



Oedipus, Odysseus and the Return of Memory¹

Édipo, Odisseu e o retorno da memória²

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ABSTRACT: The analogy between Oedipus and Odysseus is striking and provides an intriguing case of intertextuality once their relationship is investigated through the fascinating links that the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* maintains with the episode of the foot washing of the *Odyssey*, Book 19. I argue that the Homeric Odysseus provided Sophocles with an inspiring model for imitation: A middle-aged man carries on his body a childhood scar of which he has been oblivious for many years. After many years of absence, a homecoming brings with it a return of memory: the traumatic scarification begins to surface. Oedipus' and Odysseus' scars bring home something that has collapsed into forgetfulness. Returning to Auerbach's "Odysseus Scar" the article discusses the scar as a junction of forgetting and remembering and show how Odysseus' memory and Oedipus' forgetfulness are intertwined.

KEYWORDS: Odysseus' scar; Erich Auerbach; *Mimesis*; Analogy; Comparative literature; *Akedah*; Childhood memory; Forgetfulness; *Oedipus Rex*; Repression; Jewish identity

RESUMO: A analogia entre Édipo e Odisseu é impressionante e apresenta um caso interessante de intertextualidade, uma vez que sua relação é investigada a partir dos liames entre o enredo do *Édipo Rei* de Sófocles e o episódio da lavagem dos pés de Odisseu, no Canto XIX. Defendo que o Odisseu homérico forneceu a Sófocles um modelo inspirador para imitação: um homem de meia-idade carrega no seu corpo uma marca de infância da qual se manteve alheio por muitos anos. Após vários anos ausente, o retorno ao lar traz consigo o retorno da memória: a traumática escarificação vem à tona. As cicatrizes de Édipo e Odisseu trazem de volta algo que caíra no esquecimento. Voltando à "Cicatriz de Odisseu" de Auerbach, este artigo aborda a cicatriz como uma junção do esquecimento e da recordação, e mostra como a memória Odisseu e o esquecimento de Édipo estão entrelaçados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cicatriz de Odisseu; Erich Auerbach; *Mimesis*; analogia; Literatura comparada; *Akedah*; memória de infância; esquecimento; *Édipo Rei*; recalque; identidade judaica.

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My thoughts on literary analogies and comparisons began to take shape when, many years ago back in high school, I encountered Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*. In the Israeli high school system of those days, the reading of Auerbach's monumental study mainly concentrated on the book's first chapter, "Odysseus' Scar," which, in comparing the biblical tale of the binding of Isaac and the Homeric episode of the adult Odysseus having his feet washed by his childhood wetnurse, primarily offered us—young Israeli students—an important foil for the story of Isaac. We were asked to follow Auerbach's analysis that emphasized the unique ethical and metaphysical values of the biblical story of the *Akedah* and to notice specifically how Auerbach explains the inner connection between the biblical ethos and its aesthetic form. My early impression of Auerbach's first chapter was thus that the biblical story is valorized and privileged in comparison to the Homeric tale. In class the latter was somehow left behind, remaining unexplored and, in fact, excluded from the scope of our study. To you, my story might seem strange, as it probably should. How can a literary gem, the famous passage of Book 19 of the *Odyssey* describing the washing of Odysseus' feet, a passage that has become an iconic scene of recognition in the history of European literature, be obfuscated and almost suppressed by over-sensitive attention to the biblical tale?

It was clear to me, even back then, that there is something missing in our high-school reading. The interpretation of Auerbach's analogy was not fully exhausted. What bothered me in the first place was a certain contradiction, or rather an inconsistency between Auerbach's apparent endorsement of the superiority of the biblical representation and his fascination with the Homeric washing episode, a fascination which declares itself in the name of the chapter: "Odysseus' Scar." If the biblical story is the gravitational center of the chapter, why isn't it reflected in the title? Why "Odysseus' Scar" and not something like "The Sacrifice of Isaac"?

