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**The Cuckold and the Goose: Ominous Humor or Humorous Omen at *Od.* 15. 160-170?**

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to an overlooked instance of Homeric humor. In *Odyssey* 15, while Telemakhos is leaving Sparta, an omen appears that provokes a peculiar interaction: an eagle swoops down and grabs a goose from Menelaos' yard, departing in an auspicious direction. So far, this is a typical Homeric omen. But then Peisistratos, Nestor's son and Telemakhos' companion, asks Menelaos: "Did the god reveal this portent for us or for you?" (168). Menelaos is at a complete loss how to answer. Bailing him out, Helen speaks and interprets the omen to mean that Odysseus is on his way home and will have his revenge (172-8).

The omen's humor lies in the deliberate (I would argue) ambivalence surrounding its interpretation. For Peisistratos takes the unusual step of asking Menelaos to whom the omen is referring. A rare occasion in Homer where a minor omen's interpretation is expressly equivocal, Peisistratos' awkward question sets up two possibilities: the omen refers either to Telemakhos or to Menelaos. Helen is eager to offer the former interpretation. The other interpretation is concealed within Menelaos' silent discomfort. It is left to the audience to interpret Menelaos' unspoken thoughts and determine why he was dumbfounded by Peisistratos' question.

The eagle snatched a tame goose from Menelaos' enclosure. People came shouting after it, trying to make it drop its prize (162 with scholion). I suggest that this scene is meant to evoke Helen's abduction by Paris. Telemakhos' final words before the omen's appearance are also similarly ambivalent: "I am carrying much great treasure." The sense of these words could be, "I am carrying *off* much great treasure" (cf. *Od.* 10. 40-1). Of course, there was a previous occasion when much treasure was carried off from Menelaos' house (cf. *Il.* 3. 70; 7. 362-4).

The textual awkwardness of the transition from departure-scene to omen-scene, thus, is matched only by the social awkwardness provoked by Peisistratos' inappropriate question.