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The Eyes of Odysseus. Gaze, Desire and Control in the *Odyssey*

Upon his arrival in Ithaca, Odysseus first encounters Athena, disguised as a young herdsman. When Odysseus invents a dazzling story about his identity, the goddess is delighted, reveals herself, and praises her favourite hero thus (13.293–9):

... you would not
even in your own country give over your ways of deceiving
and your thievish tales. They are near to you in your very nature.
But come, let us talk no more of this, for you and I both know
sharp practice, since you are by far the best of all mortal
men for counsel and stories, and I among all the divinities
am famous for wit and sharpness...
... οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλες,
οὐδ' ἐν σῆ περ ἐὼν γαίη, λήξειν ἀπατάων
μύθων τε κλοπίων, οἳ τοι πεδόθεν φίλοι εἰσίν.
ἀλλ' ἄγε μηκέτι ταῦτα λεγώμεθα, εἰδότες ἄμφω
κέρδε', ἐπεὶ σὺ μὲν ἔσοι βροτῶν ὄχ' ἄριστος ἀπάντων
βουλήν καὶ μύθοισιν, ἐγὼ δ' ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι
μήτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν ...

Athena is not the only one to appreciate Odysseus' craft of storytelling. Classicists too have been charmed by his narrative skills and have devoted considerable efforts to elucidating the plays of his witty tongue. As Simon Goldhill noted, 'the contemporary critical interest in language itself, in storytelling, in narrative, which delights in the ludic travels of unreliable narrators, jokes, and stories within stories, finds an Ur-text in the *Odyssey*'s complex structure'¹ Odysseus, however, is also characterized by another organ that, outshone by his tongue, has failed to attract much scholarly attention. Rather appropriately, the protégé of 'shiny-eyed' Athena is distinguished not only through his abilities as narrator, but also his eyes.² When Athena transforms him into an old beggar, she dims his eyes 'that have been so handsome' ('περικαλλέ' ἐόντε', 13.401; 417).³ In the narrative of Odysseus' scar, his eyes are called

¹ Goldhill 1996, 180. The literature on story-telling in the *Odyssey* is vast, see, for example, Goldhill 1991, 1–68; Segal 1994; Olson 1995.

² Cf. Flaumenhaft 1982, 20.

³ On the significance of this dimming of Odysseus' eyes, see Prier 1989, 63.

‘handsome’ again (‘καλά’, 19.417) and among the features that Telemachus has inherited from his father the eyes figure prominently.⁴

Vision in Homeric poetry has been tackled from various perspectives. Some scholars have explored the visual quality of epic narrative already noticed by ancient critics.⁵ Egbert Bakker draws on discourse analysis and performance studies to explain the *enargeia* of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. From a slightly different angle, Elizabeth Minchin argues that epic song capitalizes on visual memory for its presentation. Strauss Clay makes the case that even in the long battle-scenes the *Iliad* forms a coherently visualized narrative. Other scholars have focused more closely on vision as part of the epic’s action.⁶ R. A. Prier provides a thought-provoking ‘phenomenology of sight and appearance’ based on a lexical analysis.⁷ More recently, Helen Lovatt, also the co-editor of a volume on ‘epic visions’, devoted a monograph to the gaze in epic poetry from Homer to Nonnus. Inevitably, given the vast corpus examined, her study is highly selective. The *Odyssey*, which Lovatt considers ‘an exception (or an alternative) to mainstream epic,’⁸ is among the poems which receive the least attention. However, the gaze in the *Odyssey* deserves a closer look. As this essay tries to prove, the gaze of the poem’s hero in particular contributes to the meaning of individual scenes and reinforces the dynamics of the plot.

First, a word on theory: the concept of the gaze is not unlike a dense, untrimmed bush in which many different animal species thrive. Just as the growth of such a bush does not yield an order, the myriad of approaches to the gaze will drive to despair whoever looks for a unified theory. At the same time, the sprawling landscape of gaze-theory has proven fruitful ground for a large number of studies, not least in the field of Classics.⁹ My exploration of the *Odyssey* will concentrate on two particularly prominent aspects of the gaze. Since Mulvey’s pioneering essay on ‘visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, the link between gazing and desire has been the focus of many studies. To mention just one example from classical scholarship, Jas Elsner shows how in both paintings and ekphraseis the gaze as an expression of desire contributes to the construction of subjectivity. The second strand of gaze theory which my reading of the *Odyssey* follows can be traced back to Michel Foucault. In *Surveillir et Punir*, Foucault analyzes the gaze as part of power relations. The ‘Panopticon’, in which one

⁴ 1.208–9 (Athena); 4.149–50 (Menelaus); see also 16.15 and 17.39 where the formula used for Odysseus’ eyes is also applied to Telemachus’.

⁵ On *enargeia* in the Homeric scholia, see Rispoli 1984; Nünlist 2009, 194–8. For a new approach from an enactive and embodied perspective, see Grethlein/Huitink 2017

⁶ In addition to the works listed above, see also Malten 1961, 9–14; Slatkin 2007.

⁷ Prier 1989.

⁸ Lovatt 2013, 325.

⁹ See, for example Zeitlin 1994; Bartsch 1994, 2006; Goldhill 1994; Elsner 1995, 2007; Fredrick 2002; Zanker 2004; special issue of *Helios* 40 (2013).

person can see all while being invisible himself, illustrates the power of the gaze as a means of control. Desire and subjection will be the two features of the gaze on which my reading of the *Odyssey* homes in.

Far from striving for exhaustiveness, my interpretation singles out passages in which the gaze of Odysseus contributes to the narrative dynamics of the *Odyssey*. I shall first point out a disruption of the nexus between gaze and desire on Ogygia and Scheria. Besides underscoring Odysseus' iron will to return home, this disruption gains a special twist from the formulaic diction used for *nostos* (I). Then I will show that the gaze highlights the increase of Odysseus' active heroism in the course of the action. On Ithaca, Odysseus' gaze is part of his empowerment, as it anticipates and accompanies the merciless punishment of the suitors. This inverts the situation in some of the adventures of the *apologoi*, in which the gaze drives home the fact that Odysseus is exposed to superior powers (II). In a final step, a brief look at archaic vase-painting will suggest that the *Odyssey*'s clever use of the gaze for narrative purposes forms part of a broader culture which seems to have taken a strong interest in vision (III).

I. GAZE, MARVEL AND DESIRE

In one of the loveliest passages of the *Iliad*, Hera seduces Zeus in order to distract him from the Trojan War and to grant the Greeks a great victory (14.293b–6):

... And Zeus who gathers the clouds saw her,
and when he saw her, desire was a mist about his close heart
as much as that time they first went to bed together
and lay in love, and their dear parents knew nothing of it.
... ἴδε δὲ νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς.
ὡς δ' ἴδεν, ὡς μιν ἔρος πυκινὰς φρενὰς ἀμφεκάλυπεν,
οἶον ὅτε πρῶτιστον ἐμισγέσθην φιλότῃτι
εἰς εὐνήν φοιτῶντε, φίλους λήθοντε τοκῆας.

