UNMARKED SPACE: ODYSSEUS AND THE INLAND JOURNEY

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> Ἔτι τοίνυν, ἔφη, πάμμεγά τι εἶναι αὐτό, καὶ ἡμᾶς οἰκεῖν, τοὺς μέχρι Ἡρακλείων στηλῶν ἀπὸ Φάσιδος, ἐν σμικρῷ τινι μορίῳ, ὥσπερ περὶ τέλμα μύρμηκας ἢ βατράχους περὶ τὴν θάλατταν οἰκοῦντας, καὶ ἄλλους ἄλλοθι πολλοὺς ἐν πολλοῖσι τοιούτοις τόποις οἰκεῖν.
>
> This [world], he said, is vast, and we inhabit this tiny part up to the Pillars of Heracles from Phasis. We live around the sea like ants or frogs around a pond, and many others, too, live elsewhere in many other places just like our own.[1]
>
> Plato *Phaedo* 109a9–b4

Every culture, no matter how comprehensive its surveillance systems or how exact its science, will always contain places in which it is possible to become lost. In the *Odyssey,* a poem that charts the unfamiliar territory of regions that were, in antiquity as today, "as hard to trace as the cobbler of Aeolus's bag of winds" (Strabo 1.2.15), the possibility of losing one's way is a recurrent motif. In this paper, I examine one isolated example of a "lost" or unmappable landscape in the poem, in an episode that never actually takes place in the *Odyssey*, but is foretold twice: first by Teiresias in the

1 All translations are my own. Citations in Greek are from the Oxford Classical Texts of Plato (vol. 1, ed. Duke et al., 1995) and the *Odyssey* (vols. 3 and 4, ed. T. W. Allen, 1965–66), and from West's edition of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (Oxford 1978).

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Underworld (11.121–31) and later by Odysseus to Penelope back on Ithaca (23.267–77). The story is well known, for it describes Odysseus's foray into a particularly unusual topography.[2] Leaving Ithaca one last time, Odysseus is instructed to walk inland with an oar on his shoulder until he meets a wayfarer from a race of men who "do not know of the sea" (11.122–23, 23.269–70). When this stranger mistakes Odysseus's oar for a winnowing shovel,[3] he is to plant it in the earth, sacrifice to Poseidon, and finally return home. As Teiresias makes clear, Odysseus will fully complete his travels only after having encountered this inland space, and only then will he be free to return permanently to Ithaca, there awaiting a "gentle death" (11.134–35, 23.281–82).

What makes this final landscape of the *Odyssey* so different from the other spaces in the poem is its complete and systematic erasure of the border between land and sea. For Odysseus to become truly lost, he must leave the orienting border of the sea behind, entering a region where he will relinquish not only his own sense of direction and reference but also his identity in the context of Homeric poetics. As I demonstrate, it is not only the epic hero but also the *Odyssey* itself that becomes disorientated when it loses sight of the dividing line between land and sea. The upsetting of established topographical notions that ensues from the directive to turn one's back on the sea also dislodges other borders or categories in the poem, ultimately leading to a shift in genre that takes the reader (like Odysseus) beyond the epic parameters of Homer's world. In short, the *Odyssey*'s brief venture into inland territory offers its audience a glimpse of a landscape that is so antithetical to Homeric geography that it calls for boundaries to be redrawn and the language of epic recast.

In the main body of this paper, I explain how the absence of a major topographical border within the inland space of the *Odyssey* translates into an absence or disruption of other kinds of borders as well. I begin, though, with James Romm's important study on the significance of the edge in ancient geographical thought. As he observes (1992.9–34), that edge was often marked by the boundary of the sea. Not only were the outermost edges of the earth commonly believed to be surrounded by the mythical river Ocean, but the Greeks also tended to both settle and travel within close

2 Hansen 1990 identifies the story as a popular folktale motif.

3 An agricultural tool used for separating the wheat from the chaff. See further Carrière 1992.34.

proximity of the coast (Thuc. 1.7). Although the Greeks generally feared the sea in its entirety as a vast and potentially destructive wasteland, they viewed the coastline marking its edge as a familiar and orienting space. Early *periploi* and sailing expeditions took their narrative thread from this edge, constructing their accounts in the form of a point-to-point itinerary along the shoreline.[4] Colonizers, too, always approached new sites from the perspective of the shore and rarely ventured far inland from coastal areas (Malkin 1998.1–31). As historians have long recognized, and as is evident from the *Odyssey,* it was necessary for sailors to keep the border between land and sea in sight for practical reasons of food and water supply. Those shores that lay further out in the Greek imagination, especially the mythical edge of the river Ocean, were fantastic and terrifying in their own right, but again, as borders, they were at least reassuring in their function of clearly demarcating space into different categories or zones (Romm 1992.32–44, Hartog 2001, esp. 23–24).

