

THE APOLOGOS OF ODYSSEUS: LIES, ALL LIES?

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UNITARIAN ASSUMPTIONS about the Homeric *Odyssey* have today largely supplanted the view, firmly held in the nineteenth century and entertained with decreasing conviction until the middle of the twentieth, that our *Odyssey* is a "stitched song" patched together by many rhapsodists. We have returned to the more ancient view: one poet, one consistent imagination.¹ What that imagination achieves, however, is a more contentious question. Conclusions are influenced by a variety of assumptions: about the nature and functions of oral epic poetry, about the particular historical and social circumstances that surrounded the composition of the *Odyssey*, about differences in sensibility between Homeric and roughly contemporary epic poetry, and about the "meaning" communicated by narrative structures in general.

Crucial to any persuasive reading of the *Odyssey* is a coherent account of the *Apologos* of Odysseus, his recitation to the Phaiakians, four books' long, of the startling things that happened to him after his departure from Troy. To be blunt, is this recitation or is it not a pack of lies? How are we to decide? And what will truth or lies mean for a reading not only of these books but of the *Odyssey* as a whole and its hero? As to evidence, there is what the *Odyssey* itself tells us and there is what we may call Homer's

¹Only the authenticity of the last book and a half of the *Odyssey* (from 23.29 to the end of 24) is now seriously questioned; see the pertinent bibliography in Simon Goldhill, "Reading the Differences: The *Odyssey* and Juxtaposition," *Ramus* 17 (1988) 1-31, esp. 26, nn. 1 and 2. This and the following studies will in subsequent notes be cited by author's name only: C. R. Traham, "Odysseus' Lies (*Odyssey*, Books 13-19)," *Phoenix* 6 (1952) 31-43; Rhys Carpenter, *Folktale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964); Norman Austin, "The Function of Digressions in the *Iliad*," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 295-312; Jasper Griffin, *Homer* (Oxford 1980); A. T. Cole, "Archaic Truth," *QUCC* NS 13 (1983) 7-28; W. J. Verdenius, "The Principles of Greek Literary Criticism," *Mnemosyne* 36 (1983) 14-59; Chris Emlyn-Jones, "True and Lying Tales in the *Odyssey*," *G&R* 33 (1986) 1-10; Michael Lloyd, "Homer on Poetry: Two Passages in the *Odyssey*," *Eranos* 85 (1987) 85-90; Kenneth Atchity's introduction in Kenneth Atchity, Ron Hogart, and Doug Price (eds.), *Critical Essays on Homer* (Boston 1987); Sheila Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* (Princeton 1987); Charles Segal, "Kleos and Its Ironies in the *Odyssey*," in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Homer's The Odyssey* (New York 1988) 127-149; Alice Webber, "The Hero Tells His Name: Formula and Variation in the Phaeacian Episode of the *Odyssey*," *TAPA* 99 (1989) 1-13; John Peradotto, *Man in the Middle Voice: Name and Narrative in the Odyssey* (Princeton 1990); M. J. Alden, "Ψεύδεα πολλὰ ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα," *Liverpool Classical Papers* 2 (Liverpool 1992) 9-14; Andrew Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca and London 1992).

view of what the *Odyssey* tells us. Both are highly problematic questions. But current opinion inclines, too often uncritically, to the position that Odysseus is indulging his own imagination here, that Homer intends us to know it, and that for good measure he gives Odysseus a sceptical audience.

Indeed, it is almost an article of faith today that Odysseus' autobiography is self-evidently incredible, within both the world view of the poem and that of its audience: commentary surrounds it with, as a given of Homeric assumptions, the language of "faerie," "the "bizarre," "magic" (as something incredible), the "supernatural," and so forth.² The *Apologos* is in short a journey through "Wonderland." Ergo Odysseus' account of his adventures, like Menelaos' report of meeting the Old Man of the Sea, cannot be literally true. So Jasper Griffin, for example, agrees with Aristotle, that Homer in general "is careful to put the more bizarre and fantastic stories into the mouths of his characters rather than vouching for the truth himself." The most "bizarre and fantastic" tales occur in the *Apologos*. And, Griffin adds, the King of the Phaiakians, Alkinoos, shares Homer's scepticism: his compliment on Odysseus' skill as a story teller (11.362-369) is "an ambiguous one, and deliberately so."³

Such argument assumes that at least Homer and his audience knew the reported tales to be nonsense. "Commonsense" is adduced. But commonsense alone is never a reliable guide to the beliefs of others. And neither the *Odyssey* itself nor any other Archaic source offers firm testimony to the limits of credulity in Homer's age.⁴ However, granted for the moment a sceptical author, is it clear whether he invites his listeners to enjoy

²So Griffin talks (10) of "magical people" and "fairy-tale monsters," elsewhere (14) of "magical and supernatural events." Cf. Alden 12 (who also draws an interesting but difficult distinction between "reality" and "poetic reality" in the *Odyssey*). Carpenter distinguishes between elements of "fiction, folktale, and saga." (However, Carpenter also argues [23] that "the Greeks believed Homer's account to be an actual record of events.") Perhaps such terms can be applied to help pinpoint differences between, for example, Homeric and other examples of Archaic epic, but they carry with them a heavy baggage of later conceptualizing not broadly at the disposal of Greek audiences before the fifth century. And see below, n. 36.

³Griffin 48-49. Cf. Peradotto 92: Alkinoos "advertises to the ever-lurking possibility of deception, if only politely to dismiss it in the case of his guest." Emlyn-Jones sees "unintended irony" in Alkinoos' distinction between true and false reporters. According to Murnaghan, Alkinoos is taken in by his guest's duplicity: the king concludes that Odysseus is not a deceptive person, but he is therein misguided (172, 173, n. 46; see below, n. 6). Other pertinent studies of truth and lies in Homer include Traham, Cole, Lloyd, Alden, Verdenius, Ford. Among the many general studies of Homeric poetics relevant to interpretations of the *Apologos*, I would single out Verdenius for special mention.

⁴A full accounting of these matters would far exceed the scope of a short article. But can't we at least admit that the poet of the *Odyssey* relegates his monsters and miracles to a fabulous world remote from the "normal" worlds of Phaiakia and Ithaka, and so at least implicitly underlines their bizarre nature? Certainly one would be more

Odysseus' exotic stories as palpable fiction or to suspend disbelief and enjoy them as truth? In either case the *Apologos* may also serve as a series of metaphors for truthful experience. But whatever the *Apologos* may contribute to Homer's imaginative programme, it matters for our reading of the immediate situation in Scheria, of Odysseus' character in general, and of Homeric poetics whether Odysseus tells the Phaiakians a false or a truthful tale. If the *Apologos* episodes are self-evidently bizarre when measured by the world view of the *Odyssey* itself, Odysseus must be lying. If, on the other hand, they are credible in that context, Odysseus may still be lying but is not inevitably doing so; he may be telling the truth. I will put the case that they are credible, that Odysseus is telling the truth, and that it is significant truth. (I will add that Homer too and his original audience understood it as such, but that argument requires greater circumspection.)

