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Nostos in Three Moves or Five Stages

A Story Pattern in Early Greek Epos

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Abstract

This article suggests that *nostos* stories in early Greek epic are typically structured around a five stage pattern, in which (1) a divine interaction motivates (2) a journey to (3) a peripheral or preliminary destination before (4) another journey to (5) a central or final destination. This can also be simplified into three moves ([I] the divine episode, [II] a preliminary destination, [III] the final destination). The argument seeks to trace this pattern in the *Odyssey*, to demonstrate that it is central to the version of Heracles's *nostos* from Troy as told in several places in the *Iliad*, and to suggest that it may also be seen at work as the basic structural principle in the *Nostoi*. The article closes by suggesting that, in keeping with recent work on the idea of *nostos* as any successful arrival after a dangerous journey, this pattern may also be of much wider application in Archaic *epos*.

Keywords

oral epic tradition – Greek epic structure – five stages/three moves – *nostos* – narrative patterns

For one reason or another, some scholars of ancient literature—including this one—love a structural diagram. The exercise always runs the risk of being a particularly modern imposition, and so it is reassuring when the ancients themselves show some awareness of the theme we seek to represent. Thus it is

with the *nostos* (usually translated “return” or “return song”) which appears as a generic label in Greek literature as early as Phemios’s first performance in the *Odyssey*, where “he sang of the dreadful *nostos*, which Pallas Athene ordained for the Greeks from Troy” (νόστον ἄειδεν / λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, *Odyssey* 1.326–327). The term and its associated stories have been well studied, and from a variety of angles—etymological, poetological, narratological¹—but by far the most thorough modern analysis is that of Anna Bonifazi, who defined the νόστος as any successful arrival after overcoming danger, with its story proceeding thus:²

Some sailors initially plan to reach a particular place (as we will see later on, this can be either their home or some other place); the trip is diverted by a storm; a shipwreck takes place, which brings about the loss of several of the crew; the result of the detour is that the survivor arrives in an unknown land where he collects some goods; after staying in this new place for some time, thanks to some helper(s) the survivor is able to reach home.

Though this outline captures many of the most prominent cases and provides a very solid basis for thinking about the phenomenon, it is perhaps too precise to capture all the journeys labelled *nostoi* in ancient and modern literature; thus, for example, during Telemachos’s outward voyages in the *Odyssey*, no storms are encountered, no shipwreck endured, the danger of the suitors’ ambush is averted by Athene, and none of the lands he visits are unknown.³ That does not invalidate Bonifazi’s scheme or the essential rightness of her insights, since it is a question of realization and choice at the moment of performance; the poet could have included any and all of the elements above but was also free not to

1 Signal among them are Frame 1978; Danek 2005; Foley 1999: 117–167; Barker and Christensen 2014a; Cook 2014; Hornblower 2018; Fowler 2018; Bakker 2019; Burgess 2019, Solez 2019.

2 Bonifazi 2009: 484. Foley 1999: 117–167 defines the *nostos* pattern strictly as a return home, consisting of the stages Absence → Devastation → Return → Retribution → Wedding, but Bonifazi shows that the *Wortfeld* of νόστ- is much wider than this. The wider scope of her definition (that is, beyond the ‘return home’) is reflected in the suggestion of *LfrGE* s. νόστος, B 433, that the term developed from an original “*Sich-in-Sicherheit-Bringen*” to a more specific “*wohlbehaltene ... Heimkehr*.” This means that almost any successful heroic journey could be described as a *nostos*, although this article will be largely concerned with those examples where a wandering figure does actually return to an established home: however, see §5 below for an extension of the argument, and some possible wider applications.

3 Nor does it capture Agamemnon’s return in the *Odyssey* and *Nostoi* (see §1 below, pp. 13–14; and §3, pp. 26–27).

do so. Nonetheless, it might be possible to complement Bonifazi's findings with a pattern operating on a slightly broader level of abstraction.⁴ This article seeks that abstraction, and suggests that a *nostos* story in Archaic poetry is frequently structured, or realized, in five stages:

- (1) the hero encounters a deity (**Divine Interaction**)
- (2) before making a journey (**Journey 1**), and then
- (3) arrives at a peripheral location (**Destination 1**), before
- (4) making another journey and (**Journey 2**)
- (5) arriving at a central location⁵ (**Destination 2**)

Since the journey is obviously a prerequisite for the arrival (which is usually the more emphasized event) and can be more or less elided or minimized in any given example, this pattern can be further simplified into three moves:

Divine Interaction (I) →
Peripheral Destination (II) →
Central Destination (III)

This is a conceptual map on the most basic level, and so it neither excludes other systems of articulation (such as, say, the book divisions, or the bipartition of the *Odyssey* around the hero's arrival at Ithaca in Book 13)⁶ nor determines everything in the poem as realized (such as all the different plot-lines in the *Nostoi*); nor does it preclude more precise or detailed patterns, such as that advanced by Bonifazi. It is, nonetheless, the highway along which a large number of such storylines seem to progress. The discussion will begin (§1) with the *Odyssey*, as the best-preserved example of a poem concerned with heroic *nostos*, before looking (§2) at Heracles's voyage home from Troy in the *Iliad* (and elsewhere in early epic), and finally (§3) the summaries and fragments of the Archaic poem known, helpfully, as the *Nostoi*. This demonstration will allow us to see (§4) what the archaic poets were doing with their resources and how each of them was responding to the opportunities thereby afforded. It will also underline the continuities in oral traditional methods of composition well after the emergence of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The point here is to illu-

4 The argument therefore positions itself as a development of Bonifazi's study and does not seek to reproduce her demonstrations of the vocabulary of *nostos*, since we are concerned with the broader narrative patterns into which that language is structured.

5 For the terms peripheral and central, which can be configured and articulated in several ways, see below.

6 For a variety of such articulations in the *Odyssey*, see Tracey 1997; Cook 2014. As we shall see, the bipartition actually works very well with the argument of this article.

mine the patterns with which the poets and audiences of early Greek *epos* were familiar and to show how the manipulation of those patterns was significant in the construction of meaning.⁷ Fundamental to the approach of this article is the assumption that the poets of the Archaic period were thinking individuals working within a tradition, responding to circumstances of performance, to the totality of that tradition, and sometimes to individual, stable, versions of those stories in poetic form.⁸

1 The *Odyssey*

1.1 The Outer Framework

The *Odyssey* manages to contain within itself not only the successful voyage home of its central character, but also those of almost every other returning hero from the Trojan War.⁹ One of the ways it achieves this is through its thematic reliance on hospitality and the opportunities for embedded narration therein provided (a point to which we shall return). Indeed, hospitality is key to the entire poem and its presentation of *nostos*, both on the voyage and at the final destination. The importance of this action has been drawn out especially by Cynthia Shelmerdine and Steve Reece with regard to the way in which typical scenes of *xenia* in the first half of the poem are deliberately connected.¹⁰ As they have shown, the episodes work in a crescendo, becoming larger and progressing to a later point in the sequence, all moving towards the final reception on Scheria and/or those on Ithaca.

7 The building blocks of the poetic language, in its widest sense, are semantic units, and similarities between extant examples of the theme are *prima facie* the product of a shared artistic inheritance rather than a series of detailed allusions between the few extant examples. One should not rule out the possibility of this latter dynamic *tout court*, but one should not start from it either. See further below, pp. 29–34, and now the review of the whole question in Nelson 2023.

8 As we shall see, the poet of the *Nostoi* undoubtedly knew and referenced the *Odyssey* in a fairly fixed form but was also working with traditional methods of constructing a *nostos* which do not require allusive dynamics of that sort. Different scholars will draw their lines in different places (for example, I do not believe the *Odyssey* knew or referenced the *Iliad*), but the possibility for such direct interaction must remain alive.

9 See, for example, Finkelberg 2015: 128 (= 2020: 170–171): “the *Odyssey*, besides being a poem of the return of the last / of the heroes, acts as a synopsis of the part of the Epic Cycle dealing with the final stages of the Trojan War and the fate of its survivors.” For a wider analysis, see Barker and Christensen 2014a.

10 Shelmerdine 1969; Reece 1993; see also Williams 1986, and the much wider study of Bettenworth 2004.

Particularly noticeable are the connections they have revealed between Telemachos's voyaging and his father's: so, for instance, Athene's arrival and reception on Ithaca in Book 1 motivates the young man's journey to Sparta, while Hermes's visit to Calypso on Ogygia in Book 5 motivates Odysseus's to Scheria; Telemachos in Pylos in Book 3 is met on the shore in the morning by the king's son Peisistratos (amongst others), just as his father is met on the Scherian shore by the king's daughter Nausicaa and her retinue in Book 6; Telemachos arrives at the palace in Sparta at night in Book 4 (3.496–4.1), as does Odysseus in the main settlement of Scheria in Book 7; a secondary figure there (Eteoneus in Sparta, Echeneus in Scheria) has an exchange with the king about his duties as host; and so on. The parallels are obviously intended to connect the two sequences, and construct an explicit and direct comparison between father and son, always to the advantage of the former.¹¹

The second half of the poem has proven a little more resistant to this kind of analysis, as the storylines of Telemachos and Odysseus are drawn together and proceed more or less simultaneously, rendering them less immediately and obviously parallel than the largely separate and foreshadowed sequencing in the first half.¹² And yet, the same basic progression of events, once we look past their detailed realization, is undergone by each character: the hero is motivated by an encounter with a deity (Athene firstly disguised as a local youth on the Ithacan shore in Book 13, then appearing as a dream to Telemachos in Book 15) who sends him on his way to a formal reception twice, and now both heroes end up in the same places (Eumaios's hut in Books 15 and 16 and Odysseus's house in Book 17), with the first of those locales being somewhat more geographically peripheral or narratively intermediate than the second. In fact, the only major difference between the two halves of the poem, and their two sequences, is that they are now interlaced. That is, in the first half of the *Odyssey*, the patterns are deployed sequentially,¹³ with Books 1–4 focusing on Telemachus and Books 5–13 on Odysseus:

11 For some analyses among many of this very important relationship, see Reece 1993: 73–76 (with much prior bibliography); Martin 1993; Murnaghan 2002.

12 This is not to claim that an ancient audience would have found it difficult, especially after the care with which the two characters' experiences have already been combined, merely an acknowledgement that modern scholarship has found the structure of the first half easier to identify. In itself, this is a reflex of the modern tendency to treat that portion as essential, while the second half is some kind of anti-climax. But, as Redfield 1983: 235 (= 2009: 278) notes, with only a little overstatement: "the plot of the *Odyssey* is in its second half; the first part of the poem is all prelude." Bowie 2013: 1–6 makes some brief and typically pertinent remarks to this end, though he is more concerned with the place of Books 13 and 14 in the scheme of the poem.