The sight of Hera directly translates into desire, the strength of which Zeus delicately expresses by comparing it with the lust he felt for his extramarital affairs neatly presented in a catalogue. The strong impression that Hera's appearance makes on Zeus may be reinforced by a talisman she received from Aphrodite, and yet the reworking of formulae describing Zeus' excitement in a speech by Paris to Helen indicates that the strong link between seeing and desiring somebody holds true also for encounters without magical gear, even of longstanding partners.¹⁰

¹⁰ 3.441, ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ φιλότῃτι τραπέιομεν εὐνηθέντε – 14.314, νῶι δ' ἄγ' ἐν φιλότῃτι τραπέιομεν εὐνηθέντε; 3.442, οὐ γὰρ πῶ ποτέ μ' ὄδ' ἔρω φρένας ἀμφεκάλυπεν – 14.315–6, οὐ γὰρ πῶ

The *Odyssey* has her hero also lay eyes on gorgeous women, but here the gaze does not trigger desire. The cutting of the link between vision and lust comes to the fore on Ogygia and Scheria. Odysseus admits that Calypso is superior to Penelope ‘in beauty and stature to look at’ (‘εἶδος ἀκιδνοτέρη μέγεθός τ’ εἰσάντα ιδέσθαι.’ 5.217), but nonetheless ‘the nymph was no longer pleasing to him’ (‘ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι ἦνδανε νύμφη’, 5.153). As the ‘no longer’ implies, there was a time when Odysseus was aroused by Calypso, but now his desire is gone. The sight of beauty, even of a goddess, does not fill Odysseus with desire anymore. Calypso bitterly remarks that instead Odysseus ‘is longing to see/ his wife, for whom he is pining all his days here’ (‘ἰμειρόμενός περ ιδέσθαι/ σὴν ἄλοχον, τῆς τ’ αἰὲν ἐέλδεται ἤματα πάντα.’ 5.209–10).

The uncoupling of gaze and desire is repeated in Odysseus’ encounter with Nausicaa. Here it is even more drastic as the narrator, describing their first meeting, devotes a great deal of space to Odysseus’ gaze at Nausicaa, gesturing to a possible liaison that will not in fact take place. On the shore of Scheria, Odysseus extensively voices his amazement at her beauty (6.160–1). Lacking human *comparanda*, he first likens Nausicaa to Artemis (6.151–2) and then compares her to the shoot of a palm tree he saw on Delos (6.162–169). Odysseus may be choosing his words carefully to flatter Nausicaa and thereby secure a warm welcome, but Nausicaa’s extraordinary beauty is confirmed by the narrator, who introduces her as ‘like the immortal goddesses for stature and beauty’ (‘ἀθανάτησι φυὴν καὶ εἶδος ὁμοίη’, 6.16). Love and even marriage are in the air: Nausicaa is at the right age to find a husband and Odysseus praises the one who gets to marry her as ‘the most blessed at heart of all’ (‘κεῖνος δ’ αὖ περὶ κῆρι μακάρτατος ἔξοχον ἄλλων’, 6.158). Still, the deep impression that Nausicaa’s appearance makes on Odysseus fails to trigger his desire. An affair or even marriage remains an alternative, but ultimately unrealized turn of the *Odyssey*’s plot.

Beautiful women are not the only marvels before Odysseus’ eyes on Ogygia and Scheria. Calypso’s residence features rich flora and fauna as well as four fountains: ‘... and even a god who came into that place / would have admired what he saw, the heart delighted within him.’ (‘... ἔνθα κ’ ἔπειτα καὶ ἀθάνατός περ ἐπελθὼν/ θηήσαιτο ἰδὼν καὶ τερφθείη φρεσὶν ἦσιν.’, 5.73–4). Accordingly, ‘there the courier Argeiphontes stood and admired it.’ (‘ἔνθα στὰς θηεῖτο διάκτορος Ἀργεῖφόντης.’ 5.75). Odysseus, on the other hand, after several years on Ogygia, no longer has an eye for the beauty of the setting (5.156–8):

ποτέ μ’ ὦδε θεᾶς ἔρος οὐδὲ γυναικός and 14.294, ὡς δ’ ἴδεν, ὡς μιν ἔρος πυκινὰς φρένας ἀμπρεκάλυπεν; 3.446=14.328, ὡς σεο νῦν ἔραμαι καὶ με γλυκὺς ἴμερος αἰρεῖ. Appropriately, while Zeus gives a long list of mistresses, Paris uses as *comparandum* only his first encounter with Helen. On gaze and sexual desire, see the literature in Steinhart 1995, 63 n. 571; Walker 1992.

But all the days he would sit upon the rocks, at the seaside,
 breaking his heart in tears and lamentation and sorrow,
 weeping tears as he looked out over the barren water.
 ἤματα δ' ἄμ πέτρῃσι καὶ ἠϊόνεσσι καθίζων
 δάκρυσι καὶ στοναχῇσι καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἐρέχθων
 πόντον ἐπ' ἀτρύγετον δερκέσκετο δάκρυα λείβων.

While Odysseus seems to have stopped recognizing the idyllic nature of Calypso's island, he is captured by the marvels that make Scheria a paradise-like place. On his way to the palace of Alcinous, Odysseus is amazed at the city of the Phaeacians: he admires their harbours, ships, meeting places, and high walls (7.43–5); he is particularly struck by the palace of Alcinous with its gold and silver dogs (7.91–4) and the burgeoning orchards (7.112–32): 'And there long-suffering great Odysseus stopped still and admired it./ But when his mind was done with all admiration ...' ('ἔνθα στὰς θηεῖτο πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς./ αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ πάντα ἐῷ θηήσατο θυμῷ', 7.133–4). At the court of Alcinous, Odysseus witnesses a dance performance of adolescents and 'gaze[s] at the twinkling of their feet, his heart full of wonder' ('μαρμαρυγὰς θηεῖτο ποδῶν, θαύμαζε δὲ θυμῷ.' 8.265). He comments on a dance with a ball: "... Wonder takes me as I look on them." ("... σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα." 8.384).

The *locus amoenus* of Ogygia and the wonders of Scheria tie in with the pull that female beauty exerts, and yet Odysseus is not tempted to stay with either Calypso or Nausicaa. What interrupts the nexus between gaze and desire is the idea of *nostos*.¹¹ Odysseus' will to return to Ithaca is so strong that it not only makes him urge his departure, but also undercuts his desire for the beautiful women offered to his eyes. He shares the bed with Calypso 'against his will' (5.155) and does not pursue Nausicaa who does not conceal her attraction to him. It is the pervasive wish to return home that prevents Odysseus from fancying what he has right before his eyes. The failing link between gaze and desire thus throws into relief the motive of *nostos* which serves as a narrative engine in the *Odyssey*.

More poignantly, the formulaic diction for *nostos* suggests that the chain of gaze and desire is not so much interrupted as it is inverted. In the *Odyssey*, *nostos* is made the object of seeing. There are three occurrences of the formula νόστιμον ἦμαρ ιδέσθαι (3.233; 5.220; 8.466) modified to νόστιμον ἦμαρ ἴδηαι in a fourth passage (*Od.* 6.311).¹² While this formula draws on a metaphorical use

¹¹ Not only Calypso, but also the Phaeaceans are among the adventures in which Odysseus' return is threatened by temptations that would make him stay (Niles 1978; Redfield 1983, 237; Scully 1987; Most 1989, 21–4). While the Lotophages use drugs and the Sirens rely on the power of song, on Ogygia and Scheria the threat comes from female beauty. Circe combines drugs and female beauty, but here the narrator does not stress the role of the gaze.

