

# Homer's Asphodel Meadow

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I was cheered when I came first to know  
that there were flowers also in hell.  
— William Carlos Williams,  
“Asphodel, That Greeny Flower”

**H**OMER'S “ASPHODEL MEADOW” (ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα), “where the spirits of the dead dwell” (*Od.* 24.14), has throughout Western literary history been envisioned as a pleasant and even desirable place. This was the impression among many of the ancient Greek poets and Homeric commentators, who understood ἀσφοδελός to mean “flowery,” “fragrant,” “fertile,” and “lush,” and who even referred to the asphodel meadow as a “paradise” (παράδεισος).<sup>1</sup> This was all the more so among the post-Renaissance English poets, especially those of the Romantic tradition, who painted colorful pictures of “happy souls who dwell in yellow meads of asphodel.”<sup>2</sup> But this is not the picture drawn in Books 11 and 24 of

<sup>1</sup> “Flowery”: it is the meadow of Persephone (Herodian on *Od.* 11.539). “Fragrant”: the asphodel is a “good-smelling” (ἅπαν εὖοσμον) flower (Aristarchus in Hesych. s.v. ἀσφόδελος). “Fertile”: the meadow is rich in all sorts of other fauna (Hecataeus of Abdera comparing Homeric ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα in *Od.* 24 to the “most beautiful” meadows around Egyptian Memphis, which are full of “marsh-meadow, lotus, and calamus,” ὄντων περὶ αὐτὴν λειμῶνων καλλίστων ἔλους καὶ λωτοῦ καὶ καλάμου: *FGrHist* 264 F 25.96.6a). “Lush”: it is a place where a cow would like to graze (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 221, 344, which offers the earliest description outside Homer of an ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα [here in Pieria] as untouched, lovely [ἀκηρασίους ἐρατεινούς 72], soft [μαλακοῦ 198], and holy [ζάθεον 503]).

<sup>2</sup> Pope's *St. Cecilia's Day* 74. Cf. Milton's *Comus* 838 “To imbathe in nectar'd lavers strew'd with asphodil”; *Paradise Lost* 9.1039 “Flowers were the couch, pansies, and violets, and asphodel, and hyacinth, earth's freshest softest lap”; Browne's *Hydriotaphia* 37 “The dead are made to eat asphodels about the Elyzian meadows”; Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* 1.11 “Is that a real Elysian brightness? ... Is it of a truth leading us into beatific Asphodel

the *Odyssey*, our earliest extended descriptions of Hades, and our earliest references to an “asphodel meadow.” The three passages in which Hades features this (11.539, 573; 24.13) portray a dark, gloomy, and mirthless place. This is not the Elysian Plain, where life is easy, and there ever blows a refreshing West wind (4.561–569); nor is it the Isles of the Blessed, where the grain-giving soil bears its sweet fruit for the most distinguished, and carefree, heroes (Hesiod *Op.* 167–173). This is Hades—dark, dank, and sunless (*Od.* 10.512; 24.10; cf. *Il.* 20.65; *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 337)—where disembodied and senseless spirits of the dead weep and wail pathetically (*Od.* 11.391, 475–476, 605–606; 24.5–9) and flit about purposelessly like shadows or dreams (10.495; 11.207–208, 222).

The regular formulaic description of Hades in early Greek epic as a place of “gloomy darkness” is illustrative of the Homeric view (three times in Homer, three in the Hymns, once in Hesiod):

–υυ/ –υυ/ –υ ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόεντα

One should then expect that a metrically useful alternative member formula (i.e., beginning with a consonant rather than a vowel) to describe Hades would connote something rather more similar than different (*Od.* 11.539, 573; 24.13):

–υυ/ –υυ/ –υ κατ’ ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα

Had we not been exposed to the post-Homeric usage of the phrase to describe a lovely and fragrant meadow blooming with flowers, we would likely surmise that the adjective meant quite the opposite: “dark,” “gloomy,” “dusty,” “infertile,” or the like—the furthest idea from a “paradise.” Such a meaning would fit aptly the context in each of the three Odyssean passages where the formula occurs: in 11.539 the spirit of the dead Achilles, having taken leave of Odysseus, “strides through the asphodel meadow”; in 11.573 the spirit of the hunter Orion

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meadows?” Tennyson’s “Lotos-Eaters” 169 “others in Elysian valleys dwell, resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel”; Longfellow’s *Evangeline* 2.4.149 “hereafter crown us with asphodel flowers”; “The Two Angels” 13 “he who wore the crown of asphodels, descending, at my door began to knock”; Wilde’s “Panthea” 34 “Where asphodel and yellow lotus twine”; Williams quoted above.

gathers together his slaughtered prey “through the asphodel meadow”; in 24.13 the spirits of the slaughtered suitors arrive, squeaking like bats in a cave, “at the asphodel meadow.”

