



## Odyssey 1.213-444: Resources for further study and discussion

### Word order, verse-form and meaning in *Odyssey* 1

#### Introduction

In Greek poetry careful attention should always be paid to the order of words in each clause and to the way the clauses fall across the lines. Consider this passage from book 6 (discussed on page 254 of the anthology).

τίς δ' ὄδε Ναυσικάα ἔπεται || καλός τε μέγας τε  
ξείνος; || ποῦ δέ μιν εὔρε; || πόσις νύ οἱ ἔσσεται αὐτῇ.  
ἦ τίνα που πλαγχθέντα κομίσσατο || ἦς ἀπὸ νηὸς  
ἀνδρῶν τηλεδαπῶν, || ἐπεὶ οὐ τινες ἐγγύθεν εἰσὶν . . . (6.276–279)

Following the Greek versification and word-order closely, we end up with something like this in the English:

'Who's this man following Nausicaa – a fine chap, and strapping –  
A foreigner? Where did she pick him up? Well, he'll make a fine husband for her.  
Perhaps it's some traveller she's taking care of – someone fresh off the boat,  
From some overseas race – since no-one here's good enough for her!'

#### The position of words in English and in Greek

Now read these lines from book 1 (289-297), particularly the lines in bold.

εἰ δέ κε τεθνηῶτος ἀκούσης μηδ' ἔτ' ἐόντος,  
**νοστήσας δὴ ἔπειτα φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν**  
**σῆμά τέ οἱ χεῖναι καὶ ἐπὶ κτέρεα κτερεῖζαι**  
**πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε, καὶ ἀνέρι μητέρα δοῦναι.**  
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ ταῦτα τελευτήσης τε καὶ ἔρξης,  
φράζεσθαι δὴ ἔπειτα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμὸν  
ὅπως κε μνηστῆρας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι τεοῖσι  
κτείνης ἢ ἐδόλῳ ἢ ἀμφοδόν: οὐδέ τί σε χρὴ  
νηπιάας ὀχέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι τηλίκος ἐσσι.

English word-order, particularly in poetry, was once far more flexible than it is today. Here is the translation of the emboldened lines from Alexander Pope's edition of the *Odyssey*, published in 1725.

Homeward with pious speed repass the main,  
To the pale shade funereal rites ordain,  
Plant the fair column o'er the vacant grave,



A hero's honours let the hero have.  
 With decent grief the royal dead deplored,  
 For the chaste queen select an equal lord. (290-292)

Modern English word-order prefers something like this: notice that only one line retains the word-order of the 1725 version.

*Repass the main [i.e. re-cross the sea] homeward with pious speed,  
 Ordain funereal rites to the pale shade,  
 Plant the fair column o'er the vacant grave,  
 Let the hero have a hero's honours.  
 The royal dead [then having been] deplored with decent grief,  
 Select an equal lord for the chaste queen.*

Now here is Robert Fitzgerald's modern free-verse translation of the same lines, given side-by-side with Pope's version:

Pope, 1725	Fitzgerald, 1961
Homeward with pious speed repass the main, To the pale shade funereal rites ordain, Plant the fair column o'er the vacant grave, A hero's honours let the hero have. With decent grief the royal dead deplored, For the chaste queen select an equal lord.	[...] then you can come back to your own dear country, and raise a mound for him, and burn his gear, with all the funeral honours due the man, and give your mother to another husband.

Consider these questions:

- How do these two versions differ in their positioning of words?
- Why do you think the translators made the choices they did?
- Which do you find more enjoyable to read, and why?
- Which do you think is better-suited to the Homeric original?

Here is the passage of Greek again, spaced out. Write the English translation beneath each word, and consider the following factors:

- the effect of the position of words on each line;
- enjambment (clauses running over the lines), particularly 'spotlighting' words and phrases in the run-on position;
- the position of words in their clauses.

(Remember that features such as 'emphatic position' and 'juxtaposition' can only be singled out for comment if they in fact represent deviations from the expected word order.)



εἰ δέ κε τεθνηῶτος ἀκούσης μηδ' ἔτ' ἐόντος,  
νοστήσας δὴ ἔπειτα φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν  
σῆμά τέ οἱ χεῦναι καὶ ἐπὶ κτέρεα κτερείξαι  
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα ἔοικε, καὶ ἀνέρι μητέρα δοῦναι.  
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν δὴ ταῦτα τελευτήσης τε καὶ ἔρξης,  
φράζεσθαι δὴ ἔπειτα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν  
ὄππως κε μνηστῆρας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι τεοῖσι  
κτείνης ἢ ἐ δόλω ἢ ἀμφαδόν: οὐδέ τί σε χρὴ  
νηπιάας ὀχέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι τηλίκος ἐσσι.

### Study: Athena's departure and Telemachus among the suitors (lines 319-326)

The interplay between grammar, vocabulary and versification can be studied in great depth with practically any sequence of lines from the AS text. We can take the exit of Athena, and how it affects Telemachus as he prepares to embark on his new mission, emboldened by Athena-Mentes' words.

ἢ μὲν ἄρ' ὣς εἰποῦσ' ἀπέβη γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,  
ὄρνις δ' ὡς ἀνοπαῖα διέπτατο: τῷ δ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ  
θῆκε μένος καὶ θάρσος, ὑπέμνησέν τέ ἐ πατρὸς  
μᾶλλον ἔτ' ἢ τὸ πάροιθεν. ὁ δὲ φρεσὶν ἦσι νοήσας  
θάμβησεν κατὰ θυμόν: οἴσατο γὰρ θεὸν εἶναι.  
αὐτίκα δὲ μνηστῆρας ἐπώχετο ἰσόθεος φώς.