This paper asks what would happen if the boundary between land and sea were to disappear from the Greeks' conceptual horizon. Did spaces exist in their cognitive landscape where the edge between land and sea had not been drawn? I call such spaces "lost" or "unplaceable" because they have no borders or markings to categorize them, nor do they have an obvious place in the geographical schemes outlined by scholars such as Romm (1992) or, more recently, François Hartog (2001). They cannot be drawn in on the wild and uncivilized edges of the earth, but, equally, there is no place for them at the "center," which is traditionally identified as a safe and familiar space. I wish to offer a new interpretation of the Greeks' conceptual geography by suggesting that an antithetical system to the "edges of the earth" theory was also at work in Greek thought. In this alternative scheme, the idea of traveling towards a center is no longer to travel towards home but to travel away from the familiar, because it is interpreted as a movement away from the anchoring line of the shore. According to this reading, inland space becomes more dangerous and problematic than even the fantastic spaces at the very edges of the earth. In the *Odyssey*, a poem that lays the blueprint for a distinctively Greek concept of geography, to lose one's bearings inland, away from any sense of an edge, is no longer to fit within the secure categories of an ordered system of classification. On the

4 Cf. Hdt. 4.42–44, Gisinger 1937, Dilke 1998.130–33, Hartog 2001.88–89.

contrary, for Odysseus to lose his way in the interior is also for him to lose all sense of direction, reference, and ultimately, identity. When he takes up an oar on his shoulder and walks inland until he meets a people who have never tasted salt—when he turns his back, that is, on the orienting border of the sea—then, and only then, will Odysseus truly lose his way in both world and poem.

The inland journey is first prophesied by Teiresias in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* and then retold by Odysseus to Penelope in Book 23, at which point a number of different boundaries in the poem begin to converge and overlap. Within the space of roughly sixty lines in Book 23 (239–96), we are invited to consider how the use of three related words for edge or boundary—πέρας, πεῖραρ (pl. πείρατα), and περάτη—complement and reconfigure one another. That is, we shall consider not only how the outer limits (πείρατα*)* or horizon (περάτη) of Odysseus's world reflect on the status of the ending (πέρας) of the *Odyssey* itself, but also on their connection to the limits (πείρατα) of Odysseus's suffering.[5] In the course of my analysis, moreover, I will demonstrate how those three boundaries are obfuscated by a corresponding disintegration of measurement, on the one hand, and markers or σήματα, on the other, the further one travels away from the boundary of the shore.

PEIRATA

Homer's ancient editors maintained that Penelope and Odysseus's withdrawal to bed at *Odyssey* 23.296 was the very last line—in their words, the true πέρας or limit—of the poem, claiming that the remaining text of the *Odyssey* was simply an epilogue or interpolation.[6] Although this theory has since been discredited, the Alexandrians raise an important point in their quest to find a suitable ending for the narrative as it moves towards closure. Indeed, Athena's abrupt entrance in Book 24, where she draws the poem to a close, has long troubled readers in search of a more satisfactory ending. This point is underscored by Odysseus's own disruption of narrative borders at *Odyssey* 23.248–50 when he warns Penelope that, despite the fact

5 Cf. Bergren 1975. On the play between πεῖραρ (limit) and πεῖρα (trial) in the *Odyssey*, see Bergren 1993.16–17.

6 Scholia on *Od.* 23.296 (M.V. Vind 133). For modern scholarship and bibliography on the topic, see, e.g., Seaford 1994.38–42. On teleology in the *Odyssey*, see Buchan 2004.1–17, and on the question of ancient closure more generally, Roberts 1997.

that they have at last been reunited, the limits, or πείρατα*,* of his story are still a long way off (23.248–50):

> ὦ γύναι, οὐ γάρ πω πάντων ἐπὶ πείρατ᾽ ἀέθλων
> ἤλθομεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ὄπισθεν ἀμέτρητος πόνος ἔσται,
> πολλὸς καὶ χαλεπός, τὸν ἐμὲ χρὴ πάντα τελέσσαι.
>
> Wife, we have not yet reached the boundary of all our trials,
> But still a labor that will be unmeasured,
> Manifold, and difficult, remains for me to complete.

The boundaries of Odysseus's story expand at the very point when we would expect the poem to draw towards closure. Just a few lines earlier, as a favor to the long separated lovers, Athena had extended the temporal boundaries of the night by holding the evening back upon the horizon, or περάτη, of the world (23.239–43):

> ὣς ἄρα τῇ ἀσπαστὸς ἔην πόσις εἰσοροώσῃ,
> δειρῆς δ᾽ οὔ πω πάμπαν ἀφίετο πήχεε λευκώ.
> καί νύ κ᾽ ὀδυρομένοισι φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς,
> εἰ μὴ ἄρ᾽ ἄλλ᾽ ἐνόησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.
> νύκτα μὲν ἐν περάτῃ δολιχὴν σχέθεν,
>
> So dear was her husband to Penelope looking upon him,
> And she would not yet at all release her white arms from his neck.
> Then rosy-fingered Dawn would have lit upon their weeping,
> If the gray-eyed goddess Athena had not thought otherwise
> And lengthened the night by holding it back upon the horizon.

