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Song and Storytelling: An Odyssean Perspective

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An Odyssean reflexivity regarding the performance and composition of poetry is well-known and well-documented.[1] Critics have made much of the *Odyssey*'s preoccupation with poetry and have interpreted it in various ways. William Thalmann, for example, suggests that this is the *Odyssey*'s way of defining its relationship to other poems and claiming significance for its own subject.[2] In general, scholars have focused on the fact that the *Odyssey* is preoccupied with poetry and raised the question of why this should be so. In this paper, I want to consider more carefully the particular ways in which the *Odyssey* talks about poetry. I also want to consider another type of narrative the *Odyssey* foregrounds alongside poetry—first-hand accounts of travel and hardship. Investigation of what the poem says about poetry and these other narratives brings out, I shall argue, a view of poetry and storytelling that, in the context of the Greek hexameter tradition, is peculiar to the *Odyssey*.

The argument will be based on four main observations. First, the nature and function of song in the *Odyssey* makes its representation in this poem different from its representation both in the *Iliad* and in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Second, the features peculiar to Odyssean song align it with the kind of storytelling that is commonly juxtaposed to poetic performance in the *Odyssey*, i.e., with autobiographical tales of travels and troubles endured. Third, important formal differences between Odyssean song and Odyssean storytelling nevertheless remain, and these imply a relationship between human suffering and the construction of narratives that is specifically tailored to the *Odyssey*'s themes, concerns, and perspective on the mortal condition, as opposed to those of other poems within the Greek hexameter tradition.

[1]The *Odyssey* "loves to talk about poetry and song," having "a language of overt poetic reflexivity that the *Iliad* lacks" (Segal 1994: 126); its making "was accompanied by a certain kind of reflection on the properties of poetry" (Redfield 1973: 146); it is, in fact, "the supreme example of hexameter poetry's tendency to self-reflection" (Thalmann 1984: 158). Odysseus is more than once likened to a poet, both by the poet-narrator of the *Odyssey* and by other characters in the poem (11. 368, 406–11; 17.518; see Goldhill 1991: 66).

[2]Thalmann 1984: 158.

Why is it important for us to recognize and acknowledge this specifically Odyssean account of song and narrative? It is easier to assume the existence of uniform "Homeric" notions of song and of verbal performance generally. But I suggest we should resist the temptation to do that, or to use the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* to "yield the Homeric chapter of what Robert Curtius called 'the history of the theory of poetry'."[3] Since representations of poetry in the Homeric poems (and in other poems as well) will inevitably be influenced by the particular themes and concerns of the texts in which they are embedded, I wonder whether we are really in any position to write such a "Homeric chapter."[4] We must acknowledge this problem if we are not to deny the Homeric epics a degree of aesthetic autonomy attributable to all works of art, whether they be products of oral tradition or of individual literary activity. Ford wonders whether "'poetry' meant for him [Homer] and his audiences what it has meant for us."[5] But perhaps poetry may mean more than one thing at any one time.

Various functions of poetry are, in my view, played out even in poems from the same tradition. Like George Walsh, Ford suggests we think in terms of a specifically Homeric, as distinct from a Hesiodic, view of poetry. I find differentiation even within the Homeric account of song. Song in the *Iliad* is not the same as song in the *Odyssey*. Both notions may be fruitfully compared, however, with the concept of song found in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In connection with this particular question, I suggest that it is most illuminating to regard the tradition of Greek hexameter poetry as a whole, but to acknowledge that, as such, it accommodates a flexible concept of song, one that varies according to the concerns of individual hexameter poems.

1. Odyssean Song

How does song in the *Odyssey* differ from song elsewhere in the Greek hexameter tradition? In the first place, its subject-matter is closer in time to the people who hear and sing about it. In the *Theogony*, the song of the Muses is said to celebrate the illustrious deeds of "former men" (κλεῖα προτέρων

[3]Ford 1992: 3. For a comparable attempt to reconstruct the early history of Greek literary criticism on the basis of Homeric statements about poetry, see Walsh 1984: 3–21 and vii: "I have tried to formulate an argument or a consistent point of view for each Greek poet's explicit statements, from the implicit sense of his language, and from the 'normal' use of poetry in his fiction."

[4]Walsh 1984: vii does acknowledge this difficulty: "the behavior of poets and audiences in fiction acquires meaning chiefly as part of a story."

[5]Ford 1992: 2.

ἀνθρώπων, 100). Similarly, in the *Iliad*, Phoinix reminds Akhilleus, Aias, and Odysseus of a particular song from the "*klea* of former men" (τῶν πρόσθεν...κλέα ἀνδρῶν, 9.524), which tells the story of Meleager.[6] This song, Phoinix emphasizes, is "not new; it is old" (μέμνημαι τόδε ἔργον ἐγὼ πάλαι, οὔ τι νέον γε, 9.527). Therein lies its instructive value. The same principle underlies Nestor's exhortation of Akhilleus and Agamemnon in *Il.* 1. He urges them to follow the example of heroes three generations ago, who were better than they (ἀρείοσιν ἠέ περ ὑμῖν, 1.260) and never failed to be persuaded by him (1.260–74). Being older than Akhilleus and Agamemnon (ἄμφω δὲ νεωτέρῳ ἐστὸν ἐμεῖο, 1.259), Nestor actually associated with these "former men." The paradigmatic function of the past of former generations accounts for its importance as subject-matter for song. The other side of the same coin is that characters in the *Iliad* anticipate becoming subjects of song for *future* generations. Helen declares that Hektor's and Paris' sufferings, together with her own, will be sung about by people yet unborn (ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι, 6.357–58); Hektor hopes to die "having done some great deed that men shall come to know of" (μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι, 22.305).

