THE DEATHS OF BEOWULF AND ODYSSEUS:
NARRATIVE TIME AND MYTHOLOGICAL STORY-TYPES[*]

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Summary

Some distinctive features of the stories of Beowulf's and Odysseus' deaths are highlighted by juxtaposing the two, with particular attention to narrative time. In *Beowulf*, the triad 'death-dragon-hoard' is interpreted as a meaningful constellation of symbols, with an underlying story-type that is closely concerned with the themes of death, immortality, and narrative resolution. This is illustrated by comparanda such as *Gilgamesh*. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, death and resolution are deferred to an indefinitve future. The standard narrative of Odysseus' death, the Telegonos legend, is a variant of the 'Sohrāb and Rostam' (or 'mortal combat of the father and son') story-type, and is a rather fuller exemplar of that type than has been appreciated.

Introduction

Over a century ago W.P. Ker criticised the last part of *Beowulf* — Beowulf's fight with the dragon, and his death — by comparing it to the *Odyssey*:

> It is impossible, by any process of reduction and simplification, to get rid of the duality in *Beowulf*. It has many episodes, quite consistent with a general unity of action, but there is something more than episodes, there is a sequel. It is as if to the *Odyssey* there had been added some later books telling in full of the old age of Odysseus, far from the sea, and his death at the hands of Telegonus.[1]

In the twenty-first century *Beowulf* does not lack for commentators to defend the poetic merit of the dragon episode. However, the point of Ker's comparison with the death of Odysseus may be partially lost now. The story of Telegonos, which was related in the lost early Greek epic the *Telegony*, is no longer a very well known one.[2]

The present article examines the deaths of Beowulf and Odysseus in juxtaposition. Both poems cast the story of the hero's death as an epilogue in some sense; both die in old age, in combat, and the relationship of the hero to his community is significant in both cases. But they face very different foes; and though both stories draw on story-types with widespread resonances in many mythologies, the types in question are very different.

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[1] Ker 1897: 184 (= 1957: 160).

[2] I follow the texts of Klaeber 1950 (*Beowulf*) and van Thiel 1991 (*Odyssey*). All quotations are given in translation, since knowledge of both Old English and Ancient Greek is no longer a common combination. Translations are my own except where noted.

Death is an important moment in any hero's career. This is partly simply because legends tend to deal with the distant past; and because only a dead hero can have a hero-cult (no death, no tomb; no tomb, no cult). But death is also always the end of a story: if not the end of a poem, it is at least the end of the story of the hero's life. This notion of a hero's life-narrative is obviously not the same thing as the sort of narrative that constitutes an epic, or a fully-written-out biography — or, if it is a biography, it is one that is not put into words —; rather, this life-narrative is the larger history that serves as a backdrop to any story about the hero's deeds.

As Ker points out, Beowulf does die in *Beowulf*; Odysseus does not die in the *Odyssey*. So we are dealing with the narrativisation of death. In one case, death is part of the main narrative; in the other, death is deferred to the future. Both kinds of death put an end to the hero, but they make for very different epics. Whether an event is narrated as *part of* an epic, or as something that only *impinges on* the epic from past or future, makes a difference in how it relates to the main narrative. Every plot, according to Todorov, finds resolution in an equilibrium of one kind or another;[3] but not every plot ends in death. Death is an especially emphatic kind of resolution, equilibrium, or closure. Within the *Odyssey*, death exists in the story only in the 'future tense', as something impinging from beyond the temporal frame of the main narrative; resolution has to be achieved by other means.[4] By contrast Beowulf has an especially direct confrontation with death, in the 'present tense'.

Another major contrast lies in the respective story-types on which *Beowulf* and the *Telegony* draw. In Beowulf's case the underlying story-type revolves around a hero's defiance of death, and — I shall argue — his attempt to gain access to something representing immortality. This story-type is most clearly paralleled in the Akkadian *Gilgamesh* epic. In the case of Odysseus and the *Telegony*, it is a variant of the 'Sohrāb and Rostam' story-type, or 'the mortal combat of the father and son'; and the Telegonos narrative has remarkably close relatives in the literature and mythology of several cultures. In Odysseus' case, an important essay by William Hansen has previously illustrated one aspect of the relationship between narrative time and an underlying folktale but that relates to a different part of Odysseus' story.[5] Here I extend the notion to the Telegonos narrative as well, and to the contrasting situation in *Beowulf*.

Points of comparison

The aim of comparing Beowulf's and Odysseus' deaths is not, of course, to suggest any historical link between the two stories, but to highlight each epic's distinctive qualities. The point lies in the contrast; but it is partly because of some structural similarities that the contrast is interesting. A brief look at a few points of comparison will help put the subsequent discussions in perspective.[6]

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[3] On a minimal plot as 'the passage from one equilibrium to another', see Todorov 1977: 111. This definition is unsatisfactory (it excludes, for example, the *ekphrasis* or rhetorical description) but will do for the present discussion. Henceforth 'story' and 'plot' are not used in strict technical senses.

[4] On the temporality of past/future events in Homeric narrative see e.g. Andersen 1990, especially 42-45. Past and future events are reconfigured and even rewritten to conform to the present; he refers to the 'primacy of the present,' and how 'the present takes precedence over the past' (45).

[5] Hansen 1990, analysing the 'sailor and the oar' story; see *Od.* 11.119-34 (which runs without a break into the prophecy of Odysseus' death, 11.134-37).

[6] *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* have been compared often: for example, with reference to stylistic elements (Foley 1981; Parks 1988, 1990, 1992), conceptions of heroism (Wolff 1987; Foley 1990), and specific episodes (e.g. Work 1930; Lord 1965 = 1991: 133-39).

One point of comparison lies in poetic genre. It is as convenient to describe Beowulf as 'heroic epic' as it is Homer. But there is also a deep similarity in the way both *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* construct the relationship between the 'now' of poetic performance and the 'then' of the legendary past. Andrew Ford has influentially interpreted Homeric epic as 'poetry of the past', arguing that Homeric poetry strives for a distancing effect as part of its magic. For example, Ford uses depictions of poetic performance within Homer to argue that epic, properly performed, is (1992: 124-25)

> a convincingly articulated and conscientiously reported account that has the appearance of truth and so must be one with truth, since form is finally content. … For Homer and his audience, who can expect no direct confirmation of these old stories, such truth was the special and defining quality of the poetry of the past.

It is similar with the Homeric trope of invoking the divine Muses to assist the poet in accurate remembrance of the past. The parallels are not perfect, but it is not hard to recognise something similar going on in *Beowulf*'s opening (1-5):

> Well! we have heard in days of yore
> of the might of the Spear-Danes' kings:
> how nobles at that time performed mighty deeds.
> Regularly Scyld Scefing would rout his enemies' bands,
> many tribes, depriving them of their mead-halls, …

This ostentatious trust in *what one hears* from a received tradition — embodied in Greek epic by the Muse — as an authoritative voice is something that would have been familiar to an early Greek poet. *Beowulf* especially emphasises this distancing effect by using the genealogy of Scyld Scefing's descendants to frame the setting at Hroðgar's hall. Words like *oft* ('regularly') add a frequentative sense to the backdrop, making it timeless and adding to the sense of distance.

