Arethusa 30.2 (1997) 201-219

Pseudo-Intimacy and the Prior Knowledge of the Homeric Audience

Ruth Scodel

Many Homerists tend to believe that the narrative method of the poems should be transparent. Within oral studies, recent work, influenced by anthropological/folkloric performance theory, has emphasized the extent of audience involvement in the creation of oral poetry and narrative. [1] The narrative can come to seem almost a collaboration. [2] Scholars are uncomfortable postulating a level of poetic sophistication that would exceed the capacity of the original audience, or many members of the audience, to appreciate it. [3] Hence, many assume that if the Homeric poems make sophisticated use of traditional language, manipulate traditional patterns, or play in interesting ways with the traditional stories, we must suppose that Homer's audience had extensive knowledge and understanding of both the formulaic technique and the traditional stories. [4] Since the Homeric poems, **[End Page 201]** and indeed oral epics in other traditions, clearly do represent what J. M. Foley calls "immanent art," in which the individual performance achieves meaning through its place in the tradition, scholars assume that poet and audience both knew the entire tradition extremely well. Extremely compressed subordinate narratives, and obscure elements in the main narrative, invite the same assumption. If the narrative was immediately comprehensible to everyone, everyone must have known these stories already, because nobody who lacked prior knowledge could understand them.

It is certainly true that some paradigmatic narratives in Homer would be quite unclear to anyone who did not already know the stories. In considering potentially difficult elements in the main narrative, we should consider that modern novels often show a sharp distinction between the "authorial audience," the audience to which the text actually addresses itself, and the "narrative audience," the one for whom the text would be true, the one which knows exactly what the text takes for granted and does not already know what it explains. So, for example, *1984* speaks as if we already knew about Oceania, Big Brother, telescreens, and so forth. [5] The narrative audience often knows more about the imagined world of a fiction than the authorial audience (sometimes it also knows less). As competent readers, we quickly use the clues the text provides to infer what these unfamiliar phenomena must be. Sometimes in a narrative such an element needs to be "held" for some time before enough information is provided to explain it. A name can be used repeatedly, for instance, before we learn enough to identify how this character is connected with others--rather as we "hold" morphological elements in a long periodic sentence until we have enough information to decide which possible syntactic pattern is actually in use. Exposition may be entirely scattered through a narrative or extended expository passages may appear after a more dramatic segment has piqued audience curiosity. Classical scholarship, however, tends to assume that authorial and narrative audience are effectively identical in Homer. In this view, exposition is not really necessary for comprehension, but is part of the traditional style; hence the narrator often repeats what the audience knows already, but never pretends that they already know something they do not.

Richard Martin's recent paper in *Colby Quarterly* illustrates this **[End Page 202]** trend at its most extreme. [6] Martin discusses the familiar fact that the *Odyssey* talks about "suitors" without any explanation. At line 18, we learn that the hero (still unnamed) had troubles even after reaching Ithaca. At 88, Athena announces that she will inspire Odysseus' son to call the assembly in order to give notice to the suitors, who slaughter his cattle. Martin argues that such a remark, taking familiarity with the suitors for granted, implies prior knowledge of the story by the audience. Martin makes very strong claims for the audience's ability to recognize minute variations in different versions of the tale. He

comments: "Reading Homer with a computerized lexical searching program enables one finally to replicate the average experience of the audience Homer had in mind," adding that "the full 'meaning,' and the full enjoyment, of traditional poetry come only when one has heard it all before a hundred times, in a hundred different versions." Even allowing for some hyperbole, this goes very far: even though we may well agree that the "full meaning" belongs to this ideal audience of experts, we cannot assume that real audiences were identical to ideal ones, or even that the implied audience includes only this ideal one.

There is no question that traditional narrators can artfully vary their renditions in order to convey particular messages or accommodate particular audiences, and that audiences who know a story well can appreciate variation. [7] On the other hand, there are also instances where traditional narrators tell stories which are new to their audiences and stories which they probably know their audiences will find difficult to understand. [8] The comparative evidence, even if we accept it as absolutely authoritative, demonstrates only that oral performers sometimes achieve subtle effects by varying familiar stories, and that audiences sometimes appreciate such variation. Not only does it not prove that traditional oral narrators always rely on audience familiarity with their stories, but it shows that sometimes they do not. The fieldwork on the Egyptian Hilali epic provides evidence **[End Page 203]** for the possible differences in performer-audience relations within a single tradition. A village performer claims that the narrative parts of his song are memorized, and that he always performs them the same way. Although he knows the entire epic, his patrons within the region have fixed preferences, and he has rarely or never performed some episodes. In Cairo, by contrast, former villagers listen to the nightly serial broadcast of the entire epic on the radio, and comment critically on the differences among live performers. They insist firmly on close fidelity to a single story line, but expect and demand variation in the punning that carries much of the meaning in this tradition. [9]

