

Blaming Helen: Inconsistency in *Aeneid* 6 and *Odyssey* 24

I. Amphimedon and Agamemnon (*Od.* 24.122-190)

σοι δ' ἐγὼ εὖ μάλα πάντα καὶ ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω,
ἡμετέρου θανάτοιο κακὸν τέλος, οἷον ἐτύχθη.
μνώμεθ' Ὀδυσσῆος δὴν οἰχομένοιο δάμαρτα:
ἢ δ' οὐτ' ἦρνεῖτο στυγερὸν γάμον οὐτ' ἔτελεύτα,
ἡμῖν φραζομένη θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν...
καὶ τότε δὴ ὃ' Ὀδυσῆα κακὸς ποθεν ἤγαγε δαίμων
ἄγρου ἔπ' ἐσχατιήν, ὅθι δώματα ναῖε σβώτης.
ἐνθ' ἦλθεν φίλος υἱὸς Ὀδυσσῆος θειοῖο,
ἐκ Πύλου ἡμαθόεντος ἰὼν σὺν νηϊ μελαίνῃ:
τῷ δὲ μνηστήρσιν θάνατον κακὸν ἀρτύναντε
ἴκοντο προτὶ ἄστυ περικλυτόν, ἣ τοι Ὀδυσσεὺς
ὑστερος, αὐτὰρ Τηλέμαχος πρόσθ' ἡγεμόνευε.
τὸν δὲ σβώτης ἤγε κακὰ χοροῖ εἵματ' ἔχοντα,
πτωχῷ λευγαλέῳ ἐναλίγκιον ἠδὲ γέροντι
σκηπτόμενον: τὰ δὲ λυγρὰ περὶ χοροῖ εἵματα ἔστο:
οὐδέ τις ἡμείων δύνατο γνῶναι τὸν ἐόντα
ἔξαπίνης προφανέντ', οὐδ' οἱ προγενέστεροι ἦσαν, 160
ἀλλ' ἔπεσιν τε κακοῖσιν ἐνίσσομεν ἠδὲ βολῆσι...
ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μιν ἔγειρε Διὸς νοὸς αἰγιόχοιο,
σὺν μὲν Τηλεμάχῳ περικαλλέα τεύχε' αἰείρας
ἐς θάλαμον κατέθηκε καὶ ἐκλήϊσεν ὀχίας,
αὐτὰρ ὁ ἦν ἄλοχον πολυκερδείησιν ἄνωγε
τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολὺν τε σίδηρον,
ἡμῖν αἰνομόροισιν ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν...
γνωτὸν δ' ἦν ὃ ῥά τις σφί θεῶν ἐπιτάρροθος ἦεν:
αὐτίκα γὰρ κατὰ δώματ' ἐπισπόμενοι μένει σφῶ
κτεῖνον ἐπιστροφάδην, τῶν δὲ στόνος ὥρνυτ' αἰεκιῆς
κράτων τυπτομένων, δάπεδον δ' ἅπαν αἵματι θῦεν.
ὥς ἡμεῖς, Ἀγάμεμνον, ἀπώλομεθ', ὣν ἔτι καὶ νῦν
σώματ' ἀκηδέα κεῖται ἐνὶ μεγάροις Ὀδυσῆος:
οὐ γὰρ πῶ ἴσασι φίλοι κατὰ δώμαθ' ἐκάστου,
οἷ κ' ἀπονίψαντες μέλανα βρότον ἐξ ὠτειλέων
καθήμενοι γοοοῖεν: ὁ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων.