But that is a comparison only in the most general sense. A much more specific point of comparison between the two poems lies in the characterisation of the story of the hero's death as an epilogue. In Beowulf's case, this is the transition from 'part one' of the poem (Grendel and his mother) to 'part two' (the dragon). Beowulf is extolled as an exemplary hero (2177-99); and then he becomes king and fifty years pass, in the space of just ten lines. Immediately the dragon appears (2208b-13a):

> He ruled fittingly
> for fifty winters — he was then an old king,
> an ancient land-warden — until one began
> to hold sway on dark nights, a dragon,
> who in his lofty dwelling guarded a hoard
> in a towering stone barrow …

The abruptness has often attracted comment.[7] Intervening events are glossed over. This leap takes us to the conclusion not just of the epic, but also of Beowulf's life-story (and this was precisely Ker's complaint).

Like Beowulf, Odysseus dies in extreme old age, with a substantial gap separating the hero's exploits in his prime from the story of his death. Greek accounts of the Telegonos story also pass over this gap with astonishing abruptness. The result is that the Telegonos narrative creates the same sense of disunity that Ker observed in *Beowulf*.[8] The epic that related the story, Eugamon's *Telegony*, does not survive, but we have an ancient summary by one Proklos.[9] According to his summary the poem started as follows:

> The suitors are buried by their families. And Odysseus, after making sacrifices to the Nymphs, sails to Elis …

Likewise in the third- or second-century BCE poem *Alexandra*, attributed to Lykophron,[10] when the prophetess Kassandra foretells Odysseus' death she jumps over a gap of apparently decades by using a poetic image that vividly evokes old age (*Alex*. 789-94):

> At last, like a gull that runs across the waves,
> like a shell worn ragged by salt all over …
> he will die, a wrinkled old crow …

And most abruptly of all, in his commentary on *Alexandra* the Byzantine scholar John Tzetzes provides a full biography of Odysseus — including a full summary of the *Odyssey* — which ends:

> [Odysseus and the Suitors' families] make friends and cease their strife; and Odysseus goes to the Eurytanes, a race in Epeiros, because of an oracle, and makes the prescribed sacrifices; and when he is completely turned around in extreme old age he is killed at the hands of Telegonos, the son born to him from Kirke. So that's the story of Odysseus.[11]

Again there is no pause, in spite of the fact that many years have passed. Telegonos is now an adult; Odysseus is 'turned around in extreme old age,' a trope implying that he faces towards death and the future, rather than memory and the past (and the *Alexandra* scholia report elsewhere that Odysseus is supposed to have lived even longer than Nestor, a figure famous for his longevity).[12] Even so, Tzetzes conceives of the *Odyssey*'s 'part two' as an integral part of the hero's story: his closing, 'that's the story of Odysseus' (καὶ τὰ μὲν κατὰ τὸν Ὀδυσσέα οὕτως ἔχει), is weirdly emphatic. A

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[7] For a tidy survey see Shippey 1997: 169.

[8] Brodeur 1959: 75 in fact compares *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* in this respect: *Beowulf*'s fifty-year gap 'confronted its poet with a problem more difficult than Homer had to face … the very need to maintain a calculated balance compelled disunity of action.'

[9] For Proklos' summary see West 2003: 166-69.

[10] Lykophron's authorship is doubted; see further Hurst 2008: xiii-xxv.

[11] Tz. sch. on Lyk. *Alexandra* 815, 262.24-28 Scheer.

[12] Sch. vet. *Alex*. 794, 250.1-3 Scheer.

similar phrase ends Odysseus' life-story in John Malalas' account (καὶ ταῦτα μὲν περὶ Ὀδυσσέως).[13] The phrasing in both closing sentences — both using a correlative μέν without an answering δέ — is especially striking: the effect is something like, 'So, to sum up …'

Finally, a third point of comparison lies in the expression of the consequences of the hero's death in terms of its impact on his community. In *Beowulf*, Wiglaf pronounces a curse upon the unfaithful retainers who did not assist in Beowulf's fight against the dragon (2884-91):

> Now treasure-taking and sword-giving,
> all home-joy for your race,
> hope will fail; of his land-right
> every man of your family
> must leave deprived, when nobles
> far off hear of your flight —
> an inglorious deed! Death is better
> for any warrior than a life of shame.

In a similar vein, the poem ends with a description of Beowulf's people celebrating his funeral in an especially futile way: they inter the dragon's hoard with him (3126-42, 3163-68), 'as useless to men as it was before,' precisely contrary to Beowulf's wish that it should benefit them (2794-98).

In Odysseus' case, death has a very different effect. In *Beowulf*, the community withers and dissolves; but when Odysseus dies, his people (the λαοί, a word from the language of ritual and myth, implying people-as-community) are assured of continuity and wealth. In the *Odyssey*, his death is prophesied by the ghost of the seer Teiresias as follows (*Od.* 11.134-37):

> And death will come to you away from the sea,[14]
> a very gentle sort of death, of such a kind as to slay you
> when you are worn out by rich old age; and around you your people
> will be prosperous and happy; these are sure things I am telling you.

In both epics the community is defined primarily in terms of its relevance to the hero. But the two communities have very different fates. Death narrated, death-in-the-present (*Beowulf*), is something destructive; death deferred, death-in-the-future (*Odyssey*), brings a promise of continuity.

Beowulf

A long-standing critical tradition interprets the dragon, the agent of Beowulf's death, as a semi-allegorical symbol of chaos or greed. As we shall see, the mythological interpretation that emerges from the comparison with Odysseus is rather different, and therefore needs some defence. We begin, therefore, with a review of critical readings of the dragon and its hoard, and then proceed to the comparative interpretation.

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[13] Malalas *Chronographia* 5.21 Thurn. Malalas' account is a fifth- or sixth-century paraphrase of 'Diktys of Crete', a heavily rationalised prose account of the Trojan War (probably Flavian-era: see [author's name omitted] 2012: 2).

[14] The first line, in translating ἐξ ἁλός as 'away from the sea,' unavoidably begs a question that will be discussed later. Briefly, an alternative interpretation is possible ('out of the sea') that points to the Telegonos story.

The dragon is not a fully-fledged allegory.[15] Still, it is often taken as symbolic of chaos, as a destructive force that breaks down community and communal values. In the 'chaos' reading, Beowulf and his kingdom represent law, order, legitimacy; the dragon is chaos incarnate.[16] In different critics' readings this chaos comes either in the form of civic discord (Du Bois); or it is an elemental principle, an impersonal force that is above the kind of personal hostility we see in Grendel and his mother (Gang, Sisam, Malone, Calder, and especially Oetgen); more specifically, it is a mythical symbol of chaos (Lionarons); or, in one recent discussion, it represents the inevitability of decay (Drout). In this last reading, Drout's, the dragon's destructiveness and the burial of its hoard along with Beowulf's body complete a narrative of the failure of inheritance: a narrative that has been going on throughout the entire epic. Beowulf and Wiglaf, together, repeat the Last Survivor's story (2231-77). The Last Survivor lamented the downfall of his people, and entrusted his treasure to the grave; so also Wiglaf damns Beowulf's retainers to exile, and entrusts Beowulf to his own grave along with the untouched treasure.[17]

All of these readings are reactions, in way or another, to an alternative symbolism in which the dragon represents the forces of evil, like Grendel and his mother. In the 'evil' reading they are not just any monsters; they are specifically monsters *for Christians*.[18] While this is clearly true in Grendel's case — he derives from Cain's descendents (104-14) — in regard to the dragon this is contested, as we have seen. Other, more general, examinations of the dragon exist too, that do not delve into either kind of symbolism.[19]

So the dominant symbolic equations are: 'dragon = chaos'; 'Beowulf/Hroðgar/Heorot = order'. However, the dragon comes with paraphernalia that remain puzzling on the 'chaos' reading. The dragon's abode (a barrow) and its hoard (the treasure of the Last Survivor) have no role in the symbolic system of *order versus chaos*. All of the above readings have difficulty accommodating these elements; so they are problems, motifs that require *ad hoc* explanations.