Songs in the *Odyssey*, however, do not record the *klea* of "former men." And the *Odyssey* does not share the Iliadic veneration of the past as a storehouse of *exempla*, for in this poem the deeds of earlier generations are not used as *paradeigmata*. In the *Odyssey*, Telemakhos is advised to take as his model a young hero of his own generation—Orestes (1.298–302).[7] Moreover, early on in the poem we find Telemakhos giving praise to the "newest song."

[6]Phoinix recounts the tale in the form of a spoken story, not a song, but the preponderance of cases in which *klea andrôn* refers to a sung narrative supports the suggestion that *klea andrôn* refers to song specifically and thus that Phoinix is recalling a story known to him and his audience from epic song (*pace* Ford 1992: 59–60). The formula is used of song at *Od.* 8.73, *Il.* 9.189, and *Th.* 100, but only here at *Il.* 9.524 of a story not told in the form of a song. At *h.Hom.* 32.18, κλέα φωτῶν is used of song.

[7]Cf. Jones 1992: 87–88, who also contrasts the *Iliad*'s paradigmatic use of the past with the *Odyssey*'s stance, commenting that "even the Orestes paradigm is scarcely 'distant past'." He concludes, "This dependence on contemporary paradigms of excellence is in keeping with the general human dimension of the story," adding the observation (88–89) that "the constant intrusion of the past into the present makes the temporal landscape of the *Odyssey* an important feature of the epic." On mythic *paradeigmata* in the *Iliad*, see Willcock 1964. Regarding the *Iliad*, Andersen 1990 argues that characters change the story by creating their own version of the past; places in which a character's statement is inconsistent with what we have been told earlier are explained by the need for a "relevant, rhetorically effective version of the past" (41).

Penelope's complaints when Phemios sings the *Returns* of the Akhaians prompt Telemakhos to excuse the poet on the grounds that "men praise the song that falls newest (νεωτάτη) about their ears" (1.351–52). I suggest that Telemakhos' comment has an important metanarrative function. It alerts the *Odyssey*'s audience—ancient or modern—to the remarkable fact that Phemios is indeed singing a "new song." Phemios' song does not record the deeds of heroes from generations past. It relates events no more than ten years old. We are not given details of the song, but we know that it involves characters, mostly still living—Odysseus, Nestor, Menelaos, Agamemnon—whom we encounter elsewhere in the *Odyssey*.[8] In the *Theogony*, the Muses are a source of knowledge to the poet because they know the present, the future, and what has gone before (τά τ' ἐόντα, τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, 38). It is song's acquaintance with what has gone before that is celebrated in the *Theogony* and the *Iliad*. In these poems, the Muses give access to a past whose temporal distance would otherwise render it inaccessible to mortals. But in the *Odyssey* Demodokos sings a song sufficiently recent to be contemporaneous with, if not identical to, Nestor's and Menelaos' first-hand accounts of their own and the other Akhaians' returns from Troy, as told in Books 3 and 4, respectively.[9] Ford suggests that Telemakhos' comment is ironic from the perspective of the tradition—the external Homeric audience prefers songs from a dim and distant past, but the poetic characters they hear about are entertained by recent themes: "The fundamental character of epic as poetry of the past is reversed when it appears in the foreground of epic."[10] But we have just seen that this is not true of the poetic characters in the *Iliad*, who are entertained by themes far less recent than Phemios'. I suggest, therefore, that enjoying "new songs" is a peculiarity of the internal audience for song described in the *Odyssey*.

Like that of Phemios in Book 1, other poetic performances foregrounded in the *Odyssey* treat the theme of a recent past, not one that is distant and mythic from the point of view of the poem's internal audience. That is, songs

[8]For the view that Phemios' song may give pleasure because it narrates or hints at Odysseus' death, see Pucci 1987: 201–2.

[9]In fact, in *Od.* 12 the Sirens, structural equivalents of the Muses, seem to characterize their universal knowledge as knowledge of things that happen every*where*, rather than things that happen at every time (ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ' ὅσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ / Ἀργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν: / ἴδμεν δ' ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ, 12.189–91).

[10]Ford 1992: 109. Thalmann 1992: 126 says that Telemakhos' response is simply "charmingly naive." But what Telemakhos says accurately reflects the behavior of most audiences in the *Odyssey*.

performed by the poets in the *Odyssey* tend to be "new songs." Demodokos, the Phaiakian bard, sings tales of the Trojan War: the quarrel of Akhilleus and Odysseus (8.73–82) and the Trojan horse (8.499–521). Moreover, Demodokos' songs, though new in comparison with the songs referred to in the *Theogony* and the *Iliad*, are "older" than Phemios', since they deal with the Trojan war rather than the aftermath of the war. Perhaps the Phaiakians are—by Odyssean standards—even a little behind the times. Geographically remote and consequently isolated from world events, they are still entertained by tales of the Trojan war. Meanwhile the more sophisticated audience on Ithaka has already graduated to songs dealing with the returns of the Akhaian heroes *from* the war. Odysseus brings the Phaiakians up to date when he takes over from Demodokos as performer and entertains them with the newer tale of his own return.

