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Article Presentation and Notes
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Framing Odysseus: The Death of the Suitors

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Summary:

In this article Burgess explores how the death of the suitors works as a framing device for the entire epic. By looking at the rhetoric used by the suitors and other characters throughout the *Odyssey*, Burgess seeks to complicate the death of the suitors. Furthermore, by looking at the response of the people of Ithaca after the slaughter, Burgess suggests that there is a disconnect from the world and standards of the gods to the expectations of the average mortals.

Methodology:

Burgess suggests two different frames of considering the suitor scenes: an internal and an external framework. By looking at the internal evidence of the epic. Burgess argues that both of these approaches are necessary to create a nuanced consensus. As there are several allusions to non-Homeric material within the epic considering the dichotomy of internal and external frameworks allows for the consideration of both the heroic and unheroic readings of Odysseus's slaying of the suitors.

Notes:

- Telemachus early in the epic predicts that the suitors will meet a bad fate, but bad behavior will not be un-avenged. Although the first aspect of this sentence clearly outlines the fate of the suitors, the second aspect of bad behavior could apply to more characters than just the suitors.
- The restoration of Odysseus to his home and wife is a "standard" expectation for plot, but what is up for question is how that fate comes into being.
 - One aspect of this argument that I do not love, is that Burgess will make these bold claims of a "standard plot", yet I do not believe this is how it should be articulated. Sure the audience has expectations for how the story should go, but as this is one of the first stories we have evidence for, it is very hard to subscribe to a "standardized" narrative.
- An internal frame suggests that Homer constructs an extensive justification for Odysseus's actions to be seen as heroic, while an external frame suggests that using a non-Homeric lens lends Odysseus's actions to be viewed as questionable.

- Burgess suggests that it is a flaw of modern scholarship to approach the *Odyssey* with an anti-Odysseus approach, which Burgess defines as approaching the reading of the text that Odysseus's actions (of slaying the suitors) are "morally" bad, and should therefore not be considered in any heroic light.
 - Burgess references other scholars who were published in the volume with him as those of this bias.
 - Maronitis: death becomes a scandal
 - Marks: slaughter makes it hard for Athena and Zeus to conclude the plot
 - Felson and Slatikin: there is implausibility of a utopian nature for a hero.
- Internal framing method of *Mnestrophonia* (killing of the suitors) demonstrates the success and validation of a hero, while external framing suggests a darker Odysseus.
- Challenging Odysseus's actions and motivations does not denigrate the poem, rather allies more nuanced celebration and adds to its sophistication.
- The audience of the poem is intended to sympathize with Odysseus and find the actions of the suitors deplorable.
- An internal framework with a specific look at language offers a sympathetic view of Odysseus:
 - Using language like *dike*, *tisis*, *nemesis*, *hybris* to describe Odysseus and his actions while surrounding the suitors.
- Using a structuralist approach can be employed to align the suitors with the companions of Odysseus as characters deserving of their fate. (their personal mistakes lead to their personal downfall).
- The Presentation of Odysseus from voices of authority
 - Looking at the narratological voice: in the beginning of the epic, the narrator asserts that Odysseus was not at fault for the death of his comrades.
 - Although the narrator makes that statement of removed guilt in the proem, it can be argued that the proem is more successful in raising questions of Odysseus's innocence.
 - Another authoritative voice is present in the scene of the divine council. Both Zeus and Athena present a Pro-Odysseus perspective.
 - This voice of Athena is then continued into the poem as she in the guise of Mentes voices her hatred of the suitors to Telemachus.
 - Even though Athena is biased given her love of Odysseus, she still has a station of authority as a goddess.
 - Also another area for question is Athena's rigid desire to kill the suitors, although other alternative fates are offered for them.
 - Her statements are half-truths used to manipulate others.
 - Athena and Zeus support Odysseus without any ethical or morally driven standpoint, this is in contradiction to Poseidon, who chooses to clearly oppose Odysseus given his slight against his son.