The hoard is particularly problematic.[20] For Rogers the hoard is 'positively evil,' but is treated as almost irrelevant, 'handled without much skill'; similarly for Sisam, 'no certain use is made of' the

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[15] On the character of symbolism in *Beowulf* generally see Lee 1997, 1998.

[16] On the equation 'dragon = chaos' see further Du Bois 1934, 1957; Gang 1952; Sisam 1958; Malone 1961; Calder 1972; Oetgen 1978; Lionarons 1996; Drout 2007.

[17] Owen-Crocker 2000 likewise casts the Lay of the Last Survivor as one of a series of four funerals, of which Beowulf's is the last.

[18] Dragon = 'evil': Bonjour 1953; Sharma 2005. This reading is sometimes attributed to Tolkien 1936, but not entirely accurately. Tolkien does claim that Grendel represents the forces of evil (1936: 278-80), but he nowhere makes this claim of the dragon; he has been cited as though he had (e.g. Sisam 1958: 133). The closest Tolkien comes to seeing the dragon in symbolic terms is when he writes that the dragon 'approaches *draconitas* rather than *draco*' (259); and that 'the monsters' — i.e. collectively, not specifically the dragon — 'become 'adversaries of God', and so begin to symbolize … the powers of evil' (262). Tolkien is not so much interested in the opposition of the monsters *to God* as in their opposition *to the hero*: see especially 264.

[19] Rogers 1955; Tripp 1983; Evans 1985; Lionarons 1996; Rauer 2000. For Evans, the dragon is more an opponent for Beowulf than an agent in its own right (similarly Tolkien 1936: 275-76; Klaeber 1950: xxii; but cf. *contra* Malone 1961: 85-86). Rauer places Beowulf's dragon in the context of mediaeval hagiographical literature. Tripp idiosyncratically identifies the Last Survivor, the dragon, and the thief who steals the cup from the hoard, all as the same person.

[20] On the hoard's symbolism see further Rogers 1955; Sisam 1958; Malone 1961; Cherniss 1968; Goldsmith 1970; Calder 1972; Helder 1977; Dean 1994; Tanke 2002; Sharma 2005; Sahm 2009; Marshall 2010.

hoard.[21] Malone is puzzled because '[o]ne would expect a hoard to represent wealth or power or the like … Again and again the poet points out the uselessness of the hoard'; but he finds meaning in it by concluding that it 'exemplifies … the vanity of worldly goods'.[22] Cherniss poses the key questions more explicitly than anyone:

> What, precisely, is the significance of the dragon? What is the nature and ultimate effect of the curse on the hoard? Why is the hoard not distributed among Beowulf's comitatus?

— and reasons, rightly, that the function of the hoard and the function of the dragon are closely linked. However, his conclusion that 'the treasure represents the dragon's honor' is unconvincing.[23] Several critics, especially Goldsmith, have interpreted the hoard as a symbol of avarice, the poet's tool for luring Beowulf into greed and sin in old age; this interpretation is driven by an insistence on the centrality of the Christian undertones in the epic, and by depictions of dragon-slayings in the hagiographical tradition.[24] However, Goldsmith is puzzled by the barrow, and troubled by the curse on the hoard: echoing Sisam, she finds that 'the poet makes no good use of it'. She is forced to the untenable view that Beowulf becomes depraved by greed in his old age, in spite of the fact that the poem repeatedly states that he is an ideal king.[25] Calder is successful in linking the dragon and the hoard: both represent something limitless. The one cup that the thief steals (the act that arouses the dragon's anger: 2214-31, 2299-2301, 2404-12) would be meaningless if the hoard were finite; '[b]ut since the treasure is without limit, then one is everything.'[26] Helder has the exact opposite view: the hoard is to be assessed quite literally, for its monetary value.[27] Dean agrees with Malone that the hoard is a symbol of futility, since its burial with Beowulf makes it as useless as it was to the dragon; but he is puzzled that, on the one hand, the curse laid on the hoard 'doomed its violator to punishment for avarice'; but on the other, 'that Beowulf was free of this motive'.[28] Tanke, adducing the hoard of the other great Germanic dragon, Fáfnir, finds a way of linking the hoard to its location, the dragon's barrow: the barrow is 'an ancient shrine or cenotaph, and its hoard a sacrificial offering';[29] however, then it is the dragon itself that is irrelevant, and that cannot be right. For Sharma, the hoard is an incitement to avarice, but Beowulf does not succumb to it.[30] Sahm sees the hoard as as a kind of duplicate of the dragon: Beowulf chooses to fight the dragon in order to secure the treasure for his people; but it is given two inconsistent backstories, betraying its ambiguous nature: it is a benefit, but also a foe like the dragon itself. Most recently, Marshall sees the hoard as

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[21] Rogers 1955: 340, 352; Sisam 1958: 130.

[22] Malone 1961: 90.

[23] Cherniss 1968: 473, 481.

[24] See especially Goldsmith 1970: 210-40. For a recent survey see Marshall 2010: 2-4.

[25] Goldsmith 1970: 95 on the hoard, and 128-29 on the barrow. Helder 1977 rebuts Goldsmith's belief that Beowulf falls into sin.

[26] Calder 1972: 31-32.

[27] Helder 1977.

[28] Dean 1994: 300.

[29] Tanke 2002: 376.

[30] Sharma 2005: 273; on avarice cf. Hume 1980: 14. Although Hume writes of Nordic dragons, not of *Beowulf*, she concludes that it is inappropriate to import this kind of 'psychological dimension' into dragon-stories: she sees dragons as the consequence of avarice, rather than a personification that the hero must resist.

not about avarice but about gift-giving and self-sacrifice: for him, the effect of the treasure is actually to reinforce communal values.

Thus the critical tradition. So many different interpretations: *embarras de richesse*, to borrow a comment of Klaeber's on a separate matter.[31]

One problem with these interpretations is the difficulty of accommodating dragon, hoard, and barrow all at once. A second problem is that they are too abstract. Chaos and order are not properties of a hero, but of a community, or an all-inclusive cosmos. Surely, as many have argued, *Beowulf* is more about Beowulf the man than about society or the cosmos. Community is important, to be sure: Heorot is an icon of an ideal society, Beowulf's kingship is a model of law and virtue. But Beowulf is not important because he represents values shared by communities depicted in the poem. It is the other way round. It is the same with Odysseus: for both heroes, the community consists of dependents *of the hero* (Beowulf's *mæg* 'kinsman' Wiglaf, and his retainers; Odysseus' ἑταῖροι 'companions' and οἶκος 'family');[32] benefactors *of the hero* (Hroðgar and Hygelac, Alkinoos and Athena); and malefactors *of the hero* (Unferð and the unfaithful retainers, the suitors and the unfaithful maidservants). These figures do not have a really separate existence: they are there for what they tell us about *how the hero relates* to them. It is all about Beowulf: how he treats his community, how his existence affects them, how theirs affects him. It makes sense, then, to focus on the hero himself. We want an interpretation that gives us the hero's own story, not a story about community.