Athena's actions allow the couple to withdraw into a closed-off space in which time is brought to a standstill. Homer tells us that Penelope could happily have kept her arms around her husband's neck forever, as if she would never, or "not yet at all" (οὔ πω πάμπαν), let go (240). Her attempt to hold her husband within the timeless space of her embrace replicates the

actions of Athena, who stretches the perimeters of time by holding back the dawn. But again, *Odyssey* 23.248–50 upsets that equilibrium, as Odysseus's reluctant admittance that they have "not yet" reached the boundary of all their trials (οὐ γάρ πω πάντων) subverts (as it echoes) the language of his homecoming scene and the promise of everlasting reunion for the two.[7] Within the space of just ten lines (240–49), moreover, the idea of suspended time is not only compounded by lexical repetition, it is also given a spatial dimension in the correspondence between ἐν περάτῃ (the horizon of the world) and ἐπὶ πείρατα (the limits of Odysseus's trials).

The horizon upon which Athena holds back the night and the boundaries of Odysseus's trials both have clear topographical associations with the πείρατα γαίης, or the edges of the earth, where the horizon (περάτη) is located (Stanford 1948 ad loc.) and where Odysseus and his crew circled for so long in their attempts to return home. In Book 11, Odysseus reaches the land of the Cimmerians, located next to the Underworld at the very edges (πείρατα) of the river Ocean (11.13–16). It is here, at the edges of the earth, that he receives the prophecy about the inland journey from Teiresias (11.121–37). Odysseus will later repeat this prophecy, along with a recapitulation of his journey home, to Penelope in Book 23, after the two have retired to bed (23.300–43, esp. 322–25). In both cases (at 11.11–19, where Odysseus reaches the land of the Cimmerians and, in Book 23, when he tells Penelope of the final boundary of his trials), Odysseus's evocation of his journey towards a border is set within a timeless zone untouched by the sun, and within which the edges of the night supernaturally extend to encompass the length of his story.

The horizon (περάτη) upon which Athena holds back the night thereby overlaps with the boundaries (πείρατα) of Odysseus's trials, just as, in turn, the edges (πείρατα) of the earth where the Cimmerians live are, like Penelope and Odysseus's endless night, untouched by the sun (11.15–16: "Gleaming Helios never touched them with its rays"). As Athena's actions make clear, the horizon or "edge" of Homer's world is a spatial *and* temporal border,[8] but this border, too, can only be fully understood in relation to the narrative boundary of the *Odyssey* and Odysseus's trials. Each

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7 Cf. Heubeck 1988 ad loc. on the unusual position of οὐ γάρ πω at the beginning of a speech.

8 Some commentators interpret ἐν περάτῃ as a spatial construct (horizon on the world's edge), others as a temporal one (the end of the course of the night). See further Heubeck 1988 ad loc.

of these boundaries is held back, at arm's length from the present, for an indefinite amount of time. In much the same way, moreover, as these various borders are connected through the motif of night and sunless space, so, too, are they joined by their narrative contexts in each of the two books in which they appear. As Odysseus narrates his past and future journeys to Alcinous in Book 11, the Phaeacian king claims that the night "seems almost endless" (11.373), encouraging him to finish his story before any of them should go to sleep. Similarly, for Penelope in Book 23, the night extends to encompass Odysseus's retelling of his wanderings ("She delighted in listening, and sleep did not fall upon her lids until he had narrated everything," 23.308–09).

Despite all the indications in Book 23 of Odysseus's final arrival home and the reaching of a boundary or endpoint to his narrative, the *Odyssey* still looks forward to an impending journey that exists beyond the borders of the poem (23.266–77):

οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὸς
χαίρω, ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλὰ βροτῶν ἐπὶ ἄστε᾽ ἄνωγεν
ἐλθεῖν, ἐν χείρεσσιν ἔχοντ᾽ εὐῆρες ἐρετμόν,
εἰς ὅ κε τοὺς ἀφίκωμαι οἳ οὐ ἴσασι θάλασσαν
ἀνέρες, οὐδέ θ᾽ ἅλεσσι μεμιγμένον εἶδαρ ἔδουσιν·
οὐδ᾽ ἄρα τοὶ γ᾽ ἴσασι νέας φοινικοπαρήους,
οὐδ᾽ εὐήρε᾽ ἐρετμά, τά τε πτερὰ νηυσὶ πέλονται.
σῆμα δέ μοι τόδ᾽ ἔειπεν ἀριφραδές, οὐδέ σε κεύσω.
ὁππότε κεν δή μοι ξυμβλήμενος ἄλλος ὁδίτης
φήῃ ἀθηρηλοιγὸν ἔχειν ἀνὰ φαιδίμῳ ὤμῳ,
καὶ τότε μ᾽ ἐν γαίῃ πήξαντ᾽ ἐκέλευσεν ἐρετμόν,
ἔρξανθ᾽ ἱερὰ καλὰ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι,

Nor am I
Happy, since [Teiresias] bid me to go to many cities of men,
Holding in my hands a well-fitted oar,
Until I should come upon a people who do not know of the sea,
Who do not eat food that has been mixed with salt,
And who know nothing of purple-cheeked ships
Or of well-fitted oars, which are the wings of ships.
But he told this clear sign to me that I will not hide from you.