It seems generally likely that most auditors of the *Odyssey* would have heard the story before and so would have heard of the suitors. But it is worth considering just how much knowledge is absolutely essential for the poem: what does the poem really presuppose in its audience, if we grant it some license to tease its hearers with references they will not immediately understand? If we follow the way the *Odyssey* introduces the suitors, the results are interesting. At 106, when Athena arrives, she "finds" the suitors outside in the courtyard, playing *pessoi*. At 114 following, we hear that Telemachus is among the suitors, dreaming that his father will return, drive them out, and be restored to his rank and property. We then hear about the suitors' feasting. As Phemius begins to sing, Telemachus precedes the standard questions to a stranger with a bitter remark on how carefree "these men" are, and how frightened they would be if Odysseus returned (159-68). At 225-29, Athena asks what is the feast and who the crowd feasting: it is not an *eranos*, and the feasters are showing very bad manners. In response, Telemachus explains that all the nobles of the nearby islands are courting his mother and eating his house to ruin (245-51). That is, he tells both Mentes, and the audience, very precisely who the suitors are.

A competent consumer of narrative could surely follow this narrative, wondering who these "suitors" are, until Telemachus explains, and in a situation in which the exposition seems "natural." [10] Mentes-Athena is only playing her part by asking so obvious a question, and Telemachus replies briefly and straightforwardly. The audience member who does not know who the suitors are, if such a person exists, is thereby told the necessary information without any overt admission by the narrator **[End Page 204]** that anyone does not know. If it is possible to follow the *Odyssey* without prior knowledge of the suitors, we may well ask what level of ignorance would make the epics inaccessible. If we look naively at the Homeric poems, trying to ignore our own experience (in which few of us can ever have read them without already knowing the stories), what foreknowledge do they actually demand?

The *Odyssey* clearly expects everyone to know that Greeks captured Troy and, at least very roughly, where Troy is. Line 2 would simply be too hard otherwise; the assumption that a hearer can understand "wandered after he sacked Troy" probably translates into an assumption that the hearer knows that Achaean heroes sacked Troy and the city's approximate location. The poem also seems to presuppose a basic familiarity with its hero, since it notoriously delays giving his name until line 21. This looks like a riddle. We learn that the poem is to be about a man who wandered after sacking Troy: Odysseus was not the only hero to have a difficult return, so this does not identify him. If polÊtropow means "wily," we have a strong hint, but this meaning is by no means certain, and while Odysseus is the only mortal to receive this epithet in the surviving epic tradition, it is used of him only twice, so that it is hard to be certain that its association with Odysseus would be familiar to everyone. [11] Then we learn that he did

not save his companions, who ate the Cattle of Helios. This eliminates Menelaus or other heroes who had difficult returns as the subject. Then we learn that he was the very last to return home and that he was held captive by a goddess who wanted him as a husband; then that the home to which the gods fated his return was Ithaca, where further troubles still awaited him; then that Poseidon, alone among the gods, did not pity him; and finally his name. For someone who knows at least some of these details about the story of Odysseus, there is narrative pleasure in becoming more and more certain that he must be the hero until the name is finally announced. For anyone who does not, it may be too much information for an auditor to try to put together and absorb while still reaching out for the all-important name.

There are some other interesting points about the expository technique here. First, we are informed right at the start that Calypso held Odysseus because she desired him. Since we will not actually receive detail about the relationship between Calypso and Odysseus for a long time, until **[End Page 205]** after the Telemachy, this is helpful, because it means that we do not have to worry about the hero: his situation is static and not dangerous, allowing us to concentrate on his family. The cause of Poseidon's anger is carefully given at 68-75, with a genealogy of Polyphemus. The genealogy marks the importance of Polyphemus in the story; the information could have been included here because the audience (or everyone in it) would not automatically understand the anomalous situation in which a hero received pity from all the gods except one. Poseidon's anger, in other words, is not taken for granted.

If we look at the opening of the *Iliad*, we can again see immediately that the Trojan War itself is taken for granted: there is no explanation of the setting at all. Troy is "Priam's city" at 19, "Ilios" at 71, "Troy" first at 129. We can safely assume, I think, that the audience knows who Priam is, since his name is used to identify something else. Certainly an efficient reader can work out that Priam is the king of a city and that Chryses' prayer implies that the Achaeans are besieging it; but along with the other material that appears at the beginning of the poem, this seems too much for anybody who is not reading in the modern style, able to stop and work things out at every line. It seems also almost essential that an auditor know who Agamemnon is. We hear that the anger of Achilles began with strife between him and the son of Atreus; then that Apollo in anger with the king caused the plague, because the son of Atreus had dishonored his priest. Then the narrative moves forward as Chryses addresses the whole army, but especially the "two sons of Atreus." This moment is worth a pause. Chryses addresses both sons of Atreus, presumably because, as an outsider, he knows them as the leaders of the expedition. He apparently does not know that his daughter has actually been awarded to Agamemnon, since he speaks to the army generally and its leaders in particular, and, given the tact of his speech, we would expect him to address Agamemnon directly if he knew. There is a deliberate contrast, after all, between this public supplication, which receives the support of the crowd, but fails, and the intensely private, and successful, supplication of Achilles; the form of Chryses' speech is thematically very important.