As we noted at the outset, the temporal framing of death is a key difference between Beowulf and Odysseus. Death plays out differently depending on whether it belongs to the present or the future of the main narrative. From that, it emerges that *Beowulf* places a very heavy emphasis on the directness of the hero's confrontation with death. Death is not just taken for granted, backgrounded as every mortal's inevitable fate; it is brought into the present. It is genuinely a *confrontation.*

This is not to say that the dragon necessarily represents death rather than chaos; though that is an eminently reasonable interpretation. On that reading, dragon and death are simultaneously something personal, since this is a man's confrontation with his own death, and since it is only Beowulf that fights the dragon; they are also universal, because death comes to everyone, and because there is something primal and elemental about the dragon (as Tolkien and Calder have argued; some epithets used for the dragon point the same way, especially *fyrdraca*, 2689 and *eorðdraca*, 2712).

But still more central to Beowulf's confrontation with death is the hoard. The hoard is consistently cast as a prize that either cannot be attained, or else must be laid aside by its owner upon death. On the mythological level, it is the impossible goal that all mortals dream of, immortality;[33] on the narratological level, it is the fictional character's dream of deferring resolution — deferring the story's end — indefinitely. The dragon, then, is the obstacle to this prize. At times it acts as death itself; at others, as the impassable obstacle between a man and immortality. Both dragon and hoard are located in a barrow, since that is the only logical place for the meeting between the hero, death, and the prize that death withholds.

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[31] Klaeber 1950: 227, commenting on a crux at 3074-75.

[32] In fact ἑταῖρος must also have been originally a kin term: it is etymologically related to ἔτης 'kinsman.' See Chantraine 2009 ad loc.

[33] Similarly Owen-Crocker 2000: 227.

We first meet the dragon and its hoard in a barrow, a place of death (2210b-13a, quoted earlier). We soon hear the story of how they got there (2231b-77): in times past a shadowy figure, the Last Survivor of a dead race, prepared his own barrow, stored up all his treasure, and laid himself to rest. Death and dragon arrive simultaneously: '… the tide of death / laid hold of his heart. And the delightful hoard was found / standing open by the ancient twilight-predator …' (2269b-71). For the Last Survivor, death is accompanied by both hoard and dragon; the same motifs later accompany Beowulf's death.

The hoard is central in both the Last Survivor episode and the dragon fight. Several clues are given as to its function. The Last Survivor lays it aside as he dies, storing it in a tomb; Beowulf is very aged, around seventy years old; he quests for the hoard both as a heroic, all-or-nothing act (2535-37) and also for the welfare of his people, to provide for their future; and most tellingly, he asks to be permitted at least a glimpse of it as he lies dying (2747-52). It is the prize Beowulf cannot have because he has met his death. It is also the prize that is denied to his people: they are mortal and will fade away, as Wiglaf foretells in his curse (quoted above), so naturally they may not keep it.

Hoard, barrow, and dragon form a closely knit constellation. They are linked at their first appearance, as we saw in the transition passage: the dragon 'in his lofty dwelling guarded a hoard / in a towering stone barrow' (2212-13). The epithets used for the dragon also connect them. The dragon is routinely called 'hoard guardian' or close variants (*hordweard*, 2293, 2302, 2393, 2554, 2593; *goldweard*, 3081; *frætwa hyrde*, 3133); a treasure is a dragon's *raison d'être*. But it is also often called 'barrow guardian' (*beorges/biorges hyrde* or *weard*, 2304, 2524, 2580, 3066), and it is also a 'guardian' in a general sense (*weard*, 2413, 2841, 3060).

Moreover, the hoard is a prize that has been placed beyond the reach of mortal hands. In its first origin story we are told that it lies in a place unknown to men (2214a *eldum uncuð*). In a second story, later on, it is (3052b-57):

> … wound up with spells
> so that no one of men might reach
> that ring-hall unless God himself,
> true king of triumphs, chose and permitted someone
> to open the hoard (for he is the guardian of men):
> whichsoever man seemed to him fitting.

This second story of the hoard's origin has some discrepancies with the version given earlier in the Last Survivor story: here it is prin*ces*, plural, who deposit the hoard in a barrow and lay a curse on it (3069-73), and it lies there for a thousand years (3050; in 2278, the dragon was there for three hundred years).[34] But in both versions the hoard represents deferral and immortality. In the Last Survivor story it is the prize that is hidden, and must be laid aside upon death; in the 'curse' story it

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[34] On the multiple backstories for the hoard see further Sahm 2009. Sisam 1958: 129-31 treats the hoard's enchantment and the curse as two separate stories, bringing the total to three versions. However, these two are presented together; so in some ways it makes more sense to see them as two multiform descriptions of a single story element. Sisam himself goes on to argue that the enchantment-curse inconsistency represents eclecticism on the part of the poet, rather than a crux or multiple authorship; one could easily take the further step of arguing that this is the same eclecticism that is generally characteristic of traditional storytelling.

is withheld by divinity, the ultimate quest-object. It would not be going far astray to say that the dragon guards the hoard *on behalf of* God; though such a bald reduction of the mythical symbols would be inappropriate within the poem.

In short, the hoard is a prize that no one can possess except by dying for it; alternatively it is a prize that brings death to anyone who seeks it. The only ones to possess it are those that are buried with it. It is a treasure whose proper place is beyond the barrier of death.

Malone and Helder put their fingers on the central problem with the hoard: 'A hidden treasure serves no purpose.'[35] This echoes what the poet repeatedly tells us: the hoard is useless to the dragon (2275-77, 2687), and once again useless after being buried with Beowulf (3167-68). This paradox should be enough to make clear that the hoard is not purely about monetary wealth. It belongs not to the world of gift-giving and marketplaces, but to the world of dragons and curses. Compare serpent-guarded treasures in classical myth: no one would dream of taking the golden fleece, or the apples of the Hesperides, as treasures whose appeal is purely monetary. The same holds for the hoard: it is as elemental as the dragon. It is limitless, as Calder has argued; it is reserved by God; it has a dragon as its *hordweard*; it is — to put it prosaically — a MacGuffin: a quest-object without function, useless to the dragon, unused by Beowulf's people, valued only as a goal. (It is worth recalling that the older term for a MacGuffin was 'golden fleece': another dragon's hoard.) If its uselessness is only a circumstance of where the hoard is located, it is incomprehensible; but if it is an *intrinsic property* of the hoard, it makes much more sense. The hoard *has* to be useless. Its uselessness, the curse, and the dragon as guardian: they are part-and-parcel.

The 'death' reading advocated here, focusing on Beowulf *personally*, rather than on order versus chaos *in the abstract*, offers an economical way of interpreting the barrow and the hoard as meaningful parts of the story, rather than as separate phenomena. As we have seen, death and immortality, the dragon and its hoard are at once personal and universal. And as Drout shows, the story repeats one from the distant past, so that there is something timeless about it: the story is specific, but it applies to all mortals. The hoard is indeed useless, because neither death (the dragon) nor a man who is already dead (the Last Survivor, Beowulf) has any use for it. Immortality is a thing that could only ever be useful to someone who lacks it.

Symbolism of this kind is mythical, rather than allegorical or moral. The story enacts the conflicts and inevitabilities contained in these symbols. Death in the abstract is not a free-willed agent; the dragon, which has long been recognised as something more impersonal than Grendel, is the same. It is an inevitability that Beowulf must face.