We do not know for certain whence the adjective ἀσφοδελός in this Homeric formula derives etymologically, even with recourse to the many post-Homeric usages of the word, both in its nominal form, accented as a proparoxytone ἀσφόδελος, and in its adjectival form, accented as an oxytone ἀσφοδελός: whether in poetry, where the flower is often associated with the afterlife,<sup>3</sup> or in prose generally, and in particular in medical treatises, where we learn of the various practical uses of the stalk, root, and flower.<sup>4</sup> The word has no apparent Indo-European etymology, no attestation in Linear B, and no cognates in the Greek language generally.<sup>5</sup> In view of this lexical isolation,

<sup>3</sup> So Theocritus (26.4), Nicander (*Theriaca* 534). Cf. *Hymn.Hom.Merc.* 221, 344, for the earliest (albeit metaphorical) association.

<sup>4</sup> The stalk is said to have been used to make cages, huts, bedding for animals, etc., and the stalk, root, and flower for various medicinal and nutritional purposes—diuretic, enema, emetic, purgative, etc.—and, in general, as a remedy for a host of medical problems, and even as a nutritional food; so Herodotus, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Crateuas, Dioscorides, Plutarch, Longus, Athenaeus, Lucian, Rufus, Galen, Pliny, etc. On the various purported uses of the asphodel in antiquity, with full citations and commentary, see J. M. Verpoorten, “Les noms grecs et latins de l’asphodèle,” *AntCl* 31 (1962) 111–129, at 111–118, and M. Biraud, “Usages de l’asphodèle et étymologies d’ ἀσφόδελος,” in J. Manessy-Guitton (ed.), *Actes du Colloque: Les phytonymes grecs et latins* (Nice 1993) 35–46, at 37–42. Cf. Hes. *Op.* 41 for the earliest reference to asphodel as a food.

<sup>5</sup> Some have attempted, unconvincingly, to adduce IE cognates: W. Prellwitz, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der griechischen Sprache* (Göttingen 1892) s.v. ἀσφόδελος, relates it to Greek σφοδρός and σφεδανός, presumably of IE origin, because the flower “trembles” and “shakes” in the wind; L. Meyer, *Handbuch der griechischen Etymologie* (Leipzig 1901) s.v. ἀσφόδελος, relates it to Greek σφόνδυλος, presumably of IE origin, because of the flower’s “round” shape; F. A. Wood, “Greek and Latin Etymologies,” *CP* 21 (1926) 341–345, at 341, proposes parallels in Gothic (*azgo*), Sanskrit (*ásah*), Old High German (*asca*), and Greek (ἄσβολος) meaning “ashes or soot,” with reference to the blossom, and parallels in Lithuanian (*gėlti*) and Greek (βέλος, ὄβελος) meaning “sting, dart, or spit,” with reference to the stalk; M. Poetto, “A proposito di ἀσφόδελος,” *Paideia* 31 (1976) 9–10, relates it to Sanskrit *āshpota-*, the name of several plants, and so to the root *sphut-* “to open, to bloom,” but he assigns an “indomediterranean” origin rather than an exclusively IE one.

it is tempting to regard it as a loan word, in which case its origin is probably to be found in the substratal pre-Indo-European language of Greece—the source of many of the terms for the flora native to the land (narcissus, hyacinth, daphne, etc.). This has become the most widely accepted view among modern etymologists and comparative linguists.<sup>6</sup>

If indeed ἀσφόδελος is an indigenous name for a native flower, the word must have entered the Greek vernacular long before Homer, and so it is no surprise that many of its post-Homeric usages, even poetic ones, appear to be independent of the three Odyssean passages: the adjectival form of the pasture of Apollo's cattle in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* (221, 344); the noun form in Hesiod (*Op.* 41) in a proverbial expression describing the benefits of the plant; the numerous references in later Greek historical, philosophical, and medical treatises describing the plant's various practical uses.