Our only source of reliable evidence is the text itself: its overall conception of truth and lies, its representation in particular of the veracity or otherwise of Odysseus, and Alkinoos' "compliment." Yet must any search for true meaning anywhere in the *Odyssey* be inevitably quixotic? Griffin prods beneath Alkinoos' explicit words, which congratulate Odysseus on his veracity, to find the king to mean the reverse of what he says. That is, the critic discovers irony in *this* passage. What we may broadly call postmodern criticism goes further. Some proponents find Homer's characters to move in a Borgesian narrative landscape that is inevitably deceptive; for that is the nature of narrative, or at least of narratives like the *Odyssey*. The poem is even self-referential, both delighting in and drawing attention to the cleverness of its disorienting techniques.⁵ Whether it cares about truth,

than surprised to have Kirke, Polyphemos, or Proteus show up on Ithaka. But people often imagine that strange creatures inhabit strange realms, far away, without necessarily disbelieving in their existence. The Yeti and Sasquatch spring to mind today. On Scheria Odysseus' account "amazes" his hearers precisely because he has seen and done things they have not; but why should the Phaiakians, who have magical boats at their disposal, be *sceptical*? On Ithaka Penelope reacts to a rehearsal of the *Apologos* without even faint surprise. In late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England, an age more advanced along the road to rationalism than Homer's, Shakespeare wrote about ghosts in one play, in another about a misshapen man begotten by the devil on a witch and enslaved by a good magician. Did he believe in such things? Or is Caliban at least a fantasy only, relegated to a remote "faerie" island? Some at least in his audience surely did believe. Shakespeare's own king, James I, wrote a book on the appalling threat posed by demonological witchcraft, which included women flying on broomsticks, having sex with Satan, and producing monstrous progeny; and he put many to death for such alleged sins. Homer may have regarded certain claims about the world as beyond belief. But the question is whether anything he chose to include in his epic poems was for him and his audience beyond belief. And see below, n. 33.

⁵Critics who would move firmly or tentatively toward this conclusion tend to assume that the *Odyssey* reflects a world different from that of the *Iliad*, a world in revolution, that the poet of and in the *Odyssey* is now something of a free spirit rather than the

or can convey it if it does, are, to say the least, moot points.⁶ Even if one could discover the author's intention, that discovery would not constitute an authoritative reading of the text. The truth or otherwise of the *Apologos* is any reader's, or better listener's, private matter as he "performs" the text; so the meaning must change from performance to performance.⁷

servant of his cultural traditions. So Peradotto (31): "The *Odyssey* shows a highly developed awareness of the poet's sense of his power to control and to tinker with the material 'given' him by the tradition." So Odysseus himself is able to "narrate a fictitious world." On the *Odyssey* as a poem reflecting a world in transition, see Atchity 1; Segal 131, 148. Odysseus, the "man of many turns," is seen as the centre of this tradition. The best account of Odysseus as a complicated ideal is still W. B. Stanford, "The Untypical Hero," in *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford 1955) 66–80. But if the heroic ideal changes from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, it does not disappear.

⁶Views on this are legion. For example, Trahan quotes with approval (43, n. 35) and applies to the *Odyssey* the words of Lord David Cecil in 1949, how art is "a highly personal activity in which facts and ideas are the servants of fancy and feeling." Emlyn-Jones notes (1) that, while an (epic) audience may insist on truthful reporting, "what they want most of all is to be entertained"; on the other hand, where their own immediate interests are concerned, they are by no means indifferent to the truth. But the truth and falsity of narrative finally "relate not to some supposedly 'real' historical context, but to the artistic demands of the poem" (8). Lloyd (90) cites the view of M. Heath ("Hesiod's Didactic Poetry," *CQ* NS 35 [1985] 260–262), that "veracity is neither expected nor required of poets in Homer." Lloyd himself argues, more persuasively (but still perhaps showing undue scepticism about the paradigmatic force of Homeric poetry; see below, n. 20), that "the task of bards, unlike characters [who can be didactic as well as informative], is to give an accurate account of heroic deeds, and thus perpetuate fame and entertain audiences" (90). Murnaghan (172) concludes that because a poet's words come directly from the Muses, they must be taken as accurate; on the other hand, "there is no internal mark of truthfulness that can authenticate the stories human beings tell one another" (173, n. 46). Alden (12–13) notes that Odysseus is likened to a bard and is therefore (cf. Hesiod *Theog.* 27–28) an unreliable witness for his adventures. We then need the validation of the gods; but Hermes and Athene confirm only some of Odysseus' claims. This kind of conclusion I am bound to challenge; despite difficulties of attestation, Homer does apply other criteria of truth here and in similar narratives. And see Alden herself (11) on some tests of accuracy in Homer.

⁷Questions about "reader/audience" which are so central to modern criticism of texts have been applied to Homer by a growing number of Homeric scholars, with varied results. See, e.g., Peradotto 93; and Goldhill (*passim*) on the active participation of the reader in interpreting Homer. These sometimes clash, sometimes overlap with more traditional questions about Homer's audience and their cultural expectations of poetry. Recent accounts include Segal's discussion of passages in the *Odyssey*, including the *Apologos*, that "help relate the values of heroic *kleos* directly to bardic tradition that keeps it alive"; and he notes (127) that "the *Odyssey* is remarkable for its self-consciousness about the social function of heroic poetry, the context in which such poetry is performed, and the rapport between the bard and his hearers." Atchity (1) talks about Homeric poetry as "oral memory managed by cultural intention"; on the other hand he believes the *Odyssey* represents a shift from "oral origins" to "literary and highly sophisticated and powerful texts" (2), with significant consequences for how we should read the poem. That assumption about the *Odyssey* seems to me a shade ambitious, but the case must

Whatever light such modern methodologies shed on literary texts, their application to traditional epic is hazardous. As with assumptions of Homeric "fantasy," they risk prejudging the text beyond recall. I prefer to presume as little as possible about the nature and function of Homeric epic. Certain premises, of course, are inevitable in any analysis, and a premise always risks forcing a conclusion. But a vicious circle is not inevitable: conclusions arising from a review of the evidence, for our purpose primarily textual, can also *test* a premise. If my reading of the *Apologos* is at all influenced by a presumption, it is one quite at variance with sceptical approaches to the text of the *Odyssey*; it is well supported in the literature on oral epic in general and Homer in particular;⁸ and it is strengthened, I believe, not weakened by the evidence cited in the present study.

I assume a first poet and a first audience of the monumental *Odyssey* around 700 B.C., who, despite incipient strains on the old heroic, "feudal" values prominent in the *Iliad* and despite the first stirrings throughout Hellas of a quite new age, still shared a common, traditional sensibility. (Whether this audience would have included the kinds of humbler folk, such as servants and goatherds, prominent in the *Odyssey* is debatable, but far from unlikely.) It is a sensibility rooted still in traditional ideas about the poet's decisive role as the voice of the past and its significance. Audiences in the *Odyssey* seem to enjoy narrative fun and games as keenly as any other audience; and they are by no means deaf to nuanced irony. We can assume the same kinds of response from early audiences of the *Odyssey*. But audiences both in and of the *Odyssey* need to know finally what is true in the tales they hear and whom they can trust to tell the truth about the past. For the true past is not merely a record of what happened; more often than not it is a demonstration of exemplary values inherent in what happened. What is exemplary changes with the times; the *Odyssey* certainly re-assesses some Iliadic ideals. But false reporting testifies mainly to the skill of the reporter. Lies are a poor vehicle of exemplary truth; even if Homer's world was familiar with the fable or other kinds of fictional

be answered. Of course, there was never a single audience for the *Odyssey* even in its "original," monumental form. And a Pisistratean recension of Homer in the mid-sixth century would mean a work probably adapted to listeners roughly contemporary with Xenophanes, who isolated certain imaginative features of Homer's account, especially his depiction of anthropomorphic gods, to Homer's discredit. But Xenophanes' cast of mind was exceptional for his times (polytheism proved very difficult to discredit). And the world of 700 B.C. is yet another matter.