We find similar symbolism in *some* other mythical dragons. The closest relative of *Beowulf*'s dragon, mythically speaking, is Fáfnir. He offers a loose parallel in that there is a curse on his hoard; but it takes Sigurðr longer to die than it does Beowulf. Even so it is striking that Fáfnir, as he lies dying, explicitly links his hoard to Sigurðr's mortality (*Fáfnismál* 9):

> … but I tell you one true thing:
> the clinking gold
> and the glow-red treasure,
> these rings will be death for you.

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[35] Helder 1977: 321.

We also find some parallels in Greek myth. The golden fleece and the apples of the Hesperides have been mentioned; both prizes, like *Beowulf*'s hoard, connote immortality on some level. The apples are holy, and the goddess Athena takes them away from Herakles, symbolically preventing his apotheosis and access to immortality.[36] The golden fleece is linked to the story of how Medea tricks king Pelias' daughters into thinking they could magically rejuvenate their father. She demonstrates the rejuvenation process on a ram; the fleece, from the ram Phrixos, has been given to Pelias shortly before.[37]

But the clearest parallels are in the epic of *Gilgamesh*: the hero's defiance of death, the roles played by serpent and by the hero's community, and above all the quest-object, the MacGuffin of immortality.[38] The second half of the epic (in the 'Standard' Akkadian version by Sīn-liqe-uninni) is entirely preoccupied with the problem of a hero facing death and his quest for immortality. After Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu dies (tablets 7-8), the hero laments the inevitability of his own death and seeks out the immortal Ūta-napishti (tablets 9-10). Uta-napishti illustrates death's inevitability by showing Gilgamesh that sleep is inescapable (11.207-46): if he cannot escape that smaller 'death,' how can he expect to evade the real thing?[39] Gilgamesh begs for the secret of immortality, and Uta-napishti gives him a magic plant that will rejuvenate him (273-300).[40] But when Gilgamesh puts it on the ground to drink from a pool, a serpent steals and devours it; it sloughs off its skin (301-307), representing its own rejuvenation. As the epic ends (in the 'short' version, omitting tablet 12), Gilgamesh eulogises his city, Uruk (11.319-29): since he himself cannot live forever, Uruk's permanence is the only immortality he can hope for. As in *Beowulf*, the hero's (im)mortality is tied to the survival of his community.[41]

Now, some other mythical serpents do seem to suggest a battle against chaos rather than death: Thor's fight with the world serpent Jǫrmungandr, Apollo's with Python, Zeus' with Typhaon, Marduk's with Tiamat (if Tiamat is to be understood as a serpent). But the difference is clear, and once again it is tied to temporality: gods do not have funerals or graves, and most of them do not die. It is gods that fight against chaos. Mortal heroes fight to defy death.

The 'death' reading does not set everything in stone in *Beowulf*; there is considerable interpretive elbow-room. For example, there is still a question of whether Beowulf's defeat by the dragon shows that he, like Gilgamesh, cannot hope to attain earthly immortality; or, conversely, whether his dying

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[36] Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11. The familiar story where Herakles persuades Atlas to fetch the apples is comparatively rare (ps.-Apollod, loc. cit.; the decorations of the temple of Zeus at Olympia); in most versions Herakles himself kills the dragon or puts it to sleep (Soph. *Tr.* 1090-1100; Eur. *Her.* 394-99; Ap. Rh. *Arg.* 4.1393-1449; Diod. Sic. 4.26.2-4).

[37] Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.27; Paus. 8.11.2; ps.-Hyg. *Fab.* 24; Ovid *Met.* 7.297-349. Although Medea deceives Pelias' daughters, her claim is true: she successfully rejuvenates Aison in the Epic Cycle (*Nostoi* fr. 6, ed. West 2003), and Jason in Simonides (548 *PMG*) and Pherekydes (*FGrH* 3 F 113ab). All three attestations — *Nostoi*, Simonides, Pherekydes — derive from one source, the ancient hypothesis to Euripides' *Medea* preserved in several MSS, especially in cod. Laurentianus 31.15 (fifteenth century).

[38] References to *Gilgamesh* follow the critical edition of George 2003.

[39] The present discussion has little in common with that of Wolff 1987. Wolff's interpretation is led by his puzzlement as to why Gilgamesh comes off so poorly in the 'contest with sleep' episode (20). In fact Ūta-napishti explains it clearly ('See the fellow who demanded life! / Sleep is wafting over him like a fog', 11.213-14, trans. George); similarly George 2003: 522.

[40] For the herb of rejuvenation/immortality cf. Thompson 1955-1958, motifs D1338, D1344.

[41] George 2003: 527: 'though men are mortal, mankind is immortal.' The longer version (including tablet 12) continues the theme of a hero facing death in a very general way, but there is a continuity break, and the problem of death is dealt with entirely differently.

glimpse of the hoard and the fact that the hoard is buried with him indicate that he has achieved an immortality, of a kind, through his people and their commemoration of him (though Wiglaf's curse on the unfaithful retainers suggests not).

And it is important to realise that the 'death' reading does not determine the poet's selection of literary motifs, nor any allegorical symbolism. There is no doubt that the bulk of the motifs and attitudes reflected in *Beowulf*'s dragon-fight are driven primarily by the hagiographical tradition, as Goldsmith, Rauer, and others have argued, more so than by an underlying mythological story-form. To that extent the 'death' reading is not actually inconsistent with the 'chaos' reading. But it is impossible to imagine that the dragon-fight *originates* in hagiography. The *Gilgamesh* parallels show that, under the surface elements, something older survives. The epic as a whole is focused on Beowulf the man; so it only makes sense that the dragon-fight is linked to his death in a personal way, while at the same time the dragon and hoard also tell a story about the inevitability of death in a more general way too.

Odysseus

Within the *Odyssey* Odysseus' confrontation with death is entirely *in*direct. It exists only as something in the future, in the prophecy made by Teiresias' ghost. Though the passage has been quoted above, it is so central that it is worth repeating (*Od.* 11.134-37):

> And death will come to you away from the sea,
> a very gentle sort of death, of such a kind as to slay you
> when you are worn out by rich old age; and around you your people
> will be prosperous and happy; these are sure things I am telling you.

The lines are repeated almost verbatim when Odysseus relates his wanderings to his wife (23.381-84).

No dragons or treasures here. As far as the *Odyssey* is concerned, resolution — equilibrium — is achieved and completed before Odysseus' death. The completion of the hero's story is the completion of his restoration to his home and family: when the *Odyssey* ends, so do the hero's deeds. In effect, so does the hero himself. Death is precisely an *after*thought. Comparison with Beowulf shows how Odysseus does not need to go out with a bang. We might say that where *Beowulf* is a narrative of achievement in adversity, the *Odyssey* is more a narrative of escape from adversity.

The desire for Odysseus to go out with a bang appears only with the story of Telegonos: this is the story that Ker referred to disapprovingly. As we saw earlier, the story was told most fully in Eugamon's lost *Telegony*, known to us through Proklos' summary; it is also known through various later treatments.[42] Eugamon picks up where the *Odyssey* leaves off, after the slaughter of Penelope's Suitors. In the first part, the so-called 'Thesprotis,' Odysseus journeys to Elis and Thesprotia, fights a war, and returns home to Ithake. In the second part it transpires that Kirke, with whom Odysseus spent a year in *Odyssey* 10, has had a child, Telegonos:

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[42] See Hartmann 1917 for a survey.