I wish to propose, however, that the adjective ἀσφοδελός in this particular Homeric formula κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα has a somewhat more complicated etymology and cannot simply be categorized as an indigenous, non-Greek, loan word. Rather, I suggest that ἀσφοδελός of the Homeric formula is the result of a resegmentation of a phrase that is better understood in a strictly Greek etymological context: that ἀσφοδελός is a reanalysis of σφοδελός, or rather σποδελός, an adjectival form, with the common Greek suffix -ελος, of the root σποδ- found also in the Homeric noun σποδός “ashes.” The Homeric

<sup>6</sup> Those who regard ἀσφόδελος as a loan word of unknown origin include J. B. Hofmann, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Griechischen*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1971); H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch I* (Heidelberg 1954); *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos I* (Göttingen 1955); P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque I* (Paris 1968); J. André, *Les noms de plantes dans la Rome antique* (Paris 1985). Those who specify that ἀσφόδελος is a loan word of substratal origin include: Verpoorten, *AntCl* 31 (1962) 118; E. J. Furnée, *Die wichtigsten konsonantischen Erscheinungen des Vorgriechischen* (The Hague 1972) 159, 288; A. J. van Windekens, “La théorie pélasgique et l'explication de grec ἀσφόδελος,” *Orbis* 24 (1975) 214–216; Biraud, in Manessy-Guitton, *Actes* 37, 43; S. Amigues, “La ‘prairie d'asphodèle’ de l'*Odyssée* et de l'*Hymne homérique à Hermès*,” *RPhil* 76 (2002) 7–14, at 9; R. S. P. Beekes, *A Greek Etymological Dictionary* (<http://www.indo-european.nl/cgi-bin/startq.cgi?flags=endnnml&root=leiden&basename=%5Cdata%5Cie%5Cgreek>).

formula *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα* in its original form meant “throughout the ash-filled meadow.” This fits the context well in all three Odyssean descriptions of the afterlife in Hades, for *σποδός* is regularly used in Greek poetry of the ashes of the dead (*Aes. Ag.* 435, 443; *Ch.* 687; *Soph. El.* 758, 1122, 1159, 1198; *Eur. Supp.* 1129, 1140; etc.), and of the ashes used in the act of mourning for the dead (*Eur. Supp.* 827, 1159, etc.). It is also commonly used in funerary epigrams of the ashes of the dead contained in a vessel, in the earth, or even in Acheron and Hades (*Anth.Gr.* 7.279, 435, etc.; *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 13124, 13135, etc.).

According to Aelius Herodian, the form *σφοδελόν* or *σποδελόν* was in fact the reading at *Od.* 11.539 in some manuscripts: *ἄδηλον δὲ πότερον σφοδελόν ἢ ἀσφοδελόν. λέγεται γὰρ καὶ χωρὶς τοῦ α. τινὲς δὲ γράφουσι σποδελόν διὰ τὴν σποδὸν τῶν καιομένων νεκρῶν.*<sup>7</sup> This reading made sense both etymologically and semantically to at least some of the ancients: etymologically because prothesis and aphaeresis of initial *α*- was a common phenomenon (*ἄσταχυς/στάχυς*, *ἀσταφίς/σταφίς*, *ἄμοργοί/μοργοί*, *ἄμαυρός/μαυρός*, etc.), as was the alternation between *π* and *φ* (*ἀσπάρραγος/ἀσφάραγος*, *ἀσπάλαξ/ἀσφάλαξ*, *ἀσπάλαθος/ἀσφάλαθος*; cf. *σπονδύλιον/σφονδύλιον*, *σπόγγος/σφόνγγος*, etc.); semantically because the adjective aptly described the ashes of the cremated dead in Hades. These arguments have made sense to at least a few modern critics as well, leading them to prefer the reading *κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα* reported by Herodian to the reading *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα* of all the surviving Homeric manuscripts.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lenz, *Gram.Gr.* II.1 152; repeated at schol. *Od.* 11.539. Cf. Eustath. ad *Od.* 11.539: *εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ χωρὶς τοῦ α γράφουσι σφοδελόν, καὶ φέρεται ἀμφοτέρως, ὡς καὶ ἀσταφίς καὶ σταφίς, καὶ ἄσταχυς καὶ στάχυς, ἄλλοι δὲ σποδελόν διὰ τὴν σποδὸν τῶν καιομένων νεκρῶν. Suda s.v. ἄμοργοί: καλοῦσι δὲ καὶ μοργούς, τὸ α ἀφαιροῦντες, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπ' ἄλλων· μαῦρον γὰρ τὸ ἄμαυρόν καὶ σφόδελον τὸν ἀσφόμελον καλοῦσιν (cf. s.vv. μοργούς, σφοδελόν).*