> Whenever some other traveler coming across me in the road
> Should say that I carry a winnowing shovel upon my gleaming shoulder,
> Then he bid me to fix the well-fitted oar in the earth,
> And to carry out auspicious sacrifices to lord Poseidon.

This story, as many have observed, exists outside the flow of narrative time, situated always at some point in the future but never realized within the temporality of the *Odyssey* itself.[9] Cut loose from the action of the plot, the journey takes place within the imaginary zone of untold and unplaced time whose existence pushes the πείρατα of Odysseus's story ever further into the distance.[10] In a simultaneous movement, therefore, we may say that Odysseus loses sight of the limits of his suffering, that the boundary of the poem as a whole slips from view, and that the coordinates of Odysseus's travels are transplanted from the edges, or πείρατα, of the earth, onto an ambiguous and unmarked "center." The narration of Odysseus's story had previously traveled as far as the edges of the world. Now as his projected story crosses the boundary of the poem's end, it also shifts from the space of sea and edge to a new site, that of land and interior. It is at this point, when Odysseus loses control over the physical trajectory of his path through space, that he will also lose control over the coordinates of his narrative.

METRA

Odysseus calls this final journey an infinite or "unmeasured" labor (ἀμέτρητος πόνος, 23.249)[11] precisely because its boundaries are not set. As an exact inverse to the circuitous journey from Troy, the location of whose ending was never held in doubt, Odysseus's movement away from Ithaca will take him to an unknown site at an immeasurable distance from home, even if he were to proceed there in a direct and unbroken line. Hidden within the ἀμέτρητος πόνος, moreover, may be a further clue as to not only the distance, but also the narratability of the landscape that Odysseus

9 See Peradotto 1990.68, 89–90, with references; Bergren 1983.50–54.

10 See here Ballabriga 1989.298, who draws a link between Odysseus's inland journey and the concept of the ἄπειρον or "boundless."

11 The word ἀμέτρητος is rare—it is attested only here and *Od.* 19.512 (Heubeck 1988 ad loc.). See further Peradotto 1990.87 and Buchan 2004.234–36.

will ultimately enter. For the journey itself, since it never takes place in the poem, is not "measured out" into the metrics of Homeric verse, nor is its "distance" ever marked through the successive flow of narrative.

In the ancient language of literary criticism, μέτρα applies both to the verses of a poem and to the meter in which they are composed. In conjunction with these two definitions, it also refers to the poet's own knowledge, or σοφία, of a particular field (West 1978 ad 648). On two different occasions in the *Odyssey,* for example, Proteus or Teiresias instruct characters within the poem on the "path and measures of their route" (ὁδὸν καὶ μέτρα κελεύθου, 4.389 = 10.539; cf. Peradotto 1990.87). As its connection to the verb μετρέω (used to describe Odysseus's traversal through space at 3.179) suggests, μέτρα here might equally refer to the physical distance, as in units of measure, of the journey home, as well as to the metrical units of the prophet's speech or to his particular knowledge concerning the theme of the hero's return. Proteus and Teiresias thereby replicate the role of the Homeric poet in their ability to spell out the terms of the hero's nostos, both in words and in measures, as the two different meanings of the word μέτρα are brought into relation with one another.

My second example of this phenomenon comes from a well-known passage in Hesiod. Scholars have argued that the Nautilia section of the *Works and Days* skillfully combines the divergent meanings for μέτρα that I outlined above in order to draw a connection between the act of sailing and the art of poetry. At *Works and Days* 648–49, Hesiod promises to tell his brother of the measures of the sea (δείξω δή τοι μέτρα . . . θαλάσσης), but then claims not to have the skill to do so (οὔτέ τι ναυτιλίης σεσοφισμένος οὔτέ τι νηῶν, "I am not well versed in sea matters nor in ships"). As Gregory Nagy (1982.65–66) first noted, in these lines, Hesiod appears to be drawing an association between the σοφία that is attributed to sailing and the concept of Homeric poetics, both of which he, as a non-Homeric poet, is programmatically rejecting. That is, in the context of Hesiod's land-rooted poem, the μέτρα of μέτρα θαλάσσης may be translated as both distance-measures and song-measures, because for an agrarian poet like Hesiod to "measure the seas" means not only to wander into the terrain of Homeric poetry, but also to begin to sing according to its "rules."

Certainly, as Ralph Rosen (1990) argues, the reference in the Nautilia to Hesiod's one brief journey by sea, from Euboea to Aulis, and the prize he won there for his singing, suggests that Hesiod is drawing a connection here between sailing and song-making, particularly Homeric song (given the reference to Aulis). Hesiod's "inexperience" in sailing might

then be interpreted as the farmer-poet's own generic difference from the "heroic" (because sea-bound) poetics of Homer. Carol Dougherty (2001.13, 21–25) recently pushed this connection between Homeric poetry and sailing further by underscoring the similarities between shipbuilding and poetic composition (a ship's planks, which were stitched or fitted together with pegs, evoked the same technical vocabulary as the crafting of poetry), and by highlighting the programmatic role of extensive sea travel in the *Iliad*'s Catalogue of Ships.