13 On the question of their actual temporal relationship and Zielinski's Law (viz, the obser-

	<i>Telemachos I</i>	<i>Odysseus I</i>
1. Divine Interaction	Athene (1.102–320, 2.260–295)	Hermes/Calypso (5.43–148/149–227)
2. Journey 1	Ithaca to Pylos (2.413–3.5)	Ogygia to Scheria (5.263–493)
3. Destination 1	Pylos (shore) (3.6–485)	Scheria (shore) (6.127–320)
4. Journey 2	Pylos to Sparta (3.481–4.2)	shore to palace (6.316–7.82)
5. Destination 2	Sparta (palace) (4.3–15.183)	Scheria (palace) (7.83–13.77)

In the second half of the poem, the same thing starts to happen, but this time the return of Odysseus to his palace (Books 13–17) is interrupted before it is complete, and the progress of Telemachos is interwoven¹⁴ within it (Books 15–17), thus:

	<i>Odysseus II</i>	<i>Telemachos II</i>
1. Divine Interaction	Athene (13.221–440)	Athene (15.1–42)
2. Journey 1	Scheria to Ithaca (13.70–95, 14.1–4)	Sparta to Ithaca (15.182–300)
3. Destination 1	Eumaios's hut (14.5–17.201)	Eumaios's hut (15.555–16.10)
4. Journey 2	to Od.'s house (17.182–325)	to Od.'s house (17.26–30)
5. Destination 2	Odysseus's house (17.260–24.548)	Odysseus's house (17.28–24.548)

In other words, the poet proceeds through the first three stages for Odysseus's return to his house before returning to Telemachos at the start of Book 15 and then runs through the five stages of his *nostos* all the way to the final arrival at his/Odysseus's house. Once the two characters meet in Eumaios's hut in Book 16, of course, the poet is treating both plotlines simultaneously, but Telemachos's onward voyage comes first at the start of Book 17, and goes off without incident. With his son safely ensconced in the palace, Odysseus's sequence is completed, as he too journeys and enters his own house, this time with considerable incident. Once more, what is for Telemachos relatively

vation that Homer narrates simultaneous actions sequentially), see Olson 1995: 91–119; Scodel 2008.

14 For brief discussion of the poem's timelines, see de Jong 2001: 589–590, with further bibliography.

straightforward and unproblematic becomes interesting, complex, and difficult for his father. Charted using the five stages above, it proceeds thus:

- (a) Odysseus 1 → O. 2 → O. 3
- (b) Telemachus 1 → T. 2. → T. 3 → T. 4 → T. 5
- (a²) O. 4 → O. 5

As a move map, the second half of the poem can be summarized thus:

- (A) O. I → O. II
- (B) T. I → T. II → T. III
- (A²) O. III

In terms, therefore, of a conceptual narrative skeleton for the *Odyssey*, the five-stage or three-move pattern is clear and obvious across both halves of the poem. It is not, one should stress, to be viewed as a compositional straight-jacket but as a creative framework to be generated, manipulated, and altered according to the particular narrative requirements and aims of the song, as the following examination of each stage seeks to make clear.

The **Divine Interaction** in these four examples is generally a personal encounter between the hero and the god (usually Athene, given the personnel involved in this story). Though motivated on a larger scale by the two assemblies at the start of Book 1 and Book 5—a redundancy which has often struck scholars and readers of the poem¹⁵—the actual encounter between Athene and Telemachos in Book 1 is more direct and reminiscent of her disguised encounter with Odysseus in Book 13, or indeed of her appearance to Telemachos in a dream while he sleeps in Sparta in Book 15, than Calypso's passing to Odysseus the import of Hermes's message in Book 5. In each case, the hero is directly compelled to undertake a journey as a result of that interaction: Telemachos to discover news of his father's whereabouts, Odysseus to recommence his voyage to Ithaca, and then to enlist the help of his retainer Eumaios, before Telemachos is dispatched from Sparta to return home.

Each of these encounters is very different in its realization, of course, with the god being able to take any of the usual forms for divine-mortal interaction: in Book 1 Athene is the disguised merchant who has old ties of guest-friendship with Telemachos's family (187–212), who encourages him and aids in the preparation of his vessel; in Book 13 she is a disguised shepherd on the shore of Ithaca (221–225); and then in Book 15 a dream (apparently in her own form) to Telemachos (9–43); finally, in Book 5 Hermes appears in his own form to Calypso (75–80), just as she does in turn to Odysseus when relaying the message. Nor is the length or type of interaction predetermined: multiple exchanges between

15 See Marks 2008: 36–44; also above, nn. 13–14.

Telemachos (and Odysseus) and Athene in disguise in Books 1 and 13, and then a wonderfully paced and intimate interaction between a revealed goddess and her favourite in Book 13, as opposed to a single speech delivered by a dream in Book 15, and a regretful conveyance of Hermes's message by Calypso in Book 5, moving into the suggestion and provision of help for the construction of the raft. Tremendous variation, each episode interesting and individual in its own way, all reflexes of the same essential action.¹⁶

The **Journeys** before each of the destinations are also formally varied and once more with all the variations that the poet can use in his travel narratives. Beginning with the examples preceding **Destination 1**, Telemachos's voyage starts with a focus on the issue of getting a ship and crew together (2.301–320, 382–387, 399–419), for much of his *nostos* to Sparta concerns the way he tries—not always with success—to gain authority in heroic company (his major thematic in the poem, indeed).¹⁷ There is no storm or great difficulty encountered or overcome on this voyage, since Athene pours sleep on the suitors (393–398), sends a favourable breeze (420–421), and in the morning they arrive at Pylos (3.1–5). In Book 5, by contrast, a long narrative sees Odysseus having to make his own raft (with Calypso's help) and then (5.282–296) overcome both a storm sent by his great divine antagonist Poseidon, and the dangers of swimming to Scheria once his raft has been destroyed, a venture in which he is aided by both Athene and Ino-Leucothea.¹⁸ As many scholars have noted, the comparison makes clear the greater impressiveness of the father and the greater danger inherent in his journey, but the actions of father and son are the same.

In Odysseus's voyage from Scheria to Ithaca, the starting point of the pattern has been inverted, or more accurately, split: **Journey 1a** falls (13.70–95) before the **Divine Interaction** on the Ithacan shore (13.221–440), while **Journey 1b** gets Odysseus to Eumaios's hut (14.1–4) after that encounter.¹⁹ Partially, this

16 The variation—in all of the elements, in fact—is essential to the success of the pattern, and it will allow different poets to proceed in different ways, as we shall see. This kind of compositional freedom is its great virtue and afforded precisely because it has a slightly greater level of abstraction than previous schemes.

17 See Heath 2001; Saïd 2011: 132–149.

18 For a list of the storms in the poem, see de Jong 2001: 594–595; discussion in Louden 2011: 171–172; Saïd 2011: 324–325.

19 This helps to increase the parallels with Telemachos's voyage, in which the encounter on the shore with Theoclymenos similarly prefaces his walk to Eumaios's hut, in yet another indication of the son's relative inferiority to his father. This kind of deliberate parallelism within the broader pattern is no argument against the five/three model, since it provides the enabling framework within which more precise links between examples can be generated.

is a result of the overdetermination in Odysseus's departure from Scheria for home, which compensates for any interim lack of that kind of episode before embarkation. This might be felt grounds enough not to have such a separate episode before the journey from Scheria begins because the kind of starting directions given in other divine interactions (viz, Telemachos's voyage to Pylos and Sparta; Calypso's remission of her captive Odysseus; Telemachos's need to return home from Sparta now) are simply not required, as all the participants have been more or less agreed on the need to convey the guest home for quite a while now. But this is not the best way to view what is happening, since it is almost to draw an apologetic veil over the poet's decision, and that is certainly not what he does—in fact, he explicitly draws attention to his variation from the pattern, when Odysseus rebukes Athene for her previous absence (314–323), prompting her defence that she did not wish to annoy Poseidon (339–343).²⁰ This not only reminds one of the change but underlines what it enables within the poem, for the encounter between Athene and Odysseus on the shore of Ithaca motivates the entirety of the *Odyssey's* second half; in Bonifazi's terms, the goddess is no mere helper but both helper and sender all in one. Just getting to the island is nowhere near the end of his story, since there are dangers to be faced there that are equal to (if not greater than, given the disparity in scale) those of the fantastical *Apologoi*, and the Ithacan narrative needs a new impetus all of its own.²¹

Finally, the initial voyage to Ithaca by Telemachus in Book 15 is once more unthreatening because again Athene dispels all danger (15.292–294; cf. 27–35 for her warning about the suitors' ambush), creating a pleasing ring with her similarly purposed assistance in the first sequence.²² Just as with that earlier

20 It might be a little persnickety to suggest that her defence is not especially convincing, given that she had—as Odysseus mentions (13.322–323)—appeared to him in disguise on Scheria (7.19–81), despite her earlier reluctance to do so (6.328–631) on the same grounds she uses to excuse herself to Odysseus in Book 13. It is more noticeable that the poet felt the need to acknowledge the need for such a defence in the first place.

21 In some sense, this also reflects the importance of Ithaca to the story, in that it is now the site of four such realized destinations, a big step up from the two on Scheria and one for Pylos and Sparta. The poet, in other words, does something individual for his most important sequence.

22 As yet another sign of how far this pattern is from determining every link the poet can create across his narrative, this sequence is also paired with Telemachos's second journey in his first sequence (see below), since they both include briefly described stays with Diocles of Pherai (3.486–394 = 15.184–192). This is no exception to our rule of two destinations, since the five/three pattern is the skeleton for the narrative structure, not for every single event in the story as it is realized, and the two elaborated destinations remain the real focus of Telemachos's story. The two destinations in Heracles's *nostos* in the *Iliad*, as we

scene, however, it is the background to the voyage which is most interesting: the negotiating of the social pitfalls of Sparta so as to disengage at the right time with the right presents (48–132), avoiding the potential entanglement and quarrel in Pylos (194–216), and managing the hospitality claims of Theoclymenos (223–286, 508–546) when they arrive—these are all signs of Telemachos’s growing maturity, or at least an awareness that these are obstacles he has to overcome. Interestingly, the poet goes out of his way to signal the cancellation of another potential reception in Pylos, which would delay the pattern’s typical progression in destination from peripheral (Eumaios) to central (home) and is reflected thematically in the haste enjoined to Telemachos by Athene in her appearance to him (15.10–27) and in the exchange he has with Peisistratos before reaching Pylos itself (193–216).²³ Aside from creating some uncertainty in the audience in the immediate context, this move allows, in fact it almost predicts, that Telemachos’s two receptions will occur on Ithaca. Once more, structural manipulation feeds more or less explicitly into the poet’s own narrative causation, as we just saw in Athene’s encounter with Odysseus in Book 13: the poet seems to know that his audience expects the narrative to follow a predictable course; when it does not, he justifies it explicitly.

As for **Journey 2**, the brevity of Telemachos’s two examples—from Pylos to Sparta, and to his own house—contrast well with Odysseus’s journeys from Scheria’s shore to the palace and from Eumaios’s hut to his own house, since the immediate preface to the final or central destination necessarily attracts greater levels of interest, and the father’s experiences help to set the stage for the poem’s climactic reception and confrontation. So, for example, Odysseus’s journey to his own house sees him encounter Melanthios (17.212–257) in a way which foreshadows their future interaction and indeed the whole tenor of the welcome he receives, while the journey to the Scherian palace focuses on the role of Arete (6.305–312, 7.50–77) and the concomitant issue of Nausicaa’s marriageability, which will be one of the obstacles for Odysseus to negotiate in his dealings with her parents.²⁴ Thus the poet uses the second journey, as the first,

shall see, do not pretend to be the totality of that hero’s experiences coming home from Troy, and many other episodes might have been chosen in their place, or added to the journey. On what this means for the way the poet deploys other events in the overall story of the *nostos*, see § 4 below.

23 That Pylos is envisaged as a stop on the way is both natural, given Peisistratos’s presence, and it is explicitly raised by Menelaos in his farewell (15.150–153). In fact, it is only averted at the last moment in their conversation as they approach the city (193–214), so this is no idle play on the poet’s part.

