

THE *TELEMACHY* AND STRUCTURAL SYMMETRY

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During our century studies have explored the possible role of structural symmetry in Homeric poetry. Among these studies are those of J. T. Sheppard, Sir John L. Myres, and Cedric H. Whitman.¹ In the symmetrical structures which these men have found in Homer, elements of content, either analogous or contrasting, stand over against each other and seem to counterbalance one another, often forming concentric patterns. The elements of content which have been taken as the basis of these analyses are chiefly occurrences in the action of the poem studied. These analyses of poetic architecture have revealed a possible unity of structure in Homeric poetry and a new aspect of the poet's art, his effort to create a structurally balanced composition.

In these studies, attention has been given mainly to the *Iliad*. It would therefore seem proper to explore further the role of structural symmetry in the *Odyssey*. In this paper we shall examine some major portions of the *Odyssey* which have not yet been shown to have a structure that is symmetrical. Specifically, we shall be examining the so-called *Telemachy*, those portions of the *Odyssey* in which there is great emphasis upon the person of Odysseus' son. We shall investigate the extent to which the individual parts of the *Telemachy* possess structural unity and symmetry and the extent to which the *Telemachy* as a whole is structurally one with the poem of which it is a part. In connection with the latter investigation, we shall address ourselves to the proposition that the *Telemachy* is a later addition to an earlier *Odyssey*.

¹ J. T. Sheppard, *The Pattern of the Iliad* (London 1922); Sir John L. Myres, "The Last Book of the *Iliad*," *JHS* 52 (1932) 264-296, and *Who Were the Greeks?* (Berkeley 1930) esp. 511-525; Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) esp. chaps. 5, 11, and 12.

We shall use diagrams in presenting our evidence. In these diagrams solid lines connect elements of content which seem to correspond by virtue of analogy or contrast. Where some elements correspond in groups we have used braces and have numbered the corresponding components of the groups with like numbers. Where a group of elements is repeated in an inverted order, the fact is expressed through the use of recessed indentation with lines connecting the corresponding elements.

It is in *Odyssey* 1-4 that the major portion of the *Telemachy* is contained. The content of these books is presented by the poet in five individually symmetrical structures, or sections (below, figs. 1-5).

The first of these sections, the prologue of the *Odyssey*, is not part of the *Telemachy* proper, but possesses a structural style like that of parts of the *Telemachy*. Its plan (fig. 1) shows two main parts, 1.1-10 and 11-26, which are related by virtue of the content at the heart of each. In the second of these two parts, both Odysseus and Poseidon are spoken of as being apart from groups to which they belong. Thus Odysseus and Poseidon, who stand against each other in the action of the poem, are here viewed analogously by the poet and are set over against each other structurally, even as they stand at odds dramatically.

With the next section, 1.26-2.259, we begin the *Telemachy* proper. The plan of this section (fig. 2) embraces the remainder of Book One of the *Odyssey* and much of Book Two. The structure is concentric: an outer frame formed by matching assemblies, divine and human, encloses an inner frame involving motion to or from the place of assembly and the palace of Odysseus. Within the two frames stands a description of events within the palace of Odysseus.

The next individually symmetrical section is the second book of the *Odyssey*. The plan of this section (fig. 4) thus overlaps that of 1.26-2.259. Here two centerpieces are enclosed within a frame. The first centerpiece (2.15-257) is concerned with a debate in the assembly; the second centerpiece (2.260-392), with the preparations for the departure of Telemachus from Ithaca. Each centerpiece possesses a structure of its own based upon analogous or contrasting content. The first centerpiece is tripartite in structure; the second, concentric. The two centerpieces are enclosed by sections analogous in content (2.1-14 and 405-426); in both these sections Telemachus goes forth,

gives commands which are obeyed, and takes a seat in an assembled company. Thus the second book of the *Odyssey* is seen to possess an architecture symmetrical in style. It is noteworthy that this structural plan is consonant with the traditional limits of Book Two.²

Most of Book Three is also embraced by a single plan (fig. 5). Here, as in the plans we have already examined, we meet a concentric pattern. In this plan an outer frame involving feasting and sacrifice to a deity (3.1-101 and 329-472) encloses an inner frame (3.102-200 and 253-328) which is composed chiefly of speeches by Nestor. Within this inner frame we find a centerpiece which looks toward the eventual restoration of Odysseus. In the outer frame's first half (3.102-200) we are told of a sacrifice made to the god Poseidon; in its second half (3.253-328) a sacrifice is made to Athena. By virtue of this disposition of content, two deities who are opposed to each other in their attitude toward Odysseus are set over against each other structurally. Both this fact and the structural opposition of Odysseus and Poseidon in the poem's prologue suggest that structure or form may express a dramatic idea in the poem.