Auerbach is known as one of the founding fathers of the field of comparative literature. And yet today, following the readings of James Porter and others, we know that his comparative study is not simply the theoretical work of a comparativist.⁴ The analogy between Isaac and Odysseus can be read as a response to the politics, the cultural crisis, of his times and furthermore hides a personal identity conflict: Auerbach, a Jewish refugee in Istanbul—escaping the horrors of the Second World War—is torn and ambivalent about his cultural identity as a European Jew. Analogies are essential for the historical narrative of development constructed by Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Indeed the Odysseus-Isaac analogy points to a critical difference, exposing a cultural divide. The analogy contrasts the Asiatic Homeric style with the Old Testament narrative and its

⁴ PORTER, 2008, pp. 115-147.

Jewish-European reception, and concomitantly separates Odysseus from Isaac. The Homeric and biblical pair demonstrates two antithetically mythical and cultural paradigms. And yet, analogies do not only make distinctions, they also unite, join, juxtapose and point to similarities. Thus, Auerbach's act of distinguishing the story of Isaac from the story of Odysseus covers up ideas that *Mimesis* shows no awareness of. Interestingly Auerbach remains silent about the salient relation between the two stories. His analogy evokes ambiguities. Despite its manifest declaration, the first chapter of *Mimesis* proves that the two different stories have actually much in common. Auerbach's comparative method, thus, operates similarly to the unconscious.⁵ Just like a spontaneous thought, the linking of Odysseus to Isaac juxtaposes different things without monitoring their hidden inner relations. How are Isaac and Odysseus similar?

Both heroes suffer from a childhood trauma related to a paternal figure. Both are scarred heroes, whose childhood memories are keys for deciphering the heroes' torn and ambivalent identities. We should notice, however, that Auerbach remains silent about Isaac's traumatic childhood experience. Moreover, unlike the story of Odysseus' scar, Isaac's scar did not leave a literal, physical mark on his body. And yet the scar is part of the sacrifice narrative, since etiologically it might be related to the presence of a symbolic scar on the male Jewish body. The heritage of circumcision can be understood as commemorating the mythical event of the Akedah⁶ These points of similarity, however, are left unrecognized in Auerbach's comparison. Auerbach's analysis denies the relevance of what makes Isaac a heroic counterpart of Odysseus. Something is therefore missing from Auerbach's comparison and that missing element is precisely the link between, or logic behind the linking of the two stories. We need therefore to inquire about the similarity and affinity between Isaac and Odysseus which Auerbach seems to ignore. The missing element that can illuminate just how similar the biblical Isaac and the Homeric Odysseus are is to be found in the third mythical Greek figure: Oedipus.

Oedipus and Odysseus have much in common. They both suffered a great injury in their childhood. These traumatic childhood events left marks on their bodies. The scars appear as means of identification for those who know Oedipus and Odysseus from childhood. In turning to these scars as sites of a distant past, the stories of Oedipus and Odysseus reveal their complex relation to this past. Remembering and forgetfulness are thus entangled in Oedipus' and Odysseus' narratives.⁷ The scar episode (19. 361-475) depicts a highly dramatic event in the plot of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus has at last come home after twenty years of absence, a stranger at home. Penelope requests Eurycleia, Odysseus' old nurse, to wash his feet. While Eurycleia

⁵ For a comprehensive discussion on the relation of analogy to the language of the unconscious see Vered Lev Kenaan. *The Ancient Unconscious: Psychoanalysis and Classical Texts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

⁶ On Auerbach's reading of the biblical Akedah in conjunction and in opposition to the Homeric wounded Odysseus, Shahr, 2011, pp. 604-630.