24 The most recent discussion of this can be found in Arft 2022, with much further bibliography.

for proleptic purposes, to tell the audience about the coming reception and its aftermath and to give them information about the character and the stage of his progress. Nothing in the pattern, however, tells the poet precisely how he should do this, and each episode shows considerable variation even as he connects the examples, in sequence or not.

As for the two **Destinations**, the difference between periphery and center can be articulated in a number of ways (and indeed, different terms could be chosen to denote them). Geography is the most obvious but not the only marker or aspect of peripherality, in that the first locale is frequently marked by its distance from the main center of the community, which will be met in the second destination: Eumaios's hut is explicitly located in a part of the island far from the main *polis* (14.1–2, 9, 26), while Nausicaa and her maids come across Odysseus by a river close to the shore (6.85–87) quite some way from the main settlement. This proximity to water is another feature of peripherality in Pylos, where the community is gathered on the shore away from the palace to conduct a sacrifice (3.4–6; cf. 85–87), though its transitional status in these terms only becomes really clear once Peisistratos and Telemachos get to Menelaos's palace in Sparta.²⁵ The preparatory, almost liminal, sense to these first destinations is also important, in that a theme is explored in a preliminary way so as to prepare for a larger development of that theme in the second destination: the marriageability of Nausicaa and the possibility that Odysseus might stay on Scheria become more widely and directly relevant across his interactions with Alcinoos and Arete, as does the aid and model of hospitality which Eumaios offers as the first of several tests through which Odysseus's Ithacan family must proceed, while the reception of Telemachos in Pylos explores the young man's readiness for heroic adventure and status before he meets the person(s) in Sparta whose journeys most closely approximate those of his father.

The second destination is central in a number of senses, both geographically and narratively, since this is specified as the hero's aim on that journey before it begins, and the narratives of what happens here are always the larger and more complex episodes in each sequence. Most obviously, the house of Odysseus is the actual and symbolic target of both father and son in the second half of the poem and will shortly become the battleground in the fight with the suitors. Sparta is signalled early on by Athene as the furthest point of Telemachos's journey away from Ithaca (1.284–285), and it is the place where the story chooses to

25 Telemachos is later taken to the palace at Pylos (3.386–389), but this is clearly subordinate to the main business of reception simply in terms of size and demanded practically because they need to sleep somewhere in the host's house before departing the next morning. The largest part of the hospitality scene occurs on the shore.

leave the young man until Odysseus has returned home and also where Telemachos will witness the closest approximation to his father's experience before meeting him. Finally, Scheria's importance to Odysseus's story is highlighted by Zeus when instructing Hermes to be on his way (5.33–42; cf. Poseidon's rueful comment to the same end 5.288–289), though it is noticeable that his words could signal its status as the first destination before the final stop in Ithaca: thus, when the poet chooses to have two receptions on the island, he raises structurally the possibility that Odysseus will stay in Scheria, intertwining that intimation with the theme of Nausicaa's marriageability, which is foregrounded so early and notably in the *Phaiakis* (6.13–41).²⁶ Having chosen this path, the poem stresses the importance of Alcinoos's palace not only in terms of its parallels with Sparta:²⁷ it is also the site of the most famous of all the *Odyssey's* storytellings and of his successful negotiation of the challenges to his *nostos*.²⁸ As we will see with some of the other examples in Archaic *epos* below, the second destination is actually the place where the story usually seems to end,²⁹ so a greater impression of centrality, even finality, makes a great deal of sense. It does not, however, have to be configured in an automatic or monochromatic manner; the pattern loses too much if it is too restrictive or too prescriptive.

1.2 *The Embedded Narratives*

So much, then, for the basic story of the *Odyssey*, its framework, where the five/three pattern is used four times in a deliberate and marked manner so as to achieve a monumental narrative and to compare and then entwine the stories

26 I owe this suggestion to a journal reviewer.

27 See above, pp. 5–7, 8–10.

28 As both Nausicaa and Athene comment, Arete in particular is crucial to the success of his *nostos* (6.310–312, 7.75–77; 6.313–315 [= 7.75–77] are poorly attested). There is an enormous amount of scholarship on just how crucial she turns out to be (see Arft 2022 for a good review), but the relevant point here is that the relative importance of the palace setting is stressed in several ways by the poet.

29 See the definition of Bonifazi 2009: 484 (quoted above, p. 2). The ending is a complex notion in early Greek *epos*, where continuity is a particular virtue (both poetic and editorial), and so the end of the pattern serves as the end of *this* sequence in the hero's experiences, however one wishes to configure it. They may, as with Odysseus's further adventures beyond the end of the *Odyssey*, simply restart again and again as required. Very pertinently, a journal reviewer suggests to me that one could use the frame more widely within the *Odyssey* itself and configure Scheria as the periphery and Ithaca as the center in Odysseus's *nostos*. Though the patterning seems to work more clearly on a smaller scale, the flexibility of such a conceptual *précis* naturally lends itself to expansion and compression depending on the circumstances of its realization, that is, its performance. The five stages/three moves are in themselves endlessly capable of recycling, reconfiguration, upscaling, and downscaling.

of father and son. But there are, as we mentioned at the start of the discussion, several other tales of returning heroes subsumed by the poem, and we should deal with some of those before moving on to a discussion of the rest of early Greek *epos*. What we shall find is that, generally, these narratives do not follow the pattern we are advancing here, though they contain a lot of nostic (that is, *nostos*-themed) material.³⁰

This is not the case, however, for Agamemnon's *nostos*, a largely third-person narrative mostly told in the mouths of other characters, which can be mapped onto our pattern without any difficulty whatsoever and with quite some interpretative advantage.³¹ As realized in the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon's return starts with the initial quarrel between the brothers, doubly caused by Zeus (*Odyssey* 3.132–133, 152) and Athene “who set a quarrel amongst both the Atreidai” (ἦ τ' ἔριον Ἀτρείδηισι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔθηκεν, 3.136); Agamemnon's purpose in this *agore* was to propitiate her (143–145), and so the **Divine Interaction**—though not explicitly a personal meeting—certainly served to contextualize the journey, this time in delaying and considerably complicating its start, sending some Greeks off on their voyage home, and leading others to stay in Troy. Presumably, given his purpose in postponing their departure, a favourable sacrifice is required with all its further opportunities for such an interaction.³²

His **Journey 1** to Greece encompassed at least one storm (4.512–520) which takes him to that portion of the coastline nearest to Aigisthos's house,³³ but it is with the arrivals that matters become more interesting. **Destination 1** occurs on the shore when Aigisthos (who has been forewarned by his spy 4.524–527) goes to summon his cousin (532), and **Destination 2** in Thyestes's actual house (as Proteus specifies: 518). As if the genealogy were not enough, the foreboding nature of this second arrival is also made clear by its peripheral location “at the very edge of the land” (ἀγροῦ ἐπ' ἔσχατήν, 517): that is, it should have

30 Sarah Cullinan-Herring alerts me to the fact that embedded narratives frequently sit in tension or opposition to the frame narrative and comprise the third type of relation between diegetic and metadiegetic text set out by Genette 1972: 242–243 (“function de distraction ... et/ou d'obstruction”): see her forthcoming study (2026).

31 For its well-accepted paradigmatic value in the story of the *Odyssey*, see esp. Olson 1990; Danek 2005; Barker and Christensen 2014a: 90–92. The treatment in the *Nostoi*, however influenced by the *Odyssey*, must be analyzed separately; see below, § 3, pp. 26–28.

32 Proteus's information that “Hera saved him” (4.513) may also hint at another such encounter. There is certainly nothing in the *Odyssey*'s very brief summary to preclude Athene appearing in person or disguise to one or both of the protagonists, but equally there is no particular reason that an interaction has to be a personal encounter or that the mortal has to recognize the deity's impulsion.

33 See below, n. 71.

been a preliminary destination, followed by a triumphant return to the palace in Mycenae. In fact, we should be cautious here, since not enough detail is given to know whether the poet envisaged a full reception on the shore, with the provision of food etc. (as Nausicaa for Odysseus in Book 6), and this raises two interesting possibilities: if (a) there was an elaborated, littoral reception, then the fact that Agamemnon goes to another preliminary reception (before coming to his actual home) is a structural signal of his mistake; alternatively, if (b) there was no such episode, then Aigisthos's house is straightforwardly the preliminary destination which becomes the final destination, thus depriving Agamemnon's *nostos* of its natural last stage (which will be fulfilled by the return of Orestes eight years later [1.298–300, 3.306–310]).³⁴ In either case, the menacing tone of Aigisthos's *xenia* remains clear and specifically because it is marked as preliminary according to our pattern. In terms of its stages, these two versions run thus:

	(a) littoral reception	(b) no littoral reception
1. Divine Interaction	Zeus (3.132–134) and Athene (3.136)	same
2. Journey 1	to Greece (4.512–523)	same and Aig's house
3. Destination 1	the shore (4.532–533)	Aigisthos's house
4. Journey 2	to Aigisthos's house (4.534)	[Orestes from Athens (4.306–307)]
5. Destination 2	Aigisthos's house (4.534–537, 11.409–426)	[Orestes in Aig's house (4.307)]

As a move map, the fragmented story runs either (a) Agamemnon I → II → III or (b) Ag. I → II → [Orestes] III in which the son assumes the father's role. The interpretative benefit of the five/three pattern is particularly evident here, where the form of the narrative makes clear on a structural basis the content or import of the story: Agamemnon's failure to achieve his *nostos* is conveyed, on the most basic level, by its defective structure.

34 I am inclined to believe that (unlike the *Nostoi* poet) the *Odyssey* did conceive a full episode on the shore, since it specifies a journey to Aigisthos's house. It is not uncommon, as we have seen, for the journey description to be very brief. On the other hand, as the subsequent history of this myth shows, a capacity for alteration and recreation remains fundamental to its existence.

Somewhat different is Menelaos's tale.³⁵ This is delivered firstly by Nestor, who traces the younger man's progress from Troy to Egypt (3.130–194, 276–312), but mostly, and at much greater length, by Menelaos himself (4.351–586). Neither of these two occasions use our five/three pattern—despite the latter closing with a two-line summary of his arrival home (585–586)! The arrival home is an afterthought in this telling, which focuses instead on his adventures in Egypt, because the speech is delivered as a response to Telemachos's request for information about Odysseus (327–331), and this is where Menelaos had last heard of him. Moreover, we hear of stops for Menelaos at Tenedos, Lesbos, Sounion, Crete, Egypt, Libya, and almost every other significant port of call in the ancient Mediterranean.³⁶ The material for Menelaos's voyaging, in other words, is not arranged or enumerated in this poem like his brother's.

This does not, however, constitute an argument against the five/three pattern. Like Odysseus's *Apologoi*, for which Menelaos's tale is a directly and deliberately foreshadowing doublet,³⁷ this is a narrative generated in a hospitality scene within a *nostos* framework, its role in that pattern being to allow the poet to include a much wider span of nostic story material without bringing the tale to its usual close at home (as with Odysseus) or (as in this case) making anything of that final stage within the story.³⁸ First-person embedded narrative of this sort is, therefore, not necessarily the dominant vehicle of the full *nostos* (as Bonifazi suggests)³⁹ rather than a common, ancillary element within that framework. In this regard, one should remember the careful delineation between professional and non-professional singers of tales in the *Odyssey*, the poet being careful to reserve the structures and patterns in his own voice which are particularly redolent of specifically poetic techniques. That is, he does not simply run through one destination/adventure after another *ad*

35 See Barker and Christensen 2014a: 101–106.

36 See Solez 2019, though he tends not to distinguish the wider story and its realized versions. He makes the point that later traditions of Paris's return from Sparta to Troy seem to mirror Menelaos's itinerary as a secondary development, but the evidence of the *Iliad* is much more limited on this point: Paris himself claims to have stopped at an island, which was either "rocky" or actually named "Kraanae" (3.442–445), and the poet tells of another stop at Sidon (6.289–292) before the assumed, but crucially untold, homecoming in Troy. The details in the *Cypria* (arg. 18–19 B) do not give us much more (except specifying a military venture against Sidon).