Telegonos sails in search of his father and disembarks at Ithake, where he ravages the land. Odysseus comes out to help but is killed unwittingly by his son. After Telegonos realises his mistake, he takes the body, Telemachos, and Penelope, to his mother. She makes them immortal; Telegonos marries Penelope, and Telemachos marries Kirke.[43]

Proklos' summary sounds eccentric, and has usually provoked very negative reactions among critics — hence Ker's disapproval.[44] The story is no joke, however. Telegonos was a very popular figure in early Italy, and was the legendary founder of the city of Tusculum near Rome; in some accounts he is also involved in the founding of Praeneste and Caere.[45] It should be remembered that the Homeric epics would also sound eccentric in a compressed summary: the *Iliad* features talking horses, a river chasing a man across the battlefield, and the goddess Athena decking Ares with a punch.

It is time to recall that one of the points of comparison with *Beowulf* lies in how the poet focuses on the impact of the hero's death on his community. Earlier we characterised death narrated as something destructive, while death deferred brings a promise of continuity. This is only so because the *Odyssey* has no explicit allusion to the Telegonos story; indeed the latter seems to contradict the prophecy's reference to 'a very gentle sort of death.' Is it possible that the *Odyssey* — whether that means the received tradition, the poet, or the intended audience — was aware of the Telegonos story? This is not the same as asking whether Eugamon's epic was known; Eugamon is certainly later than the *Odyssey* (Eugamon's home town, Kyrene in Libya, was only founded in 631 BCE, and the *Odyssey* certainly existed in some form by that date). Rather, the question is asking: was there a received tradition of the Telegonos story, one that might have been known to the *Odyssey*, and upon which Eugamon later drew? On the one hand, the discrepancy between Teiresias' 'gentle sort of death' and Eugamon's violent account suggests not; and as we have seen, modern critics are not interested in reviving Telegonos if they can help it. On the other hand, the story-type is a very ancient one, widely dispersed through many traditions, especially in Indo-European contexts.

For ancient scholars, the question was tied up with a crux in Teiresias' prophecy: the sense of *Od*. 11.134 ἐξ ἁλός 'from the sea.' In the conventional reading this means that Odysseus will die *away from* the sea, inland. Ancient scholars debated an alternative reading, according to which death will come *out of* the sea, in the form of Telegonos' unique spear, which was made from the poisonous spine of a ray. Ancient commentaries on the *Odyssey* preserve various glosses on the matter, among them the following:

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[43] West 2003: 166-68.

[44] A more extreme reaction: Severyns 1928: 410 fairly boils with rage at the story. 'Que d'invraisemblances! que de mauvais goût! quelle déchéance profonde et définitive de l'épopée qui, durant tant de siècles, avait charmé les oreilles et les coeurs, quelle mort lamentable d'un genre qui avait montré les adieux d'Hector et d'Andromaque, le roi Priam aux pieds d'Achille, la radieuse agonie de Penthésilée …'

[45] Tusculum: Dion. Hal. 4.45.1; cf. Hor. *Carm*. 3.29.8; Prop. 2.32.4; etc. Praeneste: Aristokles *FGrH* 831 F 2 (= ps.-Plu. *Parall. min*. 41b, 316a-b); cf. Strabo 5.3.11; Pliny *NH* 3.64. Caere: Servius on *Aen*. 8.479. In the cases of Praeneste and Caere these are secondary variants to more standard foundation legends (Praeneste founded by Caeculus; Caere by the Pelasgians). Odysseus, Kirke, and Telegonos were popular figures in Etruria and Latium as early as the Archaic Period. Rome founded the colony of Circeii at the legendary site of Kirke's island, where a cult-site to Kirke is later attested, no later than the sixth century BCE (Livy 1.56.3; Dion. Hal. 4.63.1); Aisch. fr. eleg. 2 (= Thphr. *HP* 9.15.2) alludes to her presence among the 'Tyrrhenians'. On Odysseus' role in Italian local legends see Phillips 1953; Malkin 1998: 156-209.

Disputed reading: (1) ἔξαλος, proparoxytone, i.e. out of and 'away from the sea'; (2) ἐξ ἁλός ['coming from the sea'], as separate words, referring to the sting of the ray that Telegonos used as a spear.[46]

ἔξαλος … Some take this as a collocation, ἐξ ἁλός, i.e. 'out of the sea' … They also say that, on a visit from Kirke, Hephaistos made a spear for Telegonos from a sea ray that Phorkys had killed while it was eating the fish in Phorkys' lake; the head was adamantine and the shaft of gold, and with it he killed Odysseus.[47]

The existence of an academic debate is confirmed by a chance turn of phrase in Ptolemaios Chennos, an eclectic first-century CE mythographer: a late summary of his work refers to the phrase as a crux (ἀπορούμενον).[48]

Not only scholars deal with the ambivalence between these alternatives: some Hellenistic poetry also acknowledges the debate. The Hellenistic poem *Alexandra* describes Odysseus' death thus (*Alex*. 793-97):

> … after escaping the shelter of the sea he will die, a wrinkled
> old crow, in combat, near the glades of Neriton.
> A vicious spike will strike his sides and kill him,
> deadly with the sting of a Sardinian fish;
> his progeny will be called his father's murderer …

The poet has it both ways: Odysseus' death is both 'out of the sea,' struck by the ray's sting, and 'away from the sea,' since Odysseus has escaped 'the shelter of the sea,' a kenning for a ship. The *Alexandra* poet carefully refuses to take sides in the Hellenistic scholarly debate.

Of the two interpretations — 'away from the sea,' and 'out of the sea' — the former is suggested by folktale aspects of Teiresias' prophecy in the *Odyssey*. Teiresias has just instructed Odysseus to go on a journey to placate Poseidon, carrying an oar over his shoulder (*Od*. 11.127-34); he will know he has reached his destination when he meets people who do not know the sea or eat salt, and who mistake the oar for a winnowing shovel. This is a standard folktale pattern. Hansen has collected several exemplars of a folktale in which a sailor tires of the sea, travels with an oar, and retires far inland.[49] The tale-type is known as the 'sailor and the oar' story. Modern Greek exemplars are about the retirement of St Elias (Elijah); in one modern North American exemplar, a Yukon inhabitant determines to escape from a life spent in the snow by taking a snow shovel southward

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[46] Sch. V on *Od*. 11.134.

[47] Sch. H, Q on *Od*. 11.134, = *Telegony* fr. 5 West. *Pace* West, ἐντεύξει τῆς Κίρκης is not objective ('a visit to Kirke') but subjective ('a visit by Kirke'): cf. the model of Thetis' visit to Hephaistos in *Iliad* 18; and for objective use we should expect a dative, not genitive, after ἐντεύξει.

[48] Chennos *apud* Phot. *Myriobiblon* cod. 190 150.i.18 (cited by Photios as 'Ptolemaios Hephaistion'). Chennos, with characteristic eccentricity, resolves the crux with yet another different story, in which Odysseus dies in old age after being turned into a horse by the witch Hals, 'sea' (150.i.12-17; cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. math*. 1.267; Servius auctus on *Aen*. 2.44).

[49] Only Hansen has studied the 'sailor and the oar' tale-type in detail; it does not appear in the standard Aarne-Thompson catalogue. See most recently Hansen 2002: 371-78; on narrative time, see Hansen 1990. On the tale as it appears in *Od*. 11, see also Peradotto 1985; Segal 1994: 187-94.

until he reaches a place where no one knows what it is. One striking thing about Hansen's exemplars is that, like Teiresias' prophecy, they are always set in the future or the past: they are never narrated in the present of the primary narrative. Hansen shows that when some modern versions of the story transpose it into the 'present tense,' they do so specifically for a comic effect.

