

The House of Odysseus

Succession, Stewardship, and the Kingdom of the Family

By Dylan McGuinty, Jr.

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“So long as my father was here it was well with us and with the house.”

The crisis at the beginning of *The Odyssey* is usually described as the absence of Odysseus. That is true, but incomplete. Odysseus has been absent for twenty years, first at Troy and then upon the sea. Yet Homer presents his absence not merely as the disappearance of a man. It is the disappearance of an ordering principle. A king is missing; a husband is missing; a father is missing; an owner is missing; and, perhaps most importantly, the person who joins one generation to another is missing. Ithaca therefore suffers simultaneously from political disorder, domestic disorder, economic waste, and uncertainty of succession.

These are not separate problems. They are different manifestations of the same problem.

The household of Odysseus possesses wealth. It has land, cattle, sheep, wine, servants, buildings, implements, stores, memories, relationships, customs, obligations, and a name. What it lacks is settled authority concerning how all these things are to pass from yesterday through today into tomorrow. The result is not merely uncertainty. It is consumption.

The suitors eat.

That recurring image is among the most important in the opening books of the poem. They slaughter the livestock. They drink the wine. They occupy the hall. They consume what they did not create and what they have no intention of transmitting. They inhabit the present as though there were neither ancestors behind them nor descendants before them. Their offence is therefore deeper than gluttony. It is a philosophy of time. They treat inherited things as available things.

Telemachus gradually learns to see the opposite truth: an inheritance is not merely something one receives. It is something entrusted to one.

In Book I he explains that while his father was present, “it was well with us and with the house”; now the leading men of the islands are “eating up my house,” making havoc of the estate and threatening eventually to destroy Telemachus himself. ([Scaife ATLAS](#)) In Book II he makes the connection still more explicit: while he was a child, the suitors wasted his possessions; now that he has grown and begun to understand, he will act. ([Scaife ATLAS](#))

There is an entire philosophy of succession contained in that movement from childhood to understanding.

For succession requires a successor.

And a successor must become capable of receiving what is handed down.

The Odyssey can therefore be read not only as a poem of *nostos*—homecoming—but as a poem of inheritance. Odysseus must return home, certainly. But Telemachus must become the sort of man to whom a home can be returned. The restoration of Ithaca requires both movements: the return of the father and the emergence of the son.

Between them stands the house.

And the house—*oikos*—is far more than real estate.

It is wealth and memory, authority and affection, ancestry and posterity, land and livestock, marriage and children, hospitality and worship, reputation and obligation. It is simultaneously material and immaterial. Its material goods sustain its human goods; its human goods give meaning to its material goods.

Seen in this light, Homer offers a profound philosophy of succession. Property is necessary, but property is not the ultimate thing inherited. What passes between generations is a way of inhabiting the world.

The estate exists so that the inheritance can live.

I. The Kingdom Within the Kingdom

The modern imagination tends to divide life into categories that Homer would have found difficult to separate. There is politics, family, economics, religion, property, education, inheritance. In *The Odyssey*, these things overlap.

Odysseus is king of Ithaca, but he is also master of a household. His authority radiates outward from the household into the kingdom. The disorder of Ithaca consequently appears first as disorder in his home.

This is significant.

The suitors do not begin by storming a palace in the manner of revolutionaries. They enter as guests. They exploit hospitality. They remain. They consume. They gradually transform permission into entitlement.

The political crisis begins at the dinner table.

The household may therefore be understood as a kingdom within a kingdom.

But the image can be extended further. Every family is, in a limited sense, a small kingdom: not because parents are despots or children subjects in a political sense, but because a family is an ordered community extending through time. It has authority, responsibilities, common goods, memories, property, customs, stories and expectations. It receives something from predecessors and owes something to successors.

Families themselves then exist within larger families: neighbourhoods, communities, professions, churches, cities, peoples, nations and civilizations. We inhabit kingdoms within kingdoms, families within families.

The individual therefore never truly begins with himself.

Before he can speak, a language has been given to him. Before he can reason, concepts have been handed down. Before he can remember, others remember for him. Before he can earn property, roads, institutions, laws, markets and communities already exist. Before he can form his identity, there is already a name.

Inheritance precedes choice.

This does not mean that inheritance determines everything. Telemachus must choose what he will do with his inheritance. Indeed, the drama exists precisely because inheritance requires choice. But one can choose only after something has been received.

The fundamental moral question of succession is therefore not simply:

What have I inherited?

It is:

What shall I do with what has been entrusted to me?

II. The Missing King

The opening condition of Ithaca is neither outright revolution nor settled government. It is something more subtle: suspended authority.

Odysseus may be alive. He may be dead.

Penelope may still be his wife. She may be a widow.

Telemachus may be the son of the reigning king. He may be the heir of a dead one.

The house therefore exists in a prolonged interregnum.

This uncertainty matters because authority has become detached from responsibility. The suitors possess enough social power to consume the king's resources but accept none of the obligations of kingship.

They want the feast without stewardship.

They desire Penelope partly because marriage to her offers a path to the household and perhaps to political authority. Yet their behaviour demonstrates their unfitness to inherit either. They seek succession by consuming the thing to which they hope to succeed.

This is succession inverted.

The good successor receives an inheritance, preserves it, develops it and eventually transmits it. The suitor consumes an inheritance before he has even received it.

Homer makes the distinction visible in food.

Food is ordinarily one of the great symbols of civilization in *The Odyssey*. Hospitality requires feeding strangers. Feasts unite communities. Sacrifice joins human society to divine order. The civilized household produces enough abundance that some of it can be given away.

But generosity depends upon ownership, measure and reciprocity.

The suitors transform hospitality into parasitism. They take a virtue designed to sustain community and use it to destroy the community that sustains the virtue.

This is one of the poem's deepest observations about disorder: corruption frequently begins not by abolishing a good institution but by severing its privileges from its obligations.

Hospitality without reciprocity becomes exploitation.

Authority without duty becomes tyranny.

Property without stewardship becomes consumption.

Inheritance without succession becomes waste.

Freedom without order becomes licence.

And kingship without justice becomes merely power.

III. "They Are Eating Up My House"

The genius of Telemachus's complaint lies in its concreteness.

The crisis of civilization appears as disappearing sheep.

The suitors are not debating constitutional theory. They are eating dinner.

Yet Telemachus understands that every slaughtered ox is part of something larger. The animals belong to an economic ecology extending across generations. Herds reproduce. Land sustains herds. Servants tend them. Households depend upon them. Hospitality is financed by them. Children inherit them.

A herd is therefore both present wealth and future wealth.