τοῖσι δ' αἰοιδὸς ἄειδε περικλυτός, οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ  
ἦατ' ἀκούοντες: ὁ δ' Ἀχαιῶν νόστον ἄειδε  
λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.

In these lines there is a mixture of whole-line clauses and skewed verse. The first line is a whole-line clause, which ends with the formulaic γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη; the second line begins with a co-ordinated addition to this clause ('and she flew upward as a bird'). After a caesura, we are given the prepositional phrase ('and in his heart...') which is completed in enjambment on the next line, the main verb θῆκε put at the head of its line followed by its direct objects (μένος καὶ θάρσος – related concepts, both third declension singular neuter accusatives, both bi-syllables, and both terminating in -ος). After another caesura we have another co-ordinated clause, ὑπέμνησέν τέ ἐ πατρὸς, which runs on in enjambment with the additional information in the adverbial phrase μᾶλλον ἔτ' ἢ τὸ πάροιθεν; isolating it on the line in this way lends it emphasis. The next sentence completes this line and runs onto the next, and after a caesura we are given the key information in the causal clause: οἴσατο γὰρ θεὸν εἶναι. (Note the alliteration of σ, τ/θ, ν running the length of this sentence.) This sets the listener up for the whole-line clause αὐτίκα δὲ μνηστῆρας ἐπώχετο ἰσόθεος φώς, which ends



the episode and looks forward to the next, with the nominatives *ισόθεος φώς* in apposition to the 'he' of *ἐπώχετο*.

The next episode begins emphatically with the demonstrative pronoun *τοῖσι* referring to the *μνηστῆρες* of the previous line, as we're told the bard Phemius sings to them. After a caesura, their silent rapture at his song is very effectively conveyed by separating the subject *οἱ* from its verb *ἦατο*, leaving the line hanging with *σιωπῆ* and possibly suggesting their open-mouthed wonder with the vowel-heavy *ἦατ' ἀκούοντες*. The following sentence delays the key adjective *λυγρόν* in enjambment and spotlights it in grammatical isolation, picking it up with *ὄν* in the relative clause the subject of which is Pallas Athena – the goddess who has just set things in motion to bring about the suitors' own destruction, climactically finishing the line.

Retaining as much of the Greek word order as practical, and roughly versifying (and updating) the English prose version of Samuel Butler, we can render the lines as follows:

So she spoke, and departed, flashing-eyed Athena,  
as a bird: flying upward. And in his heart  
she put strength and courage, and made him think of his father  
even more than before. And in his mind he noticed her  
and marvelled, for he supposed she was a god.  
At once among the suitors he went, a godlike man.

And for those men the singer sang – a famous man – and they in silence  
sat listening; and he sang of the return of the Achaeans,  
the woeful return, from Troy, laid on by Pallas Athena.

Of course, this is not a 'fair copy' translation, but an experiment to help new readers of Homer start thinking about the uses of the poetic structure for the assembly of ideas in a rhythmic and complex way. There follow two passages from the AS prescription for students to try their own analyses.

### Exercise 1: Athena-Mentes's speech to Telemachus (lines 253-259)

How does the versification and the choice of words convey the indignant tone of Athena-Mentes when she reacts to his telling her about the suitors?

ὦ πόποι, ἦ δὴ πολλόν ἀποιχομένου Ὀδυσῆος  
δεύη, ὃ κε μνηστῆρσιν ἀναιδέσι χεῖρας ἐφείη.  
εἰ γάρ νῦν ἐλθὼν δόμου ἐν πρώτῃσι θύρῃσι  
σταίη, ἔχων πῆληκα καὶ ἀσπίδα καὶ δύο δοῦρε,  
τοῖος ἐὼν οἷόν μιν ἐγὼ τὰ πρῶτ' ἐνόησα  
οἴκῳ ἐν ἡμετέρῳ πίνοντά τε τερπόμενόν τε [...]

**Exercise 2: Telemachus's ultimatum to the suitors (lines 368-380)**

This is Telemachus's first speech to the suitors, and he announces his plan to meet and deliver his ultimatum. How does the versification underline Telemachus's forceful language?

μητρὸς ἐμῆς μνηστῆρες ὑπέρβιον ὕβριν ἔχοντες,  
νῦν μὲν δαινύμενοι τερπόμεθα, μηδὲ βοητὸς  
ἔστω, ἐπεὶ τό γε καλὸν ἀκουέμεν ἐστὶν ἀοιδοῦ  
τοιοῦδ' οἶος ὅδ' ἐστὶ, θεοῖς ἐναλίγκιος αὐδήν.  
ἠῶθεν δ' ἀγορήνδε καθεζόμεσθα κιόντες  
πάντες, ἴν' ὕμιν μῦθον ἀπηλεγέως ἀποείπω,  
ἐξιέναι μεγάρων: ἄλλας δ' ἀλεγύνετε δαῖτας,  
ὕμὰ κτήματ' ἔδοντες, ἀμειβόμενοι κατὰ οἴκους.  
εἰ δ' ὕμιν δοκέει τόδε λωίτερον καὶ ἄμεινον  
ἔμμεναι, ἀνδρὸς ἐνὸς βίοντος νήποιον ὀλέσθαι,  
κείρετ': ἐγὼ δὲ θεοῦς ἐπιβόσομαι αἰὲν ἐόντας,  
αἴ κέ ποθι Ζεὺς δῶσι παλίντιτα ἔργα γενέσθαι:  
νήποινοί κεν ἔπειτα δόμων ἔντοσθεν ὄλοισθε.