125 “For my part, I will tell you everything, well and in detail—
the evil manner of our death, how it was accomplished.
We wooed the wife of Odysseus, who had long been gone,
but she neither refused the hateful marriage nor brought it about,
plotting death and black fate for us....
150 and then an evil spirit brought Odysseus back from somewhere,
to the border of the land, where the swineherd has his home.
There came the dear son of godlike Odysseus
sailing from sandy Pylos in his black ship,
and the two of them, having prepared evil death for the suitors,
came to the famous city; indeed, Odysseus came later,
155 but Telemachus led the way before.
Now the swineherd brought him, wearing disgraceful clothing
and looking like a wretched and aged beggar,
leaning on a staff, and the clothes on his body were miserable:
none of us could know it was he
when he appeared so suddenly, not even those who were older,
but we attacked him with evil words and blows...
165 but when the mind of Zeus the aegis-holder commanded him
along with Telemachus, he took down the very beautiful weapons
and put them in the chamber, and locked the bolts.
But then, in his great cunning, he commanded his wife
to place before the suitors the bow and the gray iron,
as a contest and a beginning of death for us ill-fated men....
182 Then it became clear that some god was their helper,
for rushing through the house in their might
they slew men left and right, and a shameful groaning arose,
185 as heads rolled and the whole floor ran with blood.
So we perished, Agamemnon, and even now
our bodies lie still uncared for in the house of Odysseus,
for the friends and family in each man's house do not yet know—
those who would wash the black gore from our wounds
190 and wail as they laid us out, for that is the due of the dead.”¹

II. The Contest of the Bow (*Od.* 21.1-4)

τῇ δ' ἄρ' ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,
κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολὺν τε σίδηρον
ἐν μεγάροις Ὀδυσῆος, ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν.

Then the goddess gray-eyed Athena put it in the mind
of the daughter of Icarus, thoughtful Penelope,
to place before the suitors the bow and the gray iron
in the halls of Odysseus, as a contest and a beginning of death.

¹ All translations are my own.

III. Deiphobus and Aeneas (*Aen.* 6.509-530)

ad quae Priamides: "nihil o tibi, amice, relictum;
omnia Deiphobo solvisti et funeris umbris.
sed me fata mea et **scelus exitiale Lacaenae**
his mersere malis; **illa haec monimenta reliquit.**
namque ut supremam falsa inter gaudia noctem
egerimus, nosti: et nimium meminisse necesse est.
cum fatalis equus saltu super ardua venit
Pergama et armatum peditem gravis attulit aluo,
illa chorum simulans euhantis orgia circum
ducebat Phrygias; flammam media ipsa tenebat
ingentem et **summa Danaos ex arce vocabat.**
tum me confectum curis somnoque gravatum
infelix habuit thalamus, pressitque iacentem
dulcis et alta quies placidaeque simillima morti.
egregia interea coniunx arma omnia tectis
emovet, et fidum capiti subduxerat ensem:
intra tecta vocat Menelaum et limina pandit,
scilicet id magnum sperans fore munus amanti,
et famam exstingui veterum sic posse malorum.
quid moror? inrumpunt thalamo, comes additus una
hortator scelerum Aeolides. di, talia Grais
instauratione, pio si poenas ore reposco.

510 To this, the son of Priam replied: "you left nothing undone, my friend,
you have paid in full your debt to Deiphobus and the shades of the dead.
But my own fate and **the deadly crime of the Spartan woman**
have plunged me into these troubles; **she left behind these relics.**
You know how we passed that last night amidst
the false celebrations, and all too well you must remember it!
515 When the fateful horse leapt over high Pergamum
and, gravid, brought an armed troop in its belly,
that woman, feigning possession, was leading the Trojan women in a
chorus around the city; she herself, in the midst, was holding a huge torch
and was summoning the Greeks from the high-point of the citadel.
520 Then I was in my unhappy bridal chamber, worn out
by cares and weighed down by sleep, and a sweet and deep
rest came upon me as I lay there—very much like peaceful death.
Meanwhile, my excellent wife took all the weapons from the house
—and even slipped my trusty sword from beneath my head—
525 **and called Menelaus inside the house and opened the threshold,**
hoping, of course, that it would be a great boon to her lover,
and thus the fama of her former wrongdoing could be wiped out.
Why should I delay? They burst into the chamber, along with Ulysses,
a companion and proponent of the wickedness. O gods, repay the Greeks
530 for these crimes, if I demand their punishment with a pious mouth!"