To consume it without replenishment is to consume the future.

Telemachus tells the Ithacan assembly that his father's house is approaching "utter ruin" because the suitors continually sacrifice its oxen, sheep and goats and consume its wine. ([Scaife ATLAS](#)) Later, he tells Antinous that the suitors had wasted his possessions while he was still a child. ([Scaife ATLAS](#))

The word *child* matters.

The suitors' opportunity arises because the successor is immature.

This gives the first books their peculiar structure. Athena does not simply arrange Odysseus's return. She educates Telemachus.

Before the inheritance can be secured, the heir must mature.

This suggests a principle extending far beyond Homer:

The preservation of an inheritance depends upon the formation of the inheritor.

No estate plan can ultimately solve the problem of succession if the successor has not learned what the inheritance is for.

One can transmit a cottage but not attachment to the place.

One can transmit books but not literacy.

One can transmit a business but not industry.

One can transmit investments but not prudence.

One can transmit a family name but not honour.

One can transmit a house but not a home.

The legal instrument transfers title. Culture transfers meaning.

A successful succession requires both.

IV. Waste

Here Homer comes surprisingly close to one of the enduring concerns of property and trust law: waste.

The legal doctrine and Homer's moral imagination should not be treated as identical. They arise from different institutions and historical circumstances. But their underlying intuitions illuminate one another.

The traditional law of waste addresses the problem created when one person possesses or enjoys property while another possesses a future or reversionary interest in it. The person presently enjoying the property cannot always treat it as though no tomorrow existed. The law therefore recognizes a tension built into temporally divided ownership: present possession may injure future enjoyment.

The old categories included voluntary waste, permissive waste and, in equity, what came to be called equitable waste. The latter developed through Chancery's intervention against particularly flagrant destructive conduct even where the holder might otherwise have been protected from ordinary liability for waste. ([CanLII](#))

The jurisprudential intuition is remarkable.

Property has a temporal dimension.

Someone can wrong another person who does not yet possess the property by destroying the substance of what that person is entitled eventually to receive.

This is almost precisely the moral structure of Ithaca.

The suitors possess present enjoyment without legitimate future title. They consume the capital of the house while Telemachus's future interest hangs uncertainly before him.

They eat tomorrow.

The phrase captures something that accounting language sometimes obscures. Waste is not merely diminution in value. It is the consumption of futurity.

The prudent steward therefore asks a question the consumer does not:

What must remain after me?

That question lies at the heart of trust law as well. Ontario's *Trustee Act*, for example, requires a trustee investing trust property to exercise the "care, skill, diligence and judgment" of a prudent investor. The statute expressly requires consideration of liquidity, income, preservation or appreciation of capital and even an asset's special relationship or special value to the purposes of the trust or its beneficiaries. ([Ontario](#))

That final consideration is especially interesting when placed beside Homer.

Property can have a value not captured by its market price.

A family farm may be worth a certain amount as acreage and something different as the place where generations lived.

A house may have an appraised value and another value as home.

A painting may have auction value and ancestral significance.

A family business may represent capital but also vocation, reputation, employment, relationships and community.

Even modern fiduciary law therefore contains, however cautiously, an acknowledgment that property may bear a special relationship to the purposes for which it is held.

Homer would have understood immediately.

V. The Trustee and the King

The comparison between an estate trustee and a king must be made carefully.

An estate trustee is not a sovereign. Beneficiaries are not subjects. Modern fiduciary law deliberately constrains personal discretion through law, accounting, judicial supervision and enforceable duties.

Yet precisely because the analogy is imperfect, it can reveal something important.

Both offices concern power exercised over things that are not simply one's own for the sake of others and according to an order that precedes the office-holder.

A good king does not own the kingdom in the manner in which a person owns a chair.

A good trustee does not beneficially own the trust property merely because legal title may be vested in the trustee.

In each case, possession is burdened by purpose.

The distinction between possession and beneficial entitlement is one of equity's great moral insights. To have control of something does not necessarily mean that one may use it for oneself.

The fiduciary stands in a position of power precisely so that another may benefit.

Kingship, at its best, contains a similar logic.

The crown is elevated not merely for privilege but for service. Authority is justified by the common good toward which it is ordered. A king who treats the kingdom as personal consumption confuses office with ownership.

So does a trustee who treats trust property as his own.

The corrupt king and the faithless trustee therefore commit structurally similar errors: each converts entrusted authority into personal appetite.

The suitors are worse still. They exercise de facto control without accepting fiduciary responsibility at all.

They possess power without office.

VI. Beneficiaries and Subjects

There is a corresponding analogy between beneficiaries and subjects, though again it must not be pressed literally.

A beneficiary is not merely passive.

Trust law gives beneficiaries interests capable of enforcement. The trustee's authority exists in relation to those interests. The office therefore creates interdependence.

Without trusteeship, beneficial interests may lack administration.

Without beneficiaries or purposes, trusteeship loses its object.

Similarly, political authority exists for a community. The king is not the kingdom. The people are not merely raw material upon which kingship operates. Authority and community exist in reciprocal relation.

Homer repeatedly shows this through Odysseus's memory.

His greatness is not merely that he possesses Ithaca. His conduct toward Ithacans is remembered. In Book IV, Penelope rebukes the suitors by recalling what they had heard from their fathers about Odysseus: he had not behaved unjustly toward their parents, as kings might favour one person and hate another. ([Scaife ATLAS](#))

The memory of good rule passes from parents to children.

That fact is devastating to the suitors.

Their fathers benefited from Odysseus's order; their sons consume Odysseus's house.

One generation received justice.

The next answers with ingratitude.

Succession therefore concerns obligations flowing in both directions through time.

We owe gratitude backward.

We owe stewardship forward.

VII. Telemachus and the Education of an Heir

Telemachus is initially an heir in law and blood but not yet in character.

This is why his journey matters.

He travels not primarily to acquire property but to acquire memory.

He visits Nestor.

He visits Menelaus.

He hears stories of his father.

He discovers Odysseus through the testimony of others.

The journey is therefore genealogical.

Telemachus must learn who his father was in order to understand who he himself might become.

Athena's task is not simply to give him information. It is to awaken him to inheritance.

At the beginning, Telemachus lives amid the remains of his father's world but lacks confidence in his relationship to it. He tells Athena that his mother says Odysseus is his father, but he cannot truly know it himself. ([Scaife ATLAS](#))

This is a profound statement of the problem of tradition.

Every generation initially receives its inheritance on testimony.

We do not witness our origins.

Someone tells us our family history.

Someone teaches us our language.