¹² Cf. Foley 2005, 37, who compares the to 'a beacon towards which heroes may struggle either successfully or unsuccessfully.' See also Bonifazi 2009, 495.

of ‘seeing’, the phrases φίλους τ’ιδέειν καὶ ἰκέσθαι (4.475; 5.41; 114; 9.532) and ἄλοχον τ’ιδέειν καὶ πατρίδ’ ἰκέσθαι (8.410) employ a literal visual experience to refer to the homecoming. ‘Seeing the wife’ also paraphrases *nostos* in 11.161–2 (‘οὐδέ πω ἦλθες/ εἰς Ἴθάκην οὐδ’ εἶδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισι γυναῖκα;’). In 7.224–5, property and slaves are mentioned as the objects of his seeing that signify a return: ‘... and let life leave me when I have once more/ seen my property, my serving people, and my great high-roofed house.’ (“... ἰδόντα με καὶ λίποι αἰὼν/ κτῆσιν ἐμὴν δμῶάς τε καὶ ὑπερεφῆς μέγα δῶμα.”). Odysseus ‘cannot think of any place sweeter on earth to look at’ than Ithaca (‘οὐ τι ἐγὼ γε/ ἦς γαίης δύναμαι γλυκερώτερον ἄλλο ἰδέσθαι’, 9.27–8).

Now, the visual imagery of *nostos* implies that Odysseus’ gaze does not lead to desire, but that he desires to see: metaphorically ‘his day of homecoming’ and literally his home. The relation between gaze and desire is thereby turned upside down. Through the deployment of visual terms for achieving *nostos*, the *Odyssey* redefines the dynamics of gaze and desire for Odysseus. Instead of inviting desire, vision has become the object of desire.

The course of the action adds a further irony to the visual semantics of *nostos*. At the court of Alcinous, Odysseus narrates how, after the departure from Aeolus, ‘on the tenth day at last appeared the land of our fathers,/ and we could see people tending fires’ (‘τῇ δεκάτῃ δ’ ἤδη ἀνεφαίνετο πατρὶς ἄρουρα,/ καὶ δὴ πυρπολέοντας ἐλεύσσομεν ἐγγὺς ἐόντας.’ 10.29–30). Odysseus falls asleep, however, and his companions open the bag of Aeolus, releasing the winds who drive the ships far away from Ithaca. In contradiction to the visual semantics of *nostos*, seeing Ithaca does not equate to the desired homecoming which is being deferred still further. Even more ironically, when Odysseus, after braving the Laestrygones, Scylla, and other trials, finally sets foot on Ithaca, he does not at first recognize the island, for Athena has cast a mist over it (13.187–90). As Goldhill puts it: ‘The constantly expressed desire to see the fatherland is baulked at the moment of return.’¹³ The circumstances of Odysseus’ return literally fail the visual imagery for *nostos*.

Norman Bryson notes that ‘the life of vision is one of endless wanderlust, and in its carnal form the eye is nothing but desire.’¹⁴ In the case of Odysseus, however, the desire that the sight of gorgeous women in marvellous places arouses has been blocked by his desire to ‘see the day of homecoming’. This play on the semantics of the gaze, transforming it from the cause of desire into its object, highlights Odysseus’ iron will to return to Ithaca. After inverting the link between vision and desire, the visual imagery in expressions for Odysseus’ *nostos*

¹³ Goldhill 1988, 11. Odysseus’ failure to identify Ithaca contrasts ironically with the arrival of Agamemnon, who ‘saw his country with delight’ (‘ἐπεὶ ἀσπασίως ἶδε γαῖαν.’ 4.523), but is then murdered. On the features of Ithaca seen by Odysseus upon his arrival that evoke his previous adventures, see Segal 1994, 51.

¹⁴ Bryson 1984, 209.

is itself undercut when Odysseus actually arrives on Ithaca.

II. SEEING, CONTROL AND SUBJECTION

Book 19 contains a brief, but impressive *ekphrasis* of a brooch which the disguised Odysseus describes to Penelope as proof that he has actually met her husband (19.228–31):

A hound held in his forepaws a dappled
fawn, gazing at it as it struggled; and all admired it,
how, though they were golden, it gazed at the fawn and strangled it
and the fawn struggled with his feet as he tried to escape him.
ἐν προτέροισι πόδεσσι κύων ἔχε ποικίλον ἔλλον,
ἄσπαίροντα λάων· τὸ δὲ θαυμάζεσκον ἅπαντες,
ὡς οἱ χρύσειοι ἐόντες ὁ μὲν λάε νεβρὸν ἀπάγχων,
αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐκφυγέειν μεμαῶς ἤσπαιρε πόδεσσι.

Λάω, here rendered as ‘gazing at’, has also been claimed to signify ‘to grip’ or ‘to bark’.¹⁵ There are, however, no parallels for these meanings and the etymological arguments put forward are less than compelling. The only other occurrence of the verb is found in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* where it refers to the glare of an eagle (360: αἰετὸς ὄξυ λάων ἐσκέψατο). The likely etymological relation to such words as ἄλαός and ἄλαόω confirms this meaning and supports the translation of λάω in *Od.* 19.229–30 as ‘gazing at’. There are thus two distinct acts of seeing in Odysseus’ description: that of the spectators looking at the brooch and that of the hound fixing his eyes upon the fawn. While the framing gaze of the onlookers is carried by admiration not unlike some of the instances discussed in the previous section, the gaze of the hound accompanies the strangling of the fawn - it is an act of subjection and control. This trait of the gaze is underscored through the direct juxtaposition of the agent’s act of seeing with the victim’s struggle: ἄσπαίροντα λάων. The juxtaposition that has prompted scholars to opt for a lexical *petitio principii* of ‘to grip’ for λάω only highlights the aggressive notion of the gaze.

It has been pointed out that the *ekphrasis* of the brooch foreshadows Odysseus’ killing of the suitors.¹⁶ While the latter are compared to fawns (4.335–9; 17.126–30), Odysseus is sometimes compared to hounds in similes and

¹⁵ See, e.g., Lorimer 1950, 511–3 for ‘to grip’ and Leumann 1950, 233–4 for ‘to bark’. For the translation ‘to gaze at’, see Prévot 1935, 251 and Prier 1980 who also lists further literature.

¹⁶ Rose 1979, 224. For a very different reading of the description, see Felson-Rubin 1994, 58 for whom ‘the scene on the clasp suggests an erotic chase, perhaps even the first capture of Penelope by Odysseus.’

encounters in Argos a canine counterpart.¹⁷ In this section, I shall argue that the subjecting gaze exhibited on the brooch also features in Odysseus' adventures, notably in his revenge on the suitors,¹⁸ but also in his earlier trials. The gaze as carrier of aggression, we will see, highlights the dichotomy of active and passive heroism and underlines the trajectory of the *Odyssey's* plot.