37 See Powell 1970; Kelly 2008: 188–189; Barker and Christensen 2014a: 101–106.

38 Part of the reason for this must be that the final stage of a return tends to find the wife at home, whether that eventuates positively or negatively for the returning hero. In this very anomalous case, the hero has had to bring the wife home with him.

39 Bonifazi 2009: 484 (not quoted above, p. 2). They are of course intertwined, since storytelling occurs in the context of reception, and reception helps to structure the *nostos*.

infinitum to cover the whole range of possible events in that character's fortunes.⁴⁰ This kind of freedom is reserved instead for the internal narratives and their first- and third-person perspectives, as the characters entertain and instruct one another (and the external audience) with stories of their own and others' adventures in a more obviously *katalogisch* form.⁴¹

Even so, the influence of our *nostos* framework can still be felt in these narratives from time to time. In Menelaos's experiences in Book 4, for instance, note the way in which the telling seems to be drawn into our pattern: the gods first hold him on the isle of Pharos before Eidothea moves him to capture Proteus (**Divine interaction**: 351–425); he and his men are then led to the place of ambush (**Journey 1**: 431–436) before they capture Proteus (**Destination 1**: 454–570). Obviously this is not straightforwardly a scene of *xenia* and for many reasons: Proteus is both a god and an unwilling host who needs to be caught to serve his guests, their intercourse is caused by an ambush rather than simply an arrival (but compare the way in which Odysseus's encounter with Polyphemos's cave confuses *xenia* with piracy and predation), and it is also a mantic consultation (as with Teiresias in the Underworld, to which story it looks forward). Nonetheless, note that Menelaos's team eat and sleep at their ships immediately before and after the actual meeting (426–430, 571–575), the exchange takes place on the shore well away from any civilized or central location just as with Nausicaa in Book 6, the would be host is surrounded by his people (447–451) just as Nestor on the shore at Pylos in Book 3, and it ends with a third-person account of the fates of the other heroes returning from Troy (a typical topic and exchange of information in *xenia* contexts).⁴² In short, this episode is a partial or perverted instance of *xenia*. Returning to a more conventional path, another voyage (**Journey 2**) is then predicted by Proteus (471–484), which then takes place (576–584) and presumably envisages further social encounters (**Destination 2**), since we are elsewhere told of gifts to the Spartan royal couple from several Egyptian sources (4.125–135, 227–232; cf. 3.301–302).⁴³

40 See below § 2 on the *Iliad*'s very particular selection from the wide range of Heracles's stories.

41 See Barker and Christensen 2014a: 97, on Nestor helping to “educate Telemachos in the ways of nostos.”

42 Aside from all the examples in the *Odyssey*, consider Nestor's offhand reference to storytelling with Peleus (*Iliad* 7.125–128) and the same figure telling Menelaos the stories of several major figures in the *Cypria* (arg. 26–29 B); see Sammons 2018: 25–63, esp. 47–55 on the *Nostoi*.

43 The same kind of multiplicity is paralleled among the Phaeacians (*Odyssey* 11.336–341, 13.7–12).

So this story is influenced by the five/three frame but does not apply it to Menelaos's actual homecoming because the embedded narrative responds to the requirements of the conversation with Telemachos. It emphasizes Menelaos's divine support and his knowledge of the other returning heroes' fate, both elements of particular interest in the immediate context, and not his arrival at home. In effect, our *nostos* frame expresses "the Egyptian arrival," with its final move only briefly and indirectly alluded to (in a move map: Menelaos I → II [→ III]). The abbreviation of the final move homewards is surely designed to increase the parallel with Odysseus's *Apologoi*, which was to be a hugely more complex and expanded version of Menelaos's voyaging, since Odysseus's retellings of his journey leave the *nostos* necessarily unfinished. Though these tales comprise the most elaborated embedded narratives of wandering and adventure in extant *epos*, neither of the two performances on Scheria in which they are realized is in itself a completed *nostos*, since they do not actually get him home.⁴⁴

If so, one is immediately prompted to wonder why the *Odyssey* poet structures Agamemnon's *nostos* in the five/three pattern. An obvious explanation is that his fortune is used as a parallel for the whole framework of Odysseus's *nostos*,⁴⁵ while his brother's wanderings are designed as a doublet mainly for the internal narrative of the *Apologoi*. We shall return to the ways in which the current prism affects our reading of this poem as a whole at the end of the article (§ 4) and what it might tell us about its position within the history of early Greek literature. To do that, however, we first have to examine the evidence in the rest of Archaic *epos*.

44 See above, n. 2 for the practical experience of *epos* ("return to home"), as opposed to an hypothetical, earlier and wider conception ("bringing oneself to safety"). There is, of course, much more to explore about the relationship between *nostos* frame and embedded narratives, and a journal reviewer shrewdly suggests to me that internal expansion of our pattern would naturally generate the multiple preliminary receptions one observes in those narratives. But that is a task for another study and only feasible if the arguments of this article are accepted.

45 See above, n. 31.

2 Heracles and the First Trojan War

In the *Iliad*, we find one particularly marked *nostos*, which is situated within a broader parallel to the current story—the first sack of Troy by Heracles.⁴⁶ This parallel gives precedent for a Greek expedition coming to punish the Trojans for a wrong committed in the context of *xenia*, this time in Laomedon's refusal to pay Heracles for ridding Troy of the monster which had been sent to punish the Trojan king for defrauding Poseidon and Apollo of their wages for the construction of Troy's walls (20.144–148). The continuities between generations are obviously important for an understanding of the moral significance of the story as a whole, but we should note the manner in which Heracles's tale is told—scattered over the poem and only appearing in brief and elliptical snippets to illustrate a current rhetorical point: this is presented as a well-known event.

And yet this theme hardly dominates his invocations in the *Iliad*. As the ultimate heroic figure in Greek mythology, Heracles is mentioned thirteen times in the poem,⁴⁷ but a mere five of those concern the first Trojan War (2.679, 5.628–654, 14.249–266, 15.18–30, 20.144–148), and only three of those tell us anything about the *nostos*: we learn that Hypnos and Hera conspired to create a storm which threw Heracles off course (14.249–266, 15.26–28); as a result, he came to the island of Cos, where he sired a son, Thessalos (2.678–679); Zeus nevertheless intervened to get his son home to Argos (15.29–30), where he also had a son, Tlepolemos (2.653–270).⁴⁸ These are the only details given about the voyage, but they can with one difficulty be mapped onto the same pattern we observed in the *Odyssey*.

1. Divine Interaction	[Athene (8.362–369)]
2. Journey 1	to Cos (14.255–256, 15.26–30)
3. Destination 1	Cos (2.678–679)
4. Journey 2	to Argos (15.29–30)
5. Destination 2	Argos (2.653–267)

46 For this figure in early *epos*, see Lang 1983: 150–153; Gantz 1993: 374–463; Alden 2000: 38–42; Schein 2002; Haubold 2005; Andersen 2012; Barker and Christensen 2014b; Bär 2018: 31–72.

47 2.653–670, 2.679, 5.392–404, 5.628–654, 8.362–369, 11.689–693, 14.249–266, 14.323–325, 15.18–30, 15.638–640, 18.117–119, 19.95–133, 20.144–148. See Bär 2018: 33–44.

48 Barker and Christensen 2014b are perhaps too quick to dismiss the “passing mention in

In this story, **Journeys 1** and **2** are clearly present, and the first comes with the added (and common) detail of the storm driven by Hera's conspiracy with Hypnos (14.249–266, 15.18–30), somewhat as we saw with Odysseus's progress from Ogygia to Scheria in the *Odyssey*, where he was hounded by Poseidon. That hostility is not confined to Heracles's participation in the first Trojan War, of course, but is central to his wider story and thus serves to bind the strands of the different Heraclidean narratives in the *Iliad*.

Destinations 1 and **2** are also evident and this time less in terms of a formalized hospitality sequence⁴⁹ and more from the simple fact of arrival and detention in those places for a length of time, which is just one of the several careful parallels drawn between them: Hera uses a storm to drive him off course to Cos, and her husband Zeus leads him home to Argos, and in both places Heracles has a son who then either comes himself (Tlepolemos, now from Rhodes: 2.661–667) or sends his son (Thessalos despatches Pheidippos and Antiphos) to Troy, to repeat the dose of punishment. The peripheral status of Cos comes in its association with the sea (like Pylos and Odysseus's first Scherian reception) and even in the most general sense as an intermediary stop before the final arrival at home.⁵⁰ Moreover, just as with the Odyssean cases, the first destination mirrors or is proleptic of the second, in the shared motif of the Heraclids

the Catalogue of Ships as the father and grandfather of two contingents of troops" (261), missing the parallel between the two figures as a(nother) connection between the two sieges.

- 49 We should not insist on the presence of a formal hospitality sequence at every destination, for that would be to impose the practice of the *Odyssey* as the norm, when its focus on hospitality is very particular to the ethical concerns and structure of that poem. For a narrative about Heracles, tales of heroic achievement and violent activities seem readily suitable at this point; see the next note for details of these events as related by later sources.
- 50 Later attested sources set a series of adventures on Cos, including a hostile encounter with the king Eurypylos or his sons, some kind of contest with Giants, and the kidnap or rape of the daughter Chalchiope. It is uncertain whether Homer knew of these details or not: see Janko 1992: 191–192; Alden 2001: 159; Bär 2018: 33–44; Scodel 2024. If he did, then the choice to ignore all these details so as to make Heracles fit more easily into a *nostos* framework becomes even more noticeable. The common notion that he was involved in a sack of the city makes something of a parallel for Paris in the *Iliad* and beyond, of whose voyage home to Troy Homer only mentions that there was a stop-off at Sidon (6.288–692), while Proclus's summary of the *Cypria* suggests that he sacked that city (arg. 18–19 Bernabé). It is no surprise that a hospitality setting can easily become violent, and both Pherecydes (*FGrH* 3 F 78) and Pseudo-Apollodoros (2.137–138) say that the combat on Cos was caused when the inhabitants would not let him land on the island: they tried to prevent what would have been a hospitality scene (**Destination 1**), on the not unreasonable basis that he was a pirate (see Scodel 2024: 78–79).

sired and then sent to Troy. It is notable that, despite the popularity and ubiquity of this figure, the poet confines himself to the periphery of Cos and the center of Argos, connecting them thematically around the genealogical link binding the present Trojan war with its past.