If anyone in the audience does not already know that Chryseis belongs to Agamemnon, his knowledge is not superior to Chryses'. Only Agamemnon's reply provides this important detail. Menelaus, though addressed with Agamemnon, does not answer; it is not clear whether he joins in the general acclamation or not. Someone who did not know Agamemnon's status, or his relationship to Menelaus, would have to infer **[End Page 206]** much here. It would not perhaps be impossible. When Chryses speaks separately to the Atreids and the people, one could infer that this implies that "king" earlier meant that Agamemnon had special kingly claims and then one could absorb also that Chryseis is his *geras*. But the scene surely works better if we already know that Agamemnon is the convenor of the army and holds a recognized overall authority. Otherwise, the failure of Menelaus to speak might be a confusing mystery, one which would distract from what is really at issue here. If we know that Agamemnon is the commander, but not that Chryseis is his prize, his speech works very cleverly because we hear his angry speech first, and only when we know that the request--or the army's acclamation of it--angers him do we learn about his personal motive. Agamemnon uses the first person singular at 29, refuting Chryses' second person plural at 20. Yet at 30 he speaks of "our" house; only at 31 does he speak of "my bed." The decision is Agamemnon's both because he is the commander and because the woman in question is his. So while we cannot prove anything about the original audience, the narrative provides special rewards to someone who does know who Agamemnon is, but does not know the specific plot of this poem and so has to wait for just a moment to understand fully Agamemnon's anger. The hearer who does know the situation, on the other hand, can appreciate from the start how Chryses' apparent ignorance dooms his request, tactful as he tries to be.

An auditor of the *Iliad* actually needs remarkably little prior knowledge about Achilles. The opening line joins his name and patronymic. When he summons the assembly, it is obvious that he is among the

Achaean leaders. Agamemnon tells us during the quarrel that he is an excellent warrior and the son of a goddess. As for other main characters, Nestor receives a brief formal introduction when he first speaks (1.247-52). His speech includes an exemplum pointing to his own authority, which further defines him for the audience. When Agamemnon threatens to take the prizes of Achilles, Ajax, or Odysseus at 138, and suggests these men, or Idomeneus, as leaders of the expedition to return Chryseis at 144-46, the audience gets some idea who the main Achaeans are. More such information is richly provided, of course, by the Catalogue and then by the Epipolesis and the Teichoscopia, one providing "objective" information about where the leaders come from and the size of their contingents, the others "subjective" information about their relations with Agamemnon and their special characteristics as heroes. Hector first appears at 1.242, where Achilles threatens Agamemnon that many Achaeans will die at his hands. **[End Page 207]** Although this passing mention is very casual, it is quite clear that Hector must be the most fearsome Trojan warrior. He then appears again when Iris comes to warn the Trojans that the Achaeans are ready for battle (2.786ff.) and is formally introduced in the catalogue at 816-18.

Patroclus is a special case. He first appears at 1.307, named only by patronymic, as Achilles returns to his encampment "with the son of Menoetius and his companions." Achilles addresses Patroclus by name (but without patronymic) at 337, and Patroclus obeys his "dear companion" at 347. Kirk comments that the use of the patronymic "suggests (proves, indeed, unless it be the result of minor oral insouciance) that the audience was already familiar with him." [12] Indeed, Patroclus' name and patronymic do not appear in unmistakable contiguity until 9.202. On the other hand, an audience that was at all familiar with the narrative conventions could assume that a person named in the formula "with X and his companions" is the dearest companion of the subject of the sentence and could infer, when Patroclus appears in this role in the scene in which the heralds remove Briseis, that Patroclus and Menoetiades are the same person.

The details of Chryseis' capture are completely ignored until after the quarrel. At a minimum, the audience must be able to infer that the Achaeans have had opportunities to capture such high-status women in the course of the war. This would be easier if everyone knew that the war lasted a long time and included successful raids on cities of Trojan allies. However, the exact circumstances of this woman's capture are unnecessary at the start, where it is her ransom that matters. Still, anyone in the audience who did not know how she was captured might be curious about it, since her ransom is so important and a release presupposes a capture. Just as the *Odyssey*-narrator, through Athena's question and Telemachus' answer, explains fully who "the suitors" are, so the *Iliad*-narrator also explains the smaller question of how Chryseis was captured and became Agamemnon's (1.365-69): Thetis asks the cause of Achilles' grief, and he narrates the story so far, but beginning with the capture of Thebe, Eetion's city. [13] In the **[End Page 208]** distribution of booty, the Achaeans gave Agamemnon Chryseis. Something is still omitted here, however. When Chryseis goes home, she goes to Chryse. Later expositors said that she was visiting Thebe (Sch. bT 1.366). Actually, an audience accustomed to epic would probably assume that she was married and her husband had been killed, for this seems to be a frequent situation. Briseis turns out to have been married (19.291-92) and Andromache's mother, captured at Thebe, was ransomed and died in her father's house (6.425-30).