Because the temporal reference of *aoidê*, "song," is not the same in the *Odyssey* as it is in the *Theogony* or the *Iliad*, the meaning of *kleos* is also different there. In the two latter poems, *kleos* refers to the fame of erstwhile heroes preserved in poetry through the generations. But when Telemakhos tells Nestor that he has come to hear his father's κλέος (3.83),[11] he is not referring to his father's *poetic* fame but to what Nestor has learnt of Odysseus from his own experience. *Kleos* here has the same sense as κληηδόνα at 4.317, when Telemakhos tells Menelaos: "I came to hear what news (κληηδόνα) you could tell me of my father." *Kleos* often has this meaning in the *Odyssey*. In Book 1, Athena uses the word to refer to the rumors that get circulated among mortal men (1.282–83). Recently S. Douglas Olson has argued that, despite the emphasis in contemporary Homeric scholarship on κλέος in the sense of "poetic glory," the noun in Homer simply means "oral report."[12] Telemakhos' express wishes for ἀκουὴν (4.701), κληηδόνα (4.317), and κλέος (3.83 and 13.415) of Odysseus support this claim—they refer, simply, to Telemakhos' desire for *information* about his father. I suggest that the frequent appearance of *kleos* in the sense of "news," "gossip," "report," and "rumor" is an Odyssean idiosyncrasy. It is part and parcel of the *Odyssey*'s interest in songs that are like "news" and "rumors" inasmuch as they report recent events.

The first difference, then, between song in the *Odyssey* and song elsewhere in Greek hexameter poetry is that Odyssean song takes as its subject-

[11]Cf.1.282–83: ἤν τίς τοι εἴπῃσι βροτῶν, ἢ ὄσσαν ἀκούσῃς / ἐκ Διός, ἥ τε μάλιστα φέρει κλέος ἀνθρώποισι.

[12]Olson 1995: 2–3.

matter events that are recent from the perspective of those who perform and hear the songs.[13] A second, but related, difference lies in the affective function of song. In the *Odyssey* song can be a source of pain. Elsewhere in Greek hexameter poetry, however, song makes people forget their pain. Among the programmatic statements about song in the proem to Hesiod's *Theogony*, we find the statement that the Muses' song makes the person afflicted with "grief in a newly-troubled heart" (98) ..."forget (ἐπιλήθεται, 102) and give no thought to his cares." The poetry of the Muses brings "forgetfulness" (λησμοσύνην, 55) of pain. Song in the *Odyssey*, however, can have the opposite effect and make its hearers remember their pain. In three places in the *Odyssey*, a song causes pain to an audience member in this way (Penelope at 1.336–44; Odysseus at 8.83–92 and 8.521–31). Gregory Nagy has argued that, while epic *kleos* is generally an antidote to *penthos*, "grief," an epic situation may give *penthos* rather than *kleos* to an audience member "personally involved" with the song content—as it does to Penelope and Odysseus in the passages cited.[14] What I want to add to this idea is the thought that the personal involvement of Penelope and Odysseus in song could only happen in the *Odyssey*, with its particular account of song, for such involvement is only possible when a song deals with a past contained in living memory rather than the past of previous generations. If one peculiarity of Odyssean song is its treatment of the past of living memory, and that peculiarity differentiates it from song in the *Iliad* and the *Theogony*, its related capacity to remind an audience of pain is another of its special features.

Third and finally, the Odyssean account of song foregrounds the theme of the poet's knowledge in a way that the accounts in the *Iliad* and *Theogony* do not. While poetry in the Greek hexameter tradition is often referred to as a potential source of knowledge and truth, not every account characterizes the poet himself as a possessor of the knowledge his poetry transmits. In *Od.* 11, Odysseus is likened to a poet by Alkinoos on the grounds that he has told his

[13]This feature of Odyssean *aoidê* might be explained in terms of the *Odyssey*'s self-conscious awareness of its status as a sequel or epilogue to the *Iliad*. The *Odyssey* tells of the aftermath of the *Iliad*. Regardless of actual dates of composition, its fictional setting is therefore more recent than that of the *Iliad*. Filling out the narrative with a set of fictional "new songs" could be construed as an extra-diegetic allusion to that status. Marilyn Skinner suggests that for a work to be preoccupied with its internal time-frame in such a way might be a feature typical of epilogues in general (personal communication).

[14]Nagy 1979: 98: "The factor of personal involvement or noninvolvement decides whether an epic situation calls for *penthos* or *kleos*."

tale "knowingly, like a poet" (ὡς ὅτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως, 368).[15] Odysseus himself tells Demodokos that he sings the sufferings of the Akhaians "as if he had been there or heard it from another" (ὡς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας, 8.491). His knowledge is evidence, of course, that he has been "taught" by the Muse or Apollo (ἐδίδαξε, 8.488); nevertheless, Odysseus credits Demodokos with ownership of the knowledge he has acquired from this teaching. In the *Iliad* and *Theogony*, by contrast, the knowledge poetry embodies tends to be attributed to the Muses who inspire the poet rather than to the poet himself. Thus the *Theogony* says that the Muses will be the ones to hymn their father Zeus, given their knowledge of present, future, and past (36–39). And in the *Iliad* the poet says that he himself "does not know" the *kleos* embodied by his poetry, but only hears it (ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἷον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν, 2.486); the knowledge resides with the Muses (ἴστέ τε πάντα, 2.485). Granted, this represents above all a difference of emphasis, since in all three poems the Muses inspire the poet with the knowledge that emerges in his poetry. However, the differently nuanced account found in the *Odyssey* accords with a general Odyssean tendency to characterize narrative as something that not only often derives from the narrator's personal knowledge but is also closely connected with his or her own experiences.