The element explicitly lacking here is the **Divine Interaction**, though Athene's reference to her constant assistance of Heracles during his labors (8.362–369) is a generic statement of precisely the kind of divine impulsion or assistance expected at the start of a *nostos*.⁵¹ Yet there are several good reasons for the *Iliad* poet not to refer to such an episode—not because he is trying to suppress it, rather that the kinds of stories useful to him are directed to his paradigmatic purpose of relating the two Trojan Wars.⁵² In such a context, an interaction with Athene after the first destruction could be a little troubling, since her actions at the end of Troy's second sacking result in the “baneful *nostos*” performed by Demodocos (1.326–327), which is obviously less appropriate for a story where her support for the Greek protagonist is an unwavering constant. Perhaps more importantly, the absence allows greater emphasis to be given to Hera's apparently successful hostility and opposition to his *nostos*, given that her intervention results in an extended stay for the hero on Cos, from which Heracles is only rescued by Zeus's direct action: τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν ῥυσάμην καὶ ἀνήγαγον αὐτίς / Ἄργος ἐς ἰπτόβτον καὶ πολλὰ περ ἀθλήσαντα (“him did I save and lead back once more / to Argos pasture of horses, once he had suffered many trials,” 15.29–30). This increases the force of the Heracleian analogy in its context, where Zeus's eventual triumph is temporarily impeded by Hera's actions (and he is about to intervene personally to get his plans fulfilled). So the absence or omission is explained by the poet's requirements for the paradigm as a whole, by his needs in those moments where the story is invoked.

The Heracles *nostos* of the *Iliad*, in other words, seems to reflect—with one contextually appropriate deviation for its use in that poem—much the same pattern we have suggested in the *Odyssey*: its poet, whether the same person or not, naturally looked to the five/three model when invoking a previous *nostos*. It is noticeable here, as we shall see again in the evidence of the *Nostoi*, that the invocations of his story only mention actions and events which fall naturally within the stages of our pattern—storms and divine hostility (**Journey**)

51 It is no surprise that she should place her aid in this setting rather than the context of the first Trojan War, since these stories are a relatively small part of his Iliadic presence, where the tales are more usually directed towards the Eurystheus storyline, with its direct applicability to the relationship between Agamemnon and Achilles, and to the divine conflict typically surrounding Heracles and his appearances in the poem; see above, n. 46.

52 See Alden 2001: 158–160; Porter 2014.

and sexual behaviour and procreation (**Destination**).⁵³ Whether this means that the *Iliad* is alluding to an actual song or text about Heracles which had this structure, though, is far from certain, since the destinations clearly have a particular paradigmatic function for the story of the *Iliad*, and so we should be cautious about extrapolating a fixed text to which Homer is referring.⁵⁴ It does, however, show us that a poet attempting to remind his audience of Heracles's *nostos* from Troy readily uses the five/three pattern to think of and tell the story, even when that story is split up and scattered throughout the *Iliad*.

3 The *Nostoi*

When it comes to the *Nostoi*, a poem of uncertain date and authorship,⁵⁵ this particular kind of caution is less relevant, though many other kinds race forward to take its place, as we shall see. The fullest piece of more or less direct evidence from the ancient world, the summary of the poem in Proclus's *Chrestomathia*, runs as follows:⁵⁶

συνάπτει δὲ τούτοις τὰ τῶν Νόστων βιβλία πέντε Ἁγίου Τροϊζηνίου περιέχοντα τὰδε. Ἀθηνᾶ Ἀγαμέμνονα καὶ Μενέλαον εἰς ἔριν καθίστησι περὶ τοῦ ἔκπλου. Ἀγαμέμνων μὲν οὖν τὸν τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἐξιλασόμενος χόλον ἐπιμένει. Διομήδης δὲ καὶ Νέστωρ ἀναχθέντες εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν διασώζονται. μεθ' οὓς ἐκπλεύσας ὁ Μενέλαος μετὰ πέντε νεῶν εἰς Αἴγυπτον παραγίνεται, τῶν λοιπῶν διαφθαρείσων νεῶν ἐν τῷ πελάγει. οἱ δὲ περὶ Κάλχαντα καὶ Λεοντέα καὶ Πολυπόιτην

53 The *Odyssey* downplays actual sexual activity in some of its reception scenes, if we ignore Circe and Calypso, though Nausicaa's marriageability is an ever-present element on Scheria, and the Ithacan narrative is underscored by the suitor's threatening sexual energy, whether in sleeping with the household's servant women or laying siege to Penelope's fidelity. Telemachos was held to have sired a son with Nestor's daughter Polycaste, who bathes him in the *Odyssey* (3.464–465): Hesiod fragment 221 M-W (= fragment *10 H) with Hirschberger 2004: 473–474.

54 See *mutatis mutandis* Andersen 2012: 151: "Whatever the mythological background and the *epos* tradition, the Heracles we meet in the *Odyssey* is very much a product of the *Odyssey*."

55 See West 2013: 244–250; Danek 2015 (both with earlier bibliography). Though this poem is probably post-Homeric in form and in several respects inflected by its direct knowledge of the *Odyssey*, at least some of its material almost certainly predates the *Odyssey*: see Burgess 2019 for a brief overview. Obviously significant of the thematic status of the song-type, the title tends to justify the focus of Bonifazi 2009 on the *nostos* particularly concerning stories to do with Troy, though cf. § 5 below, pp. 34–38, for some speculation about the pattern's extension in both topic and genre.

56 The text is that of Bernabé 1987, the translation is my own.

πεζῆι πορευθέντες εἰς Κολοφῶνα Τειρεσίαν ἐνταῦθα τελευτήσαντα θάπτουσι. τῶν δὲ περὶ τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα ἀποπλεόντων Ἀχιλλέως εἶδωλον ἐπιφανέν πειράται διακωλύειν προλέγον τὰ συμβησόμενα. εἴθ' ὁ περὶ τὰς Καφηρίδας πέτρας δηλοῦται χειμῶν καὶ ἡ Αἴαντος φθορὰ τοῦ Λοκροῦ. Νεοπτόλεμος δὲ Θέτιδος ὑποθεμένης πεζῆι ποιεῖται τὴν πορείαν· καὶ παραγενόμενος εἰς Θράικην Ὀδυσσεὰ καταλαμβάνει ἐν τῇ Μαρωνείᾳ, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ἀνύει τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ τελευτήσαντα Φοίνικα θάπτει· αὐτὸς δὲ [εἰς Μολοσσούς ἀφικόμενος]⁵⁷ ἀναγνωρίζεται Πηλεΐ. ἔπειτα Ἀγαμέμνονος ὑπὸ Αἰγίσθου καὶ Κλυταιμῆστρας ἀναιρεθέντος ὑπ' Ὀρέστου καὶ Πυλάδου τιμωρία καὶ Μενελάου εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀνακομιδῆ.

And there follows these the five books of the *Nostoi* by Agias of Troezen, with the following contents. Athene sets Agamemnon and Menelaos into strife about the departure (from Troy). So Agamemnon stays to appease the anger of Athena. While Diomedes and Nestor setting out come safely home. Departing after them Menelaos with five ships arrives in Egypt, the rest of his ships lost at sea. And those around Calchas and Leonteus and Polypoites proceed on foot to Colophon and bury Teiresias who died there. And when those around Agamemnon are sailing away the ghost of Agamemnon appears and tries to stop them by predicting what will happen. Then the storm occurs around the Capherian rocks, and the destruction of Aias the Locrian. And Neoptolemos, with Thetis advising, makes his journey on foot; and arriving in Thrace he overtakes Odysseus in Maroneia, and he completes the remainder of his journey and buries Phoinix when he dies; and [coming to the Molossians] he is recognized by Peleus. Then, when Agamemnon has been killed by Aigisthos and Clytaimnestra, vengeance (is achieved) by Orestes and Pylades, and the return of Menelaos to his home.

There are enormous and well-known problems with simply mapping this undated summary onto any putative poem from the Archaic or early Classical period. Aside from the textual difficulties of this elliptical and abbreviated narrative,⁵⁸ the very great likelihood that the *Odyssey* directly influenced the

57 See below, n. 65.

58 These qualities are important in two ways. Firstly, it means that scholars generally try to supplement Proclus with Pseudo-Apollodoros (as in West 2003), though one needs to be careful about the latter's use of multiple sources from which he sought to reflect a unified story rather than the version of one poet at one particular time. Secondly, the summary elides the gadding about to Tenedos and Lesbos at the start of the story (which is supplied by the *Odyssey* and Pseudo-Apollodoros), as the various groups sorted themselves

Nostoi means that we must proceed with caution in trying to use this material as independent evidence of general practice in Archaic poetry.⁵⁹ As a first step, however, our five/three pattern seems once more to be evident throughout the narrative—not in every story,⁶⁰ that is, but explicitly in those of Menelaos and Neoptolemos and probably also those of “the people around Calchas” and Agamemnon.

Menelaos’s tale is already told in the *Odyssey*, as we saw earlier, but its poet did not use the five/three pattern to structure his return home. The poet of the *Nostoi*, however, did. The **Divine Interaction** is subsumed into the wider narrative, with Athene causing a quarrel between Menelaos and Agamemnon. It is impossible to tell if the poem narrated an episode in which she did this in person, but that hardly matters, especially since this intervention concerns the very fact of the Greeks’ departure from Troy and directly impels Menelaos’s departure.⁶¹ **Journey 1** is the voyage on which Menelaos loses most of his fleet,

out according to whether they followed Menelaos in leaving Troy as soon as possible to avoid the anger of Athene or whether they stayed behind with Agamemnon and tried to propitiate the goddess. This initial period is split into several tellings in the *Odyssey*, so that Odysseus can begin his *Apologoi* at Troy at the start of Book 9 with no reference to the dissension in the Greek camp (and his own initial following of Menelaos as far as Lesbos, after which he returns to Troy): see de Jong 2001: 591–593 and Saïd 2011: 152–157 for brief discussions. Again, the current analysis is not about the whole of the story but about the poem’s structure as the realization of that story.

59 Even this statement is too dichotomous; oral composition continued well after the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became well-known and authoritative, and it is more likely that these texts, as they became known, were simply assimilated (as far as possible) into the continuum of poetic tradition and its recreation than that they immediately killed off all competing traditional composition. For recent discussion, see Burgess 2019.

60 Certainly the first story of Nestor’s and Diomedes’s quick and apparently uneventful voyages home seems to lie outside the pattern, but in truth we aren’t given enough evidence to say either way. Nestor’s tale in the *Odyssey* suggests Tenedos or Lesbos could be configured as **Destinations** (3.157–182), though details are very sketchy, and the summary of the *Nostoi* makes no mention of those places, placing their quick and safe voyage straight after the first quarrel at Troy. A perfectly happy and easy reception on the shore before one in the palace (whether told or not) would have been possible, though one suspects in Diomedes’s case that the *Nostoi* poet might have chosen to include some hint of his later forced migration: see Malkin 2008: 210–257; Danek 2015: 367; *contra* West 2013: 252–253. Sarah Cullinan-Herring suggests to me that we could have here the inverse of Agamemnon’s *nostos* in the *Odyssey*, a deliberately abbreviated and very easy version of the pattern.

61 We see a certain duplication on this kind of progression in the *Odyssey*, as the two divine assemblies in Books 1 and 5 lead into the actual divine encounter with the soon-to-be-travelling hero, but there is no reason to suppose the existence of a rule which says this must have been the case. There simply needs to be a divine preliminary of some sort to

a process told in some detail in the *Odyssey* (3.276–300). **Destination 1** is the sojourn in Egypt likewise related at some length elsewhere (*Odyssey* 4.351–586),⁶² while **Destination 2** is his late return home, though unlike the central receptions in the *Odyssey* there is not much to suggest that this episode must have been especially long or detailed.⁶³ There is no mention here of **Journey 2**, but in the *Odyssey* it is depicted as uneventful (4.585–586) and may have been so in the *Nostoi*. In any case we have already seen the elision or drastic minimalization of at least one journey in the pattern, which would be especially fitting in a narrative where the character returns too late to have a material impact on the story.

