐμὲ χρὴ πάντα τελέσσαι.

'Wife, we have not yet come to the ends of all our  
toils, but still to come will there be immeasurable labour,  
great and difficult, all of which I must complete.

Using similar vocabulary to that of Athena's πέρας, Odysseus – always formerly the accomplisher associated with the singular, defined τέλος – now opens up teleology to multiple 'ends', with the plural πείρατα.<sup>79</sup> Although Athena places only one boundary on night (περάτῃ),

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77. From πεῖραρ – a noun which interestingly is cognate with the πέρας (boundary) which the Alexandrian critics were said to set on the *Odyssey* a few lines later: Russo (n.75), *ad* 23.243–6. The scholion glosses the phrase ἐν περάτῃ with <νύκτα> πρὸς τέλει οὔσαν ('night being at an end'), using τέλος as a gloss on περάτῃ, suggesting a connection between the two terms. For a summary of the different interpretations of περάτῃ as connected either to πεῖραρ/περάω or πέρας, see Stanford (n.36), *ad* 23.243–4.

78. Cf. the repeated formula ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ τρίτον ἤμαρ εὐπλόκαμος τέλεσ' Ἥως ('but when lovely-haired Dawn brought the third day to completion', *Od.* 5.390 = 9.76 = 10.144).

79. Note that τέλος is not used in the plural in Homer in the sense of 'ending' (in the plural it has the sense 'ranks', on which see Ambrose (n.17), 58). πεῖραρ (excluding the controversial περάτῃ of 23.243, cf. n.77 above) occurs five times in the *Odyssey* in the sense of 'end': three times indicating space in the plural; and twice indicating the limits of experience, at 5.289 in the singular (μέγα πεῖραρ οἰζύος, 'the great limit of his suffering') and 23.248 (πεῖρατ'

the *Odyssey* moves towards its ending by acknowledging both the multiplicity, and the open-endedness, of boundaries. In the final usage of *πεῖραρ* ('boundary, ending') within the poem, it is deployed in a context which denies its semantic singularity and closure.

Just as the *Odyssey* appears to be moving to a close, then, Odysseus paradoxically uses a closural allusion to open it up again. Even more significantly, the plural *πεῖρατα* is followed two lines later by the verb *τελέω*: τὸν ἐμὲ χρῆ πάντα τελέσσαι (250). The paradox is fully fleshed out: in words that recall Athena's description of Odysseus as a 'fulfiller of word and deed' (οἷος κεῖνος ἔην τελέσαι ἔργον τε ἔπος τε, 2.272), Odysseus now describes the paradox that he must 'bring to a *complete* end' (with the intensifier *πάντα*) a toil which is 'measureless, without limit' (*ἀμέτρητος*, 23.249),<sup>80</sup> and has multiple and shifting 'ends' (*πεῖρατα*, 248). Just as the open-ended, deferring Penelope is reinscribed into Odysseus' *τέλος* in the recognition, by contrast, Odysseus shifts the terminus and opens up the ending once again in the juxtaposition of the end (*πάντα τελέσσαι*) and its endlessness (*πεῖρατα*, *ἀμέτρητος*). It is a central moment in the poem's manipulation of the tension between the opening and closing of narrative, as the paradox of putting an end to the never-ending, and the seamless switch in roles between Penelope and Odysseus from fulfiller to deferrer, is staged in its full complexity.

The source of this tension is revealed in Odysseus' next words. Eliding the prophecy of his return to Ithaca – which has already been fulfilled – Odysseus reveals the second, problematic prophecy of Tiresias, the famous prediction of a journey in which he carries an oar to a people who do not know the sea.<sup>81</sup> He concludes: τὰ δέ μοι φάτο πάντα τελεῖσθαι ('he said that all this will be fulfilled for me', 23.284). Many have noted the problem of this second

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ἀέθλων, 'the ends of our toils') in the plural. (There is debate over whether the *περάτη* of 23.243 is spatial or temporal; see further Russo (n.75), *ad* 23.243–6.)