IV. Deiphobus' Fama

Deiphobe **armipotens**, genus alto sanguine Teucris,
quis tam crudelis optavit sumere poenas?
cui tantum de te licuit? mihi **fama** suprema
nocte tulit **fessum vasta te caede Pelasgum**
procubuisse super confusae stragis acervum. (*Aen.* 6.500-504)

ἄλλον δ' ἄλλη ἄειδε πόλιν κεραϊζέμεν αἰπὴν,
αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσῆα προτὶ δώματα Δηϊφόβοιο
βήμεναι, ἥ γ' ἄρ' Ἀρηὰ σὺν ἀντιθέῳ Μενελάῳ.
κεῖθι δὲ αἰνότατον πόλεμον φάτο τολμήσαντα
νικῆσαι καὶ ἔπειτα διὰ μεγάλθυμον Ἀθήνην. (*Od.* 8.516-520)

500 "Deiphobus, **mighty in your arms**, born from the high blood of Teucer,
who desired to exact such cruel punishments?
Who was permitted to carry out so great a crime? The **story** I heard
was that on the last night **you collapsed, worn out by an**
immense slaughter of Greeks, on a heap of tangled bodies.

"He sang how the others, in different ways, ravaged the high city,
but of Odysseus, how he went, like Ares,
to the house of Deiphobus, along with godlike Menelaus,
and there, he said, he endured his **most dreadful battle**
and was victorious, with the help of great-hearted Athena."

V. Helen's Fama

According to Menelaus (Od. 4.274-279):

ἦλθες ἔπειτα σὺ κείσε: κελευσέμεναι δέ σ' ἔμελλε
δαίμων, ὃς Τρώεσσιν ἐβούλετο κῦδος ὀρέξαι:
καί τοι Δηϊφობος θεοεικέλος ἔσπετ' ἰούση.
τρὶς δὲ περίστειξας κοῖλον λόχον ἀμφαφώωσα,
ἐκ δ' ὀνομακλήδην Δαναῶν ὀνόμαζες ἀρίστους,
πάντων Ἀργείων φωνὴν ἴσκουσ' ἀλόχοισιν.

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"Then you came, and a god must have compelled you
who wished to give glory to the Trojans,
and godlike Deiphobus followed along with you.
Three times you circled the hollow hiding-place, stroking it,
and you called the chiefs of the Danaans by name
imitating with your voice the wives of all the Argives."

According to Helen (Od. 4.257-263):

πολλοὺς δὲ Τρώων κτείνας ταναήκεϊ χαλκῷ
ἦλθε μετ' Ἀργείους, κατὰ δὲ φρόνιν ἤγαγε πολλήν.
ἐνθ' ἄλλαι Τρῳαὶ λίγ' ἐκώκυον: **αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ ἤδη μοι κραδίη τέτραπτο νέεσθαι
ἄψ οἰκόνδ', ἅτην δὲ μετέστενον, ἦν Ἀφροδίτη
δῶχ', ὅτε μ' ἤγαγε κείσε φίλης ἀπὸ πατρίδος αἶης,
παῖδά τ' ἐμὴν νοσφισσαμένην θάλαμόν τε πόσιν τε
οὐ τευ δευόμενον, οὐτ' ἄρ φρένας οὔτε τι εἶδος.**

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"But when he had killed many Trojans with his long-pointed sword,
he went back to the Argives and brought back much wisdom.
Then the other Trojan woman cried out shrilly, **but my heart
rejoiced, for already my heart was turned to go back
home**, and I lamented the blindness, **which Aphrodite
caused me** when she led me there from the dear land of my father
and I turned my back on my child and my bridal-chamber and my husband,
a man who lacked nothing either in wisdom or in beauty."

VI. Penelope's Fama (Od. 24.194-198)

ὥς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ,
κούρη Ἰκαρίου: ὥς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος,
ἄνδρὸς κουριδίου: **τῷ οἱ κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλείται
ἦς ἀρετῆς**, τεύξουσι δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν **ἀοιδὴν
ἁθάνατοι χαρίεσσαν** ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ.

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"How noble was the mind of blameless Penelope,
the daughter of Icarus; how well she remembered Odysseus
her wedded husband! **Thus the fame of her virtue will never
die**, and the immortals will make **a graceful
song** among men for constant-hearted Penelope."