Note that the *Nostoi* poet has used our pattern for a character whose story was not so structured in the *Odyssey*, so it would be hard to argue that its deployment here depends on Homer rather than being evidence for the traditionality of the five/three framework. In that light it must be even more significant that Proclus's summary once more only mentions episodes matching directly the stages of this pattern, and one is drawn to the conclusion that Proclus focuses on these episodes precisely because the poet used our pattern. The same should be true of the *Nostoi*'s narrative about Neoptolemos, whose story is similarly structured according to our pattern, and which brings in some details (such as his meeting with Odysseus in Maroneia) that are entirely unknown to, or unmentioned in, the *Odyssey*, where Neoptolemos's voyage home is not figured as especially noteworthy or challenging (*Odyssey* 3.188–189, 4.5–9, 11.533–537).

The **Divine Interaction** in the *Nostoi* version of Neoptolemos's progress is an encounter with his grandmother Thetis, who tells him to proceed home (from Tenedos, Pseudo-Apollodoros tells us) by land. **Journey 1** takes him into Thrace, where Neoptolemos comes upon Odysseus in Maroneia (**Destination 1**),⁶⁴ before he completes the journey and buries Phoinix on the way (**Journey 2**), arriving home for the final reception (**Destination 2**) where he is recognized

the actual journey, helping to place it in a wider storytelling and theological (in the broadest sense) context. For another reason as to why not every example of the pattern in this poem has a **Divine Interaction**, see § 4 below.

62 Sammons 2018: 51 argues that the Egyptian sojourn was not actually related in the poem largely on the grounds that Proclus's summary does not give any details about what happened there.

63 For a structural reason as to why this should be the case, see § 4 below.

64 Odysseus and Neoptolemos might have met in a shared context of hospitality, somewhat like the way the disguised Odysseus speaks of coming across himself, though momentarily absent, in the house of the Thesprotian king (*Odyssey* 13.321–333): see West 2013: 263–264.

as his heir by Peleus.⁶⁵ The parallels between the destinations, once more, are noticeable and deliberate: both Odysseus and Peleus are older men of considerable conciliar wisdom, the former responsible for bringing Neoptolemos to Troy in the first place, the latter's recognition sealing the young man's return from that war and assumption of his father's rule.

Two of the more prominently narrated journeys in this poem, therefore, seem to match the pattern we have identified. A plausible case can also be made for two more examples. Firstly, the fate of "those around Calchas and Leonteus and Polypoites" is clearly constructed as an anticipatory doublet of Neoptolemos's journey: both groups travel on foot, during the course of which they bury a wise figure (Teiresias, apparently, in the former case, Phoinix in the latter, though in the former it is more likely that Calchas died in Colophon after a mantic contest with Teiresias's grandson Mopsos).⁶⁶ We are not told in this summary what happened to this group, and other sources add to the personnel involved, but Leonteus and Polypoites are recorded by Tzetzes (on Lycophron *Alexandra* 980) as returning to Greece (though the pattern would also be preserved, somewhat varied, if they settle somewhere in Pamphylia or Cilicia, as other sources aver):⁶⁷ thus the **Divine Interaction** is also to be extrap-

65 The crucial matter here is the staging of events denoted by *καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ἀνύει τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ τελευτήσαντα Φοίνικα θάπτει· αὐτὸς δὲ εἰς Μολοσσούς ἀφικόμενος ἀναγνωρίζεται Πηλεΐ*. Danek 2015: 369–370 invokes Pseudo-Apollodoros to explain: after burying Phoinix, Neoptolemos journeys to the Molossians and becomes their king, having a child Molossos with Andromache, before returning only then to Phthia, apparently to reinstall Peleus on the throne whence he has been pushed, and where he is recognized as heir and rightful ruler by Peleus. Danek is rightly cautious about how much of this should be read into the *Nostoi*. More economically, West 2013: 264 suggests that *εἰς Μολοσσούς ἀφικόμενος* is "an intrusion from the Molossian version." His interpretation is the one followed here (hence the brackets in the passage above); thus, in the *Nostoi*, Neoptolemos returns to Phthia, where he is recognized by Peleus, and where he is ruling happily in the *Odyssey* (4.5–9). Even if West's thesis is wrong, however, the Molossian journey can easily be accommodated into our pattern, in that it is the final destination of **Journey 2** and the recognition happens there (according to Proclus's summary) in **Destination 2**. If Pseudo-Apollodoros is followed in full, then the poet has recreated for Neoptolemos the post-*nostos* travels of Odysseus to the Thesprotians and inserted that into the pattern between those two stages.

66 West 2013: 254–258; Danek 2015: 368–369. For the doublet here, see Sammons 2018: 118–119, and more generally 215–216.

67 Though the majority of examples in this article have concerned returning to the home already established, the original essence of the *nostos* (above, n. 2) is the successful arrival, not necessarily a return home, after overcoming danger: see also Malkin 2018 for the way colonial activity in the Archaic period made the *nostos* a particularly suitable theme, even when the traveller was in the process of finding a new home; cf. Fowler 2018 for further discussion. As for the actual fate of this group in the several traditions, West

olated from Athene's intervention at the start of the poem,⁶⁸ **Journey 1** is the march (however abbreviated it was in the telling), **Destination 1** is the stop in Colophon, and the second journey and destination either were the final arrival in Thessaly (*vel sim.*) or were omitted entirely.⁶⁹

Secondly (and perhaps more likely), Agamemnon's *nostos*, once more told already throughout the *Odyssey*,⁷⁰ almost certainly conformed to the pattern: the **Divine Interaction** is the same as that for Menelaos's *nostos* but doubled in the appearance of Achilleus's shade and its prediction of the future in an apparent attempt to prevent (πειράται διακωλύειν) their departure, possibly until further sacrifices. This may have been necessary because so much space seems to have intervened between the narrative of the initial falling out and the resumption of Agamemnon's story. In **Journey 1**, "the storm around the Kapherian rocks" (ὁ περὶ τὰς Καφηρίδας πέτρας ... χειμῶν) may be compared with the report in the *Odyssey* that Agamemnon's journey was affected by a storm off Cape Maleia (4.514–528)—and perhaps another, prior one at the "Guraian rocks" (4.500–510).⁷¹ There is no information in Proclus's summary about **Destination 1** and **Journey 2**, although fragmentum dubium 14 B (from Servius) reports that Clytemnestra met Agamemnon on the shore (**Destination 1**) and then lured him (**Journey 2**) to Aigisthos's house (**Destination 2**); the obvious deception would have replaced Aigisthos as the helper on the shore from the *Odyssey* with Clytemnestra, and also respond to the progress from periphery to center. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely here than it was in the Homeric poem, Aigisthos's house may simply have been **Destination 1**,⁷² with the slaughter there ruling out **Journey 2** and the attainment of **Destination 2**, which never occurs because Agamemnon is dead; it is, in other words, a struc-

2013: 256 mentions the scholia to Dionysios Periegetes 850, according to whom they were guided by Mopsos to Cilicia; Fowler 2018: 62n61 notes a further variety of subsequent outcomes.

68 See Sammons 2018: 118 for other suggestions to the same end.

69 See Danek 2015: 368–369, and § 4 below, for analysis of this potential (or probable) omission.

70 Olson 1990. For the *Odyssey*'s inset version, see above § 1, pp. 13–14.

71 West 2013: 265–266 condemns the storm off Malea as geographically unrealistic, and athetizes it in his 2017 Teubner edition, but that need not concern us here. Though, as a journal reviewer notes, the first, Guraian storm is explicitly linked only with Aias, West argues that it also affected Agamemnon. All that matters here is that a storm (or storms) makes the journey more interesting as narrative, and poses a difficult challenge for the traveller to overcome.

72 For the peripherality of Aigisthos's house, at least in the *Odyssey*, see above, pp. 13–14. In any case, it is not only geography which articulates the relationship between the first and second destinations.

tural defect in the pattern, matching and enshrining the narrative's course.⁷³ Mapped out into moves, this would be either Agamemnon I → II → III (if Servius preserves an authentic fragment, and our first alternative for the *Odyssey* is chosen) or Agamemnon I → II → [Orestes] III. In the latter case, as we suggested earlier, the pattern is then completed by his son Orestes, who returns to take vengeance on his father's killers.

The *Nostoi*, therefore, seems to have used the pattern twice for certain, probably three times, and quite possibly four—or even five—times. Given that there are only five narrative sequences reported in Proclus, this is quite a good return (no pun intended) on our investment. In keeping with the first two sections of this article, here is an initial move map of the *Nostoi*:

- (i) Nestor & Diomedes I → [? II] → III
- (ii) Menelaos I → II
- (iii) “those around Calchas” I → II [? → III]
- (iv) Agamemnon I → II (or I → II → III)
- (v) Neoptolemos I → II → III
- (iv²) Agamemnon [Orestes] → III
- (ii²) Menelaos → III

There is considerable scholarly disagreement over the timing and simultaneity of the plotlines in the *Nostoi*: should they be broken into two groups (those who follow Menelaos and those who follow Agamemnon) or simply into five separate story strands (as they are presented basically in Proclus's summary)? That question does not particularly concern us here, and we have to proceed with caution anyway, given the obvious limitations in our surviving evidence. Nonetheless, it would be attractive to see the opening and closing elements in this plot as linked in other ways as well: a younger man (Diomedes / Orestes) arrives home in a journey paralleled with that of an older man (Nestor / Menelaos), though these journeys proceed in very different ways, given the disparity in length and difficulty of reclaiming the (father's) household. The closing two plotlines also manage to resolve the quarrel earlier constructed by Athene, while the return of Orestes can be seen to be foreshadowed in the success of Achilles's son Neoptolemos to claim the inheritance of his father.

Moreover, this ring construction throws stress on Agamemnon's failed *nostos* as at least one highlight of the poem, with contrasting land-based journeys before and after—“those around Calchas” and Neoptolemos—and a rough

73 For reasons to prefer this possibility, see the analysis in the next section. If so, then the *Nostoi* poet has taken the *Odyssey*'s probable intimation that this scene is premature or preliminary and made it so structurally, within the logic of the pattern itself.

total of three journeys before and after. Yet this is not the only articulation to the poem, especially once we factor in the *nostos* pattern put forward in this article. If we can trust Proclus, the move map of the *Nostoi* now looks something like this:

- (i) Nestor and Diomedes I → [? II] → III
- (ii) Menelaos I → II

- (iii) “those around Calchas” I → II [? → III]
- (iv) Agamemnon I → II (or I → II → III)

- (v) Neoptolemos I → II → III

(iv²) Agamemnon [Orestes] → III

(ii²) Menelaos → III

Set out thus, the poem reveals a repeated doublet dynamic at its heart.⁷⁴ Firstly, in what looks like an anticipatory doublet governing sequences (i)–(iv), sequences (i) and (iii) are parallel in being concerned with more than one figure and in being defective versions of the pattern: the first sequence may be too easy to require its second move, and the second may not have a third move. Then, sequences (ii) and (iv) relate the progress of the two Atreidai to their first destination, both of them after a storm has interrupted their progress, before leaving them there (one in delay, the other in death).⁷⁵ An easy anticipatory doublet, then, with contrasting fortunes for the linked heroes sitting at the end of the comparison and defining it—and with their stories equally, if differently, suspended.