2. Odyssean Storytelling

We have seen that in the *Odyssey* events recalled by song can cause pain because Odyssean song typically takes as its subject a past that is within living memory of the characters who hear it and thus may be "personally involved" in it. As a next step, I want to point out that Odyssean song shares these two features with many of the non-poetic narratives also found in the poem. There are frequent examples in the *Odyssey* of a different type of narrative—autobiographical storytelling. Odysseus and other characters often tell tales about their own travels and tribulations. Odysseus recounts his adventures to the Phaiakians; Eumaios tells Odysseus his life story (15.352–79); Nestor and Menelaos tell Telemakhos the stories of their returns from the Trojan war (3.103–200, 4.351–592); Odysseus when he reaches Ithaka makes up stories—the "Cretan tales"—about his identity and provenance (14.192–359, 17.415–44, 19.165–202). These non-poetic, autobiographical tales are arguably even more prominent in the *Odyssey* than the songs performed by Demodokos and Phemios. They may include information about the wanderings and returns of

[15]Cf. also ἀείδῃ δεδαώς (17.519).

others. Hence, the overlap between Odyssean song and Odyssean storytelling applies to content as well as time-frame. Into his own *nostos* story Nestor incorporates material about the returns of the other Achaean heroes (3.103–200). Although different in its form of presentation, his story thus resembles in other respects the song of Phemios in Book 1. In fact, the parallels between the two types of narrative often lead critics to suppose that there is no significant distinction between the two.[16] While at present I am concerned with establishing similarities, I nevertheless maintain that there are also important formal differences, which I shall discuss in the next section of the paper.

Like Odyssean songs, Odyssean stories narrate events that have occurred within the lifetimes of the people who tell them. Sometimes they constitute "news," literally, for the characters who hear them. This is true of the tales of their *nostoi* told to Telemakhos by Menelaos and Nestor. Telemakhos visits these two Akhaians precisely because they are likely to be most up to date regarding the information he seeks. Nestor sends Telemakhos to Menelaos because he is "but lately (νέον) home from distant parts in the wide world" (3.318). Athena also recommends that Telemakhos consult Menelaos since he is the "last" (δεύτατος) of the Akhaians to return from the war (1.286).

Moreover, Odyssean storytelling resembles Odyssean song insofar as it is a potential source of pain for those who attend the performance because it involves the recollection of pain. Odyssean storytelling, which tends to be autobiographical, creates the same possibility of personal involvement. In this case, however, the pain is inflicted upon the storyteller rather than his audience. Odysseus complains at 9.12–13 and 19.116–20 that telling his own story will or would cause him pain. The possibility that Odyssean storytelling may cause the teller pain derives from the fact that many Odyssean stories are stories of painful experiences undergone by the teller. Numerous stories told in the *Odyssey* are explicitly identified as recountings of the storyteller's "pains," "cares," or "troubles." Odysseus tells Eumaios that a year would not suffice to tell the tale of his *kêdea* (14.197);[17] the Phaiakians are told the tale of his νόστον...πολυκηδέ', "trouble-filled return"(9.37), and Alkinoos says that he could hear Odysseus recount his cares till dawn (κήδε' μυθήσασθαι, 11.376).

[16]See Thalmann 1984: 161: the shift from poetic performance to spoken story is an easy one in the *Odyssey*, especially since "both forms of narrative fulfill the same function with regard to memory"; cf. Thalmann 1984: 170 and Segal 1994: 129–30.

[17]For the same theme, cf. also 6.165; 7.152, 215, 242; 9.12 and 15.

Menelaos' account of his experiences to Telemakhos in Book 4 is similarly one of misery and hardships (cf. 4.95–96, 363–72, 481–83). In Book 15 Eumaios asks Odysseus to tell him his troubles (κήδε', 14.185) and goes on to suggest that he and Odysseus spend the night remembering (μνωομένω, 15.400) and exchanging stories of their κήδεσιν (15.399). The *Odyssey* actually identifies itself as a narration of its hero's ἄλγεα, "pains," "griefs" (1.4). Sometimes, however, recounting such a narrative may cause the teller pleasure rather than pain—a point to which I shall return in the next section.

Finally, in storytelling contexts as in the case of song, the narrator's knowledge and ability to inform his audience are stressed. The Sirens, who are singers, promise to send Odysseus away "knowing more" (πλείονα εἰδώς, 12.188). As noted above, Alkinoos praises Odysseus on the grounds that he has spoken "knowingly, like a poet" (μῦθον δ' ὡς ὅτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας, 11.368). Likewise, autobiographical tales in the *Odyssey* are characterized as informative by the diction of the formulas that introduce them. These tend to contain the verbs *ennepein* "narrate," "relate," "recount" and *katalexai*, similar in meaning to *ennepein* but sometimes having the additional nuance of "recounting in order, giving a list."[18] In hexameter poetry, *ennepein* designates "a speech-act in which someone *narrates* something, at length and in detail"; it calls attention to the length and authority of a performance.[19] Moreover, the formulas built on *ennepein* and *katalexai* frequently include the theme of truth-telling; audiences repeatedly ask storytellers for a truthful account and the speakers, in turn, repeatedly assure audiences that they will give one. When Telemakhos successively asks Nestor and Menelaos to give

[18]This sense is especially pronounced at 9.14 (τί πρῶτόν τοι ἔπειτα, τί δ' ὑστάτιον καταλέξω;), 16.235 (ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι μνηστῆρας ἀριθμήσας κατάλεξον), 19.497 (δὴ τότε τοι καταλέξω ἐνὶ μεγάροισι γυναῖκας), 22.417 (ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι σὺ γυναῖκας ἐνὶ μεγάροις κατάλεξον), 23.308–9 (οὐδέ οἱ ὕπνος πῖπτεν ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι πάρος καταλέξαι ἅπαντα).