On Ithaca, Odysseus uses his eyes both to survey the scene, thereby exerting control, and to transfix his opponents before he kills them. Both kinds of viewing already occur before the slaughter of the suitors commences. When night comes in Book 18, Odysseus offers to take care of the torches and commands the female servants to go home in a rather surprisingly authoritative tone that, while clashing with his adopted role as beggar, intimates his hidden identity as master of the house (18.313–19). Melanthe, the mistress of Eurymachus, harshly puts the beggar in his place.¹⁹ Telling him to sleep out in the open, she wonders whether he is drunk or carried away by his victory over Irus (18.327–36). However, Odysseus manages to intimidate her. While the female servants leave the *megaron*, he stays (18.343–5):

He then took his place by the burning cressets, and kept them lighted,
 looking at them all himself, but the heart within him
 was pondering other thoughts, which were not to go unaccomplished.
 αὐτὰρ ὁ πᾶρ λαμπτήρσι φαείνων αἰθομένοισιν
 ἐστήκειν ἐς πάντας ὀρώμενος· ἄλλα δέ οἱ κῆρ
 ὄρμαινε φρεσὶν ἦσιν, ἃ ῥ' οὐκ ἀτέλεστα γέγοντο.

Austin notes that 'Odysseus gathers to himself the formulae that are the property of the sun' and argues that 'we glimpse a mortal no longer in conflict with his ancient enemy, but incarnating now Helios ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούει.'²⁰ Even one who is hesitant to adopt such a far-reaching interpretation cannot help noting that the light prefigures the bright light which Athena will create around Odysseus in 19.34–40, heralding his impending victory.²¹ In conjunction with the light and his thoughts, Odysseus' silent gaze at the suitors anticipates the control which he will gain over them as well as his house very soon. The suitors who harass the beggar as they please have become the object of

¹⁷ On Odysseus and hounds, see Rose 1979. On the similarities between Argus and Odysseus, see Goldhill 1988, 17; Rose 1979, 223; Segal 1994, 56–7. Richardson 1975, 80 argues that Antisthenes' *Περὶ τοῦ κυνός* featured a comparison of the dog with Odysseus.

¹⁸ For a much shorter and more narrow treatment of the assaultive gaze in the *Odyssey*, see Lovatt 2013, 325–7.

¹⁹ On Melanthe, see e.g. Levine 1987; Katz 1991, 130–1; Felson-Rubin 1994, 56.

²⁰ Austin 1975, 251 n. 6.

²¹ Russo 1992 *ad* 18.317–9. See also Bremer 1976, 155 on the significance of the light in this scene.

his gaze. What is more, they are entirely unaware of being looked at. In their sleep, the suitors are helplessly exposed to the eyes of the true master of the house. Here, Odysseus still lets them ‘see the light of the sun’, but his thoughts are already set on the bloody revenge.

While the nightly mustering of the suitors expresses control, Odysseus’ row with Melanthe features another form of the gaze, which gains prominence during the enactment of the revenge. Before lashing out against Melanthe, Odysseus ‘looks at her scowlingly’: (18.337–9):

Then, looking at her scowlingly, resourceful Odysseus answered:

‘I think I will go to Telemachus, you bitch, and tell him
how you are talking so that he will cut you to pieces ...’
τῆν δ’ ἄρ’ ὑπόδρα ἰδὼν προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·
“ἦ τάχα Τηλεμάχῳ ἐρέω, κύον, οἷ’ ἀγορεύεις,
κεῖσ’ ἐλθῶν, ἵνα σ’ αὔθι διὰ μελεῖστί τάμησιν.”

James P. Holoka argues that the formula ὑπόδρα ἰδὼν, here translated as ‘looking scowlingly’, in the *Lexicon des frühgriechischen Epos* explained as ‘looking out from under brows drawn down in expression of great displeasure,²² anger’, has a marked connotation in Homeric poetry.²³ Paying particular attention to the *Iliad*, he shows that ‘the speaker, whatever his message, transmits by his facial demeanor that an infraction of propriety has occurred; he deplores the willful traducing of rules of conduct governing relations between superordinates and inferiors.’²⁴ Holoka’s analysis is also valid for the *Odyssey*, but I wish to suggest that there the formula has a further specific connotation: besides introducing a verbal expression of resentment, it is linked to physical violence. The gaze from below carries aggression that will be acted out — it prepares an assault.

There are nine occurrences of ὑπόδρα ἰδὼν in the *Odyssey*. In two instances, Odysseus is the object of a hostile gaze which translates seamlessly into an act of violence. Antinoos stares at him scowlingly, reprimands him for speaking in a shameful way and then hits him with a footstool (17.459). Not much later, it is Eurymachus who throws a footstool at Odysseus after looking at him from under his brows and dressing him down (18.388). The seven remaining instances all have Odysseus as subject of the gaze. They concentrate strikingly in Books 18–22, which feature six passages with Odysseus casting an angry look

²² J.N. O’Sullivan s.v. in LfgrE.

²³ Holoka 1983.

²⁴ Holoka 1983, 16. Cairns 2003, 44 stresses that the superiority of the speaker may only consist in the act of scolding.

from below at somebody:²⁵ besides Melanths (18.337; 19.70), Irus (18.14); the suitors (22.34); Eurymachus (22.60); Leiodes (22.320). All of them are subsequently eliminated by Odysseus and his men. The aggression inherent in the fierce gaze from below is thus acted out, even if not immediately in all cases.

We have to wait until 22.465–77 for the punishment of the treacherous female servants, and the encounter between Odysseus and Irus turns violent only after Antinous and Eurymachus proclaim a fist-fight between the two beggars. In Book 22, however, the link between staring from below and assault becomes tangible. The first instance of ὑπόδρα ἰδῶν (22.34) follows upon the killing of the first suitor, Antinous, and introduces the speech in which Odysseus reveals his identity to the suitors, who are gripped by ‘the green fear’ (‘χλωρὸν δέος’, 22.42). Eurymachus’ response, imputing all blame to Antinous and asking Odysseus to spare the others, elicits another glare from below, which leads to his death after an exchange of two brief speeches. Not much later, Odysseus rejects the supplication of Leodes (22.320–30):

Then, looking scowlingly at him, spoke resourceful Odysseus:
 ‘If you claim to be the diviner among these people,
 many a time you must have prayed in my palace, asking
 that the completion of my sweet homecoming be far off
 from me, that my dear wife would go off with you and bear you
 children. So you cannot escape from sorry destruction.’
 So he spoke, and in his heavy hand took up a sword
 that was lying there on the ground where Agelaos had dropped it
 when he was killed. With this he cut through the neck at the middle,
 and the head of Leodes dropped into the dust while he was still speaking.
 τὸν δ’ ἄρ’ ὑπόδρα ἰδῶν προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·
 “εἰ μὲν δὴ μετὰ τοῖσι θυοσκόος εὔχεαι εἶναι,
 πολλάκι που μέλλεις ἀρήμεναι ἐν μεγάροισι
 τηλοῦ ἐμοὶ νόστοιο τέλος γλυκεροῖο γενέσθαι,
 σοὶ δ’ ἄλοχόν τε φίλην σπέσθαι καὶ τέκνα τεκέσθαι·
 τῷ οὐκ ἂν θάνατόν γε δυσηλεγέα προφύγοισθα.”
 ὧς ἄρα φωνήσας ξίφος εἴλετο χειρὶ παχείῃ
 κείμενον, ὃ ῥ’ Ἀγέλαος ἀποπροέηκε χαμᾶζε
 κτεινόμενος· τῷ τόν γε κατ’ αὐχένα μέσσον ἔλασσε·
 φθειρομένου δ’ ἄρα τοῦ γε κάρη κονίησιν ἐμίχθη.