⁸Among recent anthropological studies of collective memory in traditional societies, see Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago 1989); Anna Collard, "Investigating 'Social Memory' in a Greek Context," in E. Tonkin et al. (eds.), *History and Ethnicity* (London 1989) 89-103; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge 1989); J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (New York 1992).

means to generalize truth,⁹ the outright lie about a historical figure is quite another matter.

So much for assumption. We will consider now, with as few preconceptions as possible, what answers are suggested by the textual evidence of the *Odyssey* itself to the following, interrelated questions. Is truth aspired to throughout the poem? Does Homer have ways of distinguishing true reports from false? What in particular makes memory credible? Is Odysseus so incorrigible a liar that all his stories must be suspect? If this is not the case, what criteria finally establish the veracity or falsity (or some curious mixture)¹⁰ of the *Apologos*, our hero's recollection of strange events? And why in each case does truth matter?

Homeric characters seem at times almost obsessed with questions of "lies" and "truth." At least, they use terms in abundance that seem to correspond to their English equivalents, though not always with the same moral weighting. Many tell lies, including the gods: even Zeus cannot be sure when Hera, for her own ends, is deceiving him (*Il.* 15.33; 19.111–113). The practitioner implies regret at having lied only when, like Odysseus who hides his tears as he deceives his wife (19.209–212), he has no option but to lie reluctantly for honourable ends. The victim of deception not surprisingly finds the practice reprehensible.¹¹ Indeed the liar generally seeks the disadvantage of the listener. He is, therefore, an object of anger and contempt: so Eumaios rails against false messengers who will say anything to win a reward (14.122–132); a furious Antinoos insists on no more lies from Noemon about Telemachos' whereabouts (4.642–647). Elsewhere a hearer may be anxious that a tale not tarnish the reputation of the person at the centre of the account, not least when he is that person: so Odysseus expects from Demodokos an accurate account of the wooden horse episode, especially of the role here of "great Odysseus" (8.492–498).

The recipient of news, therefore, particularly but not solely when the reporter is a stranger, demands "accurate answers," "the whole truth" (e.g., 1.169–224). "Speak truly (ἐτήτυμον)," says Eumaios to the disguised Odysseus, "so I may know who you are, whence you come" (14.185–187). "Don't seek favour or beguile me with lies" (14.387). Where there is any reason to doubt, the listener tends to press his reporter until he is, rightly or wrongly, convinced: for example, since the truth of Odysseus' account of himself to Eumaios as a Cretan is not self-evident, since Odysseus is a

⁹To have the outright lie serve as fable would, I think, be un-Homeric. On Eumaios' αἴνος see below, n. 19. The fabrications of a god in disguise are a different case; see below nn. 14 and 28.

¹⁰C. H. Whitman, for example (*Homer and the Heroic Tradition* [Cambridge, Mass. 1958; New York 1965] 198), finds the earlier adventures of the *Apologos* to be "less fantastic" than the later ones.

¹¹See, e.g., Peter Walcot, "Odysseus and the Art of Lying," *Ancient Society* 8 (1977) 1–19.

stranger, and since the issue is important for Eumaios (he seeks vital information about Odysseus' whereabouts, and has to decide whether to treat his guest as a truly deserving suppliant), the swineherd does everything possible to establish the plausibility of the account.¹²

What kinds of evidence are convincing? None, say a number of critics.¹³ But Homer is not quite so cynical; his characters apply different tests of veracity with varying degrees of persuasiveness. Forceful instruments of credibility include oaths, the testimony of eye-witnesses, and signs. "I swear on my oath," says the "Cretan stranger" (14.151), facing the tough task of winning a cloak with persuasive words but no proof. But even oaths rarely convince a suspicious listener: both Eumaios and Penelope demand more. Better testimony is the corroboration of one or preferably more honest eye-witnesses; so Odysseus himself—and any number of veterans of the Trojan War could corroborate the episodes—is able to judge Demodokos' account of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles and the trick of the wooden horse: "If you tell [the horse episode] in good order," he promises (8.496), "I will speak of you to all men," and later congratulates the poet on his success. The strongest evidence, at least for certain kinds of claim, is the "clear" or "steadfast" sign (σῆμα ἀριφραδές, 24.329; σήματα ἔμπεδα, 19.250; 23.206). A scar inflicted on his leg by a boar proves infallibly to his nurse and members of his family that the self-proclaimed Odysseus is truly the king of Ithaka.

Where hard evidence is weak or non-existent, the reputation of the reporter may be decisive. "Mentor" is to be believed when (2.272) he describes Odysseus' character to Telemachos, who would have no cause to doubt the word of Odysseus' most trusted counsellor. That Mentor is really Athene in disguise is further proof for Homer's audience of a truthful account. The audience similarly know that "Mentes" is Athene. So does Telemachos in the end (1.323). Not surprisingly, then, although Mentes is a "stranger" (1.158), Telemachos is from the first persuaded by the divine veracity of Mentes' word (1.306–308), and is indeed well informed.¹⁴ Pene-

¹²See below, n. 19.

¹³So Peradotto (93): "How trustworthy are [any] tales in a world so full of beguilers and deceivers, fashioning their fictions out of things no man could ever see to verify." Cf. above, n. 6, for similar views. Cole (*passim*) draws a useful distinction between ἔρμος as "historically accurate" and ἀλήθεια, where truth is established less by appeal to hard facts than by the persuasion of sound judgment; and see Ford's discussion (50–51).

¹⁴"Mentes" reports accurately (1.195–199) that Odysseus is alive, a captive on an island against his will; gods hinder his return. And he prophesies, also accurately (1.200–205), that Odysseus, being resourceful, will manage his return, and soon. The only distortion in his report, apart from his own identity, is the odd but minor one of saying Odysseus is constrained, not by Kalypso, but by "hard, savage men"; perhaps to have specified a goddess as a captor would have weakened the reference to the captive's resourcefulness and the hope it engenders. Otherwise the news is reliable and helpful (and see below, n. 28).

lope takes Telemachos' report, "the whole true story," of his travels at face value (17.107–150); he is her trusted son. Telemachos accepts, implicitly at least, Eumaios' "whole true story" (16.61, 69) of the "Cretan stranger" without demur, for he trusts Eumaios. Such credulity here and elsewhere is merely further evidence that truth is important in the *Odyssey*, and that Homer's characters believe they can know it. Sometimes they are deceived, but the exceptions test the rule; as we shall see, special circumstances apply to all Odysseus' fabrications on Ithaka.

The most difficult evidence to test is that of uncorroborated memory, which is all Odysseus has to offer in the *Apologos*. It is also the most important when, as in the case of the *Apologos* (so I will argue), memory alone provides a culture with knowledge of its own significant past. Where he does not have them indulge in palpable lies, Homer knows a variety of ways to establish confidence in his characters' memory. In particular we may believe wise old men and poets. We trust implicitly very aged counsellors of long memory and a proven record of honest reporting; they include Mentor and Aigyptios and the seers Halitherses and Teiresias. Halitherses, for example, is trusted by all listeners of good will (cf. 2.156–162); he knows infallibly the true meaning of the omen of the eagles, as against the false interpretation of the suitors. Aigyptios, "who was stooped with age and knew numberless things" (2.16), speaks words Telemachos rightly takes as a good omen (2.35). Seers, perhaps, have an advantage. But Echeneus, "eldest among the Phaiakians" (7.156), is merely old. No one demurs when he speaks. He knows the truth and he tells the truth. Away from home Telemachos trusts Nestor to tell him "the whole truth" about Troy, "from memory"¹⁵ (3.101), for everyone trusts Nestor implicitly: he will not tell a *ψεύδος*, a lie (3.20). One can demand of him the truth (*νημερτέα*, 3.19; *ἀληθές*, 3.247) with every confidence.¹⁶ Nestor distinguishes between hearsay and what he knows: about the Achaians, "they say that . . ." (3.186–188). But his account of the interlocking fortunes of Agamemnon, Klytaimnestra, Aigisthos, and Orestes is the "whole true story" (3.254). Nestor was no eyewitness, but

¹⁵ τῶν νῦν μοι μνήσαι. The verb is *μυμήσκω*, "remind," "put in mind of," which in turn derives some of its forms (as here) from *μνάομαι*, "remember," "be mindful of." To "tell" is to "remember aloud."

