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**Achilles' views on death: succession and time in the *Odyssey***

This paper puts in context the infamous view of death expressed by Achilles' ghost in *Odyssey* 11.489-91: that Achilles would rather serve a poor man in life than be king over all the dead. Too often this sentiment is viewed as exemplary of early Greek attitudes to death: see e.g. Griffin (1980, 100-1), as well as the major commentaries ad loc.: de Jong (2001), Heubeck (1989), Stanford (1959). Certainly there have been more balanced readings, as for example Sourvinou-Inwood (1995, 80).

It is simple to show that this is not the end of the matter, however, and that his sentiments are neither wholly despairing nor pleased, but complex. We have a 'before and after' situation. 'Before', Achilles is despondent and bitter about death; immediately following this he interrogates Odysseus about the wellbeing of his family. Odysseus' response gives particular prominence to Neoptolemos' achievements and the glory he has won, which in turn gives rise to the 'after' scenario, where Achilles strides off joyfully across the asphodel meadow. Achilles' two sentiments frame the whole conversation and provide the key to understanding the scene.

The difference between the two sentiments hinges on the related themes of genealogy, succession, and time, and the whole scene has clear implications for Odysseus' own family. Death is cause for misery, to be sure; but the achievement of succession and the continuance of his family line not only give grounds for rejoicing but can actually redeem the whole situation in Achilles' eyes. Similarly, throughout the *Odyssey* much attention is given to Telemachos' capability to perpetuate Odysseus' genealogy.

The two families are at different stages in their life-cycle. If we think of genealogical progression as a narrative, we see that Achilles' family is a family whose narrative has been resolved: Neoptolemos has proved himself, succession has been achieved, the narrative has closure. Odysseus' family, by contrast, is throughout the whole *Odyssey* frozen in mid-step, at a moment where Telemachos must never be depicted wholly as either an immature child or a mature adult. To express this liminal, timeless state, the poet has to show Telemachos continually undergoing symbolic moments of approaching adulthood, 'initiation' moments, without ever actually attaining full maturity. Whereas Neoptolemos is a fully-fledged hero, and Achilles' narrative is concluded to his own satisfaction, for Odysseus and Telemachos closure is constantly being postponed.