<sup>8</sup> So Amigues, *RPhil* 76 (2002) 7–14, who argues that *ἀσφοδελόν* “flowery” does not make sense in the context of the three Homeric passages, while *σποδελόν* “ashy,” with its connotations of death, and especially of the cremation of the dead, is a natural description of the meadows of Hades. Her argument is cited approvingly in the *Chronique d'étymologie grecque* webpage (<http://perso.club-internet.fr/flo.blanc/CEG/52.html>). W. Bur-

Let us assume for a moment that σποδελὸν λειμῶνα—though probably not Homeric and therefore not the reading to be printed in our editions of Homer—was the pre-Homeric shape of a formula used to describe Hades. We find in our inherited verses of Homeric epic a very likely avenue for the adjective's resegmentation; we can observe in the three passages of the *Odyssey* the phonetic environment that led to the creation of the new shape ἀσφοδελός. Simply stated, the three Odyssean passages point back to a period in the development of the epic diction when the shape of a formula used to describe the ash-filled meadow of Hades was:

—υυ/ —υυ/ —υ κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα

This formula was misheard, misunderstood, and misanalyzed by a pre-Homeric bard as

—υυ/ —υυ/ —υ κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα

(possibly with κατὰ σφοδελὸν λειμῶνα as an intermediate step).<sup>9</sup>

Now, even if one accepts the phonetic motivation for this change—i.e., the ambiguity of the elision of α, and the similarity between the sounds π and φ (still a true aspirate rather than a fricative)—one may reasonably hold some doubts that a semantically and contextually suitable formula for Hades “throughout the ash-filled meadow” would have been misunderstood and reshaped into a semantically and contextually awkward one “throughout the asphodel (i.e. flowery) meadow.”

kert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 196, also acknowledges the aptness of the reading and entertains the notion of an ash-strewn meadow in Hades.

<sup>9</sup> Furnée, *Erscheinungen* 159, 288, classifies ἀσφόμελος as of substratal pre-Greek origin, listing it among many words that he considers to have suffered substratal (not Greek) prothesis of α- (cf. 368–374, where he lists 90+ such words). This might explain the apparent biform σφοδελός that we find in later Greek, the earliest certain example being Aristophanes fr.693 σφοδελὸν ἐν χύτραισι μεγάλαις ἐψόμενον (“asphodel boiling in large earthen pots”). As already observed, the biform is entertained as a Homeric reading by Herodian and Eustathius. The biform is also mentioned by the lexicographers: Hesych. s.v. σφόμελος· ἢ ἄλιμος· δασὺ ἄνθος, ἄρχον, σκιερὸν· οἱ δὲ σίτον; s.v. σφοδελοφόρους· τοὺς μετοίκους; cf. Paus. Att. s.v. ἀμοργοί; Phot. *Lex.* s.v. ἀμοργοί; *Suda* (n.7 above); *Elym.Magn.* s.v. ἀσφόμελος.

Some scholars have tried to resolve the disjunction of a “flowery Hades” by portraying the asphodel as a foul-smelling, unattractive plant that grows only on barren ground and so, among all the specimens of the botanical world, uniquely suited for the barren topography of Hades.<sup>10</sup> But the ancients—poets, botanists, physicians, and Homeric commentators alike—speak of the asphodel with high praise: fragrant to the smell; lovely to the sight; nutritious, satisfying, and sweet to eat; useful as a remedy for a host of ailments; and, in the other-world, a soft bed upon which the souls of the departed may recline with friends and relatives.<sup>11</sup>

I believe the solution lies rather in a very ancient (i.e., pre-Homeric) association of the asphodel with the afterlife—though not necessarily with the underworld—an association that may go back to the indigenous culture from which the Greeks borrowed both the flower and its name.