Someone explains the meaning of ceremonies.

Someone tells us who built the house.

Someone remembers the dead.

Eventually, if tradition succeeds, what was received externally becomes internally possessed.

Telemachus begins by saying, in effect, *they tell me I am Odysseus's son*.

He must become capable of saying:

I am the son of Odysseus.

That difference is the birth of succession.

VIII. Succession Is Not Repetition

But becoming an heir does not mean becoming a replica.

Telemachus is not Odysseus.

Tradition is not photocopying.

The successful successor receives a form and inhabits it under new circumstances. He must distinguish the permanent from the accidental, the principle from its historical expression.

This is why living traditions can change while remaining traditions.

Language provides the clearest example.

English survives precisely because no generation speaks exactly the English of its ancestors. A language preserved by refusing all change would eventually become unusable. Yet a language changed without continuity would cease to be the same language.

Tradition therefore occupies a middle position between preservation and development.

So does prudent trusteeship.

A trustee charged with preserving an estate cannot necessarily preserve every asset unchanged forever. Sometimes preservation requires sale. Sometimes investment. Sometimes repair. Sometimes diversification. Sometimes expenditure.

Ontario's prudent-investor regime reflects precisely this dynamic conception: preservation does not mean immobility. The trustee must consider risk and return, diversification, liquidity, income, capital preservation and the purposes of the trust as a whole. ([Ontario](#))

True stewardship is not embalming.

It is husbandry.

The steward asks not merely, "How can I prevent change?" but:

How can this thing remain itself through change?

That is also the question of civilization.

IX. Anarchy and Anomie

The disorder of Ithaca can be understood through two related concepts: anarchy and anomie.

Anarchy is the absence or collapse of governing authority.

Anomie is deeper. It describes a condition in which shared norms lose their binding force.

Ithaca suffers from both.

Odysseus's political absence produces weakened authority. But the more disturbing development is that people cease to behave as though the old norms bind them.

Hospitality remains—but is abused.

Marriage remains—but becomes a mechanism for appropriation.

Feasting remains—but becomes consumption.

Aristocratic status remains—but loses nobility.

The assembly remains—but lacks effective authority.

The household remains—but its boundaries are violated.

The forms survive after their animating principles have weakened.

That is anomie.

And Homer understands that material waste follows moral disorder.

The sheep disappear because norms have disappeared first.

This is crucial.

Economic collapse is often treated as though it were simply material. But wealth depends upon moral and institutional conditions: trust, restraint, expectations, enforceable obligations, stable families, reliable promises, peaceful exchange, respect for property and confidence that tomorrow exists.

Destroy those things and material wealth eventually follows them.

The suitors' feast is therefore the visible consequence of an invisible collapse.

They have lost the moral grammar of inheritance.

X. The Murder of the Future

This explains why the plot against Telemachus is more than an attempt to eliminate a rival.

The suitors eventually conclude that the heir himself must disappear.

They plan to intercept him on his return. Antinous proposes an ambush before Telemachus reaches full maturity. ([Scaife ATLAS](#))

This reveals the ultimate logic of waste.

First the inheritance is consumed.

Then the inheritor must be removed.

For the existence of an heir imposes a limit upon present appetite.

The heir embodies tomorrow.

So long as Telemachus lives, the suitors' consumption remains visibly wrongful because someone exists to whom the house should pass.

Destroy the successor and the future loses its claimant.

The moral significance extends beyond literal inheritance.

Every society restrains present consumption partly because future people have claims upon it.

Children make tomorrow morally present.

A society confident that there will be grandchildren builds differently from one that imagines itself as the final generation.

It builds things.

It maintains institutions.

It preserves archives.

It teaches languages.

It pays debts.

It repairs buildings.

It transmits crafts.

It tells stories.

It makes sacrifices whose beneficiaries may never know the names of those who made them.

Civilization is therefore intrinsically intergenerational.

It is an enormous trust established by the dead, administered by the living, for beneficiaries who include the unborn.

XI. The Estate as a Bridge Through Time

This suggests a richer understanding of estate planning.

At its narrowest, estate planning concerns the legally effective transfer of property upon death.

That is indispensable.

But it is only the architecture.

The deeper question is:

What is being transferred?

Money, certainly.

Land.

Businesses.

Personal possessions.

But these goods exist within relationships.

Consider a family cottage.

Legally, it may be land.

Economically, it may be capital.

For a family, however, it may also be geography transformed into memory.

Children formed bonds of friendship there.

Grandparents sat on the porch over cups of coffee while children played.

Birthdays were celebrated there.

Stories were told around the campfire.

Certain trees evoke memories.

The road toward the cottage signals arrival.

The smell of the place evokes childhood.

Its material structure has become a vessel for immaterial inheritance.

This does not mean the cottage must never be sold. Sometimes keeping an asset destroys family harmony, imposes impossible costs or frustrates the very purposes for which earlier generations valued it.

Stewardship is not obsession.

But good succession planning asks questions broader than valuation.

What human goods does this property support?

What relationships does it sustain?

What memories are attached to it?

Would preserving it preserve those goods or burden them?

Can its meaning be transmitted if the asset itself cannot?

Those are estate-planning questions in the deepest sense.

XII. The Will as an Act of “small-g” Government

A will is therefore a peculiar document.

It speaks when its author can no longer speak.

It is an exercise of authority designed for a world in which the person exercising that authority will be absent.

In that respect, every will confronts the problem at the centre of *The Odyssey*:

How shall order continue when I am gone?

The testator knows what Odysseus’s household painfully discovers: absence changes things.

People disagree.

Circumstances evolve.

Property deteriorates.

Relationships shift.

Children mature.

Businesses require decisions.

Houses require repairs.

Taxes become payable.

Memories fade.

A will cannot govern the future completely, nor should it try to. But it can establish an architecture through which authority, responsibility and property pass from one generation to another.

And here two quite different conceptions of succession become possible.

The first is the conception most familiar to modern estate administration: succession as distribution.

The deceased owns property. At death an estate trustee intervenes. The trustee collects the property, satisfies liabilities, preserves and administers the estate, and ultimately transfers the remaining property to the persons absolutely entitled to receive it. The office is transitional. The trustee stands upon a bridge between one ownership and another.

Ontario law expresses this conception with unusual clarity. Under the *Estates Administration Act*, the deceased's real and personal property devolves upon the personal representative "as trustee for the persons by law beneficially entitled thereto." The representative administers the estate, but the ultimate purpose of the administration is to give effect to the beneficial succession. The estate trustee therefore possesses legal authority for a time because someone else is ultimately to receive.