- Zeus's casual remarks about Aegisthus in Book 1 are concerned with the mortal's failure to listen to divine warnings.
- The Aegisthus framework offers a flexible view to demonstrate another potential ending for the return story. Presents the suitors as valid threats, but also a potential for a different fate.
- Pro-Odysseus Crit: the ending point (the retribution and council of Ithaca) is a primitive form of private justice and a public judicial system.
 - This complicates basic folk readings of the epic and suggests a complex vision for the real-world.
- Next, Burgess looks at the language of the suitors, and their perspective of the potential marriage to Penelope:
 - What do the suitors actually want?
 - Do they actually want Penelope? Or would they rather have the wealth and rule over Ithaca.
 - The dynamics between the suitors shift over time.
 - In book 2: Antinous and Eurymachus suggest sending Penelope back to her father, Icarius to be married.
 - Telemachus privately confessed to Athena/Mentes his frustration that Penelope has not yet married. But in Book 2, when this option for Penelope is presented as a viable option, Telemachus refuses.
 - Antinous in book 2 addresses one of the main critiques of the suitors, saying that the only reason the suitors are spending Odysseus's wealth is because of Penelope's 'kleos' and her delay of a proper response.
 - The suitors then all go on that they do not wish any further delay.
 - Prior to this assembly, the suitors were urging for remarriage to Telemachus, saying that Odysseus must be dead since all the other men have returned from the war.
 - The most damning evidence of the suitors leading to a truly negative portrayal is their plot to assassinate Telemachus.
 - The suitors make fun of Telemachus when he plans to sail for news of his father.
 - These actions of making fun of Telemachus and threatening him should not be made if their sole intention is to marry Penelope. Rather, they see Telemachus and his journey as a threat to their potential power.
 - When Telemachus is gone, the suitors even state that they would be happy to simply split all of Odysseus's resources and move on.
 - Leocritus in Book 2 (during the assembly) claims that the suitors would kill Odysseus if he appeared. This is an indefensible statement, but Burgess suggests that one statement should not apply to all the suitors.

- This statement also corroborated the decision for Odysseus to arrive home in disguise rather than appear openly.
- Burgess argues that traditional folklore and storytelling calls for a massacre rather than a peace treaty.
- Odysseus reveals himself in book 22, and then there are two major arguments against the grain conversations that occur that suggest a more “moral” outcome
 - Eurymachus presents a truce for Odysseus: do not kill the suitors, but let them pay you back, forcing them to pay 20 oxen.
 - Odysseus refuses this option, but the narrator had set the framework that Odysseus should be concerned with his depleted resources. The suitors had taken everything, and no matter the ending, Odysseus would need to replenish those resources.
 - There is nowhere in the poem that suggests that this truce could be a trick, but the poem favors preference to vengeance rather than a political settlement.
 - After the suitors have been killed, and Odysseus is in front of all the people of Ithaca, Antinous father, Eupheithes blames Odysseus for the loss of his companions, and blames him for killing an entire generation of men (the suitors)
 - In this passage the people of Ithaca accept the godly interference.
 - They also say that Odysseus completed a “big deed”(μέγα ἔργον) by killing the suitors, a set of words that are often used in negatively charged situations.
 - This condemnation is a pattern from Book 10, where Eurylochus blames Odysseus for the loss of companions when they faced Polyphemus.
 - ἀτασθαλίαι- recklessness
 - The Internal Frame: Odysseus as hero but includes countering views.
 - If the *Telegony* (a sequel to the *Odyssey*) is considered in this discussion of the suitors, then even further nuance of the flaws of Odysseus can be raised.
 - “There is thus some parallelism between the internal-to-the-poem hypothetical treaty of Eurymachus and the external-to-the-poem treaty by Neoptolemus. In the *Odyssey* the hypothetical deal to prevent the slaughter would leave only the suitors liable, while in the post-slaughter deal imposed by Neoptolemus (the deal to exile Odysseus, or have him go on a cleansing journey) both Odysseus (for the slaughter) and the families (for the suitors' depredations) are punished” (350).
 - “Employing an external frame for the slaughter de-stabilizes our natural inclination to see the Homeric Odysseus as a justified slayer of the suitor” (351).

Synthesis:

Burgess suggests that there are two ways of understanding the cyclops episode, you can either observe using an internal framing method, which entails analyzing the dialogue and asides

offered by voices of authority, and the physical structure of the epic itself (an paralleled and balanced plot) or an external framing method, which looks at the non Homeric voice, IE the voice of the suitors to distinguish the “ethical” validity of the slaying of the suitors. Burgess concludes that using an internal framing device, the audience would be led to believe that Odysseus’s actions are entirely justified, while the external framing suggests that Odysseus took his quest for retribution too far. Burgess is careful not to express his personal opinion to his preference of the internal vs external framing. As a reader, I would suggest the most influential element of Burgess’s paper is its presentation of a structuralist reading of understanding the *Odyssey*.