All this leads me to suggest that the Homeric poems are aimed at a diverse audience, some of whose members may have rich familiarity with the tradition, but an audience which is not required to know the stories already to follow the tale. It is often thought that the poems were composed for/in performance at festivals that brought together visitors from different cities. [14] Certainly it is a commonplace that the poems are remarkably un-local. Scholars have been able to see only one passage that might flatter particular patrons, the duel between Achilles and Aeneas, and the present form of the duel further demonstrates the absence of local reference, since the hypothesis that an original poem praised Aeneas for the benefit of Aeneidae in the Troad also requires that this original poem has been revised in order to fit into the *Iliad*. [15] The poems look to a Panhellenic audience. Achilles and Odysseus both come from marginal areas of no political importance and are thus suitable for celebration by almost everyone. [16] This Panhellenic scope, and the inordinate length of the poems, far beyond those of ordinary performances as the epics present them, suggest a special performance context.

How well could a poet know his audience at such a festival? Clearly, not in the way Hesiod at Ascra could know his or Phemius would know the suitors. Oral poets who work in a single community or who travel a limited circuit can know exactly their audience's familiarity with the work and even the preferences of individual patrons. But it is unlikely that conditions were exactly the same throughout the world in which epic flourished. Some communities probably had highly skilled professional poets whose

performances were a regular form of entertainment, but the opportunity to hear the bards must have varied both within communities **[End Page 209]** and from village to village, and the breadth and depth of bardic repertory must have varied also. [17] When Odysseus praises Demodocus for being able to sing the Wooden Horse accurately, his praise implies that not every poet would be so competent. On Ithaca, the suitors should be true experts, since they do nothing but feast and so hear performances daily, though they probably do not listen attentively enough; in normal circumstances, Odysseus' household would hear Phemius the most, his closest friends and followers quite often, and others far less frequently. Demodocus sings twice in Alcinous' house, once to the crowd at the games.

It is worth remembering just how large the potential bardic repertory could be: the Trojan story and the Returns; the Argonauts (which the *Odyssey* calls "known to everyone," 12.70); the Theban cycle; theogonic poetry and other stories of divinities; narratives of heroes like Orion, Lycurgus, Meleager, Melampus, and Bellerophon; the Dioscuri; Heracles. Nestor's tales show how rich the traditions even of one locality could be. If we imagine that each story mentioned allusively within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* could stand alone as an epic performance, we are faced with several hundred possible individual songs. I find it very hard to believe that all members of the audience had heard each of these innumerable times. In some modern oral epic traditions, certain episodes are performed far more often than others. [18] The great epics surely were created in a milieu in which the poet could perform them repeatedly; but this does not guarantee that the audience for whom they were intended all belonged to that same circle.

So let us speculate that Homer composes for an audience mixed in age, in local origin, and, to a lesser extent, in social status. Everyone is expected to have a basic familiarity with the Trojan War and with the **[End Page 210]** methods of epic narrative: the authorial audience, though diverse, is not all-inclusive. Some, maybe most, auditors have heard variants of this very song before. Homer invites those who do not know the story very well already into the circle of those who do; he pretends to believe that everyone is familiar with his characters. He does not provide extended formal exposition. When important characters are formally introduced at their first appearance it appears to be as much *honoris causa* as because the audience does not know who they are, as with Nestor. Exposition is often delayed, and often naturalized: one character informs another. This technique permits the poet to play some interesting tricks. If some members of the audience know more of the tradition than others, but the narrative audience is treated throughout as well informed, the poet can avoid making a very strong distinction between those figures or incidents which are in fact very well known and those which are relatively obscure, or even invented.

This model can offer a new explanation of one of the most familiar problems in the epic, Phoenix and the duals of *Iliad* 9. There are, all will remember, two difficulties which most critics see as connected. First, Phoenix has never been mentioned before when at 9.168 Nestor proposes that he "lead" the embassy. The most recent commentator remarks that "His introduction here as if he were as well-known a figure as Hector . . . is awkward." [19] Then, once the three ambassadors and two heralds set off, duals describe their progress in 182, 183, and 185. At 192, we find t dÇ bãthn prot°rv, ¾geðto dÇ dðow ÉOdusseÊw, where it is unclear whether this means that Odysseus is excluded; Achilles then uses the duals at 197-98 in his polite address to the ambassadors as "dearest to me of the Achaeans, despite my anger." Once the duals are abandoned, they do not appear again; when the Embassy leaves (without Phoenix, who stays with Achilles), only plurals are used.

Hainsworth's commentary provides a helpful summary of the different approaches to the problem of the duals. [20] These are (not in his order and with some additions): 1) Grammatical--the dual is simply used for the plural (the view of Zenodotus, but no longer argued by anyone). 2) Analytic (Phoenix is a later intrusion and the heralds do not count) or Neoanalytic (the poet slips into the language of an earlier version, either one with two ambassadors or a general epic embassy-type scene with two **[End Page 211]** heralds). [21] 3) The duals refer to two groups, the ambassadors and the heralds. [22] 4) Phoenix, being of lower social status than the others, is counted with the heralds and excluded. [23] 5) The earlier duals refer to the heralds, in an echo of their earlier taking of Briseis; the later ones refer to Odysseus and Ajax; [24] or all the duals refer to the heralds. [25] 6) The earlier duals refer to Ajax and Odysseus, because Phoenix is ahead "leading," but then Odysseus goes ahead, and the later duals refer to Phoenix and Ajax, since Odysseus is not one of the dearest of the Achaeans to Achilles. [26] 7) Achilles focalizes the scene. Since Phoenix can be taken for granted by Achilles, he does not include him in his greeting, and since the narrator is taking Achilles' perspective, he adopts Phoenix' duals. [27]