This is succession as transmission.

But there is another architecture.

It is older, more dynastic, and in certain respects closer to the moral imagination of *The Odyssey*.

Under this conception, the central inheritance is not a collection of property that passes through an administrator and terminates in absolute individual ownership. The central inheritance is a continuing house.

The patrimony exists before the present holder and is intended to exist after him. The present holder possesses authority over it, enjoys it, maintains it, improves it, represents it, and transmits it. But morally—sometimes historically through legal restraints as well—he does not understand himself as the final destination of the property.

He is one bearer of an office extending across generations.

This is succession as stewardship.

The distinction is fundamental.

In the first model, the estate trustee is temporary because the estate itself is temporary.

In the second, the office-holder is temporary because the inheritance is permanent.

The person passes.

The house remains.

The steward dies.

The stewardship continues.

The king dies.

The kingship does not.

XIII. Fiduciary Duty as the Morality of Entrusted Power

Fiduciary law gives juridical form to an ancient moral intuition:

Power over another's interests must be disciplined by loyalty.

That principle reaches far beyond estates.

Whenever one person entrusts another with discretionary power capable of affecting his interests, the danger arises that power will become appetite.

The fiduciary principle answers that danger by insisting upon orientation toward another.

The trustee must not ask merely:

What can I do?

The trustee must ask:

For whom am I doing it?

That is also the question that distinguishes kingship from tyranny.

The tyrant understands power as possession.

The king, in the classical ideal, understands power as office.

The distinction is stewardship.

Odysseus's authority is legitimate not because he is the strongest person on Ithaca but because kingship participates in an order of duties.

The same is true of parenthood.

And ownership.

And trusteeship.

And inheritance.

Authority becomes morally intelligible when joined to responsibility.

XIV. Penelope: Preservation Through Time

No philosophy of succession in *The Odyssey* can focus exclusively on Odysseus and Telemachus.

Penelope is the great preserver.

Odysseus is absent.

Telemachus is immature.

The suitors consume.

Penelope holds.

Her famous weaving and unweaving expresses the temporal structure of her situation. She cannot restore the kingdom herself by simply declaring Odysseus returned. Nor can she allow the old order to be dissolved prematurely.

She therefore preserves possibility.

Her fidelity keeps open the space into which Odysseus can return and within which Telemachus can mature.

This is stewardship in another form.

Sometimes stewardship means building.

Sometimes it means transmitting.

Sometimes it means preventing irreversible action until the proper moment arrives.

Penelope's greatness lies partly in understanding that time itself can be governed.

Delay becomes fidelity.

Waiting becomes action.

Preservation becomes resistance.

The house survives because someone refuses to concede that absence is equivalent to extinction.

XV. Laertes and the Three Generations

Behind Odysseus stands Laertes.

Before Odysseus stands Telemachus.

This three-generational structure is essential.

Laertes, Odysseus and Telemachus represent past, present and future. The household exists across all three.

No one generation owns the whole story.

Laertes hands something to Odysseus.

Odysseus must hand something to Telemachus.

Telemachus must become capable of receiving it.

The family is therefore not merely a collection of contemporaries. It is a community extended through time.

Edmund Burke would much later describe society as a partnership connecting the living, the dead and those yet to be born. Homer dramatizes something remarkably similar without stating it abstractly.

The inheritance belongs, in different senses, to all three generations.

The past created it.

The present possesses it.

The future depends upon it.

This imposes obligations in both directions.

The young owe gratitude without servility.

The old owe provision without domination.

The present generation must neither worship the past nor consume the future.

It must mediate between them.

That is stewardship.

XVI. Name

Among the most important inheritances in *The Odyssey* is something with no market value:
a name.

Telemachus's identity is bound to the name of Odysseus.

Odysseus himself is obsessed throughout the poem with identity, recognition and reputation.

A name carries memory.

To inherit a name is to inherit stories about what that name means.

This remains true even in ordinary families.

A surname connects persons who may never have met.

Children hear stories about grandparents.

Objects become associated with people.

Expressions survive their speakers.

Recipes persist.

Professions recur.

Virtues and failures are remembered.

Sometimes a descendant spends years repairing a family name. Sometimes another generation enlarges it.

The name becomes a kind of immaterial estate.

Unlike money, it cannot simply be divided mathematically.

Each generation possesses the whole of it and alters it by possession.

This may be among the purest examples of stewardship.

One receives a reputation one did not create and hands forward a reputation partly transformed by one's conduct.

XVII. Language

Language is inheritance on an even greater scale.

No individual invents the language in which he first says "I."

The words through which we assert individuality are inherited.

Every sentence therefore demonstrates dependence upon the dead.

The vocabulary we use was shaped by people we never knew. Grammar precedes us. Metaphors outlive their inventors. Literature preserves voices across centuries.

Homer himself is perhaps the supreme example.

For nearly three thousand years, Telemachus has been speaking to descendants who are not his descendants.

His household has become part of humanity's household.

This reveals that inheritance expands outward.

There is family inheritance.

There is civic inheritance.

There is national inheritance.

There is religious inheritance.

There is literary inheritance.

There is human inheritance.

Each forms a kingdom within a kingdom of kingdoms, a family within a family of families.

We are beneficiaries of trusts we did not establish.

XVIII. The Material World and the Higher Inheritance

It would be a mistake, however, to oppose material and spiritual inheritance too sharply.

Homer does not.

The sheep matter.

The oxen matter.

The house matters.

The land matters.

The bed matters.

The bow matters.

The ships matter.

Material things carry human meaning.

This is why the suitors' consumption is so destructive. They are not merely reducing Odysseus's net worth. They are consuming the material foundations upon which the household's social world rests.

Culture requires embodiment.

Language requires speakers.

Music requires instruments.

Hospitality requires food.

Families require homes.

Education requires leisure and books.

Communities require places of assembly.

Religious practice requires time, space and objects.

Memory attaches itself to things.

The material inheritance is therefore not contemptible because it is material.

Its moral significance depends upon what it serves.

Wealth is good when ordered toward human flourishing.

The problem is not possession.

The problem is appetite without purpose.

The suitors possess an abundance of appetite.

They possess almost no stewardship.

XIX. Estate Planning as Cultural Planning

Estate planning therefore deserves to be understood as something larger than death administration.

A properly constructed estate plan answers practical questions:

Who receives the property?

Who administers it?

Who has authority?

When are beneficiaries entitled?

How are taxes and debts paid?

What happens if a beneficiary dies?

Who acts if the first trustee cannot?

These questions matter enormously.

But beneath them lie others:

What did my life build?