Sequence (v), Neoptolemos’s *nostos*, sits outside that structure and represents a departure from it, though it is also linked with sequence (iii) in terms of its method of travel and thus surrounds and highlights sequence (iv). But that is a false dawn, as it were, for Neoptolemos starts something new in the

74 Sammons 2018: 119–121 also suggests a doublet structure but a slightly different one in which departure by sea precedes departure by land, thus linking (ii) and (iii) with (iv) and (v). There are indeed connections between (iii) and (v), as suggested earlier, but Sammons subsumes (i) into (ii) in a way that Proclus does not quite support. In any case, no pattern of articulation need exclude another.

75 This remains true whether Agamemnon had one or two receptions (see above, pp. 13–14). Sarah Cullinan-Herring suggests to me that the way in which the *Nostoi* poet leaves Menelaos suspended before returning to him later imitates the complex timeline of the *Odyssey*, but it also looks back to the similar suspension in Menelaos’s own tale in the *Odyssey*, where his account breaks off in Egypt and glosses over the final return to Sparta (see above, pp. 15–17).

poem. His is (probably) the only complete *nostos* told sequentially from start to finish (and perhaps beyond), as Neoptolemos journeys home and receives his father's inheritance. This contrasts strongly with Agamemnon's fate in the directly preceding sequence, but at the same time it prepares us for its reprise in the person of the analogously youthful figure Orestes, who effects the completion of Agamemnon's story (iv²) and likewise succeeds to his father's patrimony. So sequence (v) both marks its presence outside the doublet and prepares for and provides the transition to the resolution of the two stories which are stuck in limbo at its end.

Finally, Menelaos's last move (ii²) parallels Orestes's replacement move (iv²) and sits as an apparently decreasing doublet to it, signalling the end of the poem as many other Archaic epics did.⁷⁶ To judge at least partially with the aid of the *Odyssey*, the nature of that decrease in *Nostoi* comes in the fact that Orestes has to avenge his father, while Menelaos simply arrives to find the deed done (cf. *Odyssey* 3.311–312, 4.584–586). So the *Nostoi* centers its story upon Neoptolemos, leading up to it with an anticipatory doublet of interrupted *nostos* patterns and leading away from it with a decreasing doublet giving the conclusion to those interrupted patterns.

4 Theme and Poetry in the Archaic Period

What does the presence of this five/three pattern tell us? In a traditional poetic such as that of early Greek *epos*, where formal features and methods of composition are handed down from generation to generation of performers, the best *a priori* assumption is that poetic structures shared between texts are the products of this inheritance and so neither the invention of the poet or text at hand nor evidence of direct relationships between individual poems or texts. These alternatives are rarely so clear-cut, of course, because writing and allusion to other texts (as opposed to stories) played an increasing role in the Archaic period; by the end of this period, Simonides can quote a line from *Iliad* Book 6 and confidently ascribe it to Homer, something which one cannot imagine—much less evidence—at its start.⁷⁷ Moreover, there is every chance that the

76 For the decreasing doublet as a closural device in early *epos*, see Kelly 2007 and Sammons 2018: 106 for refinement and application to the *Cypria*. Its presence is another reason to think of the *Nostoi* as representative of a continuing tradition of epic composition, whatever the influence of the *Odyssey* (and the *Iliad*) on that tradition.

77 See Kelly 2015: 22–24. For the opposite view, that allusion to more or less fixed texts was possible in the earliest period, see Currie 2016; for a wider discussion, see Burgess 2011 and Nelson 2023.

Nostoi, in particular, was directly influenced by the *Odyssey*,⁷⁸ though as we have seen this poem also includes material and tells stories which are either not contained in the Homeric poems or are in direct disagreement with them, so its poet clearly had access to non-homeric traditions and did not feel himself limited to merely filling in the *Odyssey*'s gaps.

Nonetheless, if we only had the evidence of the *Nostoi*, it would be impossible to be certain that the five/three pattern was not the invention of the *Odyssey* poet and its presence in the various plot lines of the *Nostoi* not a result of direct influence from that poem. Crucially, however, because we have observed its traces in Heracles's case in the *Iliad*, it must be *prima facie* more likely that we are dealing with a traditional pattern, that oral poets had long learned to sing *nostoi* in the way we have described—beginning with an episode of divine impulsion or interaction, comprising a journey to a peripheral or temporary destination, and then a final journey to the central and final destination—well before the *Odyssey* poet took to his task.

What, then, does this mean for our reading of the three poems with this pattern? To begin with the obvious, it shows us that the *Odyssey* poet was structurally and technically daring in his use of what is, in essence, a very simple and easily limited structure. To achieve monumentality, he uses the pattern a total of four times, in increasing scales across twelve thousand verses, and deliberately connects and intertwines the examples, so as to unify the experience of father and son. This is not a question of simple agglomeration, however, since the poet takes a pattern which more readily and naturally contrasts a foreign destination with the arrival at home (as with the *nostoi* of Heracles, Menelaos, and Neoptolemos, for example) and locates them in the same place, and does so twice—Scheria and Ithaca. He may not have been the first poet to do this, of course, since there is no peripheral destination recorded for Agamemnon's *nostos* either in the *Odyssey* or what we have left of the *Nostoi*.⁷⁹ If, therefore, there were two destinations in Mycenae and its environs as suggested above, then it

78 This seems obvious from the fact that Odysseus, an obviously significant figure in this context, is only mentioned in passing: see Danek 2015: 358–359.

79 It is not impossible that a version of his *nostos* could have included a stop at Tenedos (as in Pseudo-Apollodoros: see West 2013: 259) as **Destination 1**, but both the *Odyssey* and the *Nostoi* seem to have excluded from their deployment of the pattern the various Greek peregrinations in the immediate aftermath of the city's sack, reserving that information for the naturally expansive embedded narratives: see above, pp. 15–17. That other poets could configure this journey very differently may be seen in the fact that Sappho fragment 17.3–6 Neri has Menelaos and Agamemnon stopping at Lesbos on their way home from Troy. Clearly there was some freedom in the way an early poet could approach and configure this material.

seems possible that the *Odyssey* poet adapted that feature from Agamemnon's story and expanded it twice for Odysseus. If the *Odyssey* used just one reception (in Aigisthos's house), then the poet has taken the defect in Agamemnon's story—the absence of the final two stages—and remedied them in Odysseus's experience.

The scale and hegemonic quality of the *Odyssey*, however, are not simply achieved by multiplying examples, or even by creating a parallel course for the main hero's son, but also by managing to incorporate, through embedded narratives, the stories of almost every other hero coming home from Troy. Of these stories, told piecemeal throughout the poem, we have already suggested that Agamemnon's *nostos* responded to our pattern due to its paradigmatic status for the *Odyssey* as a whole, while Menelaos's Egyptian arrival showed the influence of that pattern even if it did not use it for his actual homecoming. Indeed, this selective quality was also encountered in the *Iliad*, where the poet chooses a version of Heracles's *nostos* relatively poorly attested in later literature (to judge from the prominence of these stories in his later mythography); many other stories could have been told about such a popular and well-travelled hero, but these two were chosen on account of their relational aspect to the *Iliad* itself and the story of the second sack of Troy. It is a question, above all, of poetic selection and choice, of the realization of wider stories and traditions beyond the pattern itself.

Thus, it is not hard to imagine that other, even more popular or well-known elements and episodes could have been brought into these tales; such internal storytelling is one of the most characteristic features of what we have left of early Greek *epos*. Formal hospitality episodes at the destination are obviously an attractive context for such narratives, as guests and hosts ply one another for information and entertainment, just as Penelope and Odysseus swap stories after their reunion (23.300–343). But the most famous extant example is Odysseus's *Apologoi*, which—though carefully and artfully structured in their own way as quasi-poetic narratives—are not amenable to our five/three pattern, precisely because they are embedded narratives and do not comprise Odysseus's achievement of a final goal. Though he is in many ways approximated to a poetic narrator, Odysseus's tale of his adventures is decidedly not the equivalent of the poet's own song.⁸⁰ Many scholars have noted

80 For the comparison, and its limitations, see esp. Scodel 1998: 171–172, who observes that such “distinctions (that is, between bardic and other narratives in Homer), precisely because they are fragile, define the special authority Homeric epic claims for itself, and when we rapidly demystify them, we fail to see how the epic sees itself”; see also Beck 2005 and Kelly 2008.

that the more fantastical—and well-known—elements of this poem are contained in the *Apologoi* and contrasted with the poet's own version of Odysseus's return.⁸¹ The possibility of this kind of suppletive internal narrative is entirely concordant with our definition and experience of the pattern (as with Menelaos in Book 4), and it picks up on the same quality which led Bonifazi to make such stories a central feature of all *nostoi*.

Though it is no great surprise that the *Odyssey* poet is innovative in his deployment of the pattern, one should note that the identification of the pattern reveals quite some sophistication on the part of the *Nostoi* poet as well. Long derided as post-Homeric poetastry, the texts of the so-called Epic Cycle are well in the midst of something of a renaissance, and the Neoanalysts have put them on a pedestal of artistic achievement and importance which may prove unsustainable in the long term. Nonetheless, we should be prepared to see structural sophistication and talent where our evidence points to it.⁸² While we cannot say with any certainty how the destinations of Nestor and Diomedes were treated in the *Nostoi*, since they could well have enjoyed a peripheral and central reception at home (that is, on the shore and then in the palace, or perhaps even on the way to Pylos and Argos), the poet seems to foreground his narrative with two stories which do not use our five/three pattern, in itself a daring thing to do when his audiences must have been expecting at least something of that sort; it is entirely in keeping with the nature of the stories involved, of course, but still a noticeable choice as an opening. Moreover, the structure of the *Nostoi* mirrors the process of the *nostoi*, with the first plot getting to its end the quickest and Menelaos returning home last of all (cf. *Odyssey* 3.317–322). That is, the shortest and the longest *nostoi*—except for Odysseus himself, of course—bookend the poem, beginning with stories that (may) not fit the usual pattern and ending with (almost) the longest one which does.

We have focused in this article, perhaps inevitably, on articulating the pattern first and foremost, and seeing how it is structured and manipulated principally from the poets' perspective. But throughout the argument we have reflected on the effect of this or that feature, this or that manipulation or deviation, this or that juxtaposition or connection because a poetic like this can only exist when performers and their consumers interact in a communicative relationship, with the former relying on the latter to interpret the repeated phrases, structures, and patterns they create and recreate. This is not simply a question

81 The *locus classicus* for this observation is Aristotle fragment 387 Gigon (= 163 Rose); see Griffin 1977: 39–41 (= 2001: 367–368).

82 See the collection of essays in Fantuzzi and Tsagalis 2015 for a generally more appreciative approach to these texts and their virtues.

of understanding the words on a straightforward denotative, lexical level but engaging in a dynamic manner with the performance (or, if one wants to insist on a reading audience, the text) as it unfolds before them. To use a famous example from the hospitality sequence, the nature of the typical dog-at-the-door motif tells the audience something about the nature of hospitality to be found inside the house being guarded:⁸³ Circe's lions and wolves betoken the rather unworldly and unnatural nature of their hostess and her potentially dangerous welcome; the reaction of Eumaios's dogs show Odysseus's long absence from his home but also the care taken by their master to avoid harming his guests; the dying Argos the limits to which Odysseus's household has been pushed and how glad it is at the master's return. The audience's ability to infer things from its familiarity with this pattern should never be forgotten.