To be sure, references that associate the asphodel with the other-world by such literary figures as Lucian may be entirely dependent upon Homer.<sup>12</sup> But the remarks of ancient lexicographers and commentators suggest that the association between the asphodel and the afterlife was a feature of broader Greek culture, not just a Homeric idiosyncrasy.

As we have seen, according to Herodian, the form σφοδελόν or σποδελόν was the reading at *Od.* 11.539 in some manu-

<sup>10</sup> E.g., W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer*<sup>2</sup> (London 1959) I 400, II 412 (“a lean, spiky plant” that grows on “poor and desolate ground”); *New Pauly* 2 (2003) 171 (“a foul-smelling plant of the kingdom of the dead”); H. Baumann, *The Greek Plant World in Myth, Art and Literature* (Portland 1993) 65 (“the pale, greyish flower ... gives to the landscape a dull appearance matching the sadness and the emptiness of the Underworld ... The bare stalks ... in winter have represented for poets the shadowy army which wanders up and down the banks of the Acheron ... The disagreeable odour ... and the clusters of flowers shaded with violet harmonize with pale death and the darkness of the Underworld”).

<sup>11</sup> References in nn.1 and 4 above; an extensive summary of the flower’s benefits at Plin. *HN* 21.68 and 22.32.

<sup>12</sup> Lucian *Cataplus* 2, *Menippus* 21, *De luctu* 5, *Charon* 22, but especially *Philopseudes* 24 (where the souls of the dead recline on the asphodel in Hades with friends and relatives) and *De luctu* 19 (where the fate of the soul in the afterlife is depicted).

scripts. Yet, Herodian argues for ἀσφοδελόν partly at least because of a perceived association between the asphodel and Persephone (ἄμεινον δὲ ἀσφοδελὸν διὰ τὸ Περσεφόνης εἶναι λειμώνα τὸν τόπον), who of course epitomizes the “flower picker on the meadow” in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (6–9, 417–428).

The Atticist Pausanias (s.v. ἀσφόδελος) offers similar remarks—reiterated in the *Suda* and other Byzantine lexica—that the asphodel is sacred to Persephone and the Chthonic deities, and the Rhodians garland with asphodel Kore (i.e., Persephone) and Artemis (i.e., infernal Artemis, presumably, who is to be equated with Hekate, both being associated with the moon):

σκιλλῶδες φυτὸν φύλλα ἔχον μακρὰ καὶ ἀνθέρικον ἐσθιόμενον.  
καὶ τὸ σπέρμα δὲ αὐτοῦ φρυγόμενον καὶ ἡ ῥίζα κοπτομένη μετὰ  
σύκων πλείστην ὄνησιν ἔχει. Περσεφόνης καὶ χθονίων ἱερὸν. καὶ  
Ῥόδιοι τὴν Κόρην καὶ τὴν Ἄρτεμιν ἀσφοδέλω στέφουσιν.

Eustathius on *Od.* 11.539 adds that the asphodel is suitable for the dead because it was to be found growing on tombs, and quotes an epigram traditionally attributed to Aristotle that could be found inscribed on tombs: “On my back I hold mallow and many-rooted asphodel; on my breast I hold so-and-so”:

διὸ καὶ ὁ ἀσφοδελὸς ἢ σφοδελὸς ψκείωται νεκροῖς διὰ τὸ πρὸς  
τὴν σποδὸν ὁμοιόφωνον καὶ ἐφυτεύετο ἐν τοῖς τάφοις τὸ τοι-  
οῦτον φυτὸν, ὡς δηλοῖ καὶ τι τῶν παρὰ τῷ Πορφυρίῳ ἐπιγραμ-  
μάτων, λέγον, ὡς ἀπὸ τινος τάφου, ὅτι νῶτω μὲν μαλάχην καὶ  
ἀσφόδελον πολύριζον, κόλπῳ δὲ τὸν δεινα ἔχω.

From a Latin version of Ausonius (*Epitaph.* 21: *Hippothoum Pyleum-que tenet gremio infima tellus; / caulibus et malvis terga superna virent*) we may fill in the names of the Greek version:

Νῶτω μὲν μαλάχην τε καὶ ἀσφόδελον πολύριζον,  
κόλπῳ δ' Ἰππόθοόν τ' ἠδὲ Πύλαιον ἔχω.<sup>13</sup>

Versions survive with different names (*SEG XLI* 855):

Νῶτω μὲν μαλάχην τε καὶ ἀσφόδελον πολύριζον,  
κόλπῳ δ' Οἰδιπόδαν Λαίου υἱὸν ἔχω.

