

## Deliberation in the *Odyssey*, or Penelope's Pressing Crowd of Thoughts

Laurie Glenn Hutcherson  
Boston University  
lglen@bu.edu

CAMWS 2022  
Greek Epic: Homer's *Odyssey*  
March 25, 2022

στάς ἄρ' ὑπὸ βλωθρῆν ὄγκυνην κατὰ δάκρυον εἶβε.  
μερμήριξε δ' ἔπειτα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν  
κύσσαι καὶ περιφῦναι ἐδὸν πατέρ' ἠδὲ ἕκαστα  
εἰπεῖν, ὡς ἔλθοι καὶ ἴκοιτ' ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,  
ἦ πρῶτ' ἐξερέοιτο ἕκαστά τε πειρήσαιο.  
ᾧδε δὲ οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι,  
πρῶτον κερτομίοισ' ἔπεσιν διαπειρηθῆναι.

24.235-240

He stood underneath a towering pear tree and shed tears.  
And he deliberated then in his heart and his spirit  
whether to embrace his father and kiss him and tell him  
everything, how he was come again to his own dear country,  
or question him first about everything, and make trial of him.  
In the division of his heart this way seemed best to him,  
first to make trial of him and speak in words of mockery.

*Odysseus upon seeing Laertes*

εἶος ὁ ταῦθ' ὥρμαινε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν  
(2x)  
5.354-367 (interrupted deliberation)  
5.406-425 (interrupted deliberation)

*Odysseus in book 5-6*

*The first 3 listed are soliloquies; the example from book 6 is narrative.*

ὡς ἄρα οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι (2x)  
5.464-474 (resolved deliberation)  
6.141-147 (resolved deliberation)

10.49-53  
10.151-155  
10.438-448

*Odysseus narrates in book 10*

*In the first and third examples, he restrains a violent impulse (option #1).*

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι μνηστῆρας ἀριθμήσας κατάλεξον,  
ὄφρ' εἰδέω, ὅσσοι τε καὶ οἱ τινες ἀνέρες εἰσί·  
καὶ κεν ἐμὸν κατὰ θυμόν ἀμύμονα μερμηρίζας  
φράσσομαι, ἦ κεν νῶϊ δυνησόμεθ' ἀντιφέρεσθαι  
μούνῳ ἀνευθ' ἄλλων, ἦ καὶ διζησόμεθ' ἄλλους."

16.235-239

"Come then, tell me the number of suitors, and tell me about them,  
so I can know how many there are, and which men are of them,  
and then, when I have pondered it in my faultless mind, I can  
decide whether we two alone will be able to face them  
without any help, or whether we must go looking for others."

*Odysseus speaking to Telemachos*

ὁ δὲ μερμήριξεν Ὀδυσσεύς,  
ἠὲ μεταίξας ῥοπάλω ἐκ θυμόν ἔλοιτο  
ἦ πρὸς γῆν ἐλάσειε κάρη ἀμφοῦδιν ἀείρας·  
ἀλλ' ἐπετόλμησε, φρεσὶ δ' ἔσχετο.

17.235-238

And Odysseus pondered,  
whether to attack [Melanthios] with his cudgel, and take his life,  
or pick him up like a jug and break his head on the ground.  
Yet still he withstood it, and exercised restraint in his spirit.

τοῦ δ' ὠρίνετο θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισι·  
πολλὰ δὲ μερμήριζε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν,  
ἠὲ μεταίξας θάνατον τεύξειεν ἐκάστη,  
ἦ ἔτ' ἐῷ μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι μιγῆναι  
ὑστατα καὶ πύματα· κραδίη δὲ οἱ ἔνδον ὑλάκτει.

20.9-13

But the spirit deep in the heart of Odysseus was stirred up by this,  
and much he pondered in the division of mind and spirit,  
whether to spring on them and kill each one, or rather  
to let them lie this one more time with the insolent suitors,  
for the last and latest time; but the heart was barking within him.

μητρὶ δ' ἔμῃ δίχα θυμὸς ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μερμηρίζει,  
ἢ αὐτοῦ παρ' ἑμοί τε μένη καὶ δῶμα κομίζη,  
εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δήμοιό τε φῆμιν,  
ἢ ἤδη ἄμ' ἔπηται, Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος  
μνᾶται ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἀνὴρ καὶ πλεῖστα πόρρησιν.  
(16.73-77)

And my mother's heart is divided in her, and ponders both ways,  
whether to remain here with me, and look after the household,  
keep faith with her husband's bed, and regard the voice of the  
people,  
or go away at last with the best man of the Achaians  
who pays her court in her palace, and brings her the most presents.

αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν νύξ ἔλθῃ, ἔλῃσί τε κοῖτος ἅπαντας,  
κεῖμαι ἐνὶ λέκτρῳ, πυκιναὶ δέ μοι ἄμφ' ἀδινὸν κῆρ  
ὄξεϊαι μελεδῶναι ὄδυρομένην ἐρέθουσιν.