If the prominent role of ships and seafaring in Homer implies a connection between Homeric poetics and the sea, as these scholars argue, then the association between the "measures" (metrics, rules) of song and the "measures" (routes, distances traveled) of the sea in Hesiod's Nautilia combine to achieve a rich metapoetic resonance.[12] According to this reading of Hesiod, to speak of the domain (or μέτρα) of Homeric poetics is also, in the same breath, to talk of the μέτρα of the sea. When Odysseus states that he will eventually embark upon an "unmeasured" journey at *Odyssey* 23.249, and, furthermore, when he proceeds to describe the people towards whom he will travel as those who know nothing of sea, salt, ships, or oars, we are reminded of Hesiod's own placement of himself in a similar position at *Works and Days* 649. That is, in both cases, we might suggest that the movement of a central character within the poem away from the sea entails a complementary movement away from the μέτρα, or laws, of Homeric poetics. Although Hesiod composes the *Works and Days* in hexameters, his programmatic rejection of μέτρα θαλάσσης indicates a turning away from Homer in terms of topic and genre.[13]

The shared vocabulary of poetic and nautical measurement ensures that Odysseus's marine wanderings will always find expression in song, no matter how far he travels. But the distance between Ithaca and Odysseus's final destination with the oar lies beyond the range of epic discourse. It is described as unmeasured, ἀμέτρητος, because it leaves behind the domain of the sea and thus, according to my argument, the realm of Homeric μέτρα. The uncharted interior landscape of the *Odyssey* is presented as an "unmeasured" linguistic space partly because it is never narrated (that is,

12 See Romm 1992.176–83 on further connections between Homeric poetry and the Ocean, especially as they were developed in later literary traditions.

13 There has been some debate as to whether μέτρον can refer specifically to meter as early as Hesiod (Ford 2002.18, nn. 40–41), but it is generally accepted that it does refer to the poet's "domain" or, as West puts it, his "rules and formulae" (1978 ad 648).

measured out into verse), and partly because it involves entering a territory whose inhabitants speak a language that is completely different from Homer's. The renaming of the oar as a winnowing shovel might then be interpreted as a process of translation between two alternative poetic territories or fields: those marked by contact with the sea (Homeric epic) and those that have little or no contact with it at all.

SÊMA

The oar's new label as winnowing shovel (23.275) serves to illustrate a new cultural or poetic zone, where the μέτρα, or rules, of Homeric poetics (that an oar is an oar, the wing of a ship, 23.272) no longer apply. Furthermore, if μέτρα is understood in terms of translation or semantic range, then Odysseus's task is to cross beyond the borders of Homeric vocabulary and nomenclature until he reaches a place where, as oar transforms into winnowing shovel, a single object can take on two completely different, and opposing, meanings (Benardete 1997.93–94, 165). Odysseus, in other words, is instructed to get as lost in language as in space.

After planting the oar in the ground, Odysseus is told to return to Ithaca and await a gentle death that will come either "from the sea" or "away from the sea." The ambiguous terminology is significant, given the context in which it occurs. For it is no surprise to find that a journey that turns on the verbal ambiguity between oar and winnowing shovel should result in a prophecy about death that can also be understood in two ways. We may imagine a trajectory running from the sea to inland on which two different extremes of meaning can be located (fig.1). The exact meaning of ἐξ ἁλός at *Odyssey* 23.281 has been debated at least since Aristarchus and still remains undecided in current scholarship.[14] But, as Nagy (1990a.214) and others observe, its meaning is best left unresolved if we are to appreciate fully its role in the narrative, for the two potential locations of Odysseus's death (sea or inland) each follow the forking paths of the *Odyssey*'s plot to their logical ends.[15] Since neither of the deaths is narrated, after all, both are

14 Those who have weighed in upon the debate include: Scholia ad. *Od.* 11.134 (= ἀπὸ θαλάσσης); Eustathius *Comm. Od.* 1676.43–59 (concurs with the Scholia); Dornseiff 1937.354: "from the sea"; Stanford 1948 ad loc.: "away from the sea"; Hansen 1990.246: "away from the sea." Carrière 1992.38–42 (cf. 21) sees the ambiguity as a necessary imitation of the oracle's obscurity; Hartog 2001.35 thinks it deliberately ambiguous.

15 In this way, it represents something similar to the "grid of possibilities" that prophecy opens up, as described by Peradotto 1985.439.

	Sea ⟷ ***Inland***	
1) object on Odysseus's shoulder	oar	winnowing shovel
2) ἐξ ἁλός	from the sea	away from the sea

Figure 1. Polarities of Sea and Inland (I)

equally possible. The two endings of the *Odyssey* that the reader is faced with in Book 23, one of which describes Odysseus's return to Ithaca and the other of which tells of his journey far away from the sea, are structurally mirrored in the two alternative locations that can be conjectured for his death.[16] In both cases, the difference between the two kinds of ending is determined by whether they take place either near or far from the border of the sea.