[19]Martin 1992: 12–13. Thus the verb is used of song in passages that stress the latter's provision of detailed and comprehensive information. In the *Iliad*, the poet will pause at certain moments and rhetorically seek information from the Muse. The invocation to the Muses introducing the Catalogue of Ships begins with the imperative Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι (2.484, cf. σύ μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, 2.761). This function of song is emphasized in the *Odyssey* proem, where the Muse is asked to "narrate" (ἔννεπε, 1.1) the exploits of Odysseus. The opening lines of most other extant hexameter poems have *aeidein*; only the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* opens, like the *Odyssey*, with *ennepein* (Μοῦσα μοι ἔννεπε ἔργα πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης)—cf. Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά (*Il.* 1.1); Ἴλιον ἀείδω καὶ Δαρδανίην εὔπωλον (*Il.Parv.*); Ἄργος ἄειδε θεὰ πολυδίψιον ἔνθεν ἄνακτες (*Thebaïs*); and Δήμητηρ' ἠύκομον σεμνὴν θεὰν ἄρχομ' ἀείδειν (*h.Cer.*).

him an account (ἐνισπεῖν) of his father's death (3.93 and 4.323), he concludes the speech each time by repeating "recall those things for me now; relate them to me truly" (τῶν νῦν μοι μνῆσαι, καί μοι νημερτὲς ἐνίσπες, 3.101 = 4.331. The same diction occurs in his question to Nestor about the death of Agamemnon (3.247). Of the formulas based on *katalexai*, most commonly found is: ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπὲ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον, "but come now, tell me this, and relate it accurately"[20] to which the storyteller will typically reply: σοὶ δ' ἐγὼ εὖ μάλα πάντα καὶ ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω, "I will relate everything to you very accurately."[21] Similar formulas that exhibit the same theme are ἀληθείην καταλέξω, "I will narrate the truth,"[22] and νημερτὲς ἐνίσπες, "tell me the truth."[23] Telemakhos repeatedly asks Nestor and Menelaos to tell him the truth (νημερτὲς ἐνίσπες, 3.101, 4.331 = ἀληθὲς ἐνίσπες; 3.247), and Nestor replies with the promise: ἀληθέα πάντ' ἀγορεύσω "I will relate it all to you truly" (3.254; cf. 3.186–87). Nestor advises Telemakhos to ask Menelaos to tell him the truth—ἵνα νημερτὲς ἐνίσπῃ (3.327), and, later in the poem, Eumaios urges Odysseus: καί μοι τοῦτ' ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμον "and tell me the truth about this" (14.186). These repeated requests for and promises of truthful accounts reflect the fact that many of the narratives related by fictional characters in this poem concern events to which they have direct access, often through first-hand experience, and about which other characters require information. Consequently, the question of whether narratives told within the fiction of the *Odyssey* are true is, for its internal audiences, of more pressing concern than is the truth-value of similar narratives for other characters elsewhere in archaic Greek poetry.[24]

[20]Found at 1.169, 206, 224; 4.486; 8.572; 11.140, 170, 370, 457; 15.383; 16.137; 24.256, 287. Cf. also 14.192 (τοιγὰρ ἐγώ τοι ταῦτα μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω); 3.254 = 16.61 (τοιγὰρ ἐγώ τοι, τέκνον, ἀληθέα πάντ' ἀγορεύσω); 1.214; 4.383; 15.266, 352 (τοιγὰρ ἐγώ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω).

[21]*Od.* 24.123; cf. *Il.* 10.413 = *Od.* 24.303 (τοιγὰρ ἐγώ τοι πάντα μάλ' ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω).

[22]Found at 16.226 = 22.420; 17.108; 21.212; cf. *Il.* 24.407. ἀληθείην κατέλεξα is found at *Od.* 7.297 and 17.122.

[23]Found at 3.101; 4.314; 12.112; 22.166 and 23.35.

[24]Pratt 1993 argues that scholarship has tended to overemphasize a perceived association in archaic Greek thought between poetry and truth, and between narrative and truth in general. Rather, ancient audiences, no less than modern ones, were capable of appreciating the false and deceptive aspects of fiction and invention. "Claims to truth in archaic poetry are better treated as individual claims applicable only to specific circumstances within particular poems, rather than as evidence for a widespread belief that all poetry was, or ought to be, in all senses true" (11). Moreover, fiction's ability to convey general truths by narrating events that do not correspond to real events means that fiction "confounds the categories true and false, belief

The characteristics shared by song and storytelling in the *Odyssey*—the subject-matter's closeness in time to the narrators and audience, the narrator's self-characterization to his audience as a knowledgeable source of truth, and the narrative's ability to cause pain to those involved in the performance—bring out the fact that, according to the *Odyssey*'s account of narrative in general, a remarkably dynamic relationship exists between narrative and life. The songs sung in the poem directly affect the action, as when Odysseus' weeping at Demodokos' song prompts Alkinoos to ask him about his identity (8.521–51). Conversely, action is translated into narrative within the context of the poem. As Thalmann points out, Odysseus' story "is progressively updated; in the course of the *Odyssey* events narrated as they occur turn into past experience, objects of memory."[25] However, there are also certain differences between the Odyssean autobiographical story and the Odyssean song. These are important because they mark the autobiographical story as even more immediately and effectively connected with mortals' lives than song. To these differences I now turn.

3. Differences between Song and Storytelling in the *Odyssey*

Despite the similarities between Odyssean song and Odyssean autobiographical storytelling, the latter represents a special, more complex case of narrative. I have suggested that song and storytelling are aligned in the *Odyssey* in that both may cause pain—the former to the audience, the latter to the storyteller. But some passages seem to suggest that, in the case of autobiographical storytelling, the storyteller may experience pleasure rather than pain as a result of recalling his painful experiences. The paradigm case is when Eumaios and Odysseus "take delight" (τερπώμεθα, 15.399; τέρπεται, 15.400) in exchanging tales of sufferings past. Another is when Penelope and Odysseus, reunited, tell one another stories about their separate experiences (τερπέσθην, 23.301). Why is

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and disbelief, so that they cannot be seen as mutually exclusive" (14–15). Hence we can say of Odysseus' "lies" that they "are acceptable, are valuable fictions, because their similarity to truth preserves not only plausibility but also what we might call 'ethical truth'" (91). Emlyn-Jones 1986: 1 goes so far as to suggest that "listeners in the *Odyssey* do not seem to care very much whether what they hear is delivered μαλ' ἀτρεκέως, as promised" (cf. Walcot 1977). However, in the examples he discusses the listeners who praise lying tales for their artistry do not know that they are being lied to, and even if the *Odyssey* does to some extent endorse Pratt's notion of "ethical truth," it is strikingly opposed in the poem to characters' requests to hear the literal truth—the latter creating a context in which Odysseus' lies do seem morally, if not aesthetically, problematic.