The Telegonos story, however, assumes the 'out of the sea' interpretation. In doing so, it transposes two intrinsically 'future tense' stories — the 'sailor and the oar' story, *and* the story of Odysseus' death — into the 'present tense.' This transposition puts special emphasis on death as a resolution of Odysseus' narrative, just as in *Beowulf*.

It has long been recognised by folklorists (but not generally by classicists) that the Telegonos narrative is a variant of the 'Sohrāb and Rostam' type.[50] In this story, a hero has a son in a distant land (sometimes as a result of a temporary liaison). He leaves a recognition token for his future son, who grows up miraculously quickly. While at play, other children taunt the son, and he asks his mother about his absent father. She gives him instructions, and he goes off in search of his father. They encounter one another, each without realising the other's true identity (one or both may have been warned to avoid the battle), and engage in mortal combat. As one of them lies dying their true identities are revealed, resulting in grief and lamentation. Not all of these motifs appear in the Telegonos legend.

Some of the most important exemplars are: the story of Rostam and Sohrāb in the Persian *Shahnameh*; Hildebrand and Hedubrand in the short Old High German *Hildebrandslied*; Cú Chulainn and Connla in the Irish story *Aided Óenfir Aífe* ('the death of Aífe's only son'); Arjuna and Babhruvāhana in the Indian epic *Mahābhārata*; and, of course, the Greek *Telegony*.[51] Another Indian variant, only recently published, is the story of Arjuna and Nagarjuna in the 'rhinoceros tale' which is still performed in *pāṇḍav līlā* dances all over Garhwal in northern India. It is not simply derived from the Babhruvāhana story, since it features several standard elements that do not appear in the *Mahābhārata* version.[52] More distant variants have been identified in other cultures too, but current thinking has it that the story was originally Indo-European.[53] Usually the father kills his son (Rostam, Hildebrand, Cú Chulainn); in the *Telegony* and the two Indian variants it is the other way round: the son kills the father, and it is striking that the two oldest accounts are in this group.

In fact the correspondences emerge with *three* of Odysseus' sons. Besides Telegonos, we know of a lost play by Sophokles, the *Euryalos*, whose plot has many similarities to the Telegonos story.[54] Odysseus, entertained in Epeiros by Tyrimmas, seduces his daughter Euippe and returns home, leaving her pregnant with Euryalos. When Euryalos is of age his mother sends him to Ithake in search of his father, and gives him recognition tokens to prove his identity. Odysseus is absent at the time, and his wife Penelope finds out the truth and persuades Odysseus on his return that Euryalos is

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[50] The largest single survey of variants is Potter 1902: 6-97 (regrettably not indexed, and missing some of the most important exemplars); cf. Thompson 1955-1958, motif N731.2. For analysis of the story-type see de Vries 1961; Ranero 1997, 1998; see also Ranero on the Irish and Indian variants.

[51] *Shahnameh*: Davis 2006: 187-214. *Hildebrandslied*: Ashliman 1997. *Aided Óenfir Aífe*: Meyer 1904. *Mahābhārata* 14.78-81 (= 14.78-80 Ganguli). *Telegony*: West 2003: 164-71.

[52] Sax 2002: 70-73, reporting the story as told by the loremaster Bacan Singh.

[53] De Vries 1961; Ranero 1998: 123.

[54] No fragments survive; a summary appears in Parth. *Erot. path*. 3 ('Euippe').

a foe; Odysseus duly kills him.[55] The surviving summary hints that the end of the play may have foreshadowed the Telegonos story as well.

With stories like this in mind, and with the cross-cultural parallels, we can see that even the story of Telemachos in the *Odyssey* shares some elements with this narrative, though not to the same extent. Telemachos is a son raised in a distant land (as his name indicates, τηλε- = 'afar') who sets out to find his father; in his case we simultaneously have the inverse of this motif, since Odysseus also travels to his son's birthplace, Ithake. We have the element of initial ignorance of identity: even in the recognition scene at *Od*. 16.171-91, Odysseus conspicuously avoids giving his name.[56] There is no direct conflict between the two, in the sense that they never come to blows, but the poem plays extensively with the theme of rivalry between them, as has been shown very fully by Thalmann.[57]

The table below tabulates parallels between some of the chief exemplars of the story-type.[58] In particular, the table illustrates some elements that are linked to the Telegonos story, but not attested for Eugamon's poem: the role of Telegonos' spear as a recognition tokens appears only in a late source, and only one source reports an obscure story that Kirke used her magic to bring Odysseus back to life. The resurrection motif appears elsewhere only in the two Indian variants.[59] The fact that we rely on relatively late sources for these elements and for the Euryalos story is not an issue, since it is not Eugamon's poem that is the centre of interest here. The point is that this is a story-type that had survived in Greek legend, and that appears in several stories surrounding Odysseus. The resurrection of Odysseus could reasonably be construed as a late attempt to rationalise the Telegonos story, combining it with a conflicting folktale that Odysseus died in old age after Kirke's apprentice Hals transformed him into a horse;[60] but that would only postpone the question over the parallels, not make them disappear. In Euryalos' case the mention of a 'writing-tablet' (δέλτος) is obviously a recent element, and almost certainly invented by Sophokles; even so, that does not mean that the idea of a recognition token was itself untraditional, or unconnected with the story-type.

Between them the stories of Telemachos, Euryalos, and Telegonos play out the three possible endings to the 'Sohrāb and Rostam' story. The conflict between father and son may be resolved without blows (Telemachos); father may kill son (Euryalos); son may kill father (Telegonos). The latter two, and especially the last, are attempts to bring an emphatic closure to the story of Odysseus' life. In Eugamon's *Telegony* the aftermath only increases this emphasis: all the major characters move to Kirke's island and become immortal, Telegonos marries his father's wife, Telemachos marries his father's mistress. This is no longer just a matter of telling the end of Odysseus' life-story: this is closure taken to a fantastic extreme. It is not enough for Odysseus to live happily ever after and die in prosperity. Like Beowulf he must die in battle, and die in old age;

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[55] Cf. Eust. *ad Od*. 1796.50, who reports that in Sophokles' play Euryalos is killed by Telemachos

[56] The naming of Odysseus, or avoidance of his name, is thematically important in the *Odyssey*: see Goldhill 1991: 24-36.

[57] Thalmann 1998: 213-18. For instances of rivalry see e.g. *Od*. 16.299-320 (gentle 'flyting'); 21.124-30 (Telemachos chooses not to best his father in the bow contest); 24.504-15 (Odysseus and Telemachos competing in valour).

[58] Cf. the motif-sequence as analysed by De Vries 1961: 261-65; Ranero 1998: 140-41.

[59] See Ranero 1998: 126. In the *Mahābhārata* Ulūpī (Arjuna's ex-wife, who has pretended to Babhruvāhana that she is his mother) places a magic stone on Arjuna's chest to revive him; in the 'rhinoceros tale' Kunti (mother of Arjuna and ancestress of the Pandavs, rather than Nagarjuna's mother Vasudanta) uses magic herbs (Sax 2002: 73).

[60] See n. 48 above.