The last of the five individually symmetrical sections in the first four books of the poem is shown in fig. 3. The plan of this section, which extends from the end of Book Three through the end of Book Four, is by no means simple, but involves an overlapping of frames within its first sixty lines.³

It is important to note that the first four books of the *Odyssey* not only possess components which are themselves symmetrical but also contribute to a single unifying structure. This single unifying structure (fig. 6) extends from Book One, line 26, to Book Five, line 50. Forming the outermost frame of this concentric pattern are two councils on Olympus, whose ends are marked by the departure of a deity. From the existence of this plan it would appear that more than one plan may exist in a given portion of the poem: both separate plans and a single unifying one may function simultaneously.

² Certain architectural realities seem to underlie more than half the traditional book-divisions of the poem. See the writer's *A Study of Analogy and Contrast as Elements of Symmetrical Design in the Structure of the Odyssey* (Columbia University diss., 1965; University Microfilms, Ann Arbor 1966) esp. chap. 5.

³ The plan of this section is treated in detail in the writer's dissertation (above, note 2).

A still larger plan (fig. 7) extends through the first twelve books. This plan reveals an important fact about the poem: the action in the first four books, in which the person of Telemachus is emphasized, is analogous to the action in the next eight books, in which Odysseus is the chief character. The first four books of the poem are represented by the first half of the diagram; the next eight books, by the second half. By virtue of the analogous action in the two parts of this plan, the story of the father may be said to parallel the story of the son until that time when the two return to Ithaca, finally meet, and become one in resolve and action. The parallelism is true both in respect to the details of the action and in respect to the order of their presentation. Moreover, by virtue of this structural apposition the first twelve books of the poem, half the traditional number, are given architectural unity.

Besides contributing to this large twelve-book section, the first four books of the *Odyssey* contain elements of content which correspond to elements located beyond the first twelve books of the poem. With these they form a concentric structural pattern that spans the whole of the *Odyssey* (fig. 8).

Before beginning to describe this plan, however, it is important to note that such a plan as this, in which the spaces between consecutive elements are considerable, testifies less strongly to the presence of symmetrical design in the poem than do those plans in which almost all of the verses covered participate in the design. For, in seeking possible components of an overall plan, we have selected and rejected from a very great number of elements and the possibility that fortuitous patterns have emerged is accordingly greater. However, in diagrams of less extensive sections where structures are tighter, the evidence for design is more persuasive. With this general qualification in mind, let us examine this single overall plan for the *Odyssey* in which elements of the first four books of the *Telemachy* participate.

Within this plan Zeus' concern for excessive suffering and death may constitute an outermost frame (1.28-43 and 24.528-544). Enclosed within it are descriptions of interviews between Athena and Zeus regarding Odysseus (1.44-105 and 24.472-503). Assemblies of Ithacans (2.1-259 and 24.413-466) form yet another inner frame. Next, Telemachus' journey to find his father and the attempt upon his life (2.413-4.847) stand over against Odysseus' journey to find Laertes and

the attempt upon Odysseus' life (23.366-24.471). Located between these corresponding parts is another pair of matching components (5.85-12.453 and 23.247-341). In these, Calypso and Penelope respectively learn that Odysseus must leave them and Odysseus recounts his adventures, at first to the Phaeacians and then to Penelope. Still another inner matching pair is composed of elements telling how Odysseus' remaining companions and Penelope's suitors were killed out of vengeance because of their violation of hospitality (12.403-419 and 22.1-389). The return of Odysseus and Telemachus to Ithaca (13.93-124 and 15.495-557) may possibly have been intended by the poet as the centerpiece of this great structure and of the poem as a whole, but we cannot be sure since some nine books are enclosed within the plan's last and innermost frame.