80. As Russo (n.75) *ad loc.* notes, only attested here and at *Od.* 19.512.

prophesied (and unfulfilled, within the poem at least) journey for the plot of the *Odyssey*.<sup>82</sup> Why include the reference to a future voyage when the first has only just been completed? Why change the τέλος of the poem as soon as it has been reached? If we posit closure of the original νόστοιο τέλος as the aim in a reading of the teleology in the *Odyssey*, then we will be disappointed. But the poem's treatment of the tension between open and closed teleologies, and its foregrounding at this complex closural moment, demonstrates that the τέλος of the *Odyssey* is not simply the fulfilment of Odysseus' νόστος: it is an exploration of the nature, and the paradoxes, of τέλος itself. Just as closure is anticipated, it is opened up again with the future τελεῖσθαι (284) – appropriating into teleological openness a term which belonged to the very closural vocabulary that led us to anticipate endedness in the first place. Penelope responds with a characteristically open conditional: εἰ μὲν δὴ γῆράς γε θεοὶ τελέουσιν ἄρειον ('if the gods fulfil for you a happier old age,' 286) – jettisoning Odysseus' future tense (which might suggest too much certainty) in favour of the open present. Penelope's final use of τελέω-vocabulary in the poem joins her with Odysseus in constructing teleological openness both verbally and thematically – less than ten lines before the τέλος of the *Odyssey* posited by the Alexandrian critics at 23.296. It is both a telling demonstration of the paradoxical nature of τέλος – and a suggestive hint that the *Odyssey* is not quite done in its teasing out of closure.

Book 23 of the *Odyssey* is thus both the consummation of one τέλος and the opening up of another, both a resolution to the tension of the plot, a staging of its complexity and a signal of the continual back-and-forth between closure and opening. Book 24, in its continuation of the exploration of τέλος, presents us with an array of terminal features which might seem to support

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81. See n.29 above.

full closure: death (the ultimate terminal event) in the journey of the suitors to the Underworld;<sup>83</sup> a recapitulation of the events of the poem by the suitors (signalling ending through a ring structure); and the return of Athena, creating a ring structure with her appearance in book 1. But it is not quite so simple. The final occurrences of *τελέω* and its derivatives are given in the voice of the dead suitor Amphimedon who, near the poem's close, launches into an unmotivated explanation of 'how his own *τέλος* came about' – in this case, the *τέλος* of death (24.123–4):

σοὶ δ' ἐγὼ εὖ μάλα πάντα καὶ ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω,  
 ἡμετέρου θανάτοιο κακὸν τέλος, οἷον ἐτύχθη.

I will tell you everything with complete accuracy,  
 the terrible *τέλος* of our death, how it came about.

Amphimedon launches immediately into an attack on 'Odysseus' wife' (*Ὀδυσσεῖος ... δάμαρτα*, 125), and describes her characteristics: *ἢ δ' οὔτ' ἠρνεῖτο στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελεύετα* ('she neither denied hateful marriage nor did she make an end to it', 126). This altered version of Telemachus' description of Penelope's inability to make an ending at 1.249–50 is, as we have seen, transformed here into the imperfect to gesture both to completion and – at the same time – the narrative ending-in-process, which, as Penelope has just made clear, is still open and will continue beyond the poem's bounds (*εἰ ... θεοὶ τελέουσιν*, 23.286). The *τέλος* of the suitors' death, then – which looked set to emphasize closure and the ending of the poem – is set in tension with the continuous, open-ended narrative which Penelope has come to represent.

Amphimedon then moves on to recall Penelope's paradoxical web which, as long as it was left open and unwoven, deferred the suitors to ensure the closure of Odysseus' *τέλος*. He

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82. Felson (n.6), 5, 'the plot resolution of the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope is only a plateau, a resting place; the final resolution, "death... from the sea..." (11.134–6) remains beyond the reaches of the text.' Compare Peradotto (n.30), 63.

quotes Penelope's words as she put off the inevitable with a qualified closural verb (εἰς ὃ κε φῶρος / ἐκτελέσω, 'until I finish the web', 24.132–3); and concludes after the suitors' discovery of the ploy, ὡς τὸ μὲν ἐξετέλεσσε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλουσ', ὑπ' ἀνάγκης ('so she completed it though she did not want to, under constraint', 24.146).<sup>84</sup> This final closural allusion in the *Odyssey* encapsulates Penelope's tension between completion (ἐξετέλεσσε, 24.133) and her inability to make an end (οὔτε τελεύτα, 24.126) – and, paradoxically, it is spoken by a character whose τέλος of death was expedited by Penelope's strategies of deferment and open endings.