²⁵ The one use of ὑπόδρα ἰδῶν before the account of Odysseus’ revenge occurs in Book 8 when Odysseus rejects Eurymachus’ invective (8.165). Here, the scowling stare does not prepare an act of violence.

The immediate sequence of looking and killing hammers home the significance of the gaze as an act of subjection, which is already encapsulated in the *ekphrasis* of the brooch. Through ὑπόδρα ἰδῶν the assaultive capacity of the eye becomes formulaic in the *Odyssey*.

The connection between looking and assault is underlined through the first weapon that Odysseus uses in his revenge, namely the bow. While Odysseus is not associated with the bow in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* has him not only boast about his skills as archer (8.215–22), but disseminates them narratively. Odysseus makes the bow contest a prelude to his revenge and kills the first suitors with the bow they were unable to string.²⁶ The relevance of the bow to my argument is nicely captured in Odysseus' description of Heracles in the underworld (11.605–8):

All around him was a clamor of the dead as of birds scattering
scared in every direction; but he came on, like dark night,
holding his bow bare with an arrow laid on the bowstring,
and looking, as one who is about to shoot, with terrible glances.

ἀμφὶ δέ μιν κλαγγὴ νεκύων ἦν οἰωνῶν ὥς,
πάντοσ' ἀτυζομένων· ὁ δ' ἔρεμνῆ νυκτὶ ἐοικῶς,
γυμνὸν τόξον ἔχων καὶ ἐπὶ νευρῆφιν οἴστον,
δεινὸν παπταίνων, αἰεὶ βαλέοντι ἐοικῶς.

παπταίνω signifies the movement of the searching eye before it fixes upon an object and aim,²⁷ but nonetheless Heracles' terrible glances here seem to translate directly into lethal shots. The only other occurrence of δεινὸν παπταίνων, this time in a speech in the underworld, applies to Odysseus. Explaining to Agamemnon why there is such a flood of new arrivals, Amphimedon recounts the slaughter on Ithaca: 'He stood on the threshold and scattered out the swift shafts before him, / glaring terribly, and struck down the king Antinous.' ('στῆ δ' ἄρ' ἐπ' οὐδὸν ἰών, ταχέας δ' ἐκχέυατ' οἴστους / δεινὸν παπταίνων, βάλε δ' Ἀντίνοον βασιλῆα.' 24.178–9). The immediate sequence of 'glaring terribly' and 'striking down' highlights the aggressive notion of the gaze, which prepares the execution of its object. Requiring a sharp eye, the bow is

²⁶ On Odysseus' bow, especially its comparison with a *kithara*, see Segal 1994, 53–7; 98–100. On its genealogy, see Grethlein 2008, 42–3.

²⁷ Cf. Beck 2004, 970, 'look searchingly (for, in expectation of) ... connot. of motion ... , often in single direction (but even then prob. w. eye-motion.)' The two occurrences of παπταίνειν discussed above should suffice to disprove Hainsworth's sweeping claim that 'παπταίνειν is always a symptom of fear' (*ad Il.* 12.333).

the instrument of the assaultive gaze.²⁸ The aggression of the gaze turns into actual violence when the eye fixes upon the object to be hit by the arrow.

Not only do the use of the bow in the contest and the killing of the first suitors spotlight the assaultive nature of the gaze, but this semantics of vision is highlighted by a very different kind of viewing. An anonymous voice mocks the beggar turning the bow in his hands: ‘This man is one who gazes at bows, a clandestine expert.’ (ἦ τις θηρητῆρ καὶ ἐπὶ κλοπὸς ἔπλετο τόξων, 21.397). Indeed, Odysseus ‘looks the bow all over’ (‘μέγα τόξον ἐβάστασε καὶ ἶδε πάντη.’ 21.405). His eyes, however, do not stop here, but go on to take aim: first, Odysseus ‘did not miss any axes/ from the first handle on, but the bronze-weighted arrow passed through/ all and out the other end’ (‘πελέκεων δ’ οὐκ ἤμβροτε πάντων/ πρώτης στείλειῆς, διὰ δ’ ἀμπερὲς ἦλθε θύραζε/ ἰὸς χαλκοβαρῆς.’ 21.421–3), before he turns to Antinous: ‘... aiming at this man, he struck him in the throat with an arrow,/ and clean through the soft part of the neck the point was driven.’ (‘τὸν δ’ Ὀδυσσεὺς κατὰ λαιμὸν ἐπισχόμενος βάλεν ἰῶ,/ ἀντικρὺ δ’ ἀπαλοῖο δι’ αὐχένος ἦλυθ’ ἀκωκῆ.’ 22.15–6). Odysseus’ glance at the bow is not that of an ignoble man who is out of his depths, but of a man who has the sharp eye necessary to hit his aim as well as the strength to string the bow. The regard of the connoisseur contrasts effectively with the sharp eye with which Odysseus eliminates the suitors.

The mocking of Odysseus as someone ‘who gazes at bows, a clandestine expert’ may be echoed ironically later when another compound form of the κλεπ/κλοπ–stem is used, again in conjunction with a visual term: ‘Odysseus looked about his own house to see if any/ man had stolen away alive, escaping the black destruction’ (‘πάπτηνεν δ’ Ὀδυσσεὺς καθ’ ἐὸν δόμον, εἴ τις ἔτ’ ἀνδρῶν/ ζῶδς ὑποκλοπέοιτο, ἀλύσκων κῆρα μέλαιναν.’ 22.381–2). If we investigate this echo, then we could note that clandestinity is now ascribed to the suitors while Odysseus’ gaze at the bow has become the search for those who have survived its work. Admittedly, the echo is weak: the metaphor in ἐπὶ κλοπὸς (‘hiding one’s true intention’)²⁹ and ὑποκλοπεῖσθαι (‘lurk in hiding’)³⁰ is similar, but the resulting meanings are very different. But even without the echo, Odysseus’ searching glance after the killing of the suitors is noteworthy, as it circles back to his vigil discussed at the beginning of this section. Like in Book 18, Odysseus looks around in what has become ‘his own house’ again. The gaze at the dormant suitors has metamorphosed into a search for whether there are any

²⁸ As Brooke Holmes points out to me, the prominent visual aspect of archery also renders it ambiguous. The distance which forces the archer to take aim carefully prevents a direct physical encounter and undermines the credentials of the bow as a heroic weapon. The unheroic character of archery, however, comes to the fore not in the *Odyssey*, but in the *Iliad*, cf. Il. 11.385-7; 13.713-8. See Farron 2003.

²⁹ Cf. H. W. Nordheider s.v. in LfgrE.

³⁰ O’Sullivan s.v. in LfgrE.

survivors among the corpses that now fill the house. The control that was implicit earlier in the eye directed at the sleeping suitors has been substantiated; Odysseus' 'thoughts' have been 'accomplished'. The gaze expressing control thus frames the assaultive gaze exercised during the revenge.