⁷ There is much to say about the connection between the story of the scar and the story of trauma as narratives of a belated experience. See Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

prepares the water for the basin, Odysseus suddenly moves to the darkness lest his old nurse recognize him by the scar on his feet. But in the darkness, while washing his feet, Eurycleia touches the scar with her hands. At this intense moment, the Homeric narrator, as Auerbach so aptly observes, brings the story to a halt. This is done precisely at the moment when the listeners are most eager to hear how Eurycleia will respond upon recognizing Odysseus and whether her reaction will publicly expose Odysseus. But instead of relieving the audience's curiosity and meeting their concerns, the narrator turns instead to describe at leisure two episodes from Odysseus' early life: the story of Odysseus' naming immediately after his birth, and the story of the boar hunt.

Auerbach is reluctant to understand the two childhood episodes as examples of Homeric childhood memory. He does not think of these two episodes as moments of recollection. According to Auerbach, these two episodes cannot be seen as memories because they are not subordinate to a singular perspective.⁸ Moreover, in bringing these past events into the foreground, their typical Homeric lucidity, visibility and uniform completeness in respect to details, disqualifies them from consideration as recollections. In contrast to representations of remembrance, Odysseus' childhood episodes render psychological processes without leaving things hidden and unexpressed.⁹ Auerbach writes in conclusion: "the Homeric style knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present:

Any such subjectivistic–perspectivistic procedure, creating a foreground and background, resulting in the present lying open to the depth of the past, is entirely foreign to the Homeric style; the Homeric style knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present.¹⁰

In other words, Auerbach's refusal to ascribe the Homeric scar episode a perspectival depth typical of subjective memory is tied to his disregard for the thematic relations between the Homeric and the biblical episodes. Auerbach not only refuses to hear in Odysseus' childhood episodes a subjective flow of associations, but he also brackets, or perhaps undermines, even forgets, the traumatic effect that the episode of the sacrifice has on the child Isaac and the way it shaped his childhood memories. Auerbach's resistance to relate these ancient narratives structures of recollection can be disarmed when considering Isaac's and Odysseus' episodes in comparison with the tragic Oedipus. More specifically, it is in light of Sophocles' elaboration and adaptation of the Homeric scar episode that the figures of Isaac and Odysseus become interrelated.

⁸ Such a subordination was deliberately avoided: "It would have been perfectly easy to do; the story of the scar had only to be inserted two verses earlier, at the first mention of the word scar, where the motifs "Odysseus" and "recollection" were already at hand" (AUERBACH, 1974, p. 7.).

⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

Oedipus Rex is a text founded on erasure and repression. Its protagonist, unlike Odysseus, suffers from memory lapses. The signs of the old wound engraved on Oedipus' infant body are an obscure example of repression. We are then dealing with a reminder of a traumatic event, an event that could not be fully grasped by the infant as it occurred. What is there to remember of an event belonging to infancy? What does Oedipus the adult remember of the founding event undergone by him as a newborn? What memory remains of his parents abandoning him, and what do the signs of the perforation of his feet by his father remind him of? The cruel act of scarification endures as marks on Oedipus' body, but their significance, the once vivid experience, is completely removed from his remembering consciousness. Only at a later stage of the play is Oedipus compelled to remember what has already been erased and blurred. This is of course not a simple case of recollection. The case of an injured infant is particularly complicated and cannot embrace a strict divide between forgetting and remembering.¹¹ The event belongs to such an early stage in life that is immemorable to begin with.

The interplay between forgetfulness and remembering that is my concern here takes place in Oedipus' adulthood and does not involve the primal experience of trauma. It has to do rather with Oedipus' inclination to forget the existence of the scar, which demonstrates how for him the scar is an unpleasant reminder of an unknown past:

Messenger

But your saviour, child, in that hour.

Oedipus

And what was my pain when you took me in your arms?

Messenger

The ankles of your feet might bear witness.

Oedipus

Ah me, why do you speak of that old calamity?

Messenger

I freed you when you had your ankles pinned together.

Oedipus

It was a dreadful shame that I took from my infant's swaddling clothes.¹²

¹¹ In the case of an infant victim the experience of trauma involves "latency", a Freudian term that, as Cathy Caruth explains, "is the period which the effects of the experience are not apparent", and she adds: "The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself." See CARUTH, 1996, p. 17.