¹⁶ In the *Iliad* Agamemnon agrees that Nestor's advice is *κατὰ μοῖραν* (1.286); so does Diomedes (8.146). Nestor tactfully congratulates Diomedes on speaking *κατὰ μοῖραν*, despite his relative youth, but as one much older, his own word will be more persuasive (*Il.* 9.52–61); and indeed all obeyed him (9.79). The old king is never held responsible for the false advice his phantom, in an evil dream, gives Agamemnon. Indeed, the episode emphasises the reliability of the real Nestor—whom Agamemnon "especially honoured beyond all elders" (2.20 ff.). On the value of Nestor's stories in the *Iliad*, and implicitly in the *Odyssey*, see Austin (301): "As apology they establish the legitimacy of his position in the Greek hierarchy as the wisest counsellor; as exhortation they offer a challenge to the younger men to live up to the heroic ideal as embodied in his person."

he speaks with absolute conviction; and, although corroboration is not necessary, Zeus himself has already revealed the episode to us as indisputable fact (1.32-43).

Poets too, at least in the *Odyssey*, are reliable witnesses. That Phemios is θεσπις or θεῖος, "divine," or merely περίκλυτος, "famous," establishes his credentials in advance. He knows the "deeds of mortals and gods that singers celebrate" (1.337-338). So the Muse loved Demodokos and taught him to sing "in exceeding good order" (8.488-489)—"in good order" is a frequent commendation of any kind of report, usually applied to those one would expect to be credible witnesses, but on occasion confirming the veracity even of a Helen.¹⁷ We expect the best from skilful poets.¹⁸ When Alkinoos praises Odysseus precisely as a skilful poet, the burden of proof rests on those who would see this as an ironic compliment.

What the aged counsellors and poets remember is rather different in kind and in significance from mundane information. Sometimes in Homer accurate reporting, credible memory, is demanded for its own sake: Penelope wants to know exactly what happened to Telemachos on his travels. Again and again, however, two other reasons apply, singly or together: a believable account confirms that a suppliant's request is deserving,¹⁹ or it confirms

¹⁷Demodokos is said to sing the sorrows of the Achaeans λήν κατὰ κόσμον (8.489), a variation on the formula κατὰ μοῖραν, "in good order"; λήν means "exceedingly," either as "excessively" or, as here, merely "very." Skilful sequence is implied; so "poet-like" Odysseus muses, "what shall I recite first, what later?" (9.14); and so a proper sacrifice is described as being κατὰ μοῖραν (3.457), executed in due order. But Demodokos does more than structure his account well; he gets both the facts and the moral right. So Odysseus' request on Scheria is "fair and orderly" (7.227), not just because it is a story in proper sequence, but because it is a reasonable request, given the power of the suppliant's tale to ring true and arouse pity. In fact, κατὰ μοῖραν means "appropriately," even "honestly." So Euryalos apologises for having spoken οὐ κατὰ μοῖραν, out of line (8.396-411). And so Eumaios: "you move me by your sorrows," he says to Odysseus, but finds part of his story οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, "in no good order," for the teller has an eye on unjustifiable gain (14.363); but persuaded at last, Eumaios admits Odysseus spoke nothing παρὰ μοῖραν, "out of order," and so shall not lack for clothes (14.509). In Helen's case, as in Nestor's (3.331), we assume that in speaking "in good order" she too is praised (4.266) for having got more than the facts right; she gets their moral right too, and is in that sense convincing.

¹⁸On the poet's "authority," see Verdenius 25; he notes, with reference to the "grace" of Odysseus' tale: "a beautiful speech cannot but be a sensible speech, and a nice story is likely to be a reliable story." E. R. Dodds describes "truth" as the Muses' gift (*The Greeks and the Irrational* [Berkeley and Los Angeles 1957] 81); cf. Murnaghan 172. Alden (12-13), on the other hand, regards bards as unreliable witnesses; so the *Apologos*, told by the poet-like Odysseus, is likely a fabrication. Certainly Hesiod declares (*Theog.* 27-28) that the Muse can tell both lies and truth; but the *Odyssey* does not express that view (except perhaps indirectly when Demodokos is challenged in advance of his account by an eye-witness of an event, and congratulated on passing the test).

¹⁹That is why Eumaios does everything he can to test the veracity of Odysseus' stories, mindful of a stranger who once deceived him (*Od.* 14.378-387). He is "stirred"

that the deed did in fact take place, and is, therefore, exemplary.²⁰ The second is in the end of greater consequence, for it is a question of the significant "history" of a traditional society. This the old men and the poets must remember accurately, each in his proper domain.

Sometimes forgetting can be a virtue—the consignment of sorrow into temporary oblivion (as when the demands of the belly make us forget our cares: 7.216–221). But since, in the absence of written records, cultural history can only be memory, long-term forgetting is always reprehensible. Forgetting may threaten a person's authentic identity: so Odysseus' crew "forget" their homeland, a moral rather than physiological lapse—they deliberately endanger their identity as Ithakans. It may even constitute culpable resistance to moral exempla: so no one "remembers" the kind of man Odysseus was (2.233–234). This is a moral judgment on those whose forgetfulness is deplorable from the start, who stand to gain unfairly from such lack of memory, and who in the process inflict unconscionable harm on innocents. They, therefore, in some sense deliberately distort the past, which is akin to lying about it.

Conversely, true "remembering" is a powerful virtue. Echeneus is trusted to get his facts right, but he also understands what he remembers. He knows "many ancient things" (7.157). And he speaks εὐφρονέων, both "with good intent" and "with good sense." So he converts true memory into wise

by this new stranger's tales of suffering and wandering, but is not persuaded by the reference to Odysseus; these, he believes, must be lies (14.364–365, 387). In the end, however, he is moved by pity as well as by Zeus' laws of hospitality (14.388–390), which means he is convinced at least in part. When the same stranger tells him how he lost his cloak, Eumaios calls the tale a "blameless αἶνος." The noun (cf. αἰνέω, ἐπαινέω) means "praise," "commendation" (*Il.* 23.652; *Od.* 21.110). Hence it can come to mean a hortatory tale, even "fable" (*Hes. Op.* 202), though I find that translation inappropriate for Homer's passage. When Eumaios introduces the stranger to Telemachos, he tells him "the whole truth" (16.61). At first he reports only what the stranger claims (εὖχεται, φησί; 16.62, 63) about himself. Then he resorts to direct speech: "For thus Fate has spun things for him; now he has come fleeing from a ship of Thesprotian men" (16.66–67). Is Eumaios here at least in part still sceptical? If so, Telemachos doesn't pick up the hint. And again, the backdrop to all Odysseus' tales here is that his identity must be concealed, that his news about Odysseus is as truthful as it can be, and that he must be entertained as a suppliant as a first step toward full return and vengeance.