[25]Thalmann 1984: 162.

telling the story of one's suffering apparently pleasurable in some cases and painful in others? For Thalmann, it is temporal distance that makes the difference; thus Penelope and Odysseus can at the end of the poem take pleasure in narratives that previously made them weep, just as Eumaios finds joy in griefs lying in the *past*. Kevin Crotty, on the other hand, accounts for the difference by suggesting that the *Odyssey* is concerned with mortals' orientation toward their griefs. The poem advocates an "...ability to stand apart from them [griefs] sufficiently to transmute them into a public narrative that conveys to others a sense of what the griefs were like."[26] On this reading, Penelope and Odysseus do not yet "stand apart" in the relevant sense when they weep at the songs others sing.[27]

I want to modify Crotty's explanation slightly by suggesting that the act of narration, rather than *reflecting* a transformation of attitude, actually *effects* it. The fact that the Odyssean storyteller tells his own tale is crucial. Within the context of storytelling, we are not really faced with two different types of case: Odysseus may complain beforehand that telling his story demands painful recollection,[28] but that does not preclude the process from bringing him pleasure ultimately. In Books 9 and 19, then, Odysseus bemoans the initial pain involved in the undertaking; in Books 15 and 23 Eumaios and the *Odyssey* poet emphasize the pleasurable end result.

Stories told in the first person can bring about this transformation; songs, told in the third person, cannot. The *Odyssey* is exceptionally interested in stories that report on first-hand experience. Thalmann points out that it is "a scene of spoken and informal storytelling with which all the narratives within the poem culminate."[29] We might add that this is a scene of spoken and informal storytelling in which the characters involved—Penelope and Odysseus—describe their experiences at first hand. The moment at which Odysseus supplants Demodokos' songs about his exploits at Troy with a first-person narrative of his

[26]Crotty 1994: 162; cf. 173: "Characters in the *Odyssey* remember their sorrows, conjure with them and reflect on them, and in the end shape them into compelling narratives. In doing all this, they 'delight' in their sorrows, and make them delightful, too, for others to hear."

[27]Thalmann 1984: 161; Crotty 1994: 173. Murnaghan 1987: 154 suggests that only in Book 23 has Odysseus reached the point when taking pleasure in song is no longer a distraction from the struggle to win fame.

[28]In addition to the examples previously mentioned, see also 19.167–68.

[29]Thalmann 1984: 161. In contrast to me, however, Thalmann is arguing for a virtual equivalence of spoken storytelling to song in the *Odyssey*—the similarities (such as that both involve a constructive use of memory) are for him far more important than the differences.

wanderings is also a highly charged one. An autobiographical tale derives from eyewitness knowledge, whose relevance to the overall theme of the epic is indicated in the *Odyssey*'s proem. The poem begins by announcing that its hero "saw the cities" (ἴδεν ἄστεα) and "knew the minds" (νόον ἔγνω) of many men (1.3). As we have seen, Odysseus himself reports on this knowledge in his first-person narrative in Books 9–12.[30] Moreover, many of the narratives tagged with *ennepein* in the *Odyssey* refer to autobiographical reports of things seen and heard in other parts of the world. Odysseus himself uses the verb this way as he prepares to tell (ἐνίσπω, 9.37) the Phaiakians about his return; at 17.549 Penelope promises to give Odysseus a cloak if she discovers that the reports he has brought her from abroad (ἐνέποντα) are true;[31] and when Odysseus and Penelope eventually celebrate their reunion by exchanging tales of their experiences while geographically separated, they "narrate stories to one another" (πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐνέποντε, 23.301). In the underworld Akhilleus asks Odysseus, voyager from the world of the living to the world of the dead, to tell him news of his son (ἐνίσπες, 11.492); on Ithaka Eumaios asks Odysseus, disguised as a vagrant, to tell him of the troubles he has encountered in his wanderings (ἐνίσπες 14.185); and in Book 8 Alkinoos hopes that Odysseus will upon returning home report to his friends what good athletes and dancers the Phaiakians are (ἐνίσπῃ, 8.101 = 8.251). Other formulas emphasize the importance of eyewitness knowledge in the *Odyssey*, especially in connection with storytelling. Telemakhos requests of Nestor at 3.97 and Menelaos at 4.327: "tell me truly how you saw the sight" (ἀλλ' εὖ μοι κατάλεξον ὅπως ἤντησας ὀπωπῆς). Similarly, Penelope asks Telemakhos, returned from his journey, "tell me what sight you had of him [Odysseus]" (ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι κατάλεξον ὅπως ἤντησας ὀπωπῆς, 17.44).

I have argued that songs in the *Odyssey* and spoken stories are alike in the *Odyssey* in that their authors are credited with the possession of knowledge. This parallelism, however, is established only to be qualified, for the source of the knowledge is different in either case. The Odyssean autobiographical tale approaches the character of Herodotean *historia* inasmuch as it is based either on the author's own eyewitness knowledge or on that of another mortal

[30]Pedrick 1992: 58 notes that little of what appears in the narrator's "own" proem (as opposed to that of the Muse) is told in the narrator's third-person voice; most of that material is contained in Odysseus' first-person recounting of his adventures to the Phaiakians.