It becomes possible in this way to understand the boundary of the sea as much more than just a topographical marker, for it also functions as a semantic boundary against which the language of Homeric epic is determined in the poem. In the context of the sea or water's edge, Homer's oar takes on its own significance, whether through metaphor (the wings of a ship) or through symbolism (as the marker of Elpenor's grave on the shore of Aeaea, a σῆμα to which I will return). As one of the seven occurrences of the word σῆμα to appear in Book 23, the oar also partakes in a secret language that only the epic narrator may reveal as part of the system of hidden signs that the *Odyssey* uses to seal its returning hero's identity.[17] While

16 I do not mean to suggest that Odysseus will plant the oar in the same place as the place indicated by ἐξ ἁλός ("away from the sea"), only that, in both examples, a structural similarity is established along the poles of "from (or on the border of) the sea" and "far from the sea."

17 *Od.* 23.73 (scar), 110 ("hidden signs" by which Penelope and Odysseus will recognize each other), 188, 202 (bed), 206 (sure signs of Odysseus's identity), 225 (bed), 273 (oar). Teiresias states that the naming of the object on Odysseus's shoulder will function as a σῆμα (23.273), and, as such, it fits within the triad of physical objects or marks (scar, bed, oar) that occur in Book 23, which—as signs—play an important role within the scheme of Homeric poetics. See further Zeitlin 1996, Foley 1997.75–81. Nagy 1990a.202–22 demonstrates that Teiresias's revelation of the σῆμα to Odysseus shares the same language as *Il.* 23.326, where Nestor indicates to his son the σῆμα at which to turn in the race. In both of these cases, the σήματα are marked by their position in the landscape, signaling the point at which the actor is instructed to turn back towards his starting point. On the

one could argue that the σῆμα Teiresias tells to Odysseus refers to more than the physical oar—rather to the entire encounter with the stranger or, more specifically, with the stranger's alien term ἀθηρηλοιγός ("winnowing shovel")—it is in keeping with the Homeric system of σήματα clustered around the end of the poem (such as the scar and bed) to read the oar as the material sign from which the rest of Teiresias's message unfolds.[18]

To carry across, manually, the "sign" of the oar from one place to another is also to complicate and dismantle, figuratively, the Homeric notion of metaphor. Aristotle classified metaphor as "the carrying-over of a name that belongs to something else" (μεταφορά ἐστιν ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορά, Arist. *Poet.* 21.1457b 7; cf. *Rh.* 3.10–11, esp. 3.11.1412a14–16); here, instead of carrying a name from one object to another, Odysseus understands that he must physically carry an object from one naming context to another, thereby undoing the work of Homeric metaphor that is already attached to the sign of the oar (ἐρετμά, τά τε πτερὰ νηυσὶ πέλονται, "oars, which are the wings of ships," 23.272 = 11.126).[19] His act is *like* a metaphor, because it involves the rhetorical movement of language across space from one context to another,[20] but the terms of the translation are ultimately reversed, leading to a kind of anti-metaphor, since metaphors only work if they can "[function] in two referential fields at once" (Ricoeur 1978.299). For the Inlanders, the object on Odysseus's shoulder means one thing only (Nagy 1990b.232); it is stripped of the symbolic value that it exhibited in Homer's world. In his study of literary space and form, Franco Moretti argues that metaphors cluster around spatial borders and are infrequent once the border is passed (1998.45–47). In this case, too, once the linguistic sign

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σῆμα "as a sign or token of something else," see Zeitlin 1996.22; as a "metonymic sign-language," see Foley 1997. See also Lynn-George's valuable discussion of the Iliadic σῆμα (1988.252–76).

18 On the importance of the "signifying object" in Homer, see Zeitlin 1996.19–20. Note that Nestor uses the same phrase "I will tell you a clear sign" in describing the physical σῆμα of the turning post/grave to Antilochus (Nagy 1990a.210 and n. 17, above). Homer also associates the oar with σῆμα's secondary meaning as gravemarker in the description of Elpenor's burial mound (see pp. 14–15 and n. 23, below).

19 I thank the anonymous reader for *Arethusa* for helping me to clarify this point. On the oar's metaphorization as wing, see Peradotto 1990.158.

20 That metaphor might be conceived of as a spatial construct is not unusual in the ancient world, where rhetoric (such as sentence structure or the art of memory) was often plotted on a topographical plane. For more modern examples of metaphor and movement, cf. George Puttenham's definition of metaphor as "the figure of transport" in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1988.189), and de Certeau 1984.99ff., 115.

or σῆμα of the oar has left the border of the sea behind, Homeric language loses its rhetorical and referential force. Despite the extraordinary range of his storytelling in Books 9–12, here Odysseus is unable to carry Homeric poetics with him, either as narrator or as epic hero.