The controlling aspect of Odysseus' gaze in 22.381-2 is thrown into relief by the use of the same verb in the preceding verse, here applied to Medon and Telemachus, whom Odysseus orders to wait outside while he does the work 'he has to do' ('ὄττεό με χρή.' 22.377): 'They sat down both together beside the altar of mighty/ Zeus, looking all about them, still thinking they would be murdered.' ('ἐξέσθην δ' ἄρα τῶ γε Διὸς μεγάλου ποτὶ βωμόν,/ πάντοσε παπταίνοντε, φόνον ποτιδεγμένω αἰεῖ.' 22.379-80). Their fearful eyes resemble the look in the suitors' eyes when the slaughter starts. After 'throwing their glances every way all along the well-built walls' ('πάντοσε παπταίνοντες εὐδμήτους ποτὶ τοίχους.' 22.24) and failing to find weapons upon Odysseus' self-revelation, 'the green fear took hold of all of them/ and each man looked about him for a way to escape sheer death.' ('ὡς φάτο, τοὺς δ' ἄρα πάντας ὑπὸ χλωρὸν δέος εἴλε·/ πάπτηνεν δὲ ἕκαστος, ὅπη φύγοι αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον.' 22. 42-3). The use of the same verb underscores the contrast: while Odysseus' wandering eyes control the scene, the suitors search in a panic for means of defence or flight.

The aggressive quality of viewing is most prominent in the last third of the *Odyssey*, but it also surfaces in the *apologoi*. Here, however, vision does not express Odysseus' control and the subjection of his opponents, but rather casts him in various ways as the object of violence. At the beginning of the Polyphemus episode, another kind of gaze occurs, for it is the curiosity to see the Cyclops and to discover whether he will give him a guest-gift that prompts Odysseus not to comply with his companions' wish to leave the cave quickly before its resident returns (9. 228-9). The cave, however, becomes a trap in which they are exposed to the physical superiority of the giant Polyphemus, who turns out to be no adherent to the conventions of hospitality. Intrigued by the pun on *metis*, scholars have concentrated on how Odysseus outwits the Cyclops by presenting himself as *outis*.³¹ For my argument, the blinding of Polyphemus is more relevant. Deprived of his eyesight, Polyphemus is unable to lay hands on the men.

That his blindness permits Odysseus and the remaining comrades to escape the fate of those already devoured is highlighted when Polyphemus addresses the ram which, against his habit, is the last to leave the cave: '... Perhaps you are grieving/ for your master's eye, which a bad man with his wicked companions/ put out...' ('... ἦ σύ γ' ἄνακτος/ ὀφθαλμὸν ποθέεις; τὸν ἀνήρ κακὸς ἐξάλάσσει/ σὺν λυγροῖσ' ἐτάροισι ...' 9.452-4).³² The tardiness of the ram is indeed linked to the blinding, albeit differently from what the Cyclops

³¹ See, e.g., Schein 1970; Clay 1983, 119-20; Peradotto 1990, 143-70.

³² That Polyphemus sees Odysseus and his men before the blinding is explicit in 9.251.

suspects. It is not grief, but the weight of the ‘man who put out the eye’ that slows down the ram, something the blind Polyphemus cannot notice. Later, when Odysseus taunts Polyphemus from his ship, the Cyclops hurls stones after him which, however, thrown without eyesight, fail to hit their target. Book 9 presents Odysseus not as the subject of a look of aggression, but as its object. Only the blinding of the Cyclops allows Odysseus the escape from his cave. The loss of control effected by Polyphemus’ loss of his eye highlights *ex negativo* the empowering aspect of the gaze.

The semantics of viewing as an act of control or as part of an assault is played out in a different way in the Scylla episode.³³ Scholars have been struck by Odysseus’ attempt to attack the monster. Ignoring Circe’s warning that ‘she is no mortal thing but a mischief immortal, dangerous,/ difficult and bloodthirsty, and there is no fighting against her,/ nor any defence’ (‘ἡ δέ τοι οὐ θνητή, ἀλλ’ ἀθάνατον κακόν ἐστι,/ δεινόν τ’ ἀργαλέον τε καὶ ἄγριον οὐδὲ μαχητόν· / οὐδέ τις ἔστ’ ἀλκή· φυγέειν κάρτιστον ἀπ’ αὐτῆς.’ 12.118–20), Odysseus puts on his armour and takes two spears. This, however, is of no help, as Circe predicted; Scylla snatches away six men. Formulae used in *Iliadic* arming scenes reinforce the incommensurability of the *Odyssey*’s adventures with heroic combat in the *Iliad* and underline Odysseus’ helplessness.³⁴ For my reading, it is noteworthy that Odysseus first fails to catch a glimpse of Scylla. Clad in full armour he goes to the prow and climbs the foredeck (12.230–3):

... for I expected Scylla of the rocks to appear first
 from that direction, she who brought pain to my companions.
 I could not make her out anywhere, and my eyes grew weary
 from looking everywhere on the misty face of the sea rock.
 ... ἔνθεν γάρ μιν ἐδέγμην πρῶτα φανεῖσθαι
 Σκύλλην πετραίην, ἣ μοι φέρε πῆμ’ ἐτάροισιν.
 οὐδέ πη ἀθρήσαι δυνάμην· ἔκαμον δέ μοι ὅσσε
 πάντη παπταίνοντι πρὸς ἠεροειδέα πέτρην.

Odysseus sees Scylla only when she has already snapped up the six men, ‘screaming/ and reaching out their hands to me in this horrid encounter’ (‘κεκλήγοντας,/ χεῖρας ἐμοὶ ὀρέγοντας ἐν αἰνῇ δηϊοτήτι.’ 12.256–7). ‘That,’ he adds, ‘was the most pitiful scene that these eyes have looked on/ in my sufferings as I explored the routes over the water.’ (‘οἴκτιστον δὴ κεῖνο ἐμοῖσ’ ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσι/ πάντων, ὅσσοι ἐμόγησα πόρους ἀλὸς ἐξερεείνων.’ 12.258–9). The horrid threat of Scylla is underscored not only by the ineffectuality of

³³ On Scylla in the *Odyssey* and beyond, see Hopman 2012.

³⁴ Cf. Reinhardt 1948, 70 on ‘jenes Inkommensurable zwischen Märchenwelt und Iliasheldentum’ and Whitman 1958, 300.

heroic armour and courage, but also by the fact that she is not seen until she has already attacked. A foe unseen cannot be fought. Paradoxically, the temporary invisibility of the adversary contributes to the qualification of the scene as the most ‘pitiful that these eyes have looked on’. While Odysseus subdues Polyphemos by depriving him of his eyesight, his helplessness in facing Scylla is highlighted by her withdrawal from eyes that could fix and control her. Odysseus is not blinded by Scylla, but her invisibility before the attack puts Odysseus in a situation of disorientation not dissimilar to the one he inflicted upon Polyphemos.

A simile lends weight to Scylla’s nabbing of six companions (12.251–5):

And as a fisherman with a very long rod, on a jutting
 rock, will cast his treacherous bait for the little fishes,
 and sinks the horn of a field-ranging ox into the water,
 then hauls them up and throws them on the dry land, gasping
 and struggling, so they gasped and struggled as they were hoisted
 up the cliff.

ὡς δ’ ὅτ’ ἐπὶ προβόλῳ ἀλιεὺς περιμήκει ῥάβδῳ
 ἰχθύσι τοῖς ὀλίγοισι δόλον κατὰ εἶδατα βάλλων
 ἐς πόντον προΐησι βοὸς κέρας ἀγραύλοιο,
 ἀσπαίροντα δ’ ἔπειτα λαβὼν ἔρριψε θύραζε,
 ὧς οἳ γ’ ἀσπαίροντες ἀείροντο προτὶ πέτρας.