TABLE. Variants of the 'Sohrāb and Rostam' story-type in the Homeric *Odyssey*, Sophokles' *Euryalos*, the Telegonos narrative, *Mahābhārata* 14.78-81, the Garhwali 'rhinoceros tale', the *Shahnameh*, and the *Aided Óenfir Aífe*. Round brackets ( ) indicate a motif that is not explicitly attested but is implied by other circumstances. Square brackets [ ] indicate a motif that belongs with the legend but cannot reliably be linked to the specific source cited.

	Telem.	Eury.	Teleg.	Babhr.	Nagar.	Sohrāb	Connl.
Father has son in distant land	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Father, leaving, gives recognition token to mother		(y)	[y][61]		y	y	y
Son grows up miraculously quickly				y	y?[62]	y	y
Son wants to find out about father	y			y	y	y	
Mother gives son instructions (and recognition token)		y	y[63]		y	y	(y)[64]
Variant: son sets off in search of father	y	y	y		y	y	y
father returns to son's birthplace	y			y			
Initial ignorance of identity	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Variant: combat with bow and arrows	y		[?][65]	y	y		
combat in several stages						y	y
Variant: father kills son		y				y	y
son kills father			y	y	y		
Recognition scene by means of token		(y)[66]	([y])[67]			y	
Mother uses magic to revive dead father			[y][68]	y	y		

his death must involve a classic scenario of misrecognition and *peripeteia*, and there has to be a resolution with extravagant permanence — a perfect achievement of equilibrium — with all loose ends tied up, death deferred permanently, and everyone living forever in Neverland married off to one another. There is more than a touch of Gilbert and Sullivan about it, where everyone must be married off at the end of the operetta. This is even more static and permanent than the conclusion given in the *Odyssey* to the story of the Phaiakians: those outlandish people end up staying in their neverlandish utopia, cut off from the rest of the world by a mountain that Poseidon places in their harbour. Isolation, stasis, permanence: these stories end definitively.

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[61] Attested in Diktys of Crete *apud* Septimius 6.15.

[62] Nagarjuna is twelve when he leaves home.

[63] Attested in sch. Opp. *Hal*. 2.497.

[64] Cú Chulainn gives Aífe instructions to pass on to Connla.

[65] In written accounts Telegonos is armed with a magical spear. The sole surviving pictorial depiction of Telegonos (Budapest Mus. Fine Arts 50.101; ca. 400 BCE, Sicilian; = *LIMC* Kirke 54*) shows Kirke giving a bow to him; no spear is visible in the fragment.

[66] The token's role in the recognition scene is implied by its existence. Alternatively the token may have been used to identify Euryalos to Penelope; cf. the 'rhinoceros tale', where the token is used to identify Nagarjuna to Indra.

[67] The token's role in the recognition scene is implied in the Diktys of Crete variant.

[68] Attested in sch. vet. Lyk. *Alex*. 805, 253.28-31 Scbeer; Tz. sch. *Alex*. 805, 254.19-21 Scheer.

In light of the traditional character of the Telegonos story, it is unsustainable to claim that the *Odyssey* poet was simply unaware of it. There is no doubt that the story-*type* existed in Greek culture; indeed Potter cites multiple other instances of it, unrelated to Odysseus.[69] At most it might be objected that the story-type existed, but it was not told *about Odysseus and Telegonos* — but even that seems desperate.

The *Odyssey* may expect a knowledge of this story or it may not. It is at least certain that the Homeric epic keeps quiet about it. As suggested earlier, comparison with *Beowulf* suggests that the *Odyssey* is best seen not as a narrative of heroic achievement, but as a story of escape and reinstatement. From that point of view, the story of Odysseus receives a perfectly thorough resolution. The hero returns home; his household regains legitimacy and stability; he himself has a full restoration of all his functions (domestic, religious, and otherwise). For the *Odyssey*, with that resolution in mind, Odysseus' end will be not just 'gentle' as Teiresias predicts, but perhaps even *uneventful.* It is a story not to be told; it is unconcretised. It has the same relationship to the 'present tense' of the *Odyssey* as does the 'sailor and the oar' folktale analysed by Hansen. As far as the *Odyssey* is concerned, Odysseus never actually does die: his death never quite gets around to taking place.

Final remarks

Two very different epics; two underlying story-types; two views of the relationship between the hero's death and the rest of his life-narrative. *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* share a focus on an individual hero and his story. But many distinctive features emerge from juxtaposing the two: death as destructive in the present, but promising continuity in the future; heroic defiance of death, versus an acceptance of an inevitable but indefinite future. In Beowulf's case, it is the roles played by dragon, hoard, and barrow that are highlighted; in Odysseus' case, it is the negotiability of death, open to different meanings for different writers.

In the introduction, above, it was mentioned that no hero can have a hero-cult without dying. It is exactly because of the vagueness and futurity of Odysseus' death that multiple places laid claim to his grave. In Epeiros, Trampya and the Eurytanian people both laid claim to him, matching not only the Thesprotian episode in Eugamon's *Telegony* but also perhaps Sophokles' *Euryalos*, if that too was a traditional story. At the same time, on the strength of the Telegonos story, the early Etruscans also claimed Odysseus' grave at Cortona in Italy.[70] In *Beowulf*, too, Robinson argues that the excessive attention and elaborateness of Beowulf's funeral is suggestive of hero-cult.[71]

But still more immediately, different deaths give different perspectives on the hero's life-story. By including a 'part two,' the *Beowulf* poet makes the epic a definitive, with an aggressive hero who defies not only monsters but also old age and mortality. For Beowulf selfhood is something that needs to be continually reasserted, up to and including the moment of death. This is one aspect of

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[69] Potter 1902: 59 (Herakles and Zeus), 59-60 (Alexander and Nektanebos), 91-92 (Laios and Oidipous); cf. also modern Greek tales, 75-77 and 84-85.

[70] Epeiros and Aitolia: Arist. fr. 508 Rose; Nikandros *FGrH* 271-72 F 7; Lyk. *Alex*. 799-804; Herodian *De prosod. cath*. 303.7, 382.20-22 Lentz; sch. H *Od*. 11.122; and later sources that are not independent witnesses (Steph. Byz. s.v. Βούν(ε)ιμα and Τραμπύα; sch. vet. *Alex*. 799 and 800; Eust. *ad Od*. 402.26-28 Stallbaum); see further Malkin 1998: 120-55. Cortona: Lyk. *Alex*. 805-11 (site of Odysseus' grave); Theopompos, *FGrH* 115 F 354 (Odysseus founded Cortona); see further Phillips 1953. Notice, incidentally, that once again the *Alexandra* poet has it both ways.

[71] Robinson 1993: 1-19.

Beowulf captured in the 2007 Robert Zemeckis film, where Beowulf roars out his own name while standing on the bodies of sea-monsters he has slain, and again before tearing off Grendel's arm. These are tremendously overblown assertions of self; but one might fairly say that the dragon-fight in the epic, taken as a whole, is doing something similar. Similarly, Odysseus calls out his name *only* during his wanderings (to the Phaiakians, *Od*. 9.16-20; after blinding the Kyklops, 9.502-5); when revealing himself to his family he never uses his name. But a desire for defiance and a more definite resolution still appears: in later poets, who turned his death into another epic; and in later commentators, the *Alexandra* commentary and Malalas, who felt the need to narrate a *Telegony* as well as an *Odyssey* before they could allow themselves to conclude, 'That's the story of Odysseus.'

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