## Beyond the τέλος

At the opening of this article I suggested that a teleological reading of the *Odyssey* might provide insights into character, theme, metapoetics, and the operation of closure in Greek narrative more broadly. As I hope to have shown, reading the differences in the teleologies between Odysseus and Penelope delivers a new understanding both of their reciprocally inverted characterization in relation to endings, their differing access and responses to divine knowledge, and their intertwined roles within the progression of their narrative. In Odysseus' case, we see a teleologically closed character certain of his destiny throughout, who is opened up to new endings at the poem's close; while Penelope, by contrast, figures as a character maintaining her narrative strategies between open and closed endings, who finally moves to closure in the penultimate book of the poem only to join with Odysseus in opening it up again. The theme of the τέλος resonates throughout the poem: the frequency of τελέω and its derivatives, and their appearance in critical scenes, suggests that the question of endedness, what it might mean, and

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83. See n.51 above.

84. Repeating *Od.* 2.93–110 and 19.137–56.

why it might matter, is central to the interpretation of the poem. Different characters lay claim to endings with equal authority – the suitors, for example, often make false predictions of what will come to pass;<sup>85</sup> yet not all endings are fulfilled. Endings, then, are part of discourse and can be laid claim to in speech; and they are also connected to problems of hermeneutic instability, prediction and divine knowledge, in the correct or incorrect interpretation of omens. The poem’s teleologies resonate through issues of characterization and theme, all engaging in part of a metapoetic reflection as to what it means to make a narrative, how plot progresses between open and closed teleologies, and how the end comes about.

There are clear implications for such a reading beyond the interpretation of the *Odyssey* alone. The use of ἐτελείετο in the proem of the *Iliad* was discussed above for its connection to τελέω-vocabulary in the *Odyssey* – and we might well ask what the implications of such a discussion of teleology in the *Odyssey* could be for the *Iliad*. How might we compare, for example, the fact that τελέω is so prominent in the proem of the *Iliad*, but delayed hundreds of lines in the *Odyssey*? If we read *Il.* 1.5 as suggesting that it is Zeus who is ultimately responsible for closure in the *Iliad*, could a similar claim be made for Athena in the *Odyssey* – who, after all, is seen offering her comments on closure to Telemachus in the first book of the *Odyssey*? And – turning to the end of the poem – how do we read the double ending of the *Iliad* (with Achilles’ duel with Hector in book 22, and his reconciliation with Priam in book 24) against the multiple endings, deferments and closural openings of the *Odyssey*? Can we see a similar teleological vocabulary being deployed in early epic more generally, and subsequent authors of Greek narrative poetry? Might it even be possible to trace a history of narrative teleology before Aristotle?

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85. See, for example, Eurymachus’ false prediction of Odysseus’ death (2.182–3), followed by τέλος-vocabulary at 187: ἀλλ’ ἔκ τοι ἐρέω, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται (‘but I tell you, and this will come to pass’).



The centrality of teleology to the *Odyssey*, then, is not only of interpretative matter to the poem itself, but to the study of archaic epic, and perhaps Greek narrative more broadly – a testimony to a consciousness of the poem’s own journey towards the τέλος well before the theorization of narrative teleology. It implies, in the resistance to easy closure, that this is perhaps a poem that both engages with the narrative vocabulary of its time – in comparison to the poem of the *Iliad* – and looks forwards to its own reception, in the moment after the τέλος: aware, in the complex intertwining of open and closed endings and the ultimate openness of Odysseus’ second journey, that *all* poems go on in the open space of interpretation after the end is reached.