What should survive me?

What relationships do I want my property to support?

What responsibilities accompany what I am giving?

What memories should be preserved?

What institutions deserve continuation?

What have I received that I am obliged to transmit?

What should my children know that cannot be written into a dispositive clause?

The best estate planning cannot answer all these questions through legal drafting.

Nor should lawyers pretend that it can.

A will cannot manufacture virtue.

A trust cannot create gratitude.

A memorandum of wishes cannot guarantee wisdom.

A succession agreement cannot force children to love one another.

But law can build structures within which human goods are more likely to survive.

That is no small thing.

Law provides the vessel.

A family must provide the cargo.

XX. The Failure of Succession

The opposite is visible throughout *The Odyssey*.

When succession fails, three things happen.

First, authority becomes uncertain.

Second, property becomes vulnerable.

Third, memory weakens.

These processes reinforce one another.

Without authority, no one restrains consumption.

As property disappears, the material basis of the household weakens.

As the household weakens, the memory of its order loses force.

Eventually, what once seemed permanent becomes unimaginable.

This is how families disappear.

It is also how institutions disappear.

Rarely does everything vanish at once.

First nobody remembers why a custom exists.

Then the custom becomes inconvenient.

Then the property supporting it is sold.

Then the stories become anecdotes.

Then the names become photographs.

Then no one knows who is in the photograph.

Succession is the resistance to this erosion.

Not resistance to all change.

Resistance to meaninglessness.

XXI. The Return of Law

Odysseus's return is therefore not simply the return of a man to a building.

It is the return of order.

But Homer carefully prepares another fact: restoration cannot mean merely turning the clock backward.

Telemachus has changed.

The boy Odysseus left behind no longer exists.

The restored household must therefore include a new adult generation.

Father and son eventually stand together.

That image completes the philosophy of succession.

The successful father does not return in order to prevent the son from succeeding.

The successful son does not succeed by erasing the father.

They become allies.

Tradition reaches fulfilment when inheritance becomes cooperation between generations rather than competition between them.

The father's authority makes the son's maturity possible.

The son's maturity makes the father's work durable.

Past and future meet in the present.

XXII. Two Architectures of Succession: The Administrator and the King

The analogy between estate administration and kingship can now be stated more precisely.

There are at least two fundamentally different ways of imagining succession.

A. Succession as Distribution: The Trustee of the Interregnum

The first is the characteristic architecture of the modern distributive estate.

Death interrupts ownership.

The deceased can no longer act.

Those beneficially entitled have not necessarily received the property.

Someone must therefore stand between.

That person is the estate trustee.

The office is fundamentally transitional.

The trustee gathers what belonged to yesterday and prepares it for tomorrow.

Some assets must be preserved.

Some must be sold.

Some debts must be paid.

Some distributions must wait.

Income may accrue.

Taxes must be considered.

Beneficiaries may possess competing interests.

Property may possess sentimental as well as financial value.

The estate trustee consequently inhabits a genuine moral world of stewardship. He exercises power without confusing power with beneficial ownership. He preserves without unnecessarily immobilizing. He distributes without wasting. He accounts. And finally he relinquishes control.

In this architecture, that last obligation is crucial.

The purpose of the office is to terminate the necessity for the office.

The estate trustee succeeds by completing the administration.

The bridge succeeds when those travelling upon it reach the other side.

This conception fits naturally with the development of modern succession law toward broader and more equal distribution of property.

But the history requires precision.

The important change concerned the mode of descent.

English common law, received in Upper Canada, had given the eldest son a privileged position as heir to intestate real estate. Upper Canada abolished that right by statute in 1851, effective January 1, 1852. Instead of the eldest son alone taking the inheritance, descendants of equal degree could inherit in equal portions, with provisions for representation where children had predeceased.

The movement was therefore from primogenitary descent of the fee simple toward partible and statutory succession to it.

A further development of modern succession law placed the personal representative between the deceased owner and the ultimate beneficiaries. In contemporary Ontario, real and personal property ordinarily devolve upon the personal representative as trustee for those beneficially entitled. The representative administers; the beneficiaries ultimately receive.

This is an immensely important legal achievement. It facilitates payment of debts, orderly administration, equality of treatment, alienability of property and individual freedom. It recognizes that children are persons rather than merely components of a dynastic institution. And it avoids making the economic future of an entire family depend automatically upon the accident of birth order.

But it also produces a characteristic moral picture.

The estate comes to an end.

The corpus is distributed.

The beneficiaries become owners.

And the fiduciary disappears.

The ultimate destination of succession is therefore the autonomous owner.

This is one possible moral architecture of inheritance.

But it is not the only one.

B. Succession as Stewardship: The King and the Continuing House

There is a second conception in which succession looks very different.

Here the death of the present holder does not create an interregnum in the deepest sense because the office survives the office-holder.

The king dies.

Another king succeeds.

The property associated with the house is not understood primarily as a fund waiting to be divided among absolute beneficiaries, who may or may not possess the wherewithal to invest it prudently; and the distribution to whom may weaken the institution of the family across time, whose wealth and place becomes dispersed. This second conception of inheritance is understood as a patrimony to be held, governed and transmitted by successive generations.

The present holder therefore resembles not the temporary administrator of an estate destined to disappear, but the temporary occupant of an office destined to continue.

His tenure is temporary.

The institution is not.

This is the sense in which the estate trustee may become a powerful metaphor for kingship.

The first trustee holds.

Then another trustee holds.

Then another.

The identity of the fiduciary changes while the identity of the trust, the patrimony or the house persists.

One steward succeeds another because no steward is the ultimate beneficiary of history.

The office itself is hereditary only in the broad philosophical sense that responsibility is handed onward.

Historically, the institutions closest to this moral architecture were not fee simple and primogeniture considered as simple opposites. They were the combination of primogeniture, entail, settlement and the dynastic conception of landed property.

Primogeniture answered the question:

Who succeeds?

Entail and settlement answered another:

How far may the present generation dispose of what future generations are expected to receive?

The distinction matters.

A fee-simple owner could, subject to the law applicable at the time, possess extensive powers of alienation. Primogeniture by itself did not necessarily prevent the living owner from dissipating the estate. What created the more recognizably dynastic structure was the effort to preserve property across generations—to prevent the present holder from treating the inheritance as though he were its final destination.

The moral intuition behind that structure is the intuition underlying the doctrine of waste:

present enjoyment does not exhaust the meaning of ownership when the future possesses a claim upon the thing enjoyed.

This is extraordinarily close to Homer.