<sup>13</sup> So e.g. E. Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* II (Leipzig 1925) 181.



One can imagine that many a deceased Greek was honored by this epitaph, so long as his name could be accommodated metrically into the pentameter.

It does not seem to me that all these various associations between the asphodel and death could have resulted simply from the three appearances of the formula ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα in the *Odyssey*. Rather, I think that the epic tradition was mirroring in its formulaic diction the already-existing association in wider Greek culture. And I suggest that this long-held association between the asphodel and the afterlife added semantic temptation to the already existing phonetic temptation to reshape of the epic formula κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα as κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα.

To clarify, and to dig a little deeper, we should consider the general confusion in the archaic period about what happens to the human soul in the afterlife: does it go to the verdant Elysian Plain or to the gloomy depths of Hades? Like most cultures throughout human history, both ancient and modern, the Greeks held complex and sometimes contradictory views about the afterlife. Did an immaterial soul survive the physical body? If so, did all souls go to the same place, or did they have different destinations? If different destinations, on what criteria were their destinations determined? Were some rewarded and others punished for their behavior while alive?

This complexity was probably a result of the syncretism of several different cultural traditions. The notion of a dark and gloomy Hades situated deep in the earth is very close to the Mesopotamian and Hebrew conceptions of the underworld.<sup>14</sup> The notion of a brighter and more pleasant Elysian Plain or Isles of the Blessed seems to have its origin in Minoan, and ultimately Egyptian, views of the afterlife.<sup>15</sup> Complicating the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Enkidu's descriptions of the underworld in tablets seven and twelve of the Epic of Gilgamesh, and the many descriptions of Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Numbers 16:30–33, Job 10:21–22, Psalms 88:3–6, Isaiah 14:9–20, Ezekiel 32:18–32).

<sup>15</sup> Several aspects of the Elysian Plain and the Isles of the Blessed point to a Minoan origin. First, the *Odyssey* places the Cretan king Rhadamanthys on the Elysian Plain (4.563–564)—the *Ilias Parva* (apparently) on the Isles of the Blessed (fr.32 Bernabé)—where he serves as judge over those who are

picture further are the inherited (i.e., Indo-European) memories of a meadow criss-crossed by rivers somewhere in the foggy West or North.<sup>16</sup>

The relative weight attached to these various conceptions changed over time, both in the theological and philosophical musings of the ancient Greeks and in the literary and poetic tradition that serves as a mirror of these broader beliefs. We can observe, for example, that over time the yearning for the pleasantries of the Elysian Plain and the Isles of the Blessed became increasingly realized. In the *Iliad* the souls of all the dead go straight down to Hades, including such heroes as Patroclus (23.69–76) and apparently even those of divine parentage like Sarpedon (16.431–457). In the *Odyssey* Menelaus is said to have a special dispensation: he is advised by Proteus that the immortals will send him to the Elysian Plain, where life is easy, and there is no snow or rain, but only the cool refreshing breezes of the West wind (4.561–569). Cretan Rhadamanthys resides there, and Helen will presumably join Menelaus, but it is a very exclusive club: the souls of countless other heroes and heroines, including Teiresias, Achilles, and even Heracles, are to be found in Hades (11.36–635; 24.13–204). Hesiod opens

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fortunate enough to end up there (cf. Pind. *Ol.* 2.73–75); Rhadamanthys' pre-Greek name in -vθ-, his association with Crete, and his relationship to Minos, all point to a Minoan origin for the other-world over which he rules. Second, the location of the other-world beyond the Ocean or on an island is more naturally conceived by a sea-faring people like the Minoans than by the inland-dwelling Indo-European ancestors of the Greeks. Third, Minoan funerary art represents the divinization of man and a voyage of the deceased over the sea in a boat to a distant land, both concepts apparently derived ultimately from Egypt, where the apotheosized dead are regularly provided with boats for their voyage to the far-off islands. See M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion*<sup>2</sup> (Lund 1950) 426–443, 619–633; J. Gwyn Griffiths, "In Search of the Isles of the Blest," *G&R* 16 (1947) 122–126; E. Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley 1979) 42–82.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Norse *Hel*, the land of the dead to the North; Hittite *wellu-* (= 'Hλύσιον?'), the meadow that was the goal of the departed in Hittite mortuary rituals; Vedic *gavyūti*, the other-worldly cow-pasture of Yama. So J. Puhvel, "'Meadows of the Otherworld', in Indo-European Tradition," *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung* 83 (1969) 64–69; *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore 1987) 138–140.

