

## §46. Father and Son



Thus spake Telemachus, and Laertes exulted, exclaiming,  
 “Ah, how blessed a day, dear gods! Of a truth I am happy,  
 hearing my son and the son of my son thus vying in valor.”

– *Odyssey 24:513-515*

Why, we may ask, did not Laertes resume the kingship during his son’s absence, thus preventing all this suitor nonsense? The simple answer is: that is not how the story comes out. The poet had to work with what the lore gave her. But perhaps something can still be said. The old conventions governing the household during Odysseus’ absence seem to have been something like this:

- Authority is lineal, and in the male line
- During a husband’s absence, and in the minority of his son, the wife exercises stewardship<sup>1</sup>
  - When the absent husband’s son comes of age, he inherits, and the wife’s stewardship is at an end. The wife may remain, but it will be the son’s wife to whom fall any duties of stewardship.<sup>2</sup>

In this particular case,

- The husband has specifically instructed the wife to remarry when the son is of age to assume the stewardship in his own right.

But . . .

- The suitors hope to marry Penelope while her son is still a minor. If so, Penelope’s new husband will become lord of the manor, and her son by Odysseus will be excluded from inheriting.

Given the constraints of the old folktale’s plot, and the uncertainties created by the overwriting of the Telemachus material, this is more or less what obtains.

Laertes’ pleasure in seeing Odysseus and Telemachus vying in valor has its own meaning. It is prowess in war that creates the kingship in the first place/ Now, now Laertes’ kingly line is not only restored, it is showing suitable vigor, and thus establishing its legitimacy along the old lines.

<sup>1</sup>The excellence of the wife as steward, as property manager, are elaborately praised in Proverbs 31:10-31, the conclusion of the Proverbs compilation. To judge from this and that, Penelope does not seem to have greatly shone as a household manager. Her wifely virtue, as we see in Od 24, is her fidelity; that is, her holding off the suitors.

<sup>2</sup>The previous ruler’s wife, if she survives and meddles, creates a palace nightmare. For the early Hàn Empress Dòu, see Brooks **Introducing 00**

Those old lines will not hold until the end, but they need to be worked out.  
Here are the stylistic results for the working-out: the Last Battle.

- a. 412-419 (8) The townsfolk bury their dead
- b. 420-438 (19) Euphithes inflames the assembly for war
- c. 439-450 (12) Medon's speech urges peace
- d. 451-462 (12) Halisthernes' speech urges peace
- e. 463-471 (9) The townsfolk assemble for war
- f. 472-488 (17) Athena confers with Zeus; decision for peace
- g. 489-501 (13) Odysseus hears of the approach of foes
- h. 502-515 (14) He encourages Telemachus; Laertes rejoices
- i. 516-527 (12) Athena strengthens Laertes; he kills Euphithes

<i>Battle</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>a</i>	~	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00
<i>b</i>	0-00	~	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00
<i>c</i>	0-00	0-00	~	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00
<i>d</i>	0-00	0-00	0-00	~	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00
<i>e</i>	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	~	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00
<i>f</i>	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	~	0-00	0-00	0-00
<i>g</i>	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	~	0-00	0-00
<i>h</i>	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	~	0-00
<i>i</i>	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	~

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### The Final Peace

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