The fifteenth book of the *Odyssey*, the remaining portion of the *Telemachy*, also possesses a symmetrical structure and contributes to larger symmetrical patterns, though not to the all-embracing one just described. The basic structure of Book Fifteen is presented in fig. 9. In this plan an outer frame involving instructions for going home encloses an inner frame involving the interpretation of bird-omens (15.1-43 and 539-557; 160-181 and 525-538). Jointly forming a centerpiece are two life-stories, one of Theoclymenus (15.224-256), the other of Eumaeus (15.380-484). Overlying this concentric pattern are dialogues concerned with hospitality (15.44-91, 194-216, 259-286, 303-345, and 508-524). These dialogues may be regarded as contributing to the architecture of the book, though not without a measure of asymmetry. As was true of Book Two and almost so of Book Three, a structural plan seems to underlie the traditional limits of this book.

Book Fifteen also participates in larger structural patterns, each covering two or three books (fig. 10, 14.1-16.26; and fig. 11, 14.1-17.559). From these large plans in which the content of Book Fifteen figures, we may conclude that this book is structurally one with its environs. In addition, we see that one portion of the poem may contribute to more than one structural plan, even as we noted in our discussion of the *Odyssey's* first four books.

Finally and very importantly we must note that the structural style we have observed in the *Telemachy* is consonant with a symmetry that

pervades the remainder of the *Odyssey*.^{3a} The whole poem would seem to possess throughout all its books an architecture at once highly detailed and comprehensive, an architecture symmetrical in style.

From our study of the *Telemachy* we may say that, in terms of the structural style and function of its components, the *Telemachy* may be regarded as an integral part of the *Odyssey*. This may be said of the earlier portion of the *Telemachy* contained within the first four books of the poem as well as of Book Fifteen. This is not, however, to argue that the *Telemachy* is one of the oldest constituents of the poem that tells of Odysseus' return. The *Odyssey* may have possessed less symmetry or symmetry of a different configuration at various stages in its development: an originally independent element may have been balanced by the addition of a new element; a whole new symmetrical section or a new pair of corresponding elements may have been added to the poem; or a new element may have been added and the whole reshaped to accommodate it symmetrically. Thus the fact that an element contributes to the poem's symmetrical structure would not necessarily imply that it is one of the earliest constituents of the poem; indeed, the removal of a particular element might in fact yield an earlier form of the poem's structure.

Yet, while the existence of symmetry or components of symmetry in the poem cannot serve as a criterion for relative dating, the design which pervades the poem testifies to a sensitive handling of material with consummate skill in which the seemingly insignificant part was conceived of in relation to the whole, and form and content were subtly fused.

^{3a} The role of symmetrical design in the *Odyssey* as a whole is treated in the writer's dissertation (above, note 2). In this larger study we explore the motivations for such design, the relation of such design to the theory of oral composition, and the relevance of such architecture to the question of the poem's authorship.