This simile can be read as an elaboration of the much briefer comparison of the Laestrygonians throwing stones at Odysseus and his men with men spearing fish (10.124).³⁵ The only other extended fishing simile in the *Odyssey* occurs in 22.383–9, right after Odysseus’ search for the hiding suitors as discussed above:

He saw them, one and all in their numbers, lying fallen
 in their blood and in the dust, like fish whom the fishermen
 have taken in their net with many holes, and dragged out
 onto the hollow beach from the gray sea, and all of them
 lie piled on the sand, needing the restless salt water;
 but Helios, the shining sun, bakes the life out of them.
 Like these, the suitors now were lying piled on each other.

τοὺς δὲ ἶδεν μάλα πάντας ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίησι
 πεπτεῶτας πολλούς, ὡς τ’ ἰχθύας, οὓς θ’ ἀλιῆες
 κοῖλον ἐς αἰγιαλὸν πολιῆς ἔκτοσθε θαλάσσης
 δικτύῳ ἐξέρυσαν πολυωπῶ· οἳ δέ τε πάντες
 κύμαθ’ ἀλὸς ποθέοντες ἐπὶ ψαμάθοισι κέχυνται·
 τῶν μὲν τ’ ἠέλιος φαέθων ἐξείλετο θυμόν·

³⁵ See Hopman 2012, 30-1 on the similarity with Patroclus’ *aristeia* in Il. 16.406-8.

ὥς τότε ἄρα μνηστῆρες ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι κέχυντο.

There are no pointed echoes and while the first simile features a single fisherman harpooning, the fish in the second have been caught by several fishermen with the help of a net. The kinds of similarities between the similes and their contexts are also different: in Book 12, the primary point of comparison is the desperate struggle of fish and men (12.254: ἀσπαίροντα – 12.55: ἀσπαίροντες); in Book 22, image and context are aligned by 'all' (22.383: πάντας – 22.386: πάντες) 'being piled up' (22.387: κέχυνται – 22.389: κέχυντο). And yet, the fact that these are the only two extended fishing similes in the *Odyssey* may justify a comparison that would highlight the changed situation: Odysseus, who first has to witness his men being harpooned like fish, finally finds himself metaphorically in the role of fisherman. The prominent role of seeing in both contexts is also reflected in the similes. The little fish are lured by baits just as the companions are snatched away by a force they do not see. The second simile explicitly illustrates Odysseus' gaze. As Bakker notes, 'Helios kills the fish by shining, that is, gazing at them.'³⁶

Viewing as an act of aggression and control is exemplified most clearly in the revenge on the suitors, but, as we have just seen, it also surfaces in Odysseus' earlier adventures. While some episodes, notably the passing of the Sirens, foreground other senses, in the encounters with Polyphemus and Scylla the notion of (not) seeing significantly enriches the presentation of Odysseus' trials. Before Odysseus can follow up on his own gaze with acts of violence, he has to break the control exerted by the eye of a giant and experience the impossibility of fighting an adversary withdrawing from sight.

The gaze thus contributes to the dynamics between active and passive heroism in the *Odyssey* explored by Cook.³⁷ Cook argues that in archaic Greek poetry heroism is not confined to inflicting pain upon others, but also embraces the ability to endure pain oneself. While the *Iliad* emphasizes the stance of the active hero, the *Odyssey*'s hero combines both aspects. When Odysseus is the victim of the assaultive gaze, his passive heroism comes to the fore. Subjecting the suitors to his own gaze, Odysseus becomes an active hero. Of course, the boast of his true identity before Polyphemus as well as his blinding show Odysseus as an active hero, just as his endurance continues to be tested on Ithaca. That being said, the inversion of the assaultive gaze sketched here highlights the larger trajectory of the *Odyssey*. While the gaze in the *apologoi* underscores Odysseus' exposure to forces beyond his control, his own gaze during the revenge marks his return to full agency.³⁸

³⁶ Bakker 2013, 111.

³⁷ Cook 1999.

³⁸ Cf. Grethlein 2017: 177-9 on this trajectory.

III. The Gaze beyond literature

In this article, I make a case for the narrative significance of the gaze in the *Odyssey*. Homer uses the link between gazing and desire to reinforce the drive of *nostos*. The experience of gazing at beautiful women fails to instil desire in Odysseus; instead, in a notable inversion generated by the formulaic diction for *nostos*, Odysseus desires to ‘see the day of his homecoming’. Ironically, when he actually returns, the visual imagery of *nostos* does not pan out. Other than the desiring eye, Homer capitalizes on the gaze as carrier of aggression and control. In some of the adventures of the *apologoi*, the presentation of the gaze underlines that Odysseus is the object of assaults. Then on Ithaca, he himself marshals a stare that expresses control and conveys aggression. In the stringing of the bow, crucial to his revenge, Odysseus’ gaze turns into an actual assault. The engagement with vision thus highlights the shift from passive to active heroism in the course of the *Odyssey*’s plot.

To close this article, I would like to take a brief look at pottery.³⁹ As scanty as it is, our record of early vase-painting suggests that the *Odyssey*’s deployment of the gaze is more than a literary strategy and mirrors a broader investment with vision in the archaic age. The eye is an iconographic motif that is widespread.⁴⁰ The black-figured eye-cups from Attica and Chalcis immediately spring to mind (fig. 1).⁴¹ Featuring two eyes beside the handles on one side, these cups become masks for whoever lifts them. While the majority of eye-cups stem from the last third of the 6th century, other vessels featuring eyes are closer to what may have been the time in which the *Odyssey* was composed. Eyes are found on jugs, bowls and *amphorai* from the 7th century BCE across Greece, from Attica to Boeotia and Rhodes.⁴² The great pupils on the reverse side of Attic olpai, well known from works of the Amasis painter, also seem to originate in the third quarter of the 7th century (fig. 2).⁴³ Whatever the function of depictions of eyes on archaic vases is,—whether, for example, they serve apotropaic purposes or anthropomorphise the vessels—⁴⁴ they parallel the fascination with vision that

³⁹ In Grethlein 2015, I take the juxtaposition of the representation of vision in the *Odyssey* and early vase-painting in a different direction. There I argue that while that both play up their own media, vase-painting by privileging a scene that centres on vision, Homer by linking *nostos* to vision through formulaic diction, but then granting narrative a far more prominent place in Odysseus’ return.

⁴⁰ Besides Martens 1992, 284-363, see also Steinhart 1995; Moser von Filseck 1996; Giunan 2013; Haug 2015; Grethlein 2016.

⁴¹ E.g. Ferrari 1986; Kunisch 1990.

⁴² Cf. Martens 1992, 295-325.

⁴³ See the olpe from the Athenian Agora P 22550, Brann 1962, 93 Nr. 544 t. 33.