When Odysseus removes the oar from its rightful context, he comes close to reinventing it as a metaphor (from wing to winnowing shovel) and, in doing so, to rewriting the symbolic language of Homer's world.[21] But the oar is also a marker of the failure of Homeric poetics to reach quite that far. Just as the meaning of Odysseus's bed is "fixed" by its immobility and becomes instantly invalid the moment it is moved (Foley 1997.79), so, too, does the oar change its semantic value when it is moved from one place to another. These two σήματα, then, the bed and oar of Book 23, both complement and undo one another: the bed creates narrative resolution and closure because, as a σῆμα, it remains fixed in place,[22] while the oar throws not only the ending of the poem but also its whole system of meaning into question because it moves ever further away from its original position on (the shores of) the ocean.

Finally, as several scholars observe, a connection exists between the σῆμα, which, especially as a tomb, preserves the hero's κλέος, and epic poetry.[23] Perhaps the best known example of this phenomenon is the gravestone or σῆμα envisioned by Hector for his opponent in Book 7 of the *Iliad* that will extend this opponent's κλέος far into the future and is placed, significantly, on the edge of the sea (*Il.* 7.86; cf. *Od.* 24.82). In the *Odyssey,* the parallel has also been drawn between Elpenor's tomb, or σῆμα, marked by an oar on the edge of the sea in Book 11, and Odysseus's planting of the inland oar as a gravemarker of sorts of his own eventual death. Unlike El-

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21 Peradotto 1990.158 likens the stranger to a poet, for he "recategoriz[es] the world through metaphor." The "secret" unfamiliar language of the oar is also connected to the role of the magical token in folklore that undoes a spell when it is correctly identified with its true secret name. Dornseiff 1937.353 adduces that the use of such an unusual word has all the properties of a spell. On the rarity of the term ἀθηρηλοιγός, cf. Hansen 1990.254 and Olson 1997. Dougherty 2001.172–74, 220, n. 37 sees the randomness of the "sign" about where to plant the oar as comparable to random signs given to colonizers by the Delphic oracle, on which see n. 29 below.

22 Cf. Zeitlin 1996.42: "The *sêma* that is *empedon* (i.e., the bed rooted in the earth) emerges as a *sêma empedon* (a valid sign)."

23 Redfield 1975.34, Murnaghan 1987.150–51, Lynn-George 1988.252–76, Nagy 1990a.215–20, Vernant 1991.69, Ford 1992.131–37. For an ancient discussion of σῆμα as both tomb and sign, see Pl. *Crat.* 400c1–4.

penor, though, who requests that the oar be planted so that "men who come hereafter will learn of me" (11.76), Odysseus's planting of the σῆμα of the oar will mark an identity that will presumably remain anonymous.[24] If we were to add these two σήματα to the chart outlined above (fig. 1), we would find that they symbolize quite opposite meanings. Elpenor's oar, a σῆμα "on the edge of the sea" (ἐπὶ θινὶ θαλάσσης, 11.75), permanently marks his role in epic history, while Odysseus's oar, planted far inland as a σῆμα that evokes a gravemarker, instead functions as a token of *mis*recognition. In contrast to the other signs at the end of the *Odyssey*, the inland planting of the oar signifies the point at which the σῆμα becomes unrecognizable and loses all connection with its meaning in the context of Homeric poetics (fig. 2). Thus the inland zone that Odysseus will eventually enter with his oar is one in which the protagonist will lose not only his way but also the signs and language by which to navigate.[25] This translates, finally, into Odysseus's loss of his own name as he becomes truly οὔτις: a "nobody" whose σῆμα

	Sea ⟷ ***Inland***	
1) object on Odysseus's shoulder	oar	winnowing shovel
2) ἐξ ἁλός	from the sea	away from the sea
3) oar	wing	winnowing shovel
4) planted oar	Elpenor's grave	Odysseus's mark of anonymity

Figure 2. Polarities of Sea and Inland (II)

24 On the importance of naming in the *Odyssey,* see Peradotto 1990.94–119, 143–70.

25 See here Wigley's comments (1996.49–50) on Jameson's famous description of being lost in the Bonaventura Hotel: "The space [of the Bonaventura Hotel] produces a breakdown in the system of categories, the way of reading, of negotiating terrain, with which Jameson is familiar . . . The critic is lost in the face of a new form of space, where being lost is understood as an inability to describe 'the thing itself.' " This is where my reading departs most strongly from the standard interpretation of the inland journey, which is that the oar colonizes the inland space by increasing the boundaries of Poseidon's realm. See, e.g., Hartog 2001.35 (my argument is, in fact, more in sympathy with Hartog's 1988 reading of Scythian space as *aporia*).

exists nowhere, that is, it is both unnamed and unplaced.[26] For even in his passage through the fantastic and alien spaces of Books 9–12, Odysseus never loses his control over the province of language. Polyphemus and the Phaeacians are seduced by Odysseus's artful handling of the disclosure of his name, while on Circe's island and in the Underworld, Odysseus brings a magic token with him (Hermes' *moly*, blood) that grants him full power over who speaks, and when.