Fig. 1: 1.1-26

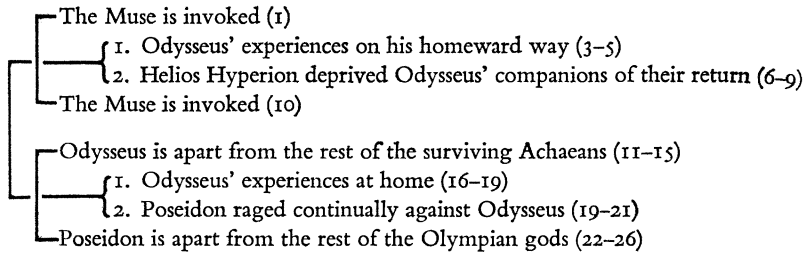


Fig. 2: 1.26-2.259

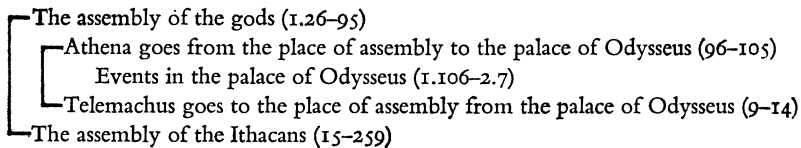


Fig. 3: 3.473-4.847

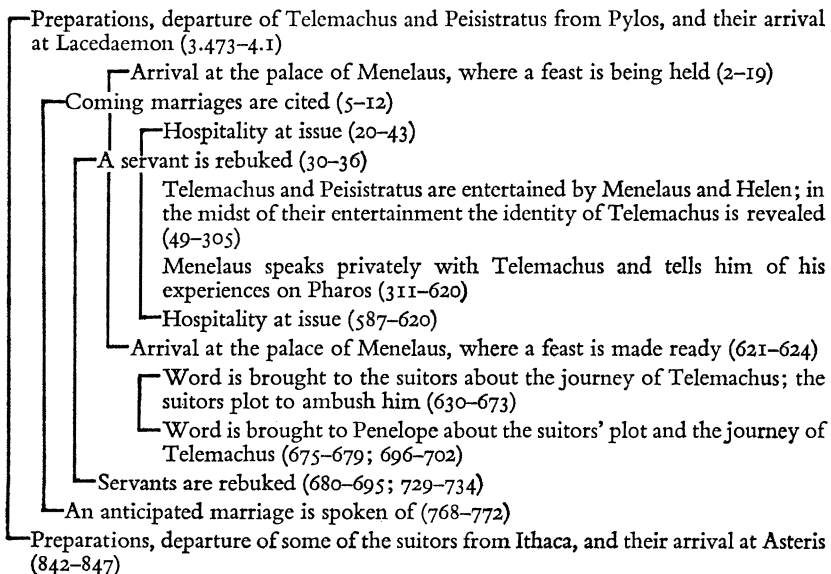


Fig. 4: Book Two

- 1. Telemachus arises, dresses, and goes forth from his chamber (1-5)
- 2. He bids the heralds call the Achaeans to assembly; they do so and the Achaeans are assembled (8)
- 3. Telemachus goes to the place where the Ithacans are assembled; [Athena sheds grace upon him] (9-13)
- 4. Telemachus sits down in the place of assembly (14)
 - 1. An elder (Aegyptius) makes a speech favorable to Telemachus (15-34)
 - 2. Telemachus makes a speech (35-81)
 - 3. A suitor (Antinous) makes a speech opening with hostility toward the previous speaker (82-128)
 - 2. Telemachus makes a speech (129-145)
 - 1. An elder (Halitherses) makes a speech favorable to Telemachus (157-176)
 - 3. A suitor (Eurymachus) makes a speech opening with hostility toward the previous speaker (177-207)
 - 2. Telemachus makes a speech (208-224)
 - 1. An elder (Mentor) makes a speech favorable to Telemachus (224-241)
 - 3. A suitor (Leocritus) makes a speech opening with hostility toward the previous speaker (242-257)
 - 1. Telemachus by the sea (260-266)
 - 2. Athena encourages Telemachus and gives him instructions (269-295)
 - Telemachus joins the company of the suitors (296-300)
 - Telemachus speaks of his journey to Antinous and the other suitors; the other suitors make response (309-336)
 - Telemachus goes down to the storeroom (337)
 - Description of the storeroom and mention of its stewardess (338-347)
 - Telemachus speaks of his journey to Euryycleia; she makes response (348-372)
 - Telemachus joins the company of the suitors (381)
 - 1. Athena by the sea (388-392)
 - 2. Athena urges on each man (392)
 - 3. [Athena leads the way:] Telemachus goes to the place where the crew is assembled (405-408)
 - 2. Telemachus bids the crew bring the provisions from the palace (409-412)
 - 1. 2. Telemachus leads the way; the men bring the provisions to the ship (413-415)
 - 4. Athena sits down in the stern of the ship; Telemachus sits down near her (417-418)
 - 2. In obedience to Telemachus the men raise the mast and haul up the sail (422-426)

Fig. 5: 3.1-472

1. Sunrise (1-3)
2. Neleus is mentioned (4)
3. Bulls are sacrificed to Poseidon (5-9)
4. Telemachus comes forth from [the ship led by Athena and encouraged by her] (12-31)
5. Nestor is seated with his sons (32)
6. All greet Athena and Telemachus; Peisistratus takes their hands and seats them beside his father and brother (34-39)
7. Peisistratus bids Athena and Telemachus pour libations and pray to Poseidon; they do so (41-64)
8. The roasted meat is served (65-66)
9. Telemachus, [replying,] reveals his identity to Nestor [and asks for word of his father] (75-101)

A speech is made by Nestor in which he tells of the return of the Achaeans from Troy and speaks of Aegisthus' treachery and punishment; the speech is introduced by a question put to Nestor by Telemachus and closes with a protreptic conclusion directed at Telemachus (102-200)

The possibility that Telemachus with divine help may become a champion and that Odysseus with divine help may return is discussed by Telemachus, Nestor, and Athena (201-242)

A speech is made by Nestor in which he tells of Aegisthus' treachery and punishment and of the return of Menelaus from Troy; the speech is introduced by a question put to Nestor by Telemachus and closes with a protreptic conclusion directed at Telemachus (253-328)