Instead of discussing the flaws of each of these approaches, let us consider another possibility: that the failure to introduce Phoenix, as if he were as familiar as Hector, is quite deliberate: the audience is supposed to accept that Phoenix is as familiar as Hector, whether he is or not. For some of them, probably most of them, he is not. Suppose the duals are part of a deliberate strategy to tease the audience? That is, what if even the original audience was not supposed to be certain who was referred to, or why?

The embassy includes two major heroes, one unknown who is "leading," and two heralds. As they leave, Nestor offers exhortations to "each," but especially to Odysseus, to try to persuade Achilles. So there is already a slight perplexity. Nestor himself has said that Phoenix should "lead." This can hardly mean that the others do not know the way to Achilles' encampment, so it would seem to be a more general leadership; but now Nestor seems to be placing his trust in Odysseus. Then the duals start. The listener probably does not worry very much about the heralds. They are clearly not going to do the persuading with Odysseus there. In 183, two characters are apparently praying to Poseidon that they will easily persuade Achilles; these should be those who are actually going to speak to him, and Odysseus must be one of them. Maybe Phoenix has gone ahead. The audience simply has to wait and hope that things will become clearer. **[End Page 212]** At 192, two of them come forward, with Odysseus in the lead. Phoenix has not led by going ahead, since Achilles is interrupted while singing to himself. Achilles then greets two visitors with considerable courtesy and has a meal prepared. After the meal, Ajax nods to Phoenix and Odysseus notices and begins to speak (223-24). This surely piques the auditor's curiosity further. Ajax apparently thinks that Phoenix should now speak, but Odysseus begins instead; the sequence replicates the events which created confusion about "leading" a minute earlier. But once Odysseus' great speech starts, the auditor cannot worry about Phoenix or his role; all attention must be on Odysseus and Achilles.

Then, after Achilles' angry response to Odysseus, Phoenix begins to speak, and if this episode is really following the narrative pattern I have suggested, it is no surprise what he does: he explains who he is, providing the necessary information in a pathetic context that conceals the expository function it serves for the external audience within the equally important functions it serves for the characters themselves. Phoenix tells the story of his relationship to Achilles, not because Achilles does not know it--of course he knows it--but as a *captatio benevolentiae*, a way of asserting his rhetorical authority relative to Achilles and also, I have suggested in an earlier article, as a negative exemplum for him. [28] The narrative is perfectly "natural," but once it is over everyone knows that Phoenix stands in a very special relationship to Achilles. From Achilles' answer to Phoenix, we also learn that unlike Patroclus or Achilles' other immediate followers, Phoenix does not normally spend the night in Achilles' own tent. Phoenix begins his own speech by implying that if Achilles went home, Phoenix would not wish to stay behind without him; this gives us a delicate relationship, in which Phoenix could apparently choose whether to go with Achilles or remain at Troy. This possibility is confirmed by Achilles' answer, which warns Phoenix not to side with Agamemnon against him.

At this point Phoenix' role becomes much clearer. Nestor chose him for the embassy, obviously, because of his close association with Achilles. His "leadership" was presumably intended to get the embassy through the door and win them a fair hearing. It now seems likely that the duals Achilles used were addressed to Odysseus and Ajax, the surprise visitors; Phoenix is an intimate who does not require such special greeting. The earlier duals also referred to Odysseus and Ajax, who were supposed to **[End Page 213]** do the actual persuading and prayed for success in it. Phoenix was to "lead" by putting Achilles in a mood to listen. If that is the case, there might be some tension between Phoenix and Odysseus, or perhaps rather between Nestor and Odysseus: Nestor from the start expects Odysseus to give the important speech, and so directs his instructions mainly to him, but is nervous about how Achilles will receive him. Odysseus, however, does not wait for Phoenix to intervene, but steps forward himself and speaks first. Achilles to some extent justifies Odysseus' actions, in that he behaves with the utmost correctness in welcoming the embassy. On the other hand, Nestor turns out to have been right that Phoenix would be useful. He is not needed to win the embassy a hearing, but his persuasion is important in leading Achilles away from his initial angry decision to sail home.