¹² Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 1030-5. Tr. Storr with my amendments.

Ἄγγελος
 σοῦ τ', ὦ τέκνον, σωτήρ γε τῷ τότε ἐν χρόνῳ.
 Οἰδίπους
 τί δ' ἄλλος ἴσχοντ' ἀγκάλαις με λαμβάνεις;
 Ἄγγελος
 ποδῶν ἂν ἄρθρα μαρτυρήσειεν τὰ σά:
 Οἰδίπους
 οἴμοι, τί τοῦτ' ἀρχαῖον ἐννέπεις κακόν;
 Ἄγγελος
 λύω σ' ἔχοντα διατόρους ποδοῖν ἀκμάς.
 Οἰδίπους
 δεινόν γ' ὄνειδος σπαργάνων ἀνειλόμην.

When the messenger directs Oedipus' gaze to his feet as evidence of his real identity, Oedipus responds in horror, betraying thus his denial, the temporary forgetfulness of the scarred feet that have become an integral component of his being: "Why do you speak of that old calamity?" Oedipus' language unknowingly gives expression to a prelingual experience. He names the originally unnamed: *kakón*, that is, evil or calamity. He intensifies the oldness of the scar: *arkhaíon kakón*.¹³ The scar signifies for Oedipus a place beyond the memorable. Thus, the reminder of the immemorable means a turn backwards, expressed in Oedipus' regression. This is the moment when Oedipus is addressed by the messenger as a child, *ho téknon*. Intense feelings of fear and shame emerge as the symptoms of his regression. Oedipus' fear and shame do not reflect moral responsibility for the horrible deed of the past, the event of unwittingly killing his father. Fear and shame arise, strangely, in relation to a traumatic infantile experience of which Oedipus is completely oblivious and which now returns.

In seeing the scars as ancient (archaic), Oedipus seems to excuse his forgetfulness. He seems to be saying that forgetting signs from a remote past is only to be expected.¹⁴ And yet the implied equation between ancient and forgotten as two different modes of referring to a remote event bears a trace of negation. Oedipus' silence about his punctured ankles is particularly remarkable in the light of Jocasta's testimony.¹⁵ How is it that the memory of his injured feet is not reawakened when Jocasta tells Oedipus that Laius pierced his baby's ankles immediately after

¹³ Ibid 1033. Another example of temporal exaggeration is *palaiás aitías*, *ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴ Oedipus' use of hyperbolic language is an expression of his unconscious. Characterizing the scar as *arkhaíon* or describing the crime as *palaiás* (Sophocles *O.R.* 109) allows Oedipus to take distance from it. These *adýnata* reflect Oedipus' self-alienation and are symptoms of a repression mechanism.

¹⁵ On the basis of line 1031 Dawe argues that "Sophocles intended his Oedipus to know about his pierced feet. If so," he continues, "he ought to have latched on to the vital clue given him by Jocasta at 717-19...but Sophoclean characters in other plays besides this one seem at times to suffer from dramatically convenient transitory amnesia." Dawe seems to take Oedipus' pathological manifestations of amnesia as dramatic manipulation.

birth?¹⁶ What does his forgetfulness of his scars mean then? Although many readers do not attribute an unconscious to the mythical Oedipus,¹⁷ Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is founded on forgetting and repression.¹⁸ The focus on forgetting the scarred feet has, however, first and foremost to do with Oedipus' name and identity. The scars on his ankles provide fixed answers to the future questions "who are you?" and "where are you from?" But denial of the existence of the scars persists throughout the play.