1. Sunset (329)
7. Athena bids all pour libations to Poseidon and the other gods; they do so (330-341)
9. Athena [departs as a sea-eagle and thereby] reveals her identity to Nestor (371-373)
7. Nestor pours a libation and prays to Athena; after all pour libations [they retire] (388-403)
1. Dawn (404)
2. Neleus is mentioned (408-410)
5. Nestor sits; his sons are gathered about him (411-415)
6. Nestor's sons lead Telemachus and seat him beside them (416)
3. A heifer is sacrificed to Athena (417-463)
4. Telemachus comes forth from [the bath like the immortal gods in form] (466-469)
8. The roasted meat is served (470-472)

Fig. 6: 1.26-5.50

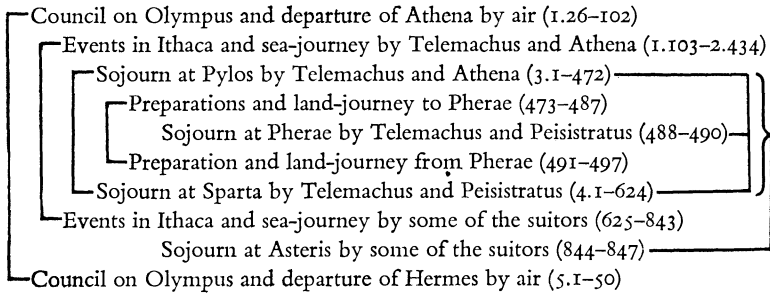
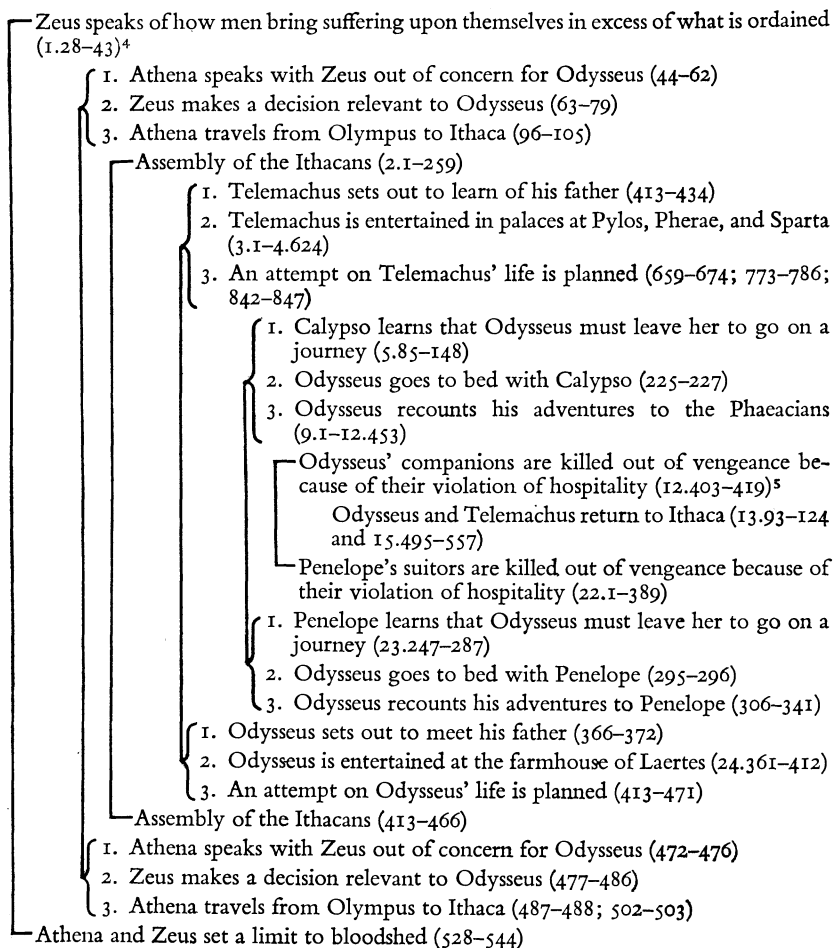