On this hypothesis, there is good reason for readers to find the duals confusing, because they are supposed to be confusing. They serve to increase the mystification around Phoenix. In fact, they could render the sequence mildly perplexing even to someone who already knows quite well who Phoenix is. Such an auditor might guess that Phoenix is the excluded ambassador, especially when Achilles fails to include one of his visitors in his greeting, but the point of this distinction between Phoenix and the

others can only become clear after the speeches. Only someone who is familiar with exactly this version, in which Odysseus moves in before Phoenix can introduce the embassy and, by prompting Achilles' long response, allows Phoenix his great speech--only such an auditor will be immune to surprise. As with the earlier narrative tease about Chryseis, some information is permanently omitted. The narrative never explains why Phoenix was at the meeting of the Achaean leaders, either because the narrator had no good mimetic reason (he was there so that he could go on the embassy), or because any explicit reason would be distracting and unnecessary. Because it is never explained, however, the audience is required to take his presence for granted. They may, of course, speculate about why he was there. Since the Meleager story indicates that embassies are a regular feature of stories about angry heroes (*Il*. 9.574-87) and stories of angry heroes appear to be very frequent in the tradition (cf. *Od*. 8.75-82), the audience can expect the characters to know the protocol. [29] The audience may assume, therefore, that Phoenix could well have been present because characters in the story **[End Page 214]** (Nestor or Phoenix himself) knew he would be needed. Such guesses, however, do not interfere with the poet's authority to place Phoenix where he wishes.

The technique allows Phoenix to be introduced while never admitting that he might need introduction, and thereby accomplishes more than generating suspense, although it certainly does that. By inviting everyone into the circle of those who know the tradition thoroughly, flattering the audience, it simultaneously exerts considerable power over the audience, who are thus distracted from comparing what they know beforehand and what they do not. If the narrative audience knows all the stories already, the authorial audience is invited to treat them all as equally traditional, whether they are actually familiar or not. In a rich tradition crammed with variants, amid a mixed audience who are familiar with different versions in varying degrees, an individual would in any case find it hard to be sure that an unfamiliar element was actually new. The narrator has tremendous power over any areas of the stories that are not completely standardized--which probably means all but the basic outlines. The Muse guarantees the validity of what he sings at a supernatural level and, in the everyday world, the poet knows more about the tradition than anyone else: and even if he did not, nobody can have a basis from which to deny the truth of what he sings. Even another poet could only complain that his own version was superior or that he had never heard the song performed that way: unless he had exactly the performer's experience, how could he deny the traditional basis of a performer's song? Even if the story is not traditional, it could still be true since the Muse provides access unmediated by tradition. Homeric poets consistently obscure the realistic processes by which songs are learned and transmitted by emphasizing the role of the Muse. [30] As long as the poet praises and blames appropriately, and keeps to the crucial facts the audience would care about, nobody can argue with him. [31] The expository technique makes it even harder for anyone to dispute with him. Exposition directed at the audience admits that they do not all know this information already and draws attention to its unfamiliarity. By refusing to distinguish between what everyone probably knows and what many do not, the poet renders it harder for anyone to distinguish among the traditional and widely-known, the traditional but unfamiliar, and the newly **[End Page 215]** invented. The poet invites the audience to pretend to know everything already, which leaves no position from which they can distinguish what they could have known, but happened not to know, and what they could not have known, because it was not previously part of the tradition. Those who remember alternate versions of a tale may appreciate the difference, and the poet may provide special narrative rewards for such sophisticated audiences, but it would not be easy to identify innovation as such.

Subordinate narratives are sometimes told in a form so compressed that they surely would be difficult for anyone who did not know them already to follow. [32] This obscurity, however, never produces more than local difficulty. Where a story has a clear paradigmatic point, Homeric speakers make that point very clear. For example, it is not easy to reconstruct the events that lead to Meleager's anger, as Phoenix tells the tale. [33] He mentions an important event, Meleager's killing of his uncles, only allusively as the cause of Meleager's mother's anger and curse against him. This event, however, though it is central to the story in its own right, is not important for its paradigmatic function, and the foregrounded elements are those that contribute to the parallel between Meleager and Achilles. A hearer who did not know the story of Meleager would probably be confused, but this confusion would not interfere with understanding the point. Similarly, in a story that does not have so straightforward a function, Glaucus' narrative of his ancestry at *Il*. 6.145-211 could baffle anyone who was not familiar with it; but as long as everyone realizes that Glaucus claims descent from the famous hero Bellerophon, the immediate consequence--the exchange of armor with Diomedes in recognition of their guest-friendship--is comprehensible. Anyone who does not know all the stories can follow the main narrative and enough of the subordinate ones to understand their point, but must be willing to tolerate not being able to understand every detail.

The details of some of these paradigmatic stories narrated by the characters themselves are the likeliest of all the narrative elements of the *Iliad* to be ad hoc inventions. It is very implausible that an independent story ever existed in which Niobe ate (24.602). [34] Yet if such inventions are in one way distanced from the poet's authority by being put into the mouths of his characters, in another they are placed as firmly within the tradition as **[End Page 216]** they could possibly be, for they are treated as already known and familiar to the heroes of that distant past. Inventions are, in any case, based on traditional materials and story-patterns, so that the poets themselves need not have been consciously aware of their own innovations as such; giving a traditional story a new emphasis for a new context can shade invisibly into providing new details. Invention was probably constant, as stories were adapted to new contexts, and invisible. Controversy about invention and tradition has persisted in an unhelpful way because scholars needlessly identify invention with creativity or imagine that a poet who invents a detail is somehow less fully traditional. [35]