²⁰On the didactic or paradigmatic function of tales see, e.g., Austin 300–301; Verdenius 31–37. Emlyn-Jones (3, 8) stresses two aims of the storyteller: he projects himself in a favourable light; and he "conveys warnings and suggests paradigms for behaviour." Lloyd (89) denies that Homer suggests that poetry has any didactic purpose; the poet simply tells the truth, "giving a complete and accurate picture of events," not selecting them "so as to point a moral." Ford too argues against a moralizing intent in Homer (52): "to interpret the tale for its moral lesson would break the spell . . ."; he would accept only "very indirect and unconscious persuasion of [epic] audiences"; but this is, in Ford's own words, precisely "the truest and most profound" kind of teaching, the embodying of an ideal kind of behaviour.

counsel—how to behave hospitably—, which his king among others accepts without hesitation.²¹ Nestor's "information" about Troy is, like Echeneus' about past behaviour, correct both in its details and in its moral weighting. He has μῆτις, "counsel," hidden in his heart (3.18). His account of Agamemnon's murder is value-laden—"be brave too" like Orestes (3.200)—and leads to practical advice: don't leave your home at the mercy of your enemies; but before you return, seek out Menelaos to arm yourself with the latest information (3.313–328).

The exploits of Odysseus are the most significant information for every audience in and of the *Odyssey*; those who report them must be credible reporters. Menelaos himself, who will not tell a ψεύδοξ, as the truthful Nestor says (3.327–328), and who insists he will not deceive (οὐδ' ἀπατήσω),²² highlights sterling qualities when he recalls Odysseus' part in the episode of the wooden horse. Telemachos even trusts implicitly Menelaos' superficially unlikely account of meeting the Old Man of the Sea; for Proteus too is a "truthful" reporter who contributes significant information about Troy and Odysseus.²³ Even Helen is in that sense a good historian when she fills in details for Telemachos: the "facts" remembered by Helen are the ἄεθλοι of Odysseus (4.241), his heroic exploits, with particular emphasis on his "counsel and intelligence" (βουλὴν τε νόον τε; 4.267), and his powers of endurance (4.270). Her tale is self-serving, a claim to pro-Greek activities on her part, and, like her drugs, it helps calm down the guests at Sparta. But its primary function is to praise Odysseus, for the edification of his son.²⁴ Most of Helen's listeners (not, of course, Telemachos, who does not

²¹ Conversely, Menelaos accuses Eteoneus of "talking νήπια, like a child (παῖς)," for recommending inhospitable behaviour; he has to remind him of how they themselves have in the past been welcomed by others (4.31–34). That is, Eteoneus speaks both like one with no experience and like one who has forgotten.

²² According to Aias in the *Iliad* (17.715–716), Menelaos spoke κατὰ μοῖραν. And Menelaos, like Nestor, is πεπνυμένος. In Homer adjectival and other forms of the verb πέπνυσθαι combine the senses of "mentally vigorous" (Od. 10.495), "with sound understanding" (Il. 23.440, 24.377), "shrewd" (Il. 3.148), "sensitive" to diplomatic niceties (Od. 3.21, 52). The adjective therefore tends to endorse the speaker's reliability, usually based on his age and experience (Laertes, Menelaos, Nestor); young Telemachos and Peisistratos, remarkably tactful for their age (cf. 4.158–160), are noted as exceptions (3.21, 52; cf. 4.205). The adjective πεπνυμένα describes "wise" counsels, μῆδεα, at *Iliad* 7.278.

²³ As truthful Nestor vouches for Menelaos, so honest Menelaos emphasises the veracity of the Old Man of the Sea, his informant about Odysseus' recent fortunes; Proteus is νημερτής (= νή + ἀμαρτάνειν), "unerring, speaking with full knowledge" (4.349, 384, 401, 542). Everything points toward a truthful account all round.

²⁴ Douglas S. Olson, "The Stories of Helen and Menelaos (Od. 4.240–289) and the Return of Odysseus," *AJP* 110 (1989) 387–394, notes (387–388) these three functions, but downplays the importance of the recollection of Odysseus' deeds. He even finds Helen's story "peculiar in a number of ways," in that she reveals how she unmasked

yet know his father or his history) are in a position to measure the facts as she has recalled them. Even so, she promises to speak *ἐοικότα* (4.239), "plausibly"—in a fashion that is seemly, fit, suited to the occasion.²⁵ And Menelaos affirms when she is done, "You have spoken in good order" (4.266), thus corroborating her self-declared credentials.

The poet is the most important recorder of the truthful past, and by the same token the most important repository of his culture's values; he is a teller of tales, the professional memory of the tribe. Poets of course must entertain: "let the singer please himself, as his mind bids" (1.347). And audiences praise the "newest song" (1.351–352) because they delight in novelty. But new stories, like the treacherous death of Agamemnon and Orestes' heroic reaction to it, quickly become paradigmatic once they are taken as true deeds to be remembered.

In sum, the question of truth and falsehood in the *Odyssey* is so vital in many areas of life and for a variety of reasons that Homer's characters need to know which is which. And Homer provides them, sooner or later, and his own audience, with sundry means to do so. What, then, of Odysseus' own account of his past in the *Apologos*? Submitted to the usual Homeric tests does it declare itself a true or a false tale? And if the truth, what functions does the truth serve? Neither politeness nor necessity nor legitimate advantage would seem to explain why Odysseus should lie at all to Alkinoos, nor why with such apparent extravagance. His account would appear then to be either pure make-believe or unvarnished truth. Whatever Odysseus' motives for lying in a given context, Homer's audience always know, if we except the *Apologos* for the moment, what is going on. And indeed, where the imperatives of courtesy do not rule this out, his interlocutors sooner or later are enlightened too: the full truth is only postponed. His tales on

Odysseus' disguise and caused the deaths of many; "she seems tortured by the secret, and compelled somehow to disclose it." He reads (390–391) Menelaos' story as "on the surface a reminiscence of Odysseus and his remarkable abilities," but finally his and his wife's stories are "subtle acts of self-justification, self-explanation, and mutual recrimination." Goldhill (19) adds approvingly A. Bergren's opinion ("Helen's Good Drug: *Odyssey* IV.1–305," in S. Kresic [ed.], *Contemporary Literary Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Literary Texts* [Ottawa 1981] 201–214, at 207–208) that "Helen's recollection is oddly elliptical and when questioned its foundations slip"; she includes Menelaos' probable embarrassment at hearing how Helen ministered to Odysseus when he was nude. But whatever multiple purposes this and Menelaos' story serve, they are not lies. Telemachos "learns" (*πυνθάνομαι*) models of behaviour from the words of others (2.314–315). He "takes great pleasure in" (*αἰνῶς τέρπομαι*) Menelaos' "stories" and "accounts" (4.597–598), which include the "fantastic" account of the Old Man of the Sea. Given the reasons for Telemachos' voyage, and what Menelaos and Proteus have to say about Troy and Odysseus, "entertainment" in any sense of mere distraction is out of the question. So are lies.

²⁵On *ἐοικότα* see Emlyn-Jones 2; he includes "plausible" among its meanings, but "not exclusively at the service of the truth."

Ithaka are, like Hera's lies to Zeus, palpable fabrications, short-term strategies to mislead the victim only as long as is necessary. The audience are in on the deception from the start. If the *Apologos* is a lie, no explicit admission that it is so is ever made. Is that because the status of the *Apologos* is self-evident during the telling? But if so, self-evidently what?