the door to a pleasant afterlife wider by sending to the Isles of the Blessed some (or perhaps all) of the heroes who fought around Thebes and Troy. There they live a care-free life beside the deep-eddying Ocean, where the earth produces crops for them three times a year (*Op.* 156–173). Later lyric poets such as Ibycus and Simonides admit Achilles and Medea to Elysium,<sup>17</sup> and Pindar opens the way to the Isles of the Blessed—where ocean breezes blow, flowers of gold are ablaze, and heroes spend their time entwining their hands with wreaths and garlands—not only to additional mythological heroes such as Cadmus, Peleus, and Achilles (*Ol.* 2.56–83), but even to people of his own time, namely, to the patrons who are the objects of his odes (e.g., Theron of Acragas in *Ol.* 2). One begins to wonder who, other than the occasional oath-breaker or loathsome criminal, is left to inhabit an underworld Hades.

I propose that the reshaping of the formula *κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα* as *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα* in early Greek epic diction occurred in tandem with the opening up of Elysium to a larger and larger clientele of inhabitants in early Greek theological musings about the fate of the soul in the afterlife. I believe that if we were able to explore more extensively the early (pre-Homeric) formulaic diction created to describe the topography of the afterlife—the dark and barren underworld of Hades, on the one hand, and the pleasant and fertile Elysian Plain and the Isles of the Blessed, on the other—we would find that a distinct family of formulaic phrases had been designed for each.<sup>18</sup> Within these families of formulae, those in the accusative case preceded by the preposition (adverb) *κατὰ* were *κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα*, on the one hand, and *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα*, on the other. Phonetically, the former would have been prone to mishearing and misanalysis under the influence of the latter (and possibly vice versa). The phonetic

<sup>17</sup> Schol. Ap. Rh. 4.814–815 reports that in the poems of Ibycus and Simonides Achilles ends up on the Elysian Plain married to Medea.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., for Hades *σποδελὸς λειμῶν*, *σποδελοὶ λειμῶνες*, *ἐν(ι) σποδελῷ λειμῶνι*, *κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα*, *ἐς σποδελὸν λειμῶνα*, etc.; for Elysium *ἀσφοδελὸς λειμῶν*, *ἀσφοδελοὶ λειμῶνες*, *ἐν ἀσφοδελῷ λειμῶνι*, *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα*, *ἐς ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα*, etc.

temptation to misanalyze was further stimulated by external considerations: the increasingly confused conception of what were formerly regarded as two distinct regions of the other-world, and especially, in the realm of epic diction, the diminished exclusivity of Elysium as more and more epic heroes found themselves elevated from Hades. In short, the theological ambiguity about the afterlife, complemented by the phonetic ambiguity of the two formulae, led to the resegmentation of *κατὰ σποδελὸν λειμῶνα*, an epic formula used to describe Hades, as *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα*, an epic formula used to describe Elysium. Henceforth, *κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα* was used of both, even in contextual situations where it was somewhat inappropriate, even awkward, as in the three passages of the *Odyssey* under consideration here.<sup>19</sup>

June, 2007

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<sup>19</sup> Coincidentally—and just as a curious addendum—the ancient pre-Hellenic name for this flower, \*(a)sphodel-, long after its introduction into Greek as ἀσφόμελος continued to spawn resegmented forms in the modern languages, such as the English derivative *daffodil*, the initial *d* of which has been plausibly attributed to the union of the article *th* and *affodil* (i.e., *th' affodill* or *t' affadil* > *daffodil*), or alternatively to such an expression as “fennell and affodil” > “fennell an(d)affodil.” A resegmentation may also have arisen in Dutch or Flemish in the union of the article *de* and *affodil* (*de affodil* > *daffodil*), and in French in the union of the preposition *de* and *afodille* (*fleur d'aphrodille* > *daphrodille*). On the etymology see *OED* s.v. “daffodil.”