As Jonathan Ready has most recently and fully discussed, this kind of knowledge naturally leads to suspense, as the audience's expectations are constantly operative.⁸⁴ One of the poets' great opportunities is to guide those expectations in a variety of ways, fulfilling, confounding, redirecting. In this mission, the semantic potential of our five stages/three moves allows all sorts of effects to be achieved: the juxtaposition and then interlacing of Telemachos's and Odysseus's journeys enable all a range of other, more detailed, connections between them, inviting the audience to look upon the final triumph of the father and his relative impressiveness as measured next to the growing reputation and stature of his son. In effect, they are encouraged to ask, Will Telemachos match up to Odysseus? If not, then why not? On a smaller scale, the fact that Agamemnon's reception in the *Odyssey* is structurally defective and unusual encapsulates his failure to achieve *nostos*, hedging the narrative with the kind of structural underpinning which makes it effective, while the central and emphasized arrangement in the *Nostoi* of the successful *nostos* of Neoptolemos and its framing by the somewhat less successful *nostoi* of Menelaos and Agamemnon continue the contrast between the Atreidai and Achilles so prominently on display in the *Iliad*. These are all cases where the natural inclination of the story aligns with the pattern's directions, with form and content reinforcing one another on several simultaneous levels.

But we also find other ways of responding to or manipulating the audiences' expectations in this respect: the *Iliad* omits a single divine interaction in Her-

83 For all this, see the excellent study of Reece 1993: esp. 14–15.

84 Ready 2023: 195–220, identifies three kinds of suspense arising from familiarity, concerning the how, what, and when of the narrative. Our pattern fulfils all three kinds, though—in keeping with the scale of the unit itself—most of the examples examined in this article have focused on the first two.

acles's case because it avoids a reminder of the imminent sack of Troy it does not wish to encourage and directs attention instead to those elements which help to make its point about the connections between the two destructions of the city. This is a form of misdirection or, perhaps better, redirection away from an expectation. The *Nostoi* poet starts, surprisingly, with journeys which do not conform to the pattern precisely because they are apparently unproblematic and quick, setting the background for the more difficult, involved, and sometimes unsuccessful *nostoi* to follow.⁸⁵ Scheria is emphasized early as an important stop for Odysseus on his way home in the *Odyssey*, but the very fact that it is a final destination in the pattern raises the unsettling possibility that he may be permanently detained there, with the spectre of the unfriendly Phaeacians and the issue of Nausicaa's marriage a constant thread throughout the episode. The audience in this case are geared towards asking themselves how Odysseus will manage to restart his journey and overcome the various social and physical challenges facing him on Scheria.

This kind of attention to the audience and to the narrative's effects on that group is obviously important in a context where the broad outlines of the stories were well known, but the way in which those stories progressed to their conclusions could vary tremendously. As the song continues, the audience must be engaged and intrigued, pulled in different directions, made to anticipate and then reconfigure those expectations, if the poet is to succeed in holding their attention. To appreciate fully the richness of Archaic *epos* is to reimagine this dynamic relationship, as the poet reacts to his audience, real or idealized, at the moment of performance. To do that, we have to know what he—and they—were working with.

5 Conclusion

One popular way to sing an epic *nostos* in the Archaic period was to structure the story in five stages or three moves, and our scanty evidence shows us that three different poets took the opportunities of this flexible structure and did very different things with it. For the poet of the *Iliad*, it was a partially submerged glance at another story or tradition, a chance to let his audience in on his own skill and knowledge of that material, but an invitation also to reflect on the interconnected nature of Greek heroic song. For the *Odyssey*, the *nostos* is

85 This recalls, though it reverses, the somewhat unexpected way that the *Odyssey* foregrounds the voyage home of the "man" in its proem but does not actually get to him until Book 5.

the ideal song-type, a target for self-advertisement and the means of achieving it, generated with a focus on formal reception at each destination. The pattern is quadrupled and interlaced, expanded and linked on a scale surely rarely seen in the Archaic period, resulting in the ultimate masterwork of the theme, for the ultimate hero of the story-type. Finally, the *Nostoi* launched itself into a world already influenced by the *Odyssey* and decided to deploy multiple narratives in a ring-compositional, doublet-marked structure to sit alongside and display something of its own sophistication.

The utility of such a pattern in a poetic tradition driven by recomposition in performance⁸⁶ should be obvious. This ready-made plot is capable of theoretically endless contraction and expansion, able to be generated in different forms and to different extents, but also able to be linked individually in more specific and allusive ways. If, as noted earlier,⁸⁷ Odysseus's journey within the *Odyssey* could be conceived with Scheria as periphery and Ithaca as center, then each location and the voyages to and within it can be expanded with separate receptions according to the requirements of the song and the performance context: the *Odyssey* proceeds with greater leisure due to its monumental narrative, elements from Heracles's story only appear when needed to make a parallel with the earlier sack of Troy in the *Iliad's* narrative, and the *Nostoi* arranges everything to focus on the complete, and sequentially narrated, journey of Neoptolemos as contrasted principally with the somewhat more fragmented experience of the Atreidai. Doubtless, there were many other poems and performers using this pattern: the returns of the Argo, of the Argive heroes from the second sack of Thebes, of Heracles from his continued adventures. The list of potential songs from the riches of Greek mythology is almost endless.

Indeed, this expansive possibility could be applied across generic or formal lines as well. Consider, for example, the return to Olympos by Persephone and Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, a poem long ago recognized as utilizing the wrathful withdrawal pattern so familiar from heroic *epos*.⁸⁸ Here, **Divine Interaction** comes in the message from Zeus to Hades that he must return Persephone (346–357); then she is escorted by Hermes (375–383:

86 This is not to say that every extant or known *nostos* from the Archaic period was generated by an oral poet composing directly in such a context, simply that these poets were using a pattern inherited from it: see above, p. 4 with nn. 7–8.

87 See above, p. 12n29.

88 See esp. Lord 1967, Cook 2014: 91–96; for a more recent discussion of the patterning of this text, see Cook 2012. On the wrath pattern more generally in early epic, see Lord 1960: 186–197; Edwards 1991: 15–19; Nagler 1974: 131–166; Sowa 1984: ch. 4; Grossardt 2009. The identification of the five/three pattern in the hymn was first suggested to me by Amelia Bezuidenhout Cowen.

Journey 1) to a reunion with her mother at the latter's temple, which location is a peripheral dwelling place to their home on Olympos (384–440: **Destination 1**), its construction a symbol of Demeter's self-isolation from the divine community. The very brief **Journey 2** (484) is prefaced by another messenger's despatch, this time in the form of Rheia bringing Zeus's promises of the new honors each goddess is to have (443–469), and by Demeter's restoration of agriculture and demonstration of its control (470–482); while **Destination 2** (484–486) in the Olympian center sets the seal on their reconciliation with Zeus and his new world order.

1. Divine Interaction	Hermes's instructions to Hades (346–357)
2. Journey 1	Persephone to Eleusis (375–383)
3. Destination 1	Demeter's temple (384–440)
4. Journey 2	Persephone and Demeter to Olympos (484)
5. Destination 2	Olympos (484–486)

The move map runs Persephone I → II → Persephone [+ Demeter] III, where Demeter joins her daughter's journey after **Destination 1** and completes the *nostos* with her on Olympos in **Destination 2**, somewhat as Peisistratos attaches himself to Telemachos and arrives with him at Sparta.⁸⁹ The other variation is the duplication of the **Divine Interaction** before each journey rather than just the first—another deeply meaningful change, since Demeter needs to be persuaded to end her geographical isolation, underscored in its preliminary status within the five/three frame, by Rheia's promise of her renewed honors to join in her daughter's *nostos*.⁹⁰ Appreciating this pattern adds considerably

89 Of course, it is not entirely analogous, since Demeter's own return to Olympos has been the subject of much interest in its own right. We could analyze the **Divine Interaction** impelling her return as the failure to apotheosize Demophoon with its attendant, terrifying epiphany (250–293); she sweeps out of the house (282) on **Journey 1** to her temple (302–304), after the Eleusinians have built it in accordance with her instructions, and here—after Zeus's failures to get her moving (see next note)—her daughter finds her. So the map would more accurately be (a) Demeter I → II, (b) Persephone I → II, (c) Demeter and Persephone III. This contrasts slightly with the way in which the *Odyssey* poet keeps the *nostoi* of Odysseus and Telemachos separate even when their plotlines are intertwined and underscores the closeness of the two goddesses' association.

90 This matches Zeus's earlier, failed attempt to move Demeter from her temple (313–324), followed by the parade of suppliant gods (325–333), so that an overdetermination of **Divine Interactions** seems to be the rule in this poem. That should not surprise us in an hymnic narrative.

to the power and deference accorded to Demeter in this hymn and illustrates the richness and transferability of the poetic thesaurus.

The idea that our pattern may be found articulating returns in hymnic as well as heroic *epos* should occasion no surprise. Indeed, given the generally accepted wider definition of the *nostos* mentioned at the start of this article—that it denotes *any* successful arrival after overcoming danger on the journey (in which sense it covers Telemachos’s voyages to Sparta and Pylos, and Odysseus’s from Ogygia to Scheria)—it is tempting to examine other journeys and arrivals for this pattern, as for instance the heroic *katabasis* undertaken by Priam in *Iliad* Book 24.⁹¹ Each of the two legs of this journey proceed in the same way as a *nostos*, with the old man arriving safely in Achilles’s tent and then back home in Troy. That progress easily responds to our five/three frame:

1. Divine Interaction	Iris (24.143–188)	Hermes (679–691)
2. Journey 1	to the river (189–352)	to the river (690–691)
3. Destination 1	(Hermes at) the river (352–439)	(Hermes at) the river (692–694)
4. Journey 2	to Achilles’s tent (440–447)	to Troy (695–708)
5. Destination 2	Achilles’s tent (448–678)	Troy (709–804)

The move map here is 2 × Priam I → II → III. Note that **Destination 1** on each leg is a meeting, close to a body of water (cf. 351–352), with someone who is (pretending to be) associated with the host at the final destination and who then attends the travellers (like Nausicaa attends Odysseus to the city outskirts, Peisistratos attends Telemachos as his guide from Pylos to Sparta, or Demeter and her daughter in the hymn just above). One could also figure the voyage out and the voyage home as the two journeys, so that Achilles’s tent is **Destination 1** (located at the far end of the Greek camp, but also figured in Book 24 as Hades in Priam’s *katabasis*)⁹² and Troy is **Destination 2**.⁹³ In either case, Priam is given the status, prominence, endurance, and agency awarded to those who undergo dangerous voyages and successfully make it home.

91 I am indebted to Felix Budelmann for discussion on this point.

92 See Herrero de Jáuregui 2011.

93 The case is analogous to that of Odysseus above (p. 12n29), where we could see the pattern exemplified on a smaller scale in the progression from his reception on Scheria shore to the palace but on a larger scale between Scheria and Ithaca as well. Its flexibility is its strength.

These are just some of the directions in which the five/three pattern might be taken, but this kind of extension must be reserved for another foray. What we have tried to do here is focus on the structural similarity of stories arranged around the theme of *nostos*, but, if scholarship is right to think of these stories as a subset of travelogue in Greek *epos*, then the pattern's extension beyond the material analyzed in this article would be only natural. Attention to five stages/three moves can give us new insights into the canonical narratives of early Greek *epos* and perhaps even an avenue into understanding the artistry and sophistication of those texts which have not survived. Whatever else it shows, the discussion should make us marvel at the size and beauty of the trees grown from such small acorns and mourn the loss of almost the whole forest they produced.

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