A scar is an old sign, a wound that has scabbed over and became fused with the skin surface. A scar is a junction of forgetting and remembering. In the *Odyssey*, the scar has a mnemonic function in the recognition scene. The Homeric scar is a *séma*, which etymologically connects the sign to a thought, *nóos*, and to a homecoming, *nóstos*.¹⁹ The scar brings home something that has collapsed into forgetfulness. Thus, Odysseus' scar triggers a homecoming through a digression:

So said he, and the old woman grabbed the gleaming basin
she washed feet with, poured a lot of water in it,
cold water, then poured the hot on top. Then Odysseus
sat at the hearth, but suddenly turned toward darkness,
at once, for in his heart he was suspicious, lest in taking hold of him
she'd take notice of his scar and his deeds would be discovered.
She came near and washed her lord. She knew at once
the scar, that a pig inflicted on him with its white tooth
when he'd gone to Parnassus...²⁰

ὥς ἄρ' ἔφη, γρηῦς δὲ λέβηθ' ἔλε παμφανώοντα
τοῦ πόδας ἐξαπένιζεν, ὕδωρ δ' ἐνεχεύατο πουλὺ
ψυχρόν, ἔπειτα δὲ θερμὸν ἐπήφυσεν. αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ἴζεν ἐπ' ἐσχαρόφιν, ποτὶ δὲ σκότον ἐτράπητ' αἴψα:
αὐτίκα γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ὄϊσατο, μὴ ἔλαβοῦσα
οὐλήν ἀμφράσσαιτο καὶ ἀμφαδὰ ἔργα γένοιτο.
νίζε δ' ἄρ' ἄσσον ἰοῦσα ἄναχθ' ἐόν: αὐτίκα δ' ἔγνω
οὐλήν, τὴν ποτέ μιν σῦς ἤλασε λευκῶ ὀδόντι
Παρνησιόνδ' ἐλθόντα

¹⁶ Sophocles *O.R.* 718.

¹⁷ See for example, Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Oedipus without the Complex," in VERNANT & VIDAL-NAQUET, 1988, pp. 85-112.

¹⁸ The mechanism of repression protects Oedipus and Jocasta, for as soon as the memory of the trauma penetrates their conscious memories it causes an uncontrollable outburst of violence towards themselves: Jocasta hangs herself, and Oedipus blinds himself. I am grateful to Noga Weiss for this observation.

¹⁹ On the relationship between *séma*, *nóos*, and *nóstos* see NAGY, 1990, pp. 202-222.

²⁰ *Od.* 19. 386-394 (tr. James Huddleston).

Odysseus succumbs to the encounter with his old nurse, Eurycleia, an encounter uniting the strange and the familiar, the past and the present. Just before she washes his feet, Eurycleia notices that the stranger bears a striking likeness to Odysseus: “I’ve never seen anyone who was so like him as you are like Odysseus in form and voice and feet” (19: 380–381). This triad with its crescendo specifying the feet, not the form or the voice, shows the feet to be the primary site of identification and recognition. The encounter with the feet, though, is not immediate; it takes time, and happens in stages. The existence of the scar hovers, appears not as an object of thought, but as involuntary recollection, an echo from the past. (No sooner has the scar made a flimsy impression in memory than Odysseus, turning away from the fireside, manages to conceal it in the darkness (*Od.* 19.390–391). The scar is hidden as soon as it becomes an object of thought. Consequently, when the scar figures as a physical and tangible object in the sensual field of experience, it summons the memory of its creation (*Od.* 19.393) Only when the scar is present as an object integral to the body, current and tangible, does it, when touched, awaken the memory of its creation, and resuscitate the child’s experience.

Indeed, as Auerbach shows, the emergence of the scar brings about a digression. For Auerbach it means that the narrated past “fill[s] the present entirely.”²¹ The fusion of the past with the present, which for Auerbach is inherent to the structure of the Homeric digression, explains in our context its connectedness to the peculiar, temporal structure of psychoanalytic regression: the Homeric digression is a return to an earlier state, and the digression of Book 19 is a reenactment of an infantile memory. When Auerbach describes how the detailed digressive narrative wins the reader over, making her forget what had just taken place during the foot-washing, he has the aged Eurycleia and the middle-aged Odysseus vanish from the stage and make room for their past selves: the young Eurycleia and the baby Odysseus. Thus, Auerbach’s characterization invites a reading of the Homeric digression as a regression.