First, is Odysseus' word that of a truthful man? The Phaiakians have little to go on. Before them Odysseus cannot appeal to eyewitnesses, nor can he call upon a credible third party to vouch for him. If, then, they are sceptical in any degree, we will understand. I will argue they are not. But setting aside for a moment their reaction, does our poem consistently paint Odysseus as so unregenerate a liar that his word must be at least unreliable here? Homer elsewhere explicitly calls Odysseus a trickster and one who knows how to "tell lies like to the truth" (19.203; cf. 13.294-295). This characterization runs through the tradition. Odysseus himself even tells Alkinoos that he is famous for his δόλοι (9.19-20). But Homer's audience know from other passages how necessary, or at least legitimate, and in either case admirable, these δόλοι, "deceptions," are; they do not include gratuitous lies. With one exception (unless the *Apologos* makes two) Odysseus tells lies in the *Odyssey* only when he should, to be polite; when he must, to save his own skin and so ensure his return home and vengeance on the suitors; or otherwise to secure advantages deemed legitimate by the moral assumptions of the poem.²⁶ Trickery, in fact, whether lies or disguise, is never a shameful trait when practised by those Homer establishes at the very start as "good," from Athene to Penelope²⁷ to Odysseus; for by definition it is in their hands the means to good ends. And to their friends they lie only to the extent necessary. Telemachos asks Athene, disguised as the "stranger" Mentos (1.158), who she is: "speak ἐπὶ τρυμὸν, truly, so I may know well" (1.174). Athene promises an accurate answer: "I will tell you ἀτρεκέως" (1.179). She then, inevitably, lies about her identity (1.180-

²⁶Only the fib to Laertes gives us pause (24.239-314). Unlike its predecessors on Ithaka, it is totally unnecessary—the truth now can jeopardize nothing. Perhaps the passage is a clumsy interpolation, within a larger interpolated section (23.29-24.548). Or perhaps Homer reminds us here, not for the first time, that Odysseus, for all his virtues, has some rough edges too. However, those who see in this passage a motif, for once less than perfectly motivated in its context, the testing of friends and relatives after a long estrangement, may be right. On the other hand, it makes the reconciliation between father and son less abrupt than it otherwise would have been and therefore more consistent with the Odyssean theme that self-disclosure and the restoration of relationship takes time. In any case, the audience is never in doubt as to what Odysseus is up to, and Laertes is not deceived for long.

²⁷Penelope, for example, tricks the suitors with the admirable δόλος of Laertes' shroud. With it she "holds out hopes and promises, but her mind has other thoughts" (2.91-92). See Segal (136) on how Penelope's δόλοι are sources of her κλέος; in this she parallels her husband. So Telemachos lies justifiably to Eurymachos (1.412-421).

181). But here as elsewhere the function of the characters she assumes is to give sometimes helpful information, sometimes the kind of advice and encouragement well-meaning friends or even strangers *would* give, but with "divinely" persuasive force.²⁸

Among mortals in the *Odyssey* only Odysseus operates in disguise; in this he is in significant ways, although on a much humbler level, a mirror-image of Athene. So too he is like her in his cleverness (13.294–299), including his skill at "deceptive tales." Again, the means are justified by the ends: he cannot reveal his true identity to his wife or townsfolk until the suitors have been punished and justice achieved (13.291–310).²⁹ As for verbal falsehoods alone, Odysseus sometimes tells a white lie, out of courtesy: anxious not to bruise her sensibility, he speaks to Nausikaa "a sweet and crafty word" (6.148); and to protect her reputation he tells Alkinoos, who is worried that his daughter may have treated Odysseus inhospitably, that it was his own choice, not Nausikaa's insistence, that had him come separately to the palace (7.299–307). More often he lies because he must. He even lies to Athene, but she congratulates him for it, since such cunning is the appropriate means to desirable goals. Of course, his stories on Ithaka are always hugely entertaining, and the teller sometimes delights in the subtle skills they require. But sometimes not: as he lies to Penelope, "he hid his tears as he deceived her" (19.212).³⁰ In any case, Odysseus is

²⁸ "Mentes" is a guest-friend of Odysseus; he brings essentially accurate news of the king (see above, n. 14). He also (like Zeus before him and others, such as Nestor, later) applies the paradigm of Klytaimnestra-Agamemnon-Orestes as the basis of his counsel (1.298–302). Telemachos is convinced (1.308): "I will not forget your good advice." Even when Telemachos sees through Athene's disguise (1.322–323; ostensibly because "he" flies off like a bird), he goes away emboldened by the kind of advice a credible well-wisher would give, its validity reinforced by the "divine" energy of its presentation (1.321): "she put in his heart strength (*μῆνος*) and courage (*θάρσος*)." "Mentor" too, a trusted counsellor of Telemachos, gives him accurate and helpful information. He tells the young man how like his father he is: Odysseus was a man for effective words and action; so Telemachos' journey now will be fruitful (2.267–273). In similar fashion Athene disguises herself as Dymas the friend of Nausikaa, who accepts her advice without demur (6.13–65), as a young girl who guides Odysseus on Scheria (7.18–36), as a herald who promotes Odysseus' plans (8.7–9), and as a herdsman who gives him reliable information in Ithaka (13.221–252). Athene also disguises herself as a dream-figure, Penelope's sister Iphthime, to stop Penelope grieving: "be bold," she urges (4.825); Penelope is indeed reassured (4.840). The only lies here concern the speakers' identities.

²⁹ Odysseus' lies to Athene include trickery, deceit, and *κέρδεα*—cunning guile with an eye to self-advantage that is here honourable; for such *κέρδεα* are implicitly "good" as traits of Penelope (*Od.* 2.117–118) and of Odysseus and Athene (13.296–297), explicitly *κακά* of "the many" (23.217). On the Ithakan lies as necessary to protect Odysseus' identity, see Traham, *passim*; Alden 11. And see above, n. 19. Odysseus' disguises and lies are essentially pragmatic; in this they cannot be compared to a god's appearances and words to mortals.

³⁰ These tears are evoked less by the painful content of the tales themselves than by the need to deceive his wife. Elsewhere Odysseus does weep simply to remember his past or

never "a man who, yielding to his poverty, utters deceitful falsehoods" to gain immediate, dishonourable advantage (14.157), or merely for their own sake.

Before the Phaiakians Odysseus insists he has told "the truth" (7.297) about his passage from Ogygia to Scheria; we have Homer's word that he has. And when Alkinoos presses Odysseus for an accurate answer about more details of his recent life (8.572-286), he declares first his true identity (9.19), since before Alkinoos he has no need to spin even the kind of white lie both he and Athene must resort to on occasion.

Veracity here would not prove the entire *Apologos* to be truthful. But let us return to possible motives for deception at all. If Odysseus is lying it cannot be out of politeness or necessity or hopes of legitimate gain. Indeed, Odysseus would unwisely jeopardize his goal by including bizarre details that raised his host's suspicions. For well *before* he hears the *Apologos* Alkinoos is ready to send Odysseus home, even as a stranger (7.188-196). All have concurred (7.226-227); and Alkinoos has reconfirmed the decision (7.317).