⁴⁴ Jahn 1885 is the crucial point of reference for works that emphasize apotropaic purposes. Martens 1992, 284-359 concentrates on ‘animation anthropomorphe’; Steinhart 1995 focuses on the pictorial context to define the function of eyes.

we have found in the *Odyssey*. At the same time, the pictorial engagement with vision is further charged: since we perceive pictures by sight, representations of eyes are potentially reflexive.⁴⁵

While it is difficult to find in early vase-painting motifs that express the link between desire and vision with which the *Odyssey* plays, the aggressive dimension of the gaze looms large. Most incisively, Medusa embodies the assaultive gaze: whoever looks at her stare is transformed into stone. From the beginnings of Greek art, the *gorgoneion* is a fixture. While exacerbating the force of the gaze, the motif of Medusa's head gains an ironic twist from the *en face* presentation. Unlike most other figures on vases, Medusa gazes at the beholder, but instead of the beholder, she herself is fixed, if not in stone, then in clay. Rainer Mack argued that the viewer thus re-enacts the victory of Perseus over Medusa: through the power of representation, the objectifying view of Medusa is turned upon herself.⁴⁶ This inversion notwithstanding, the prominence of the *gorgoneion* in early vase-painting illustrates a vivid concern with gaze and aggression.

What is more, one of the episodes discussed in this essay seems to be the earliest Odyssean motif in our record of vase-painting. As we have seen, the blinding of Polyphemus demonstrates the power of the gaze *via negationis*. Only by depriving the Cyclops of his eye-sight can Odysseus evade his control. It has recently been doubted that the archaic vases which show men ramming a spear into the eye of a giant actually represent the Polyphemus episode.⁴⁷ The fluidity of oral traditions and the loss of most of them to us certainly dictate a caveat, and yet the reasons adduced to exclude a representation of Polyphemus are far from conclusive. Deviations from the Homeric account in the number of attackers and the object used for the blinding surely do not warrant the assumption that another story is depicted. At the same time, a detail in some of the paintings seems to corroborate a reference to the *Odyssey*. A vessel held by the giant indicates his inebriation, an element that is not found in any of the non-Homeric tales of blinded ogres.⁴⁸

Our scanty record makes it impossible to assert with certainty that the blinding of Polyphemus actually was the earliest Homeric motif in vase-painting. What can be stated with confidence though is the popularity of the motif. Our evidence spans a vast area, including Eleusis (amphora), Argos (Aristhonotos krater), Etruria (Getty Museum pithos) and Samos (dagger). The arguably earliest vase further suggests that the topic of vision was one of the reasons that made the blinding of Polyphemus such an attractive motif.⁴⁹ The Proto-Attic Eleusis

⁴⁵ See the argument in Grethlein 2016 and, more broadly for 1 chs. 5 and 6.

⁴⁶ Mack 2002.

⁴⁷ See Snodgrass 1998, 90-100; Burgess 2001, 94-114. For a fuller consideration of this issue with further bibliography, see Grethlein 2015: 203-204.

⁴⁸ Cf. Giuliani 2003, 110-112.

⁴⁹ For Schefold 1993, 163, the prominence of the Polyphemus motif is due to the significance of the episode, which provokes the wrath of Poseidon and therefore serves as a central juncture in the

amphora pairs the blinding of Polyphemus on its neck with the pursuit of Perseus by the Gorgons on the belly (f. 3).⁵⁰ Both scenes feature an encounter of man with monster, albeit inversely: while three men attack Polyphemus, Perseus is pursued by two Gorgons, with the third one already dead. Strikingly, both motifs revolve around vision: where Odysseus and his comrades ram the spear into the open eye of Polyphemus, the Gorgons threaten to petrify their viewers with their gaze. The petrifying look of the Gorgons therefore at once corresponds and contrasts with the blinding of Polyphemus: while the one scene magnifies the power of the eye, the other reveals its vulnerability.

This meditation on vision can be interpreted along different lines. Taking his cue from the use of the amphora as a coffin for a boy, Robin Osborne considers vision as a metaphor for life: “The whole vase is a construal of death, a discussion of the nature of death as sensory deprivation. Death comes when the visual world closes in on you when you yourself are to be seen in a pot. To die is to enter Hades, and to enter Hades is, by the very name, to become unseeing and unseen.”⁵¹ Approaching the Eleusis amphora from a different angle, I propose that the depictions of Polyphemus and the Gorgons furnish a reflection on pictorial seeing.⁵² The eyes of the Gorgons meet the eyes of the viewer and invite him to relate the gaze depicted *on* the vase to his gaze *at* the vase. More specifically, the *en face* depiction of the Gorgons highlights that the beholder is immune to their visual threat. This underscores the ‘as-if’ of pictorial seeing. The safety of regarding a picture is also thrown into relief by the scene on the neck. Polyphemus loses the very organ by which the beholder perceives his representation.

What matters to my argument here is that the juxtaposition with the stare of the Gorgons draws our attention to the reflection on vision inherent in the blinding of Polyphemus. Not only in the *Odyssey*, but also in early vase-painting, Odysseus’ encounter with Polyphemus is used to reflect on the eye and its power. In this context, a black-figured Pseudo-Chalcidian *amphora* dating from the last third of the 6th century BCE is worth mentioning. Here, we do not in fact see the eye of Polyphemus, occluded as it is by the stake that the Greeks ram into it. The invisibility of the eye makes Polyphemus’ blinding tangible for the viewers: the Cyclops’ loss of (active) sight is iconographically expressed through the viewers’ loss of (passive) sight; the represented act of blinding is at once paralleled by and mediated through the representational occlusion of the organ for seeing. As if to underscore the point, the neck of the *amphora* features a Silen’s mask with two

plot. Concerning the blinding, Touchefeu-Meynier 1992, 957 ponders the beauty of the episode in Homer as well as the popularity of the underlying tale. Hölscher 1999, 20-4 interprets Odysseus’ encounter with barbarian Polyphemus as a reflection of the experiences with alien people in the course of travels, commerce and colonization, all increasing in the 7th century BCE.

⁵⁰ The shoulder shows a third hostile encounter, lion vs. boar, which relates to the two other pictures but will be left aside here. For a closer look at the Eleusis amphora, see Grethlein 2016: 89-94; fc 2.

⁵¹ Osborne 1988, 4. For a critique of Osborne’s interpretation of the Eleusinian *amphora* and its use for social history, see Morris 1993, 28-32; Whitley 1994, 63-5.

⁵² Grethlein 2016: 89-94.

large eyes staring frontally out at the viewer. Such masks recur on Chalcidian vases, adding a Dionysian theme.⁵³ On the vase under discussion, the Silen's mask takes on an additional significance: the prominent eyes reinforce the focus on vision in the Polyphemus motif.

The gaze has lately attracted much attention in the field of Classics.⁵⁴ Greco-Roman antiquity was, it appears, highly invested in vision. Most scholarly work has concentrated on the Hellenistic and Imperial periods. Their penetrating reflections and subtle games with text and image richly reward our interpretative efforts. My reading of the narrative use of the gaze in the *Odyssey* and the brief consideration of early vase-painting suggest that the Archaic age too was deeply concerned with vision. While Homer deploys the gaze of his characters to endow individual scenes with depth and to reinforce the trajectory of his plot, painters cash in on the reflexive potential of the eye for visual art. The sophisticated treatment of vision in authors like Philostratus, Lucian and Achilles Statius is embedded in a long tradition that has its roots in Homer.

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⁵³ Steinhart 1995, 62–3. See also Ferrari 1986, 11–20 and Frontisi-Ducroux 1995, 100–103 on masks on vases.

⁵⁴ E.g. Zeitlin 1994; Goldhill 1994; Fredrick 2002; Elsner 1995; 2007; special issue of *Helios* 40 (2013).

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