But after the night comes and sleep has taken all the others,  
I lie on my bed, and the sharp anxieties swarming  
thick and fast on my beating heart torment my sorrowing self.

ὡς δ' ὅτε Πανδαρέου κόυρη, χλωρῆς ἀηδῶν,  
καλὸν αἰείδησιν ἕαρος νέον ἱσταμένιοι,  
δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκινοῖσιν,  
ἢ τε θαμὰ τρωπῶσα χέει πολυδευκέα φωνήν,  
παῖδ' ὀλοφυρομένη Ἴτυλον φίλον, ὃν ποτε χαλκῷ  
κτεῖνε δι' ἀφραδίας, κοῦρον Ζήθιοιο ἀνακτος·  
ὡς καὶ ἑμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα,  
ἢ ἐ μένω παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσω,  
κτῆσιν ἐμήν, δμῳάς τε καὶ ὑπερεφές μέγα δῶμα,  
εὐνήν τ' αἰδομένη πόσιος δήμοιό τε φῆμιν,  
ἢ ἤδη ἄμ' ἔπωμαι, Ἀχαιῶν ὅς τις ἄριστος  
μνᾶται ἐνὶ μεγάροισι, πορῶν ἀπερείσια ἔδνα.

As when Pandareos' daughter, the greenwood nightingale,  
perching in the deep of the forest foliage sings out  
her lovely song, when springtime has just begun; she, varying  
the manifold strains of her voice, pours out the melody, mourning  
Itylos, son of the lord Zethos, her own beloved  
child, whom she killed with the bronze in her senselessness;  
so my spirit is divided and urges me this way and that:  
whether I should stay here by my son and keep all in order,  
my property, my serving maids, and my great high-roofed house,  
honoring my husband's bed and the voice of the people,  
or should I go away at last with the best of all those Achaians  
who court me here in the palace, with endless gifts to win me?

παῖς δ' ἑμὸς εἶος ἔην ἔτι νήπιος ἠδὲ χαλίφρων,  
γῆμασθ' οὐ μ' εἶα πόσιος κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσαν·  
νῦν δ' ὅτε δὴ μέγας ἐστὶ καὶ ἠβης μέτρον ἰκάνει,  
καὶ δὴ μ' ἀράται πάλιν ἐλθέμεν ἐκ μεγάροιο,  
κτῆσιος ἀσχαλόων, τὴν οἱ κατέδουσιν Ἀχαιοί.  
ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναὶ καὶ ἄκουσον.

My son, while he was still a child and thoughtless, would not  
let me marry and leave the house of my husband; but now  
that he is grown a tall man and come to maturity's measure,  
he even prays me to go home out of the palace, fretting  
over the property, which the Achaian men are devouring.  
But come, listen to a dream of mine and interpret it for me.

19.515-535

ἀλλ' ἑμοὶ οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν οἶομαι αἰνὸν ὄνειρον  
ἐλθέμεν· ἢ κ' ἀσπαστὸν ἑμοὶ καὶ παιδὶ γένοιτο.  
ἄλλο δέ τοι ἔρέω, σὺ δ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῆσιν·  
ἦδε δὴ ἠὼς εἶσι δυσώνυμος, ἢ μ' Ὀδυσῆος  
οἴκου ἀποσχίσει· νῦν γὰρ καταθήσω ἄεθλον...

But I do not think that this strange dream that I had came to me  
through this gate. My son and I would be glad if it did so.  
But I will tell you something different, and you put it in your heart.  
This dawn will be a day of evil name, which will take me  
away from the house of Odysseus; for now I will set up a contest.

19.568-572

Translations are from Lattimore, adapted by me.

- Austin, Norman. 1975. *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey*. Berkeley and Los Angeles.  
Barnouw, Jeffrey. 2004. *Odysseus, Hero of Practical Intelligence: Deliberation and Signs in Homer's Odyssey*. U Press of America.  
Harsh, Phillip Whaley. 1950. "Penelope and Odysseus in *Odyssey* XIX." *American Journal of Philology* LXXI: 1-21.  
Heitman, Richard. 2005. *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope and the Plot of Homer's Odyssey*. U of Michigan Press.  
Levaniouk, Olga. 2011. *Eve of the Festival: Making Myth in Odyssey 19*. Hellenic Studies Series 46. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies.  
Massumi, Brian. 1995. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique* 31.II: 83-109.  
Murnaghan, Sheila. 1987. *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.  
Pellliccia, Hayden. 1995. *Mind, Body and Speech in Homer and Pindar*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.  
Russo, Joseph. 1968. "Homer Against his Tradition." *Arion* 7.2: 275-295.  
Russo, Joseph. 2012. "Re-thinking Homeric Psychology: Snell, Dodds, and their Critics." *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, New Series 101.2: 11-28.  
Scully, Stephen. 1984. "The Language of Achilles: the ΟΧΘΗΣΑΣ Formulas." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 114: 11-27.