If, then, Odysseus does lie to the Phaiakians, it can only be as a self-indulgence. But there is the poet-like art of Odysseus' presentation, both its beauty and its intelligent content. And here we turn to its effect on the Phaiakians. Alkinoos compliments Odysseus on his "poet-like" skills, not only the "grace" but the "good sense," *φρένες ἐσθλαί*, of his words (11.367-368). By the first interlude, Odysseus has reduced the Phaiakians to silence (11.333). They are clearly impressed. Arete explicitly praises his beauty and mind (11.337); he deserves, she says, even more honour! Echeneus agrees (11.344-345)—important confirmation, given the credentials of this old wise man. So does Alkinoos, who concludes: "you do *not* seem like the liars . . . so go on with the account of your *θέσκελα ἔργα*," 11.374); not "wonderful" deeds in the sense of fantastically inventive, for he stresses the all-too-real *sufferings* exemplified by the tale (11.369).³¹ And when Odysseus at last is done, his audience is not just silent but awed by the *κληθμός* (13.1-2), the spell-binding force, of what they have heard. We remem-

have it recalled to him; Lloyd (87) argues that "Odysseus cannot even enjoy a song about one of his own most glorious exploits." But weeping is not the antithesis of pleasure. It may be pleurably cathartic: so Eumaios looks forward to the pleasure Odysseus and he will take (*τερπόμεθα*) in exchanging recollections of their "painful sorrows" (15.398-400).

³¹Homer knows a varied language of "the amazing," but never as the opposite of the real, the factual. One group of words, including *θέσκελος*, etc. (cf. *Il.* 3.130; *Od.* 11.610), means primarily "divine," by extension "remarkable." One word in this group, *θεσπέσιος*, Lattimore tends to translate as "magical," including "the magic threshold" of Olympos (*Il.* 1.591) and "whether 'by magic' you fail to take this city or by men's cowardice and ignorance of warfare" (*Il.* 2.367). But even if "magic" could be equated with fantasy, the adjective in the first passage means merely "divine," "stunning." The noun in the second is the unexampled form *θεσπεσίη*: not "by magic," surely, but "by divine decree" (cf. *θέσφατος*, "god-ordained").

ber that Phemios knows the "deeds of mortals and gods" that are βρωτῶν θελκτήρια (1.337–338), able to "enchant" the listener with their beauty and their significant truth.³² Odysseus too is a poet of reliable memory. The king immediately prepares his guest's voyage home laden with magnificent gifts. Not so does one respond to or reward liars, unless one has been utterly hoodwinked.

But regardless of what the Phaiakians think, does Homer undermine the recital for his own audience by withholding his authorial validation? In fact, far from holding his nose as Odysseus recites his *Apologos*, Homer includes parts of it in his own narrative. We hear of Odysseus' sojourn with Kalypso long before it becomes part of Odysseus' autobiography (1.13–15; 5, *passim*; and cf. the corroboration of the "truthful" Old Man of the Sea, 4.555–560); and Odysseus tells Alkinoos about Kalypso and Kirke in the same breath (9.29–32). Homer refers to the Polyphemos episode both directly (1.68–71; 2.19–20) and more indirectly, when Odysseus, with no audience to entertain, urges his own heart to remember his victory in the Cyclops' cave (20.18–21). And when Odysseus rehearses his past before Penelope, including a digest of the *Apologos* adventures (Hades and all), she raises no eyebrow; nor do we, at this marvellous moment of their reunion in the "real" world of Ithaka (23.310–341).

Whether or not Homer and his audience ever suspended disbelief at times is more than we can securely know.³³ But when measured by assumptions internal to the *Odyssey* the contents of the *Apologos* scarcely challenge credulity more than do other parts of the poem "vouched for" by Homer.

³²In the *Iliad* Antenor, counsellor of Priam, notes that Odysseus could give the appearance of "an ignorant man," "a fool." That impression changed when one heard his voice, which resembled winter snows: "then no other mortal could compete with him" (3.219–223). Clearly a compliment.

³³See above, n. 4. Many "miracles" in Homer are so closely associated with the power of the gods—in the *Iliad*, for example, it is Hephaistos who makes living maids out of gold (18.417–418), Hera who briefly empowers a horse with prescient speech, the Furies who remove it (19.404–418)—that to be sceptical would risk doubting the truth of polytheism itself. Homer's record of conversations on Olympus and Demodokos' account of the story of Ares and Aphrodite can never have been once verified as "factual" recent history; but that by no means requires us to suppose for its listeners suspension of disbelief, or mere delight in "fiction" rather than in one of the "deeds" (ἔργα) of gods and men (1.338). What they hear is the truth, the truth of Olympianism itself, "remembered" by generations of Muse-inspired poets whose credentials are not in doubt. And again the truth of doings in heaven, like that of more earthly adventures, confirms their didactic aspect. Demodokos' story is a diversion, pleasant entertainment over the cups. At the same time it sustains, in its light-hearted way (for the gods are beyond true sin and suffering), the organizing theme of the *Odyssey*—the preservation of the sanctity of the family and the punishment of would-be adulterers. For some recent discussions of Ares and Aphrodite, see Christopher Brown, "Ares, Aphrodite, and the Laughter of the Gods," *Phoenix* 43 (1989) 283–293; Douglas S. Olson, "Odyssey 8: Guile, Force and the Subversive Poetics of Desire," *Arethusa* 22 (1989) 135–145.

Are we, for example, to believe that Poseidon is plausible, but his one-eyed son Polyphemos is not? Kalypso is real, but Kirke is fantastic? That the Hades episode, reported only by Odysseus, is mere fantasy, while the Leukothea episode (5.333–353), reported by Homer, thereby smacks of plausibility? It is Homer who tells us about the Phaiakians: they are both the audience of the *Apologos* and, with their magical associations (ships, for example, that sail themselves; 8.556–563), part of so-called “faerie.”

In brief, the *Apologos* passes Homeric tests of true memory. The reporter is a man who in general lies only for the best of reasons—to be courteous, to win legitimate advantages, or to protect himself for the common good. No such reasons apply on Scheria. Homer’s audience enjoy the tales on Ithaka since Homer tells them precisely that these are lies, and explains clearly what is going on. In contrast, to the extent that he is able, he assures them that the *Apologos* adventures, while remarkable, are by no means fabrications. Odysseus tells the truth about Kalypso and about his identity; why lie about the rest? As for the Phaiakians, Odysseus would have much to lose quite needlessly by lying to them or even exaggerating. And while he is no professional poet like Phemios or Demodokos, the general reaction of his spellbound listeners, the compliments of Arete and Echeheus, and Alkinoos’ particular comparison with skilful poets and contrast with liars all confirm the Phaiakians’ trust in this teller of tales. Nothing Homer says or omits to say suggests that such trust is misplaced.

But does it in fact matter a whit whether the *Apologos*, or indeed any other reminiscence in the *Odyssey*, is a “true” or “false” account? Everything becomes grist for the mill of the *Odyssey*’s imaginative narrative. So Griffin: differences between “magical people like the Phaiakians and fairy-tale monsters like the Cyclops” are obscured by “the energy of the Homeric style and the consistency of the Homeric picture of the world” (10). Few modern critics deny such consistency; most find it directed toward multiple ends, from sociological observation to the enactment, not least in the *Apologos*, of Odyssean Man’s psychological journey toward self-discovery.³⁴ Since, however, the distinction between truth and lies is so important throughout the *Odyssey*, especially in reports of the significant past, it is unlikely to be irrelevant in the case of the *Apologos*. If Odysseus

³⁴See, e.g., Charles H. Taylor, Jr., “The Obstacles to Odysseus’ Return,” in *idem* (ed.), *Essays on the Odyssey* (Bloomington 1963) 87–99; more recently, Cléopâtre Athanassiou, *Ulysse ... Une Odyssée Psychoanalytique* (Lyon 1986). Such interpretations of Odysseus’ travels as the reification of a psychological journey seem to me somewhat at odds with the temper of early Archaic Greek thought, although there is some evidence in the *Odyssey* itself that a lyric sensibility, and with it a heightened degree of self-consciousness, is already stirring in the land; in any case, see William H. Race’s cautionary distinction between “classical” and “romantic” voyages, “Classical and Romantic Poetic Journeys,” *CML* 10 (1989–90) 27–45.

tells lies here, they are redeemed by their entertainment value, by their function possibly as a kind of symbolism (unconscious, perhaps, in the Archaic age), and by their display of rhetorical skills. But false reports cannot embody persuasive exempla, for these must be rooted in real exploits. Odysseus' "Cretan stranger" lies on Ithaka come as close to factual truth as they dare, in their account of a soldier's heroic deeds at Troy, arduous travels, courage, and resourcefulness. In this they resemble Athene's fibs, but without their divine perspective. To the extent they are half-truths (including references to Odysseus' whereabouts) they deserve some reward. But to the extent they are half-untruths, they attest *qua* lively inventions only to Odysseus' fertile imagination. This is a laudable attribute in a good hero facing adverse circumstances. But the actual content of a false past told by a mortal offers at best weak models of ideal behaviour.