[31]The promise is relayed, in the same language, to Odysseus by Eumaios at 17.556, and repeated by Odysseus at 17.561–62 (Εὔμαι', αἴψά κ' ἐγὼ νημερτέα πάντ' ἐνέποιμι / κούρῃ Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ).

wanderer.[32] *Aoidê* or song, however, is a second-hand report derived from the eyewitness account of the Muses.[33] Thus in *Il.* 2 the poet prefaces the Catalogue of Ships with an invocation to the Muses in the form of a *recusatio*.[34] The poet says that he could not narrate his tale without the Muses. The Muses were present (πάρεστε, 2.485); the poet was not. The Muses have direct knowledge (πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε) of events about which the poet only hears (ἀκούομεν, 2.486) reports from them.[35]

The distinction is highlighted when Odysseus appraises Demodokos' song in *Od.* 8. The diction of the passage subtly alludes to the difference between the autobiographical and the poet-and-Muse models of verbal art. Odysseus tells Demodokos, "you sing of the fate of the Akhaians as though you yourself had been present (παρέων) or had heard the tale from another" (ἄλλου ἀκούσας, 8.491). Odysseus' diction resembles Telemakhos' when the latter asks Nestor, and then later Menelaos, to tell him of his father's death, "if you saw it with your own eyes (ὄπωπας / ὀφθαλμοῖσι τεοῖσιν, 3.93–94 = 4.323–24), or heard the story from some other wanderer (ἢ ἄλλου μῦθον ἄκουσας / πλαζομένου, 3.94–95 = 4.324–25)." But a fundamental difference remains, for Odysseus must at the same time acknowledge that Demodokos, like any other poet, was taught his song by the Muse or Apollo (8.488).[36] While Odysseus' tales are stories of what he literally *saw* on his travels, Demodokos was blinded by the Muse who gave him poetic insight as compensation for the loss of his physical sight (8.63–64).

Odysseus himself also tells tales about things he only claims to have seen on his travels, as if he had eyewitness knowledge of them. Hence it is that at 19.203 he is said, like the Muses in the *Theogony*, to "say false things that are

[32]On the valorization of first-hand accounts by characters in the *Odyssey*, see also Olson 1995: 12–14. Olson sees a general Homeric evolution from local gossip to universal rumor to song. In my view, such an evolution is particularly appropriate to the *Odyssey*'s characterization of song. We need not read it as a universally "Homeric" account of song.

[33] Note that here too *ennepein* is used (ἔσπετε, *Il.* 2.484) to refer to an account given by someone—in this case, the Muses—who has knowledge derived from another setting.

[34]ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε, πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα, / ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἷον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν (*Il.* 2.485–86).

[35]On the Muses as "eyewitnesses" in these lines, see Nagy 1979: 271–72.

[36]When the Sirens offer to send Odysseus away *pleiona eidôs*, "knowing more," they threaten to interrupt his exploration with the promise of a type of knowledge of the poetic kind. The knowledge the Sirens give is based on hearsay from Muse-like goddesses, rather than gained by being a traveler and seeing for oneself. Pucci 1979: 129 describes the Sirens as "turned to the past, living in a spatial and temporal remoteness which is frightening since their Musean memory becomes forgetfulness of the present and spells only grief, pity and death."

like the truth" (ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, cf. *Th.* 27: ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα). However, because the content of Odysseus' tales is allegedly the result of eyewitness knowledge, his tales are subject to scrutiny and testing in a way that the poetry of the Muses, recounted by Hesiod, is not. Because Odysseus' tale purports to derive from experience, Penelope can attempt to test him by asking him further questions designed to prove whether he really encountered her husband as he claims (19.215–19). In this particular instance, Penelope's technique of questioning him does not get the better of Odysseus' ability to construct deceptive narratives that resemble his experience. But this is only because the events he describes are sufficiently close to his own experience to enable him to construct a convincing fabrication. The general character of Odyssean storytelling means that ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα in Odysseus' case refers to things "similar to first-hand experience."

4. Narrative and Pain in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

It remains to consider the significance of the *Odyssey*'s conception of poetry and song. Colin Macleod observes that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* "are principally concerned with suffering (cf. ἄλγεα *Iliad* 1.2, *Odyssey* 1.4)."[37] I will conclude this paper by suggesting that both poems also construct a particular relationship between suffering and verbal narrative, and that the relationship in each case reflects that poem's particular account of the human condition. In both poems we find the notion that pain and suffering will at some stage be translated into a verbal narrative that is a source of pleasure to someone. But in the Iliadic scheme of things, the relevant transformation does not occur within the lifetime of the individual who suffers. It comes only generations later, when the painful experiences become the subject of epic songs that delight future audiences. Helen's comment at *Il.* 6.357–58, which I quoted earlier, suggests that this knowledge provides some compensation for present suffering. In the *Iliad*, then, the suffering of the poem's characters is told by someone else—a latter-day poet. The story is told, moreover, at a time when the characters involved are long dead. In the *Odyssey*, however, characters tell their own stories, and these stories are told relatively soon after the occurrence of the events they describe. We might say, then, that the special features of Odyssean storytelling I have identified in this paper arise from the fact that characters in the *Odyssey* have a certain autonomy and agency in the

[37]Macleod 1983: 1. Cf. Dimock 1963.

process of translating suffering experienced into suffering narrated. Iliadic characters lack such autonomy.