VII. Gender and Conflict: Briseis

...ἐγὼ δέ κ' ἄγω Βρισηΐδα καλλιπάρηον
αὐτὸς ἰὼν κλισίῃν δὲ τὸ σὸν γέρας **ὄφρ' εὖ εἰδῆς
ὅσσον φέρτερός εἰμι σέθεν**, στυγείῃ δὲ καὶ ἄλλος
ἴσον ἐμοὶ φάσθαι καὶ ὁμοιωθήμεναι ἄντην. (Il. 1.184-7)

τοῖσι δ' ἀνιστάμενος μετέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς:
'Ἄτρεΐδῃ ἦ ἄρ τι τόδ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἄρειον
ἔπλετο σοὶ καὶ ἐμοί, ὃ τε νῶϊ περ ἀχνυμένῳ κῆρ
θυμοβόρῳ ἔριδι μενεΐναμεν **εἵνεκα κόρης;
τὴν ὄφελ' ἐν νήεσσι κατακτάμεν Ἄρτεμις ἰῶ
ἥματι τῷ ὅτ' ἐγὼν ἐλόμην Λυρνησσὸν ὀλέσσας:**
τῷ κ' οὐ τόσσοι Ἀχαιοὶ ὁδὰξ ἔλον ἄσπετον οὐδας
δυσμενέων ὑπὸ χερσὶν ἐμεῦ ἀπομνήσαντος.' (Il. 19.55-62)

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"...but I will come to your tent myself and take
fair-cheeked Briseis, your prize, **so that you may know well
how much greater I am than you**, and so another may also abhor
to claim he is my equal and to match himself against me."

Then swift-footed Achilles stood up and addressed them:
"Son of Atreus, was this, then, the better thing for us both,
for you and me, that, however grieved at heart,
we raged in heart-gnawing strife **because of a girl?**
**I wish that Artemis had slain her with an arrow among the ships
on the day when I took her**, after sacking Lyrnessos.
Then so many Achaeans would not have bitten the vast earth
at the hands of the foe, because of my stubborn wrath."

VIII. Gender and Conflict: Penelope

καὶ γὰρ πολλὸν ἄριστος ἀνὴρ μέμονέν τε μάλιστα
μητέρ' ἐμὴν γαμέειν καὶ Ὀδυσσῆος γέρας ἔξειν.
(*Od.* 15.521-2)

..οὗτος γὰρ ἐπίηλεν τάδε ἔργα,
οὐ τι γάμου τόσσον κεχρημένος οὐδὲ χατίζων,
ἀλλ' ἄλλα φρονέων, τὰ οἱ οὐκ ἐτέλεσσε Κρονίων,
ὄφρ' Ἰθάκης κατὰ δῆμον ἐκτιμένης βασιλεύοι
αὐτός, ἀτὰρ σὸν παῖδα κατακτείνειε λοχίσας.
(*Od.* 22.48-53)

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"For he (Eurymachus) is by far the best man, and is extremely eager to marry my mother and possess the honor of Odysseus."

"For that one (Antinous) brought these deeds to pass,
not so much out of desire or need for marriage,
but plotting other things that the son of Cronus did not bring about for him:
that he might be king over the people of well-settled Ithaca
himself, and also that he might ambush your son and kill him."

IX. Gender and Conflict: Helen

ὁψὲ δὲ δὴ μετέειπε βοὴν ἀγαθὸς Διομήδης:
'μήτ' ἄρ τις νῦν κτήματ' Ἀλεξάνδροιο δεχέσθω
μήθ' Ἑλένην: γνωτὸν δὲ καὶ ὅς μάλα νήπιός ἐστιν
ὥς ἤδη Τρώεσσιν ὀλέθρου πείρατ' ἐφῆπται.'
(*Il.* 7.399-403)

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At length, Diomedes, good at the war-cry, spoke among them:
"let no man accept as compensation Alexander's treasure—
no, nor Helen: for it is clear, even to an idiot,
that the cords of destruction are being stretched around the Trojans."

non tibi Tyndaridis facies invisā Lacaenae
culpatusue Paris, divum inclementia, divum
has evertit opes sternitque a culmine Troiam.
(*Aen.* 2.601-603)

"It is not the hateful beauty of the Spartan daughter of Tyndareus, I tell you,
nor disgraceful Paris, but the mercilessness of the gods—the gods—that
has overturned this kingdom and laid low Troy from its height."

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