Odysseus does not appear to understand Ithaca as a portfolio awaiting liquidation upon his death.

Neither does Telemachus.

The house has an identity.

The lands, animals, servants, relationships, obligations, family name and political authority form a coherent whole.

Telemachus does not merely wait for Odysseus to die so that he may become an absolute beneficiary.

He is being educated to succeed Odysseus.

This is a much larger thing.

He must succeed to the name.

He must succeed to the house.

He must succeed to the obligations attached to the house.

He must succeed to the memory of Laertes and Odysseus.

He must succeed to relationships with the people of Ithaca.

He must succeed to the responsibility of maintaining what he receives.

He must eventually become the person from whom someone else succeeds.

Telemachus is therefore not merely an heir to property.

He is an heir to office.

And once inheritance is understood in this way, the meaning of stewardship changes.

The steward does not administer the patrimony in order to terminate the patrimony.

He administers it precisely so that the patrimony will outlive him.

The faithful estate trustee of the first model eventually distributes everything and disappears.

The faithful king of the second model eventually dies and is replaced.

The former brings an administration to completion.

The latter maintains a succession without completion.

One is a bridge.

The other is a link in a chain.

The first asks:

How shall I deliver this property to those presently entitled to it?

The second asks:

How shall I preserve, improve and transmit this inheritance so that the house remains capable of supporting generations I will never see?

Neither question is inherently ignoble.

They correspond to different understandings of property, family and time.

But *The Odyssey* unmistakably draws us toward the second.

For Ithaca cannot finally be restored merely by calculating everyone's distributive entitlement to the surviving sheep.

What must be restored is the house of Odysseus.

XXIII. From Absolute Beneficiary to Successor

This distinction also changes the role of the beneficiary.

In the modern distributive model, the beneficiary stands beyond the estate trustee.

The trustee's administration is directed toward him.

Once the administration is complete, the beneficiary receives what is his and, where the gift is absolute, ordinarily possesses the broad powers of ownership: to retain, invest, consume, give away or dispose of what has been received.

The legal relationship comes substantially to an end.

Trustee becomes former trustee.

Estate becomes distributed estate.

Beneficiary becomes owner.

There is moral dignity in this architecture because it recognizes the beneficiary as a free and responsible person. The father does not attempt to govern the adult child indefinitely from the grave. The property becomes genuinely the child's property. Each generation receives freedom to confront circumstances its ancestors could not foresee.

But freedom creates its own problem.

If every beneficiary becomes an absolute owner in a purely individualistic sense, and if every absolute owner understands ownership as an unrestricted invitation to consumption, then succession eventually ceases to be succession.

The inheritance terminates in appetite.

One generation accumulates.

Another receives.

Another consumes.

Nothing reaches the fourth.

Thus the central question becomes whether an absolute beneficiary can nevertheless understand himself as a steward.

Legally, perhaps he owes no fiduciary obligation to his unborn grandchildren.

Morally, the argument of *The Odyssey* suggests that he may owe them something nevertheless.

The alternative architecture makes this obligation explicit.

Under the dynastic conception, the person succeeding to the headship of the house is not merely one beneficiary among others.

He becomes a custodian.

His relationship to the inheritance resembles the relationship between the king and the kingdom.

He enjoys the patrimony, certainly.

Kings eat.

Kings live in houses.

Kings use resources.

Kings benefit from their position.

But the distinction between a king and a plunderer lies precisely in the fact that enjoyment is bounded by office.

The patrimony exists partly for him but not solely for him.

Other people live within its order.

Children depend upon its preservation.

Future generations possess expectations concerning it.

The larger community may depend upon the stability it provides.

Thus the successor simultaneously possesses privileges and obligations.

The beneficiaries of such a patrimony can consequently be compared—carefully—to subjects within a kingdom.

The analogy must not be confused with modern legal status. Beneficiaries possess enforceable legal rights; they are not political subjects of a trustee. Nor does historical primogeniture supply a ready-made template for contemporary justice. It frequently preferred sons to daughters and elder children to younger ones for reasons that a modern legal system has properly rejected.

The philosophical analogy concerns something else:

the relationship between authority and a common inheritance.

A kingdom cannot exist for the king alone.

A trust cannot exist for the trustee alone.

A family patrimony cannot have moral coherence if the person controlling it understands every other family member merely as an obstacle to his own consumption.

The head depends upon the members.

The members depend upon the head.

Authority without community is tyranny.

Community without authority may descend into disorder.

Rights without responsibilities invite consumption.

Responsibilities without rights invite oppression.

The proper order therefore requires reciprocity.

This is why the figure of Telemachus becomes so important.

If we treat him merely as an absolute beneficiary awaiting distribution, much of the poem becomes unintelligible.

Athena would need only to protect his entitlement.

Instead she forms his character.

She sends him outward into the world.

She sends him to Nestor and Menelaus.

She makes him hear about his father.

She makes him discover the history of the house to which he is to succeed.

Why?

Because the inheritance requires more than a recipient.

It requires a successor.

The difference between those words is the centre of the argument.

A recipient asks:

What do I receive?

A successor asks:

What am I succeeding to?

A recipient may measure inheritance quantitatively.

A successor must understand it historically.

A recipient sees assets.

A successor sees a patrimony.

A recipient reaches the end of an estate administration.

A successor enters the middle of a story.

That story began before him.

It is not supposed to end with him.

Telemachus therefore stands between two generations in precisely the position once occupied by Odysseus.

Laertes gave way to Odysseus.

Odysseus will give way to Telemachus.

Telemachus, if the house survives, must eventually give way to another.

The king is always dying.

The kingdom is always being inherited.

This is why there is, under the second conception, no true interregnum at succession.

There may be uncertainty about the identity of the successor. There may be minority. There may be incapacity. There may be political struggle. There may be the destructive suspension dramatized in *The Odyssey* because no one knows whether Odysseus is living or dead.

But properly ordered succession aims at continuity.

The office does not cease because its holder dies.

The king is dead; long live the king.

The formula expresses in a few words the metaphysics of succession.

Two mortal persons are involved.

One enduring office connects them.

The individual life ends.

The order continues.

And this is perhaps the strongest model for understanding inheritance as stewardship.

The inheritance does not properly belong to the past, present or future generation alone.

Each generation possesses it differently.

The dead created and transmitted it.

The living govern and enjoy it.

The unborn stand to receive it.

The successor occupies the centre only temporarily.

He is king for a lifetime.

He is steward for a lifetime.

But stewardship itself has no natural terminus because after every steward comes another.

XXIV. A Kingdom of Kingdoms

We can now return to the image with which we began.