It is true that in the *Iliad* we do at least find examples of lament—a genre in which the suffering of the speaker inspires an autobiographical narrative that has a cathartic function.[38] A crucial difference, however, remains. As long as he or she is performing, the singer of lament never ceases to be passively caught up in the experience of grieving. The lament ends at a point when the mourner attains his or her fill, or surfeit, of grief (cf. γόοιο τετάρπετο, *Il.* 24.513 [Akhilleus]; ἄλλοτε μέν τε γόῳ φρένα τέρπομαι, ἄλλοτε δ' αὖτε / παύομαι, αἰψηρὸς δὲ κόρος κρυεροῖο γόοιο, *Od.* 4.102–3 [Menelaos]; αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κλαίων τε κυλινδόμενός τε κορέσθην, *Od.* 4.541f. [Menelaos]). In the *Odyssey*, however, the corresponding performance does not end until the speaker has achieved such a detachment from the matter of his or her story that it has become a source of pleasure. Again, Crotty suggests that in *Il.* 24 Akhilleus arrives at a point where he can disengage himself from his personal experience of grief sufficiently to extrapolate from it and thereby understand Priam's suffering. His telling of the parable of the two *pithoi* of Zeus at 24. 527–33, from which the god dispenses boons and banes to mortals apparently at random, reflects this disengaged attitude. Speaking this parable, Akhilleus gives a neutral, objective account of the cause of human suffering.[39] His attitude, however, is less advanced than that of the Odyssean storyteller. While Akhilleus achieves a *neutral* perspective upon human suffering in *general*, he stops short of transforming the *particular* events of his own experience into a narrative that gives pure pleasure or delight—as Odysseus and Eumaios succeed in doing.

We can trace this heightened agency of Odyssean characters in creating their own happiness to a general feature of the human condition as described in the *Odyssey*. At the beginning of the epic, Zeus complains that mortals are mistaken when they hold the gods responsible for all their sufferings (1.32–43). Much of the time, mortals are themselves to blame and bring trouble upon themselves by their own actions. Conversely, Akhilleus in the *Iliad* talks of the two *pithoi* as sources of troubles or boons dispensed at random or by divine whim, without qualification or exception. The relationship between these passages has generated much discussion. Some read Zeus' comment as

[38]Cf. *Il.* 18.22–64, 79–93; 19.287–339; 22.477–515; 23.1, 12, 153–54, 178–83, 222–225; 24.723–76.

[39]Crotty 1994: 75–77.

indicative of a specifically Odyssean account of relations between gods and men, a "new" theodicy according to which the gods cease to act cruelly and capriciously toward mortals but instead intervene justly in mortal affairs by punishing wrongdoers. Others have pointed out that in terms of the gods' actual behavior there is not in fact much difference between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[40] Jenny Strauss Clay, meanwhile, identifies a "double theodicy" in the *Odyssey*. If we look not only at what people say about the gods, but also at what the gods *do*, we find that "the *Odyssey* presents what seems to be a massive internal contradiction," as both modes are present—just intervention *and* random, capricious cruelty.[41] "The two views of the gods' influence on human life...appear continually side-by-side in the *Odyssey*."[42] The characters in the *Odyssey*, however, do not consider the different modes according to which the gods are seen to operate to be contradictory,[43] and Clay offers an explanation for the apparent contradiction. The gods must act with justice from time to time if they are to continue to receive homage from mortals, even though most of the time they maintain their habitual capricious attitude. In the *Odyssey*, it is Odysseus himself who is primarily the object of the gods' caprice, while the suitors are the recipients of divine chastisement.[44]

The *Odyssey* differs from the *Iliad* in foregrounding this double theodicy or inconsistency in the behavior of the gods toward men. Zeus' words about Aigisthos, however, whose own actions caused him to suffer ὑπὲρ μόρον (1.34–35), is as much an account of mortal as of divine behavior. In fact, the *Odyssey*'s interest in the inconsistency between the divine modes of operation results in a highlighting of two types of mortal agency. In this passage, Zeus introduces the idea that mortals can be agents, responsible—to some extent at least—for their own suffering.[45] This type of agency is exemplified in the poem by Aigisthos and the suitors. What we find in the phenomenon of Odyssean storytelling is the obverse. Even in the face of unpredictable god-sent disasters, mortals can, through their ability to construct narratives, become authors or agents of happiness. Storytelling, the construction of narratives, provides a

[40]See Clay 1983: 216 and n. 2.
[41]Clay 1983: 219.
[42]Clay 1983: 221.
[43]Clay 1983: 226.
[44]Clay 1983: 225; 235–36.
[45]Zeus does not say that Aigisthos would not have suffered *at all* had it not been for his folly (ἀτασθαλίῃσιν, 34), only that his folly caused him to suffer ὑπὲρ μόρον, "beyond what was ordained."

means of creating order out of the chaos with which mortals are beset by the gods. Thus it is no surprise that Odysseus, the character in the poem who is above all plagued by pains sent from the gods, is also the *Odyssey*'s central storyteller.

As has often been noted, the motifs of poetry and storytelling are remarkably prominent in the *Odyssey*. Song, other types of narrative, and the differences and similarities between them are foregrounded in the process of exploring the various functions narratives can have in the context of human life and human experiences. However, these motifs do not tell us about poetry as such, or present us with a specifically "Homeric" account of song. Rather, they are employed in the *Odyssey* to construct a particular—and relatively optimistic—perspective on the problem of human suffering, without relying upon a theodicy according to which gods regularly intervene in mortal affairs to dispense justice. In this emphasis on human agency in the creation of happiness, the *Odyssey* would appear to be unique in the archaic Greek poetic tradition. Consequently, the *Odyssey*'s perspective on the mortal condition produces a representation of song and storytelling likewise unparalleled in the tradition of Greek hexameter verse.

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