If on the other hand, as I have argued, Odysseus tells the truth to the Phaiakians, then his account has the additional merit of being exemplary. When Alkinoos compares Odysseus to a skilful *δοιδός*, the compliment is not ironical, but a measure of what Odysseus has remembered in the content and communicated in the "good order" of its telling, about cunning, resilience, and other ideal virtues, not least notable examples of his capacity to learn about the world, even from his most terrifying adventures: "What countries, the men themselves, which were savage and without justice . . . which hospitable with a goodly mind to strangers?" Alkinoos asks Odysseus at the outset (8.573-576). That is, he repeats Homer's own programme announced at the start of the poem, where he asks the Muse to "sing of the man" who "saw many cities and learned the minds of many men" (1.3). It would be odd to exclude from what Odysseus saw, and learned from, most of the encounters recorded in the *Apologos*. High on the list of those Odysseus' intellectual curiosity impels him to know about, and so evidence for that curiosity, are the Sirens; his intent is not to disprove their existence, but precisely to know what their song really sounds like. And should we exclude from "men" the huge, one-eyed Cyclops, an episode where Odysseus demonstrates so many of his virtues? (Or even from the cities Scheria, where ships row themselves?)

The *Apologos* completes the story of Odysseus' wanderings and is important testimony to Odysseus' character. In this it addresses several audiences—the Phaiakians, the Ithakans, and Homer's own. None, I believe, mistakes it as other than in the first instance the true, significant past, episodes ranging from what we would call saga to fiction to folktale, that can not only move the emotions of the audience (and as autobiography of the singer himself), but also describe the full reality of the dangerous world in which we live and set forth models of appropriate, heroic response. For the Phaiakians Odysseus' reminiscence constitutes an implicit challenge to their own often pampered, and therefore vulnerable, way of life (cf. 8.246-249). For the Ithakans it is an important contribution to their

cultural identity, further testimony to the qualities of their leader. Penelope had earlier accused the suitors of "not listening to your fathers [tell] what sort of man Odysseus was" (4.688-689). Athene had complained to Zeus: no one of his people remembers Odysseus, how he was kind like a father (5.11-12). Odysseus will rehearse his *Apologos* to Penelope, necessarily in digest form; thereby it will enter Ithakan history, to supplement the earlier period of Odysseus' life, the years at Troy and the bondage to Kalypso, as testimony to his character. (The first Ithakan to learn of that earlier period is Telemachos, and appropriately so: the secret of his very identity as Odysseus' son, and therefore his future as king of Ithaka, is hidden in that past.)³⁵

And beyond all audiences in the *Odyssey* is Homer's own audience. Speculation is here unavoidable. But it is far from improbable that they too insisted on knowing what is true and what is not, in the full record of Odysseus—his Trojan exploits, his return to Ithaka, and the ten years between. And what has seemed incredible to later times and therefore literally untrue need not have seemed so in the early Archaic age. In any case, Homer's relation to his audience resembles that of Odysseus, Phemios, and Demodokos to theirs: the reporter must establish his credentials. Unlike Demodokos, however, Homer cannot be pressed to verify his account on occasion; for there are no recent events to be incorporated into the canon—the past ended in the Age of Heroes. His credibility can rest only in his reputation and the convincing power of each performance, including the criteria he establishes for assessing the content of tales within his tale. Poets can in theory still be in error, or even lie. But Homer is to be trusted if any poet is. He will be expected to remember truthfully the core of the tradition, that people said and did certain things. And he will be expected to establish criteria that show whether what they said was the truth or lies. Where lies, the audience may still enjoy and respect the skills of the story teller, at once Homer's and his character's. Where truth, they will also respond to the idealized models of behaviour embodied in the recollection of real deeds; truth must be certain even as its emphases shift from age to age, as new ideals replace old.

Homeric history is a remarkable pageant, but the remarkable is not self-evidently the false. Even the history of the gods, including records of their private conversations, is indisputable truth, once it is established that he who remembers it is a "divine" poet and we are given no cause to doubt his word: so Phemios knows "the deeds of mortals and gods." Homer's *theoi* include Kalypso and Kirke.

Whether true or false, the *Apologos* is great entertainment; and the poet-like skills of imaginative story-telling are an Odyssean virtue. But Homer insists by every means at his disposal that Odysseus' autobiography is part

³⁵See above, n. 24.

of the hero's true history, measured by the standards both of the *Odyssey* and of Homer's own world. The *Apologos* is for Odysseus and his listeners in a sense true "history" in the making, for Homer and *his* audience true "history" now enshrined in the canonical tale.³⁶ By virtue of that truth it is a paradigmatic tale for audiences both in and of the *Odyssey*, in a way the Ithakan tales cannot be. A historical sensibility as we understand the term today is a post-Homeric invention. Of course, Homer will have known kinds of rational, narrative history; the varieties of record, for example, that must be cited for claims to property entitlement. But what we call cultural history is another matter. In Homer's world, of the late eighth and early seventh centuries, such history is the memory of undated and undatable but true events, including the telling of palpably false and palpably true tales. The latter are sung not only with grace but with good sense and in good order. Both their performance and their content exalt the singer and his subject, and mirror ideals of his culture.³⁷

The *Apologos*, which serves a wide range of imaginative functions in the *Odyssey*, qualifies in the first instance as true history, both within the *Odyssey* and for the poem's audience. It is the authentic memory, expertly communicated, of a great man's adventures in a strange but by no means incredible world. We need postulate neither sarcasm on Alkinoos' part nor distancing on Homer's.

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³⁶"Whatever else it may have been, the epic was *not history*," says M. I. Finley (*The Use and Abuse of History* [London 1975] 14–15). I mean by the word history no more than "record of the past." What such history implies in epic is, of course, among the most controverted of questions: see now Ford's discussion (50–51, and *passim*). One struggles here to find twentieth-century language that will begin to do justice to a preliterate, prerationalist epic sensibility, but Ford's description (49) of the pleasure of Homer's poetry for *his* audience is a good place to start—"an experience of vividness, a sense that the past is somehow present before us."

³⁷We should also note the cathartic function of the true tale. If the experience of Homer's characters is a fair guide, Homer's audience enjoyed weeping over the retelling of moving episodes, responding mimetically to the real experiences of great heroes: cf. *Od.* 4.100–103, 183. But cathartic song is a delicate balance when the poet must weigh the pleasure and pain of his account: Phemios' tale is too much for Penelope; and Demodokos' tale of Achilles so moves Odysseus to tears that Alkinoos becomes worried—sad song cannot please all (8.537–538). No such anxieties are in evidence when Odysseus and Eumaios weep over their own sad experiences (15.398–400).