Every family is a kingdom within a kingdom of kingdoms.

The metaphor should not be understood as a defence of domination. Its point is order.

A healthy family possesses a common good greater than the immediate preference of any one member.

So does a community.

So does a country.

So does civilization.

The smaller kingdoms inhabit the larger and the larger depend upon the smaller.

The nation cannot preserve virtues that families cease to teach.

Families cannot flourish where public order collapses.

Communities cannot survive if every generation liquidates inherited institutions for immediate gain.

The relationship is reciprocal.

This is why the destruction of Odysseus's household is simultaneously a political problem for Ithaca.

The house and kingdom mirror one another.

Disorder at the hearth spreads outward.

Order restored at the hearth begins restoring the realm.

XXV. Stewardship Against Consumption

The deepest opposition in *The Odyssey* may therefore not be simply between Odysseus and the suitors.

It is between two ways of inhabiting time.

The suitors represent consumption.

Odysseus, Penelope and eventually Telemachus represent stewardship.

Consumption says:

It is here; therefore I may use it.

Stewardship says:

It is here because someone preserved it; therefore I must ask what it is for.

Consumption sees wealth.

Stewardship sees inheritance.

Consumption sees the present.

Stewardship sees generations.

Consumption sees possession.

Stewardship sees trust.

Consumption sees appetite.

Stewardship sees order.

The difference is not that the steward never consumes. Odysseus feasts. Menelaus feasts. Nestor feasts. Hospitality requires consumption.

The question is whether consumption occurs within an order capable of replenishment, reciprocity and continuation.

A feast becomes civilized because tomorrow remains possible.

XXVI. The Moral Architecture of Succession

A complete philosophy of succession therefore requires several elements.

It requires memory, because one cannot steward what one does not understand.

It requires authority, because goods left entirely without governance become vulnerable to appropriation.

It requires law, because authority must itself be ordered.

It requires prudence, because preservation cannot be reduced to mechanical rules.

It requires gratitude, because inheritance begins with recognition that one has received something one did not create.

It requires restraint, because the present generation can always consume more than its share.

It requires education, because successors must be formed before they can inherit responsibly.

It requires hope, because stewardship makes little sense unless tomorrow matters.

And finally it requires love, because the most important things handed down cannot be compelled.

These principles apply to an estate.

They apply to a family.

And they apply to a civilization.

XXVII. The Meaning of Homecoming: The Three Generations and the Continuing House

This brings us finally to *nostos*.

Odysseus wants to return home.

But what is home?

Not simply coordinates.

Calypso can offer comfort.

The Phaeacians can offer hospitality.

Other lands can offer wealth.

Yet Ithaca is his because it contains relationships extended through time.

Laertes is there.

Penelope is there.

Telemachus is there.

His household is there.

His ancestors are there in memory.

His future is there in his son.

Home is therefore a place in which time has acquired human form.

This explains why property matters so intensely in the poem.

The house is not valuable merely because Odysseus owns it.

It is valuable because belonging has accumulated there.

And this allows us to see more clearly the significance of the three generations Homer places before us: Laertes, Odysseus and Telemachus.

They should not be understood merely as three successive absolute beneficiaries.

Laertes does not simply possess property that eventually becomes Odysseus's property, which will eventually become Telemachus's property, as though the history of the house were merely a sequence of individual ownerships.

Something persists through all three.

The house persists.

The name persists.

The patrimony persists.

The relationships persist.

The obligations persist.

The memory persists.

The place persists.

The office persists.

Laertes, Odysseus and Telemachus are therefore better understood, within the moral architecture of the poem, as three successive custodians of one continuing inheritance.

Each possesses it.

None possesses it finally.

Each generation can say:

This is mine.

But each generation must also say:

This was not always mine, and it must not end with me.

That is the paradox at the heart of custodial succession.

The inheritance genuinely belongs to the living generation, because stewardship without meaningful authority would be impossible. The steward must be capable of acting. He must govern. He must decide. He must adapt inherited things to changing circumstances.

But his possession is morally bounded by time.

He stands between those from whom he received and those to whom he must eventually give.

Laertes therefore does not simply disappear when Odysseus becomes king.

He becomes the past of the house.

Odysseus does not merely replace Laertes.

He becomes the present bearer of something Laertes previously bore.

And Telemachus does not simply await the moment at which Odysseus's property will become his.

He is being formed to become the next bearer.

The succession is therefore not:

Laertes → property → Odysseus → property → Telemachus.

It is better represented as:

House → Laertes → Odysseus → Telemachus → the generation still to come.

The persons pass through the office almost as the office passes through the persons.

This is the point at which the analogy between kingship and trusteeship reaches its fullest expression.

Under the modern distributive model, the estate trustee is temporary because the administration is temporary. The trustee gathers, preserves, accounts and distributes. Once the persons beneficially entitled have received their property, the estate can come to an end.

The bridge has served its purpose.

But under the custodial model, the steward is temporary for the opposite reason.

The steward is temporary because the inheritance is intended to be permanent.

The king dies because kings are mortal.

Kingship survives because the kingdom is not identical with the king.

So too the steward dies while stewardship continues.

One generation leaves precisely because another must enter.

This is why the ancient formula captures something more profound than political succession:

The king is dead; long live the king.

The apparent contradiction is the point.

The king has died.

The king continues.

One statement concerns the mortal person.

The other concerns the enduring office.

Succession reconciles them.

And *The Odyssey* gives this abstract principle human form.

Laertes.

Odysseus.

Telemachus.

Past.

Present.

Future.

Three persons.

One house.

Each king is an heir before he is a king.

Each king is a steward while he is king.

Each king must eventually become an ancestor.

And each successor must therefore learn that kingship itself is something inherited.

This greatly deepens the meaning of Telemachus's education.

Athena is not merely helping a young beneficiary protect his assets.

She is preparing the next king.

That is why genealogy matters.

That is why reputation matters.

That is why Nestor matters.

That is why Menelaus matters.

That is why Telemachus must hear stories of Odysseus.

The successor must know the tradition before he can govern it.

A merely distributive inheritance could be accomplished by transfer.

A custodial inheritance requires formation.

Telemachus must learn what sort of house he is inheriting before he can become capable of preserving it.

And this finally explains why the suitors represent something more dangerous than theft.

They threaten the chain itself.

They consume the animals.

They consume the wine.

They occupy the house.

They seek Penelope.

And ultimately they seek the death of Telemachus.

Their logic proceeds inexorably from consuming the inheritance to eliminating the successor.

For Telemachus is not merely another claimant upon the existing property.