We might say, then, that Odysseus's skillful use of language acts as a map upon which the *Odyssey* plots its course, ensuring that its hero never becomes absolutely lost but rather that those places and peoples whom he meets along his way will bend themselves to his will or lose themselves under the force of his linguistic or semantic spell. Although he may have to rely on physical strength or divine aid in order to escape from other situations, Odysseus's journey in Books 9 to 12 of the *Odyssey* takes him through a world that is either linguistically familiar or over which he is able to exert linguistic control. Finally, and most importantly, throughout the poem Odysseus sails the waters of his own epic genre, through seas where the story of the Trojan War is well known (Scheria, the Sirens' island), or where his name has already been spoken in prophecy (the island of the Cyclopes and Aeaea; cf. Pucci 1998.1–9).

But when Odysseus boasts to the Phaeacians that his κλέος "reaches to the sky" (9.20), he fails to take into account the logical consequence of Teiresias's prophecy: there exists somewhere upon the earth a group of people who, although they are human and "eaters of bread," have never heard of the Trojan War, much less of a man called Odysseus. The Inlanders must be eaters of bread if they mistake the oar for an agricultural tool (Carrière 1992.34), and, since it is impossible to narrate the story of the Trojan War without the mention of ships, they must also be a people who are ignorant of Homeric verse. The oar that Odysseus eventually plants thereby marks a "lost" or invisible space in terms of epic narrative's ability to cover the entire earth with its κλέος. The σῆμα of the oar conveys its message across the domains of both sea and sky (as the wings of ships),

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26 Benardete 1997.94. The oar that stands as a double for Elpenor's grave and, as a σῆμα or tomb, proleptically marks the death of Odysseus, also works as a kind of anti-σῆμα, in that it remains anonymous. In this way, it is also related to Odysseus's actual death by Telegenos in the version recorded in Proclus's summary of the *Telegony.* There Odysseus dies at the hands of a son who "did not recognize him" (κατ' ἄγνοιαν)*;* cf. Carrière 1992.19. On σῆμα's role as an agent of recognition (νοήσις), see Nagy 1990a.202–22.

since, in both regions, its meaning is fixed by a Homeric context. As soon as it moves inland, however, it leaves both the language and the reception of the *Odyssey* behind.

When Odysseus walks inland, beyond the end of the poem, into a new form of space, he abandons the old devices and measuring systems of epic. This leads to a narrative impasse that is connected to the loss of the poem's overall cohesive vision and, hence, to a loss of boundaries. The final, untold story of the *Odyssey* stands as a point of dislocation in the hero's nostos, a nostos that instead of reaching a fixed boundary or limit simply recedes towards a geographic and semantic vanishing point upon a fluid horizon. The fact that the *Odyssey* always looks forward to an ending in a location that is indeterminate and unplaced speaks, I suggest, to a corresponding indeterminacy concerning the place of this poem in general and the role of the epic tradition once its heroes have either died (cf. *Od.* 24.1–202) or safely returned home (Martin 1993.240). In one sense, the meditation on boundaries at the end of the poem only serves to thematize the possibility of a story's (endless) expansion within the context of an oral performance that the audience of an epic poem will experience in a way that readers of texts—who can count pages—will not.[27] Furthermore, even after it had been "fixed" in writing, the ending of the *Odyssey* remained insecure, as we see with Aristarchus's deletion of 23.297 through to the end of the poem and with the competing cyclic epics such as the *Telegony* that sought to continue Odysseus's story. As Richard Martin (1993) argues in a different way for the beginning of the poem, the ending of the *Odyssey* anticipates a time, and a place, that exist beyond the range of its own transmission.

Teiresias's instructions do not prophesy, as is usually stipulated, an extension of Poseidon's realm (and therefore of Homeric subject matter) into new, inland regions.[28] For the same reason, they cannot serve as a

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27 I thank Timothy O'Sullivan for this observation.

28 See n. 25, above. Odysseus is given detailed instructions on how to carry out the sacrifices to Poseidon and the other immortal gods (11.130ff., 23.277ff.), and it is the only task that he must perform before returning to Ithaca. Nevertheless, there is no indication that the planted oar remains anything more than a winnowing shovel to the Inlanders, nor that they will understand the significance of Poseidon's name any more than they will Odysseus's. The sacrifices are a personal act of reconciliation between Odysseus and Poseidon, and, in this sense, they provide closure for his long sea-bound narrative. If Poseidon *is* introduced as a new divinity within this inland space, he must also be "translated" into a god of a new domain and thus lose his identity in the context of Homeric poetics.

kind of prescription for colonization, as Dougherty suggests.[29] For in this new, inland territory, it is Odysseus who remains the stranger, and the only epic material that he brings with him—the oar—symbolically erases his own identity as its meaning is changed. Rather, the subtle use of language and the contexts surrounding the telling and retelling of Odysseus's final journey in Books 11 and 23 suggest that his story will draw to a close in a landscape that lies beyond the reach of Homer's customary routes and "paths" of song.[30]

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29 2001.172–74. Space so far from the sea is too alien ever to be associated with home in the early Greek imagination. Thus although colonization may well signal a symbolic movement from "sea to land," Greek colonizers rarely, if ever, settled at any considerable distance from the shore.

30 In addition to those already acknowledged in the notes, I wish to thank Judith Barringer and Corinne Pache for their help in revising earlier drafts of this paper.

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