My approach to Homeric narrative technique could thus be taken in two directions I would oppose. First, I do not want to try to draw sharp lines between tradition and invention, still less to give one more value than the other. Instead, I am suggesting that the narrative method that blurs the two should be respected. While we may find it helpful to speculate that particular details are invented, we should not give this possibility an importance it did not have for the singers or their contemporary audiences. Equally, I do not think that we should reject suggestions that the poems may allude in sophisticated ways to myths outside their own narrative field, as Laura Slatkin argues that the *Iliad* uses the mythological connection between Thetis and the succession to Zeus. [36] On the contrary, I believe that such allusions are part of the narrative technique. But I do not think we need to imagine that most members of the audience had to understand every poetic trick; this romanticizes the relation between oral poet and audience. On the contrary, the poems attempt to be "fail-safe" narratives. [37] Complex enough to satisfy the most exacting connoisseurs, they are simultaneously accessible to anyone with a minimal knowledge of the tradition and some ability to follow narrative. By taking so much for granted, the poet invites the audience to reconfirm his authority.

The University of Michigan

Notes

1. For example, the tradition examined by Basso 1985 actually requires that a member of the audience of a story regularly interject encouragements to the narrator to continue.

2. Doherty 1995.24-25 (and note 37) helpfully warns against the "(projected) nostalgia" for this homogeneous audience of some oralist studies. Lord 1960.14-17 describes the "instability" of the guslar's audience. Although a gathering in a town coffee-house might include singers who would form a critical audience, the typical audience is easily distracted and songs are often not finished.

3. Wyatt 1985, especially note 10: "Had there been any lack of comprehension among his hearers, Homer would have known of it and would either have changed the phrasing of his remarks, or provided more introduction to them, or have later offered an explanation of the confusion. He simply was not in a position to allow perplexity in an audience which would have denied him payment if themselves denied of comprehension and thus satisfaction."

4. Foley 1991. While he points out that "not all traditional poets are equally talented" (p. 8)--and identifies one aspect of talent as size of repertory--he does not examine possible gaps between the whole potentially available tradition and the tradition actually familiar to particular poets and audiences.

5. Rabinowitz 1987.94-104 and Phelan 1989.29-30.

6. Martin 1993.228-28.

7. Narayan 1989.37-42 describes how a swami on different occasions tells the same exemplary story with altered details that give it a special message for individuals in the present audience. Some of his regular visitors appreciate the different nuances of each rendition, but not everyone.

8. Mills 1989.55-56 describes a peculiar storytelling session in which the audience includes not only a foreign woman, but a public official to whom one of the narrators has reason to be hostile. Although the situation is unusual, the skill with which such a narrator can simultaneously create the obligatory audience rapport, while teasing, provoking, and confusing a segment of the audience, suggests that he has practice with complex storytelling situations.

9. Slyomovics 1987.30, Connelly 1986.57-116.

10. Sternberg 1978.58-62. I have, in fact, known students to comprehend the *Odyssey* with little difficulty although they were not familiar even with the names of the gods.

11. West 1988.69.

12. Kirk 1985, on 1.307 (p. 84). On the other hand, Howald 1924.411-12, first argued that the equivalence of "Kleo-patre," Meleager's wife in the paradigm at 9.561, with "Patro-klos" means that the latter was invented by Homer, and many scholars have followed him, such as von Scheliha 1943.236-51. Janko 1992.313-14 suggests that Patroclus is an old character whose role Homer has expanded.

13. de Jong 1985.1-22 argues that Achilles knows more than he naturalistically could, since he narrates Chryses' prayer and Apollo's response; but I do not think that he exceeds the limits of believable inference.

14. e.g., Taplin 1992.39-41.

15. Merkelbach 1948.

16. Nagy 1979.116 argues that the poems also suppress hero-cult, which would attach the characters to the specific places where they were worshipped.

17. Moyle 1990 describes the career of the minstrel Müdamî. He apparently had little familiarity with minstrel songs as a child and even after his formal apprenticeship, during which he traveled with his teacher, his repertory was incomplete; he learned many new songs during his military service. Not every village has a minstrel and the minstrels travel limited circuits. In the same Arabic tradition studied by Connelly and Slyomovics, Reynolds 1995 describes the "Village of the Poets" in the Nile Delta. This single village included fourteen households of poets, while other villages of equal size might have none.

18. Slyomovics 1987.23: ". . . other sections, such as those dealing with the magical birth of the hero, were uninteresting, "Adwallah said, to his patrons and so, though he knew the sections, they were never, or only rarely, performed." Ironically, Connelly's analysis (see above, note 6) treats three performances of precisely this episode, which seems to have been especially popular among the Cairene audience she studied. Lord 1974.298 quotes the great guslar Avdo Me##&#65533;##edovic##;##: in 1950 he had not performed "Smailagic##;## Meho" since 1935, because no audience was interested.

19. Hainsworth 1993.85-86 (on 182).

20. See note 16 preceding; there is also a good introduction in Griffin 1995.23-25.

21. Page 1959.297-300.

22. Thornton 1978.

23. Köhnken 1971.

24. Segal 1968.

25. Stanley 1993.351-53 n. 9; but I cannot imagine that Achilles' propriety would extend to calling the heralds his dearest friends.