He is the person through whom the house possesses a future.

To kill Telemachus is therefore to do something much greater than remove a beneficiary.

It is to sever the chain.

It is to transform a patrimony into a terminal estate.

It is to make the present generation the last generation.

And once the last generation believes itself to be the last, there is no longer any reason for stewardship.

Everything can be eaten.

The sheep.

The oxen.

The wine.

The capital.

The land.

The memory.

The name.

The future itself.

The return of Odysseus therefore prevents more than the destruction of his property.

It restores the possibility of succession.

And the great achievement of the homecoming is not that Odysseus permanently reclaims the house for himself.

It is that the house once again possesses a past, a present and a future.

Laertes stands behind him.

Telemachus stands beside him.

And an unnamed generation stands beyond Telemachus.

That is the restored kingdom.

Conclusion: What Must Remain After Us?

At the beginning of *The Odyssey*, a house is being eaten.

The image is almost painfully ordinary.

Sheep disappear.

Oxen disappear.

Wine disappears.

Meals are consumed.

But Homer teaches us to see what is really disappearing.

A lineage is threatened.

A household is dissolving.

Authority is weakening.

Memory is endangered.

The connection between generations is being severed.

Telemachus therefore matters not simply because he might inherit Odysseus's property.

He represents the future tense of the house.

His maturation restores futurity.

And here *The Odyssey* speaks with extraordinary force to the philosophy underlying succession law.

Modern law gives us one powerful architecture of succession.

The owner dies.

The estate trustee assumes authority.

The trustee gathers and preserves.

Debts are paid.

Obligations are discharged.

The property is distributed.

The beneficiary receives.

The administration ends.

This is succession as transmission.

Its characteristic image is the bridge.

But Homer gives us another.

The steward receives.

The steward governs.

The steward preserves.

The steward develops.

The steward transmits.

Another steward receives.

This is succession as continuity.

Its characteristic image is the chain.

The difference is profound.

Under the first architecture, the beneficiary is the destination of the inheritance.

Under the second, no living person is its final destination.

The first asks:

To whom does this property belong?

The second adds:

From whom did it come, what does it sustain, and to whom must it eventually go?

The first concerns title.

The second concerns time.

The first is capable of telling us who owns the house.

The second asks what it means to belong to the house.

Neither need exclude the other.

Indeed, perhaps the richest philosophy of succession requires both.

Modern law may rightly give the beneficiary property absolutely.

But moral inheritance may nevertheless tell the beneficiary:

You are free, but you are not first.

Others were here before you.

Others may come after you.

The house you own may contain labour you did not perform.

The money you possess may represent sacrifices you did not make.

The language you speak was formed before your birth.

The institutions protecting your freedom were built by people whose names you do not know.

The family name you bear existed before you.

The stories by which you understand yourself were first told by the dead.

Absolute ownership therefore need not entail absolute moral independence.

The law may say:

This belongs to you.

Stewardship answers:

Then take care of it.

Tradition adds:

Remember where it came from.

And succession finally asks:

What will remain when it leaves your hands?

This is where Laertes, Odysseus and Telemachus become the governing image of the entire poem.

They are not merely three owners standing at different points on a timeline.

They are three generations gathered around one inheritance.

Laertes received.

Odysseus received from him.

Telemachus will receive from Odysseus.

And Telemachus's success will ultimately be measured not merely by whether he receives the house intact but by whether there remains, after his own life, a house capable of being received again.

The deepest measure of inheritance is therefore not acquisition.

It is transmissibility.

A fortune that cannot survive its possessor has failed as a patrimony.

A language that is not taught dies with its speakers.

A tradition that cannot explain itself becomes an empty ritual.

A family that cannot remember loses its continuity.

A civilization that consumes its capital without replenishing it becomes the feast of the suitors.

Stewardship is the discipline by which the present refuses to make itself the final generation.

And so every generation occupies the throne only temporarily.

Every generation is, in this limited sense, king.

Not because it may command whatever it wishes.

Precisely the opposite.

It is king because something has been placed under its care.

Its authority and its obligation arise together.

The king receives the kingdom.

The trustee receives the trust.

The parent receives the household.

The heir receives the inheritance.

The citizen receives the commonwealth.

The speaker receives the language.

The believer receives the faith.

The artist receives the tradition.

The living receive the world.

And none created from nothing the thing entrusted to them.

We are all, therefore, successors.

We arrive in the middle.

That may be the central truth hidden within the very word *inheritance*.

There was something before us.

There should be something after us.

Between those two facts lies our stewardship.

The modern estate trustee may stand temporarily between the deceased and the absolute beneficiary.

But the deeper moral trustee stands between generations.

His administration cannot finally be closed because his beneficiaries include persons not yet born.

He receives from the dead.

He governs among the living.

He preserves for the future.

This does not require the restoration of legal primogeniture, entail or hereditary monarchy. The historical institutions through which custodial succession was sometimes expressed contained injustices of their own. The philosophical insight can be separated from those particular legal forms.

What deserves recovery is the idea beneath them:

an inheritance can belong genuinely to one generation without belonging exclusively to that generation.

That is the moral architecture Homer gives us.

It is why waste is so serious.

Waste does not merely reduce capital.

It breaks faith with time.

It takes something produced by yesterday, consumes it today, and leaves nothing for tomorrow.

The suitors therefore commit the archetypal offence against succession.

They eat what they did not build.

They destroy what they did not inherit.

They disregard the man who came before them.

They attempt to murder the man who should come after.

They enthrone the present moment.

Against them stand the three generations of the house.

Laertes.

Odysseus.

Telemachus.

The old king.

The returning king.

The coming king.

Each temporary.

The house continuous.

The king dies.

The kingdom remains.

The heir succeeds.

The steward becomes ancestor.

And another steward takes his place.

This is why the philosophy of the estate begins not with death but with stewardship.

The central question is not finally:

What do I own?

Nor even:

Who will receive what I own?

It is:

What have I received, what human goods does it sustain, and how must I govern it so that there remains something worth receiving when my own stewardship is finished?

Telemachus begins *The Odyssey* in a house where that question has been forgotten.

The suitors eat.

Penelope preserves.

Athena teaches.

Telemachus learns.

Odysseus returns.

Laertes remembers.

Past, present and future are joined again.

And the house, almost consumed by people who recognized appetite but not inheritance, becomes a household once more.

The restoration is therefore greater than the restoration of property.

It is the restoration of time itself to moral order.

The past is honoured.

The present is governed.

The future is protected.

The inheritance continues.

The king is dead.

Long live the king.

That is more than homecoming.

It is succession.

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