Something vanishes from the foot-washing scene and allows an old memory to take its place. The current setting makes room for a primal scene, and the present dissolves into the past. To understand the mnemonic affect of the Homeric footbath episode, and especially its complex form of temporality, we need to attend closely to the sound of the splashing water. We need to attend to the mixing of cold water with the hot as they fill the slippery basin. The water filling the basin brings up an association, or even a blurry memory, of a womb-like place, the place of fetal growth, out of which a baby will emerge into the light of the world. Odysseus’ intimate proximity to his nurse, his eagerness to have his feet bathed in her old hands, not only accelerates the imaginary birth of a baby but also allows the memory to break through. The extrication of memory is connected to the reconstruction of a past custom and its translation into the present: The picture of old Eurycleia preparing the footbath reenacts a daily ritual from Odysseus’ early childhood and youth: she behaves now as she did then, when she used to bathe

²¹ AUERBACH, 1974, p. 4.

the child and in time, the young man of the household. The focus on the everyday actions of the old woman is what sparks involuntary thoughts of the scar on his feet, as if they were suddenly brought out of the depths of forgetfulness.

In the *Odyssey*, the discovery of the scar awakens two very early and related childhood memories. The first has to do with Odysseus' birth in Ithaca, while the second brings back an event from Odysseus' puberty, on Mount Parnassus where his maternal grandfather lived. Bringing these memories to the foreground, Auerbach argues, depends on the digressive movement produced by discovery of the scar. The narrator tells a story known to Odysseus since childhood. Eurycleia would have often recited it to him. His mother's father, Autolycus, was visiting the palace in Ithaca when the news of his grandson's birth was conveyed to him. With Autolycus present, the wet-nurse, Eurycleia, took the infant on her lap for him to receive his name. The grandfather promised that when the baby was grown and came to visit him on Mount Parnassus, he would give him many presents. This memory revives two aspects of Odysseus' identity: the domesticated and the wild. On the island of Ithaca, surrounded by the sea, at home, in a woman's warm lap, he receives his name from his savage grandfather—Odysseus, meaning "the angry one". The grandfather, a man of the wild mountains who lives with his tough hunter sons on Mount Parnassus, makes a surprise visit and places his mark on the future of the baby even while he is peacefully and contentedly nursing, giving him a name and a promise. It is a memory of a meaningful connection between grandson and grandfather. These memories (like free associations) weave a tangled connection between a number of points of view in the present and past. The infant memory of Odysseus is inseparable from memories of his puberty, and the memory of visiting Parnassus is connected to Odysseus' present perspective on Ithaca as a stranger in his own home. The scar's very coming to light means that this complex tangle of temporal layers is woven together. The Homeric text links the two signs, the scar and Odysseus' name, and thus presents their different occurrences in the past as interrelated. In Freudian dream terminology, the event of the scar and the event of naming are superimposed.

Having reached puberty, Odysseus first travelled away from his parents' home, to his grandfather's abode in the mountains "so he'd give him splendid gifts" (19.413). This journey, the fulfillment of an old promise by a distant grandfather, also the fulfillment of a grandchild's wish, turns out to be a ruthless initiation, whose impressions are to be repressed in the mind of Odysseus the adult. The memory of the journey contains a difficult (and repressed) scene that was compensated by the grandfather's desirable gifts. Receiving the gifts turns out to be conditional on proving Odysseus' manhood. The initiation ceremony, especially from a modern point of view, involves severe abuse by the men of the family. There is nothing pleasant in the memory of the test of masculinity that awaits Odysseus on his arrival at the house of his grandfather and his wild uncles. The boy that bursts onto the stage of Odysseus' memory is fresh from the protective feminine environment of his mother and his nurse. On the face of it, the encounter between Odysseus the youth and his mother's family is described as a celebration,