26. Nagy 1979.49-55.

27. Martin 1989.236-39.

28. Scodel 1982.

29. Schadewaldt 1966.142-43; Kakridis 1949.47-49 discuss the hero's anger as a traditional theme.

30. Ford 1992.90-92, 129-30.

31. Pratt 1993.11-54, 98-99.

32. Kirk 1962.164-69 discusses this "abbreviated reference style."

33. Hainsworth 1993 on 9.524-605 (pp. 130-32) gives bibliography on the episode.

34. Willcock 1964.

35. So in G. Nagy's polemic against Willcock (Nagy 1992.311-31), the argument leads to an infinite regress: if the singers never invented anything, it would be hard to see where the variants they used ever came from. At the same time, he is surely right that the search for Homeric inventions is impelled by a mistaken need to confirm Homer's greatness with a kind of originality Homer did not need.

36. Slatkin 1991.

37. The phrase is from Sternberg 1985, though I use it in a different sense.

Bibliography

Basso, K. 1985. *A Musical View of the Universe*. Philadelphia.

Connelly, B. 1986. *Arab Folk Epic and Identity*. Berkeley.

Doherty, L. 1995. *Siren Songs: Gender, Audiences, and Narrators in the* Odyssey. Ann Arbor.

Foley, J. M. 1991. *Immanent Art*. Bloomington.

Ford, A. 1992. *Homer: The Poetry of the Past*. Ithaca.

Griffin, J. 1995. *Homer: Iliad IX*. Oxford.

Hainsworth, B. 1993. *The Iliad: A Commentary*. Volume III: books 9-12. Cambridge.

Howald, E. 1924. "Meleager und Achill," *RM* 73.402-25.

Janko, R. 1992. *The Iliad: A Commentary*. Volume IV: books 13-16. Cambridge.

de Jong, I. F. 1985. "*Iliad* 1.366-392: A Mirror Story," *Arethusa* 18.1-22.

Kakridis, J. T. 1949. *Homeric Researches*. Lund.

Kirk, G. S. 1962. *The Songs of Homer*. Cambridge.

------. 1985. *The Iliad: A Commentary*. Volume I: books 1-4. Cambridge.

Köhnken, A. 1971. "Die Rolle des Phoinix und die Duale im I der Ilias," *Glotta* 53.25-36.

Lord, A. B. 1960. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, Mass.

------. 1974. *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs III: The Wedding of Smailagic##; ##Meho*. Cambridge, Mass.

Martin, R. 1989. *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the* Iliad. Ithaca.

------. 1993. "Telemachus and the Last Hero Song," *Colby Quarterly* 29.222-40.

Merkelbach, R. 1948. "Zum U der *Ilias*," *Philologus* 97.303-11.

Mills, M. 1989. *Rhetorics and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling*. Philadelphia.

Moyle, N. K. 1990. *The Turkish Minstrel Tale Tradition*. New York.

Nagy, G. 1979. *The Best of the Achaeans*. Baltimore.

------. 1992. "Mythological Exemplum in Homer," in R. Hexter and D. Selden, *Innovations of Antiquity*. New York.

Narayan, K. 1989. *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*. Philadelphia.

Page, D. L. 1959. *History and the Homeric Iliad*. Berkeley.

Phelan, J. 1989. *Reading People, Reading Plots*. Chicago.

Pratt, L. 1993. *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar*. Ann Arbor.

Rabinowitz, R. 1987. *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*.

Reynolds, Dwight. 1995. *Heroic Poets, Poetic Heroes*. Ithaca.

Schadewaldt, W. 1966. *Iliasstudien*^{3}. Darmstadt (reprint of second ed., Leipzig 1943).

von Scheliha, R. 1943. *Patroclos: Gedanken über Homers Dichtung und Gestalten*. Basel.

Scodel, R. 1982. "The Autobiography of Phoenix: *Iliad* 9.444-95," *AJP* 103.128-36.

Segal, C. 1968. "The Embassy and the Duals of *Iliad* 9.182-89," *GRBS* 9.101-14.

Slatkin, L. 1991. *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad.* Berkeley.

Slyomovics, S. 1987. *The Merchant of Art: An Egyptian Hilali Oral Epic Poet in Performance* (University of California Publications in Modern Philology 120). Berkeley.

Stanley, K. 1993. *The Shield of Homer*. Princeton.

Sternberg, M. 1978. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Baltimore.

------. 1985. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*: *Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington.

Taplin, O. 1992. *Homeric Soundings*. Oxford.

Thornton, A. 1978. "Once Again the Duals in Book 9 of the *Iliad*," *Glotta* 56.1-4.

West, S. 1988. "Book I: Commentary," in A. Heubeck, S. West, and J. B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*. Oxford.

Willcock, M. M. 1964. "Mythological Paradeigmata in the *Iliad*," *CQ* 14.141-51.

Wyatt, W. F. 1985. "The Embassy and the Duals in Iliad 9," *AJP* 106.399-408.

.