Fig. 7: 1.26-12.453

1. Council of the gods (1.26-95)
2. Preparation and journey of Athena from Olympus (96-102)
3. Arrival of Athena in Ithaca; she comes upon the suitors; description of the scene she sees (103-112)
4. Hospitable reception by and interview with Telemachus (113-143; 156-270)
5. Athena gives Telemachus instructions (271-302)
6. Athena departs for Olympus (319-320)
7. Telemachus goes to join the company of the suitors (324)
8. Telemachus acts in response to [part of] Athena's instructions (2.1-259)
9. With the help of Athena and Eurycleia Telemachus makes ready for his journey and sets out (260-434)
10. Telemachus is welcomed and sojourns in palaces at Pylos, Pherae, and Sparta; Nestor and Menelaus tell of their experiences and adventures on their homeward way from Troy (3.1-4.624)
1. Council of the gods (5.1-42)
2. Preparation and journey of Hermes from Olympus (43-54)
3. Arrival of Hermes in Ogygia; he comes upon Calypso; description of the scene he sees (55-75)
4. Hospitable reception by and interview with Calypso (76-94)
5. Hermes gives Calypso instructions (95-147)
6. Hermes departs for Olympus (148)
7. Calypso goes to join the company of Odysseus (149-150)
8. Calypso acts in response to Hermes' instructions (159-191)
9. With the help of Calypso Odysseus makes ready for his journey and sets out (228-277)
10. Odysseus is welcomed and sojourns in the palace at Scheria; Odysseus tells of his experiences and adventures on his homeward way from Troy (6.127-12.453)

Fig. 8: 1.28-24.544



⁴ The correspondence between this element and 24.528-544 is possible but not clear.

⁵ This element is actually contained within the verses of the element immediately preceding it and does not in fact follow it as the schematic representation might suggest.

Fig. 9: Book Fifteen

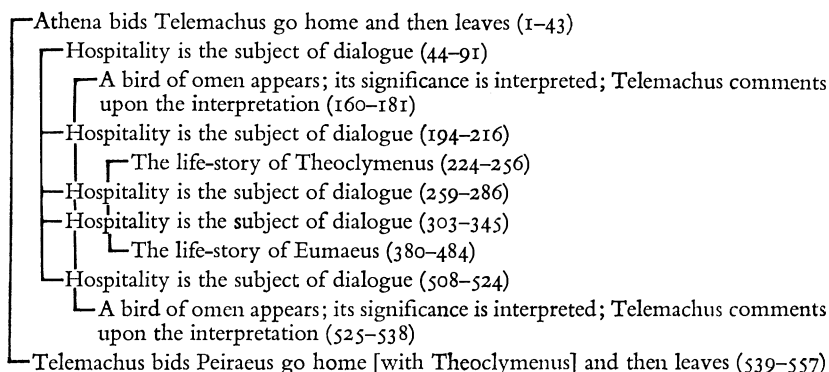
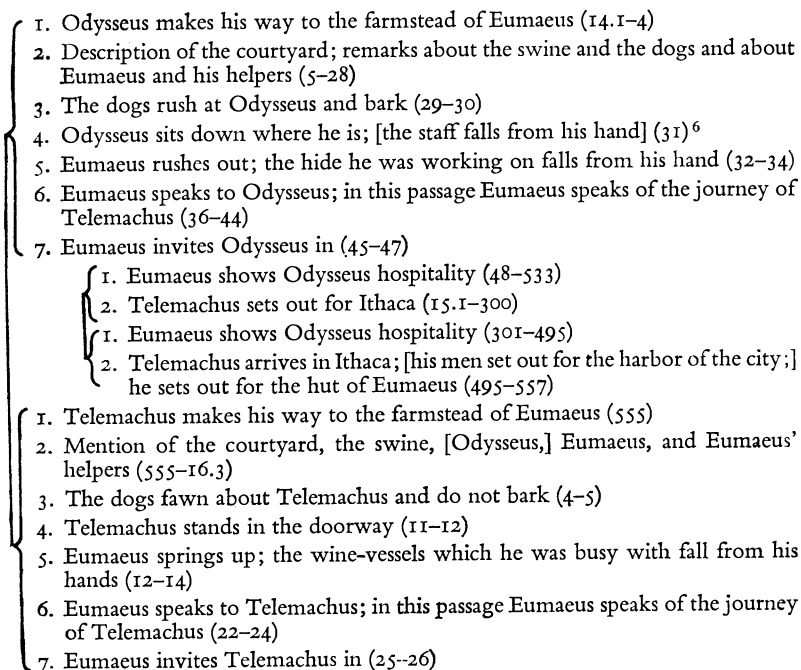


Fig. 10: 14.1-16.26



⁶ We have compared this element with 16.11-12 because in each case a character takes, as it were, a pose.

Fig. II: 14.1-17.559