but it is impossible not to get a different and frightening impression, through the child's eyes, a point of view which only a regression can bring to life. It is certainly the experience of Odysseus the man-child that is reenacted now, on Ithaca decades later. The boy is sent to a strange place to meet a group of bold men he doesn't know. Memory uncovers a wild site that for the modern reader resonates with what Freud in *Totem and Taboo* identifies as a primordial experience. In the child's point of view, as it is now reconstructed in the Homeric text, he takes part in a feast centered on the cruel killing of a five-year-old ox. The slaughter is described in detail, but unlike other descriptions of sacrifice in Homeric poetry, here the description is subordinate to the point of view of a small child who watches the slaughter in terror: the animal is flayed and cut up at the centre of the circle of uncles, who take and roast their shares on skewers (19.420–427). In the morning, the test of the boy's masculinity reaches a crescendo when he joins a wild-boar hunt. The men reach the dark thick of the forest, where the eye of Helios the sun god never glances:

A big pig was lying down there, in a thick lair,
through which the fury of the winds, blowing wetly, did not blow,
nor did the shining sun strike it with his rays,
nor did the rain pierce through it, through and through, it was so thick,
but there was a pile of leaves, a really big one, in it. (*Od.* 19. 439–443)

ἐνθα δ' ἄρ' ἐν λόχῃ πυκνῇ κατέκειτο μέγας σῶς:
τὴν μὲν ἄρ' οὔτ' ἀνέμων διάει μένος ὑγρὸν ἀέντων,
οὔτε μιν Ἥλιος φαέθων ἀκτῖσιν ἔβαλλεν,
οὔτ' ὄμβρος περάσσκε διαμπερές: ὥς ἄρα πυκνὴ
ἦεν, ἀτὰρ φύλλων ἐνέην χύσις ἥλιθα πολλή.

It is here that the child is brought, where he tries to prove that he is worthy of belonging to the society of hunters. He hurls the lance, killing the boar, but not before it has torn his leg, leaving him wounded and bleeding. The child is sent home only after his grandfather and uncles have healed him. Back at his parents' home they want to know the meaning of the wound, testimony to a fresh memory, the story still easily told (19.444–466).²² These two memories of infancy and youth are intertwined and don't allow a simple linear telling of a sequential narrative from one point of view.

The analogy between Oedipus and Odysseus can be productive once we begin to explore the intertextual links between the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and the foot-washing episode of *Odyssey* 19. The Homeric Odysseus provided Sophocles with an inspiring model for imitation: in both narratives a middle-aged man lives with the bodily manifestation of an early wound—a childhood scar—of which he has been oblivious for many years. After many years of

²² Lillian Doherty reads the boar hunt as a “mise en abyme in that it recapitulates in a single adventure the essential elements of Odysseus' entire ‘career.’” See *Siren Songs: Gender, Audiences, and Narratives in the Odyssey* (1995, p. 156).

absence, a homecoming brings with it a return of memory: the traumatic scarification begins to surface. Similar connections surface as we explore Auerbach's analogy. When Auerbach compares Odysseus' scar to the binding of Isaac, his disparagement of Homer's "Asiatic style" cannot quench (or conceal) his fascination with the scar episode. Moreover, it opens his own comparative analysis to the possibility of reflecting a subjectivist-perspectivist approach. Auerbach's modern condition is opened to the archaic memory of the son's planned sacrifice. When we reconsider how his analysis conceals the similarities between Isaac and Odysseus, how it ignores their Oedipal connection, Auerbach's comparative analysis discloses its depth perspective. Although Auerbach keeps his silence about the inner relations between the two mythical and culturally separate protagonists, these relations stimulate the memory of his own personal scars. There, in Istanbul, closer now to the ancient and mythical landscape of both Isaac and Odysseus, Auerbach's painful memory as a middle-aged Jewish scholar, a refugee from Europe, is awakened.

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